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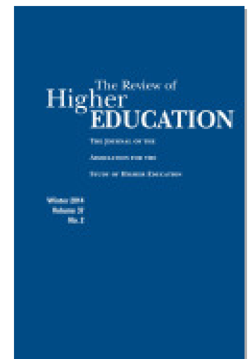

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Laura I. Rendón

Dedication and Invocation

I dedicate this speech to my dear friend Raul Garza, one of the most caring educators I have ever known. In the 1960s when few Chicana/os in Laredo, Texas, dared to dream that higher education was for them, Raul inspired me and reaffirmed my decision to attend college. Raul, *donde este tu espiritu* (wherever your spirit may be) this one's for you.

I begin with a brief invocation that honors the Seekers of Truth of our past, present, and future. Following this invocation, I invite us to enter a moment of silent reflection.

We honor the Seekers of Truth of the Past—all of you who have gone before, our ancestors and our teachers. May we carry on the legacy you bequeathed us.

Laura I. Rendón is Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Arizona State University, Tempe. Dr. Rendón is a Fetzer Institute fellow participating in a program designed to develop and sustain the capacity of individuals to inform their work through the inner life of spirit and outer life of action and service. She delivered this presidential address at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, 19 November 1999, San Antonio, Texas.

We also honor the Seekers of Truth of the Present—all of you with whom we live, work, love, and share our passion for knowledge.

Last, we honor Seekers of Truth of the Future—all of you who will come after us on this earth. Though we cannot hear your voices or see your faces, may we remember that we are your ancestors, as we seek to connect our scientific mind with the artistry of our spirit.

INTRODUCTION

This is the most difficult and most important address of my educational career. It seems fortuitous that the last speech given by an ASHE president in the 20th century would be here in the Southwest, *en tejas,* land of my birth, mythic land of my ancestors. The Southwest is a dynamic culture with a rich history that fuses ancient wisdom and tradition with all that is modern at the start of a new millennium.

And so it is here, in the land of my origins, that I stand before you to reveal my innermost thinking about the nature of knowledge. I want to articulate an integrated, humanistic view of research with an emphasis on higher education. Let me begin by sharing a dream.

THE DREAM OF REASON

It is 380 years ago. It is November of 1619. René Descartes, the founder of the modern theory of knowledge, has a vision and a series of three dreams that will later impact all of us who wander into the realm of academic research. We know from Descartes's biographers (A. Baillet, 1691, qtd. in Gaukroger, 1997) that at age 23 Descartes was intensely engaged in a highly personal mission to construct a reliable method of generating knowledge.

Descartes's first dream is a nightmare. As terrifying phantoms appear, he seeks to drive them away but feels weak on his right side. This forces him to lunge to the left. Suddenly, Descartes is caught in a great wind and whirled around. He manages to drag himself to the chapel of a college. Someone calls him by name and hands him a melon. Descartes awakens, feeling a sharp pain on his left side. He prays for protection from the evil effects of the dream and returns to sleep.

Descartes immediately has a second dream. He hears the clap of thunder and finds himself a room, surrounded by sparks. In the third dream, Descartes discovers a book of poems entitled *Corpus Poetarum.* He opens the book and sees the words *Quod vitae sectabor iter?* (what road in life should I follow?). A stranger enters and gives him some verses beginning with the words, *est et non* (it is and is not).

In analyzing his dreams, Descartes interprets the question, "what road shall I follow?" to be counsel that he should be asking himself this question.

The Corpus is revelation and inspiration. The "is and is not" stands for truth and error. The pain on his left side, he believes, is the devil trying to prevent him from going where he wants to go. The melon, he thinks, symbolizes the chasm of solitude, as Descartes often spent time alone and believed that man could exercise good reasoning by himself. The thunderclap was a sign that the spirit of truth was about to descend. In the months following these dreams, Descartes wrote his most influential work, *The Discourse on Method,* adjusting everything to the level of reason and separating the intellect from intuition (Zajonc, 1993). The spirit of truth as reason had truly descended in the young philosopher's mind.

My concern here is not to focus on the interpretation of Descartes's dreams. Rather, two things are much more important. First is the fact that Descartes himself includes all three dreams in his account of developing his theory of knowledge based on reason. Second, it is noteworthy, if not highly ironic, that rational science, including the method of deductive reasoning, reductionism, and the elegance of the proposition, "I think, therefore I am," could evolve from the cathartic, passionate, mysterious experience of having a dream. If the path to reason can indeed be sparked from dreams, what does this say about our work as educational researchers?

The Error of Our Ways

As researchers who study higher education, we carry a highly significant, if not sacred, life assignment. We are charged with seeking truth, with illuminating truth. Ours is the path of unraveling mysteries, entering darkness and bringing light to darkness. In a postmodern world, we do this in a way that is shaped by the modern consciousness that came before it. Descartes and his followers gave us two key principles that shape postmodern, Western epistemology:

1. Intellectual training and analysis alone provide the road to understanding. Western ways of knowing prize the intellect. However, this is not the case throughout the world. Asian traditions such as Vedanta, Sankhya, Buddhism, and Taoism emphasize that, while intellectual training is essential, it is not by itself sufficient for deep understanding. In transpersonal philosophy, the mind must also be given a multidimensional, contemplative or yogic training that refines ethics, emotions, motivation, and attention (Walsh, 1998).

2. Reason and emotion are separate and irreconcilable. In his book *The Growth of the Mind,* psychiatrist and behavioral science specialist Stanley I. Greenspan states: "Ever since the ancient Greeks, philosophers have elevated the rational side of the mind above the emotional and seen the two as separate" (1997, p. 2). But this dichotomous view of reason and emotion is now being challenged. In *Descartes' Error* (1994), neurobiologist Antonio

Damasio suggests that Descartes was wrong—that reason and emotion are not separate and that the absence of emotion and feeling can impair rationality, making wise decision making almost impossible.

Greenspan's (1997) research investigating the link between emotion and cognitive behavior goes a step further. He asserts that "emotional experience is in fact the basis of the mind's growth" (p. 308). Indeed, there is a relationship between intellect and emotion, and early emotional experiences play a critical role in fostering intelligence, academic abilities, sense of self, consciousness, and morality. For example, autistic children who are unable to make the connection between physical objects and emotions may fail to display cognitive skills. Greenspan advocates that theories of intelligence should connect, rather than separate, cognitive and emotional mental processes.

Despite emerging brain research, and regardless of what non-Western philosophers believe, our allegiance to the separation of reason and emotion, with some exceptions, remains steadfast. What has been the impact of a separatist philosophy on our higher education research enterprise? For one thing, I believe we have failed to see the error of our ways, to perceive that there is indeed a shadow side of research. We have failed to acknowledge the limitations of our Western intellectualism. We have perpetuated dualistic, either/or thinking. We have privileged individual research over collective scholarship. We have prized theory over practice.

We consider that objective, quantitative research, separating the knower from what is to be known, and employing complex mathematical models to explain causal relationships, are superior over less pure, subjectively tainted, qualitative research that seeks to discern truth, not from numbers, but from fieldwork, interviews, and personal reflections. We have separated the path of reason from the path of faith and personal commitment. Few of us feel comfortable revealing both our academic knowledge and our humanity in our work. We have tended to disregard and/or disdain ancient wisdom and diverse ways of knowing as advanced by feminists and people of color among others. We have neglected the "soul" of research. In doing so, we have equated being humanistic with lowering standards, for humanists are often seen as "soft" and nonrigorous.

We have put a premium on ridiculously high standards that constantly ask us to do more and more in an atmosphere of competition, tension, and conflict. We are left with little time to self-reflect and to get in touch with our own lives. In essence, we have created a dualistic, 20th-century consciousness that Richard Tarnas (1998) indicates "is estranged from nature, our own deepest selves, and inner ways of knowing" (p. 14).

Operating within this dualistic consciousness has brought us many rewards, but not without cost. As a Fetzer fellow, I have been involved in numerous discussions with faculty and administrators. When asked to speak

of their experiences in higher education, faculty invariably talk about lack of purpose and meaning. They often refer to higher education as a "meat grinder."

For example, Alexander Astin and Helen Astin (1999) uncovered multiple sources of stress in their study of purpose and meaning in faculty lives. Those stressors led to "health problems, divorce, over-consumption of caffeine, and sleep deprivation" (p. 27). Stressed faculty often wonder whether everything they worked so hard for has really given them what they longed for in their personal and professional lives. They feel overburdened with more and more work. It is as if something is killing their spirit, but they are not sure how or why. They're not even sure how to talk about their disturbing thoughts and feelings. Yet nearly always there is a longing, a yearning to change something about how we approach our lives and our work.

There is a deep imbalance in higher education that stems from a disconnected, fragmented view of teaching, learning, and research. We need a new framework that reconnects the intellect with the spirit, that allows us to bridge our inner and outer knowing, and that honors our humanity while incorporating high standards in our work. We need a marriage between precise inquiry and poetic intuition. We need a humbler view of higher education research that acknowledges uncertainty and human limitation.

Academics of the Heart

With support from the Fetzer Institute, I am currently developing a model that I call "Academics of the Heart." The Fetzer Institute is a nonprofit, private foundation that supports research, education, and service programs exploring relationships among body, mind, and spirit. This model, which is a work in progress, seeks to reinterpret how we presently conceptualize teaching, learning, and research. Elsewhere (Rendon, 1999), I have presented the teaching and learning elements of the model. This is the first time that I have focused on the research elements of Academics of the Heart.

To frame the philosophical foundation of the research dimensions of Academics of the Heart, I turn to the ancient wisdom of the indigenous people of Mexico and Central America. I turn to the timeless philosophy of the Maya and the Aztec cultures. From the Mayas, we get the principle of the unity of existence. For the Mayas, to know is to understand how something fits in a changing, expanding world system. They believed in the connection of opposite principles. The Maya saw the sciences as inseparable from divination (Spilsbury & Bryner, 1992). The principle of connectedness can also be found in great cultural and religious beliefs and traditions of the contemporary world, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism (Freidel, Schele, & Parker, 1993).

From the Aztecs we get the importance of employing the heart in the search for individual growth and universal truth. The Aztecs believed that the only truth on earth was poetic and artistic creation, as embodied in what they called in *xochitl,* in *cuicatl,* or "*flor y canto*" (flower and song). In essence, *flor y canto* was an education of the heart. Those who were able to create beautiful things such as music, literature, poetry, philosophy, art, and buildings were said to have God in their hearts and to be able to communicate with the divine. Mexican scholar Miguel Leon-Portilla wrote that the Aztecs believed that wise individuals possessed "a heart made divine [*yolteotl*]" (1963, p. 78). The spirit of *flor y canto* led the Aztecs to the heights of mathematical, scientific, and philosophical knowledge. The philosophy behind the model I propose is based on ancient wisdom. This view was in place in many world cultures long before Descartes, long before modern and postmodern theories of knowledge. We need to honor and respect the brilliance of this ancient wisdom that is so often forgotten or pirated as original.

RESEARCH ELEMENTS OF ACADEMICS OF THE HEART

There are three research elements in Academics of the Heart which higher education researchers may incorporate in the research design, analysis, and discussion of findings.

1. View academic research as a relationship-centered process. The term "relationship-centered" comes from the concept of relationship-centered care that is being advanced in the health care education profession (Tresolini & Pew-Fetzer Task Force, 1994). This model posits that healers must enter into relationships with patients, communities, and colleagues to provide a holistic approach to health care. Along the same lines, Academics of the Heart represents a relational view of research organized around two principles.

The first principle is that the knower and what is to be known exist in relationship to each other. Let me elaborate by sharing the story of cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo. In his book *Culture and Truth* (1993), Rosaldo writes about the research he and his wife, Michelle, undertook to study grief with the Ilongots of Northern Luzon, Philippines. The Ilongots have a cultural practice that we in this country would consider savage and barbaric. To deal with the rage of bereavement, the Ilongots cut off human heads.

The rituals involved in Ilongot headhunting include determining an appropriate time to conduct an ambush. Rosaldo explains:

> The raiders call the spirits of potential victims, bid their ritual farewells, and seek favorable omens along the trail. Ilongot men vividly recall the hunger and deprivation they endure over the days and even weeks it takes to

> move cautiously toward the place where they set up an ambush and await the first person who happens along. Once the raiders kill their victims, they toss away the head rather than keep it as a trophy. In tossing away the head, they claim by analogy to cast away their life burdens, including the rage in their grief. (p. 16).

A successful raid is followed by an expiatory ritual of cleansing, catharsis, and celebration.

As a trained ethnographer, Rosaldo sought to explain this perplexing practice with the tools he learned as an academic scientist. Rosaldo found that neither his scientific methodological training in ethnographic research nor theoretical explanations could explain "the cultural force of emotions" that would drive men to cut off human heads. As it turned out, it was only through Rosaldo's own bereavement when his wife died in a fall that he was able to truly understand the simple Ilongot notion that "the act of severing and tossing away a victim's head" allowed men to "throw away the anger of bereavement" (p. 1).

Rosaldo writes:

> In 1981 Michelle Rosaldo and I began field research among the Ifugaos of northern Luzon, Philippines. On October 11 of that year, she was walking along a trail with two Ifugao companions when she lost her footing and fell to her death. . . . Immediately on finding her body I became enraged. How could she abandon me? How could she have been so stupid as to fall? I tried to cry. I sobbed, but rage blocked the tears. . . . I experienced the deep cutting pain of sorrow almost beyond endurance, the cadaverous cold of realizing the finality of death. (p. 9)

While the Ilongots' anger was not entirely the same as Rosaldo's rage, there were some striking similarities. Both felt intense anger; both sought for a realistic solution to vent their rage. In the end, it was not an objective, detached scientific model, but a relational model, connecting Rosaldo to his research subjects in a most personal way, that provided the most enlightening perspectives about his fieldwork. Rosaldo explains that his own mourning and personal reflection on Ilongot bereavement and headhunting allowed him to explain the intensity of rage in Ilongot grief. Rosaldo's study provided not only a personal and scientific report, but also a critical analysis of anthropological method.

Similarly, David Freidel, an archeologist, Linda Schele, an art historian, and Joy Parker, a writing expert, collectively studied the Maya worldview and came away enormously imfluenced both by what they learned and by how the experience of research changed their own lives. Initially, the authors saw the Maya as an alternate reality that had little relevance to their personal life. They explain:

> We did what the majority of scientists are supposed to do—keep an objective distance. Like the majority of our colleagues, we were secure in the superiority of our own worldview. [We] changed our attitude. . . . Because [the Maya] way is pervasively spiritual, we had to discover our real feelings about spirituality and faith. . . . To write about the Maya cosmos, we had to accept the significance of its supernatural reality and learn to play by the rules of its own internal logic. (pp. 10-11)

The second principle of relationship-centered research is to honor both science and heart in research undertakings. In his book *The Heart's Code,* Paul Pearsall (1998), a psychoneuroimmunologist, presents a very exciting breakthrough in the field of "energy cardiology." Pearsall proposes that we have been given two intelligences—the intelligence of the brain and the heart. In case after case of experiments involving heart transplant patients, amazing stories have emerged providing evidence that the heart thinks, feels, and remembers. A little girl who receives a heart transplant from a murdered child starts screaming at night. In her dreams, she recognizes the man who murdered her donor. A young man from a Spanish-speaking family begins using the term, *copacetic,* a word he never employed before. The wife of his heart's donor explains that every time she and her husband argued and made up, they would both say everything was "copacetic" (Pearsall, 1998, pp. 7-8, 76).

These cases are not science fiction. Pearsall (1998) maintains, "If the 20th century has been the Century of the Brain, then the 21st century should be the Century of the Heart" (p. xii). If Pearsall is correct, then the future of research is truly phenomenal. Higher states of consciousness can be reached if we learn to use the marvelous gifts of our brain and the wisdom of our heart. Perhaps it is here that we will find the third side of knowledge, the space that blends objective science and "the energy of the soul conveyed by the heart" (Pearsall, 1998, p. 17).

There are already many examples of researchers who honor science and spirit. For instance, the authors of the *Maya Cosmos* (Freidel, Schele, & Parker, 1993) explained that, in conducting their research, they did not turn their backs on scientific knowledge or methods. Yet the heart and soul of their research was to be found in the personal encounters with the Maya as well as their own adventures of discovery. Paul Pearsall's (1998) research on the role of the heart relies on personal experiences, lessons from indigenous peoples, stories from heart transplant patients, and theories and research of scientists. In much the same way, higher education research can benefit from studies that blend scientific methods and theories with personal reflections about the process of engaging in a particular study, as well as the incorporation of diverse ways of knowing.

2. Honor diverse ways of knowing. Truth comes in many forms. In our higher education research, we need to know that we can draw from a vast array of views of reality. In *Other Ways of Knowing,* historian John Broomfield (1997) explains that the whole of knowing invites wisdom from a variety of perspectives. We can learn from the sacred traditions of our ancestors, from the spiritual traditions of other cultures, from personal experiences, from feminine ways of knowing, from the experiences of racial/ethnic and religious minorities, from the experiences of gay/lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, from quantitative and qualitative research, from our dreams, and from what Huston Smith calls "the sacred unconscious," a meditative state that unites the self with a higher and deeper wisdom (Broomfield, 1997, p. 79; Rendón, 1999).

Let me also emphasize that Academics of the Heart is not about privileging qualitative research as a method of inquiry. Last year, I took a trip to the Yucatan to attend a Dream Arts Workshop. As I reflected on my dreams and the very challenging academic work ahead of me, I shared with the participants that I wanted to find a way to explain that quantitative and qualitative research, though different, could be used in a stand-alone way but were more powerful if they could be used to inform each other.

One of the participants, a weaver named Betty, gave me the answer. She explained that the underlying structure of a woven artifact is called a "warp." In the warp, the threads have to be in the exact order, they cannot cross each other, and they have to have exactly the same tension. The warp must be in place before adding the creativity of colorful patterns at the top of the weaving called the "weft." The final creation, said Betty, is a marriage of rigid structure and playful color. What the weaving metaphor illuminates is the delicate coexistence between two forms of inquiry—the exactness of science and the creativity of the spirit.

3. Engage in contemplative practice, self-reflection, and introspection. Academics of the Heart is about connecting the inner and outer nature of knowledge. Roger Walsh (1998) encourages us to see things both as they are and as we are. We cannot understand the external world if we do not understand ourselves. Walsh explains, "Contemplative training changes the way we are and opens us to hidden wisdom and higher grades of significance in transpersonal traditions, in the world, and in ourselves" (p. 23).

There comes a time in many a researcher's life when we wonder: Why are we doing what we do? What is the meaning of what we do? Is our research truly making a difference? These questions are about purpose, about our longing to find a deeper meaning to what we do. In his book *How Then Shall We Live?,* Wayne Muller (1996) poses four questions that can help reveal meaning and purpose: "Who am I? What do I love? How shall I live, knowing I will die? What is my gift to the family of the earth?" (p. xii).

Contemplative practice is sometimes difficult, painful work. It involves facing our demons, our shadow self, our uncertainties, our deepest fears, our sorrows, and our joys. Here is an excerpt of my poem, "*Quien Soy Yo?* (Who Am I?)" (Rendon, 2000):

Quien soy yo?

The truth is that I am more than
What I appear to be today.

Quien soy yo?

No one really knows that I am
The young girl who wanted nothing
More than a pair of moccasins
For her sixth birthday.
They seemed to be such
An extravagant purchase at the time.

It was when we lived
In a two-room shack with an outhouse.
It was a time that I had for so long
Cleverly blocked from my memory.
El dolor, the pain, numbs the senses.

Quien soy yo?

I am the high school student
Who didn't get invited to the senior prom
Because she was unattractive,
Unlike the girls who found their way
Into school clubs and organizations
Not for what they knew, but for how they looked.

The girl who was told by the sponsor
Of the Future Teachers of America that
She would never be a teacher because
She had made an "F" in chemistry.
"Teachers don't make F's," she said.
She didn't know that I had sprained my knee
So badly I could not walk to school for weeks.
But there was no money to see the doctor
Nomas no habia dinero—this was
Just the way it was . . .

Quien soy yo?

I am the graduate student who left Laredo
To take the risks my parents were afraid of,

> The Chicana at the University of Michigan
> Filled with awe at the sheer fact
> That I was there; knowing full well
> *Mi familia* did not understand what I
> Was doing or where I was going . . .
>
> *Quien soy yo?*
>
> *Soy la mujer*
> Haunted by childhood memories
> Buried deep in my subconscious
> Appearing to me in dreams of evil spirits
> Wanting to penetrate
> *Mi cuerpo*
> Terrorizing my trembling body.
>
> *Quien soy yo?*
>
> I am a multiplicity of identities
> That frighten me, guard me, teach me,
> Love me.

It is through the artistry of poetry and written expression, quiet meditation, opening my heart to joy and pain, and taking the time to know myself in relation to the work I do that I am becoming a more centered individual. Slowly I am building a foundation to approach my external work, not with certainty, but with mystery and awe. Slowly I am learning that I can make a difference for others only if I can make a difference for me. Slowly I have begun to understand the importance of forgiving and of being open to give and receive love. Slowly I have realized that work, work, work is not all there is to life, that real life involves balance and rhythm between inner peace and outer action.

It was very interesting for me to learn that some of the greatest minds in the world have engaged in some form of contemplative practice. René Descartes analyzed his dreams and meditated; Carl Jung became engrossed with mandalas, drawings that give meaning to the center of personality. And ancient philosophers often crossed the line between fact and subjectivity. Galileo used dialogue to present his views on mechanics, and Plato's dialogues involved morals, ethics, and even how to face one's own death (Jung, 1989; Wolf, 1996). Indeed, our history shows that excellence can occur when the scientific mind connects with the artistry of the spirit. It is to this end that higher education research can be taken to a higher level.

Opening the Heart

I have chosen to take us into the light and into the darkness to open a dialogue about imagining a new higher education research enterprise that

focuses on connectedness as the basic foundation for doing research. If we believe in this, then we must train a new generation of researchers who understand concepts such as the relationship between the brain and emotion, the evolution of consciousness, the wisdom of indigenous peoples, diverse ways of knowing, mind/body interactions, and the connection between reason and faith. We also need to create a climate for genuine inquiry to occur. This means putting a stop to excessive faculty stress that diminishes their academic and personal lives. It means staying focused on putting our graduate students through a dignified process of doctoral study that respects them as individuals, values what they know, and involves them as co-creators and co-beneficiaries of research.

One thousand years from today, in the year 3000, a new ASHE president or the president of a similar organization will be addressing a body of his or her peers. What will the president say? I trust the president will say that we, their ancestors, did a very courageous thing at the turn of the century. I trust the president will say that we opened our hearts to change—that we invited a shift of consciousness that took academic research to a level the world had never known.

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