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## **Bringing a Counter-hegemonic Pedagogy to Scale in Mexican Public Schools**

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# Bringing a Counter-hegemonic Pedagogy to Scale in Mexican Public Schools

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## Abstract

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How and under what conditions can a counter-hegemonic pedagogy, that is, a pedagogy that is qualitatively distinct from the dominant institutional culture and power relations of schooling, be brought to scale? This paper addresses this question by using the Learning Community Project (LCP) in Mexico as a case study. LCP started in 2004 as a grassroots initiative to promote a pedagogy of tutorial relationships of dialogue and reciprocal learning. This practice disseminated across hundreds of schools in five years and, in 2009, it inspired the creation of a nation-wide strategy to radically transform teaching and learning in nine thousand schools across Mexico. By integrating theory and knowledge on instructional improvement and widespread cultural change, this paper examines the role of a critical community in developing a counterhegemonic pedagogy, and the strategies and conditions that enabled its dissemination in the social, political, and pedagogical arenas.

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**Keywords:** counter-hegemony, pedagogy, instructional improvement, widespread cultural change, Learning Community Project

# Llevar una Pedagogía Contra-hegemónica a Escala en Escuelas Públicas Mexicanas

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## Resumen

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¿Cómo y bajo qué condiciones puede llevarse a escala una pedagogía contra-hegemónica - es decir, una pedagogía que es cualitativamente distinta a la cultura institucional y las relaciones de poder dominantes en la escuela -? Este artículo afronta esta cuestión utilizando un estudio de caso del Proyecto Comunidad de Aprendizaje (LCP) en México. El LCP inició en el año 2004 como una iniciativa de base para promover una pedagogía de relaciones tutoriales de diálogo y aprendizaje recíproco. Esta práctica divulgada en cientos de escuelas en cinco años inspiró la creación de una estrategia nacional más amplia para transformar radicalmente la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en nueve mil escuelas de todo México. A través de la integración de teoría y conocimiento en la mejora pedagógica y el cambio cultural extendido, este artículo examina el papel de una comunidad crítica en desarrollar una pedagogía contra-hegemónica y las estrategias y condiciones que hacen posible su divulgación en las arenas pedagógica, política y social.

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**Palabras clave:** contra-hegemonía, pedagogía, mejora instruccional, cambio cultural, Proyecto Comunidad de Aprendizaje

**H**ow can a counter-hegemonic pedagogy, that is, a pedagogy that is qualitatively distinct from the dominant institutional culture and power relations of schooling, be brought to scale? This paper addresses this question using the Learning Community Project (LCP) in Mexico as a case study<sup>1</sup>. An initially grassroots, NGO-led pedagogical change initiative, the LCP succeeded in consolidating and expanding a pedagogy based on tutorial relationships of dialogue and reciprocal learning across hundreds of schools. In 2009, the LCP inspired the creation of the Program for the Improvement of Educational Achievement (PEMLE), a nation-wide strategy aimed at radically transforming teaching and learning in thousands of schools across the country. Between 2010 and 2012, PEMLE schools had increased the percentage of students scoring at good and excellent levels in Math and Language, at a faster pace than and surpassing the national average (DGDGIE, 2012).

By integrating theory and knowledge on instructional improvement and widespread cultural change, this paper examines the role of a critical community in developing a counter-hegemonic pedagogy, and the strategies and conditions that enabled its dissemination in the social, political, and pedagogical areas.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### **Counter-hegemonic Pedagogy**

The term counter-hegemonic is used herein to qualify pedagogical principles or practices that disrupt the traditional instructional culture and power relations of schooling. More specifically, a pedagogical principle or practice is considered counter-hegemonic when it fundamentally redefines the relationships within the instructional core – that is, the relationship between teacher and student in the presence of content (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Hawkins, 1974). The term counter-hegemony has been

adopted from the Gramscian school of thought (Broccoli, 1979; Gramsci, 1981; Thomas, 2009) to deliberately position prospects of pedagogical change in the larger context of social relations of domination. Broadly speaking, modern institutions – e.g., the medical establishment, schooling, the State – can be characterized by vertical relationships of authority and control, with a clear separation between the expert – e.g., doctor, teacher, policy maker –, considered to have superior knowledge and whose role is to dictate what to do and how, and the ‘acolyte’ – the patient, the student, the citizen – whose role is to follow the indications of the expert. While most often reproduced through the institution of schooling (Apple, 2004; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1977), dominant social relations may be subverted through the development of counter-hegemonic practices that seek to establish new social relations based on humanist principles of dialogue, respect, and solidarity (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; Hooks, 1994; Scott, 1990).

I have qualified the core practice of tutorial relationships advanced by LCP as counter hegemonic. The qualifier is, indeed, a central component of the research question guiding the study presented here. But declaring that a practice is counterhegemonic without providing descriptive evidence that supports such claim would constitute a grave omission. After all, a large body of educational reform implementation studies provides robust evidence of considerable differences between the declared intentions of reform and the actual instructional practice in classrooms (Coburn, 2004; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). The case needs to be made that the practice under examination can, indeed, be qualified as counterhegemonic. Such is the intention of the next few paragraphs.

The core pedagogy of LCP looks more or less as follows. Teachers offer their students a collection of topics they master, which they have studied in their own network of tutors. Students choose their topics from this available catalogue and develop individual lines of inquiry, at their own pace. Throughout the process, the tutor engages in one-on-one dialogue with students, using their thoughts and questions as the basic material to build new meanings and solve problems. Students are expected to publicly demonstrate their mastery of the topics and their skill to learn independently in writing and in public presentations for their peers, their teachers and often parents from the community. Once they demonstrate mastery of a topic, students are expected to serve as tutors to other students interested in the

same topic. Over time, the knowledge constructed in this way constitutes a collective fund of knowledge available to the group and to anyone who visits the school (City, Elmore & Lynch, 2012; Rincón-Gallardo & Elmore, 2012).

The practice just described is remarkably at odds with classroom pedagogy not only in Mexico but in most schools serving children and adolescents internationally. LCP's tutorial relationships fundamentally shift the relations of authority and control within the instructional core – the relationship between teacher and content, between teacher and student, and between student and content (Rincón-Gallardo, 2014). A new relationship between teacher and content among LCP participants involves teachers acknowledging gaps in their personal knowledge, opening up to receive the support of coaches and peers, and developing a new identity as learners. The teacher-student relationship involves a transition from vertical relationships of power into more horizontal relationships of dialogue and mutual learning. In some cases, the relationship is subverted when students become tutors and teachers become their tutees. The relationship between student and content shifts from one of dependency on the teacher and a predetermined curriculum to one of autonomy as independent learners. Associated with this shift is the development student efficacy and engagement as they interact with content.

The new relationships within the instructional core just described suggest a fundamental shift from vertical relationships of authority and control to more horizontal relationships of dialogue and mutual influence. A word of caution, however, is in place here. Looked at more closely, it is possible to find instances where relationships of authority and control of conventional schooling remain unchallenged even when the more structural arrangements of tutorial relationships are in place. In these instances, students and adults work one-on-one, yet the interactions between tutors and students maintain a clear separation between the tutor as expert and the student as the acolyte expected to follow the directives of the tutor. I will come back to this point later in the paper, arguing for the examination of the pedagogical arena as a fundamental step in analyzing whether and to what extent the practice under examination can be considered counterhegemonic.

### **Large-Scale Instructional Improvement as Widespread Cultural Change**

Bringing a counter-hegemonic pedagogy to scale is conceptualized here as a process of widespread cultural change. In this sense, I depart from the technical-rational view under which the term of scale was originally

conceived (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1981). From a technical-rational perspective, scale means the number of actors or sites adopting an intervention, and the process of scaling is understood as replication of an intervention at multiple sites (Glennan, Bodilly, Galegher & Kerr, 2004). Instead, I adopt the more complex definition of scale advanced by Coburn (2003), which consists of four interrelated dimensions: 1) *Spread* – the expansion of new or improved practices to new sites or groups; 2) *Depth* – the extent to which practice is transformed in meaningful and deep ways; 3) *Sustainability* – the creation and adaptation of policy and infrastructure systems to support the consolidation and expansion of deep improvements in practice over time; and 4) *Ownership* – the transfer of knowledge and authority to sustain the reform to actors on the ground.

To better understand how a counter-hegemonic pedagogy can be brought to scale, I integrate knowledge and theory on instructional improvement and on widespread cultural change (Rochon, 1998), two fields that have evolved separate from each other and yet, when combined, can illuminate the problem of transforming pedagogy at scale in a new light. In a nutshell, I posit that widespread cultural change in classrooms occurs when a counter-hegemonic pedagogy developed by a critical community is adopted by movements who disseminate the new practice in three arenas: the social, the political, and the pedagogical arenas. These ideas are briefly developed below.

Thomas Rochon (1998) examined the processes and conditions under which widespread cultural change occurs by studying some of the most prominent instances of cultural change in a 150 year span of American history – the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the California immigrant farmer’s movement, the gay movement, and the environmental movement, among others. Widespread cultural change, he argues, occurs when new values, ideas, or practices developed by critical communities are adopted by movements that spread them into the social and political arenas. A critical community is defined by Rochon as a relatively small network of critical thinkers who develop over time a shared understanding and sensitivity to some problem, an analysis of its sources, and a stance on how it should be addressed. But the influence of critical communities on widespread cultural change becomes powerful only to the extent that their ideas and practices are adopted by wider social and political movements to carry them to a wider audience, to provoke critical examination of existing values, and to create social and political pressure for change.

The social arena is the world of changing values, identities, concerns, and daily behaviors. Hence the true locus of social movements is in homes, workplaces, schools, etcetera. The political arena, on the other hand, is the realm of leaders, movement organizations and specific policy demands. Events in the social and the political arena can influence each other, although sometimes the influence may be indirect or delayed. Because of this interactive relationship, Rochon argues that the examination of widespread cultural change must be attentive to its manifestations in both the social and political arenas. Transferred to the educational realm, a comprehensive understanding of how and under what conditions widespread cultural change occurs requires an examination of the micro-dynamics and the macro-dynamics of pedagogical change, that is, the everyday activities of movement actors, and the wider structures of political opportunities that enable or constrain pedagogical change.

To the social and political arenas I add the *pedagogical* arena to bring specific attention to the dynamics within the instructional core – the relationship between teachers and learners in the presence of content. Several authors in the educational change field have used the French proverb *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (the more things change the more they stay the same) to describe the pervasiveness and resiliency of what has come to be termed the default culture of schooling, that is, the established instructional culture and institutional structure of schools (Elmore, 1996; Sarason, 1982). Some distinguishing features of such default culture include a top-down separation between teaching and learning, with authority and control highly concentrated in the hands of teachers; a focus on covering content at the same time and pace for the whole group; and a prioritization of covering content over ensuring student understanding. As Evans (1996) points out, culture in organizations exerts a powerful influence over the beliefs and behaviors of their members to preserve continuity and oppose change. The power of organizational culture to rule out options for change, or more specifically to prevent the adoption of a counterhegemonic practice, is not be underestimated. Even when deliberate efforts have been made to substantially transform the instructional core, the default culture of schooling has more often than not re-emerged and prevailed as the dominant form in which teachers and students go about their everyday classroom activities (Cuban, 1984, 2013; Elmore, 1996; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Sarason, 1982). Looking at the pedagogical arena, and in particular examining whether and to what extent a new pedagogy is indeed



counterhegemonic, is therefore a basic requirement if our interest is to advance our understanding of widespread pedagogical change in classrooms. The theoretical foundations presented here provide a roadmap to examine how and under what conditions a counterhegemonic pedagogy may be brought to scale. The role of a critical community in developing a counterhegemonic pedagogy carried over through the Learning Community Project, as well as the processes of change in the social, political and pedagogical arenas constitute major components of this paper.

### **Methodology**

As explained above, an adequate examination of the strategies and conditions under which a counterhegemonic pedagogy can be brought to scale requires looking into the role of a critical community in developing a counterhegemonic practice, as well as its dissemination in the social, political, and pedagogical arenas. With this in mind, two major areas of inquiry can be identified. The first has to do with the origins, development, and dissemination of countercultural work in the social and political arenas. It involves looking into the role of a critical community in devising and initiating countercultural work and the creation and use of opportunities to introduce and disseminate the practice in the social and political arenas. The second area of inquiry is the pedagogical arena. It involves describing the new practice as observed in classrooms, the processes through which the practice is learned, consolidated, and expanded to new schools, and the interactions of LCP actors with their surrounding institutional environments as they attempt to transform their pedagogy.

Each of the two areas of inquiry just named requires a somewhat different methodological approach. However, they share as a common unit of analysis the specific pedagogical practice promoted and expanded through LCP and PEMLE. Choosing this single practice as the unit of analysis allowed the author to trace down the interactions between a critical community, a variety of actors and organizations, and other social and political institutions. The focus on a specific change in practice makes possible the incorporation of “the diversity of means and ends that exists

within any movement [while casting] aside the less fruitful aspects of scholarly debates about whether movements are strategic or cultural, resource-based or identity-based, while utilizing the very substantial insights generated by each of these approaches.” (Rochon, 1998, p. 51). Finally, a focus on a counterhegemonic practice permits an examination of the interactions between the social, the political, and the pedagogical arenas of movement action, the tensions involved in simultaneously trying to affect each arena, and the ways in which movement actors respond to and deal with such tensions.

The sections below describe in some detail the methodology designed to examine, first, the role of a critical community in devising the counterhegemonic practice under examination and the opportunities it created and capitalized on to introduce the practice in the social and political arenas and, secondly, the features of the countercultural practice and the processes through which it is learned, consolidated, and expanded.

*Examining the role of a critical community in devising a counterhegemonic practice and its work on the social and political arenas.* 668 documents were compiled and examined, including 396 fieldwork and workshop reports, 127 progress reports, 118 official and internal documents, and 27 essays, publications, and public presentations. These documents were created by 67 authors between 2003 and June 2012. Authors included leaders and coaches from LCP and PEMLE, as well as participating technical-pedagogical advisors and external visitors.

I also conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 8 leaders of LCP and PEMLE. In 60 to 90 minute sessions, participants were asked to talk about their involvement in LCP, the history behind the project, and their accounts on why the project expanded the way it did. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the compiled documents were ordered chronologically for analysis.

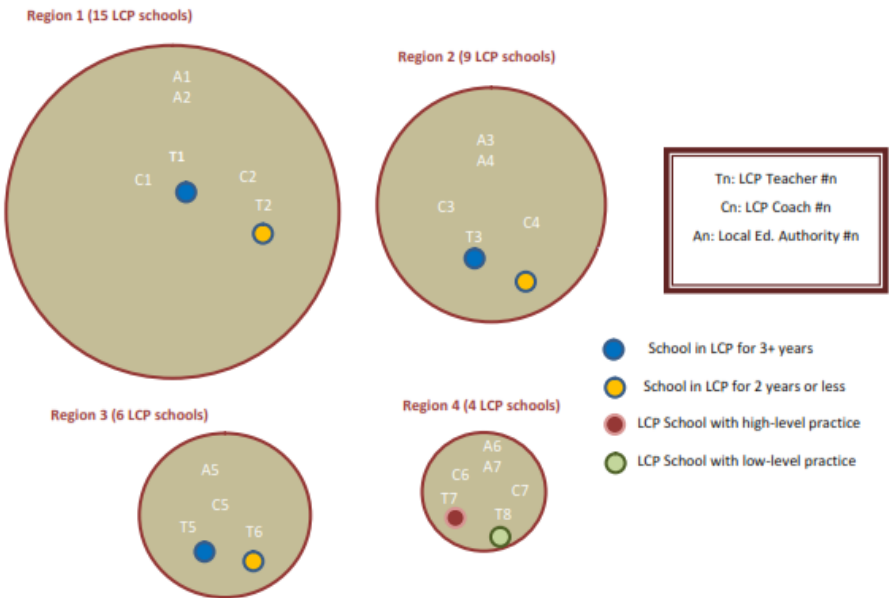
Documents and interviews were analyzed with the explicit intention of understanding four previously determined themes (Boyatzis, 1998): i) the origins and development over time of the pedagogical practice under examination; ii) the learning of its promoters and the changes made to the practice and their strategies over time; iii) The work and most prominent outcomes of LCP and PEMLE in the social and political arenas, and iv) The conditions and political opportunities that enabled the relatively rapid

expansion of the practice between 2004 and 2012. Themes i) through iii) required mostly a historical reconstruction of past events, which involved reviewing the compiled documents in chronological order and creating a narrative account of the inception and development of LCP's core practice, and the social and political opportunities created or capitalized on by project leaders and participants to introduce the new pedagogy in a large number of schools and across the educational system. This narrative account was shared with five pioneering leaders of LCP for their review. Reviewers were asked to intentionally search for omissions, and to provide suggested changes and corrections to my historical reconstruction. This exercise of calibration helped develop internal validity (Maxwell, 2005).

I took a somewhat different approach to address the fourth theme, which relates to the political conditions that enabled the relatively rapid dissemination of the pedagogy advanced through LCP and PEMLE. Between 2004 and 2008, Convivencia Educativa, A.C (CEAC), the small NGO that developed the practice of tutorial relationships, initiated several small scale projects, all of which shared a focus on introducing the same core practice in classrooms and a very similar strategy. All of these projects but one – a small scale pedagogical change project in Zacatecas – had a short life. Since all these projects had several design features in common, they were carried out by the same organization, and shared similar implementation conditions, they provide a useful “control,” however imperfect, against which to compare the case of Zacatecas. Identifying the particular combination of conditions that were present in the case of Zacatecas and not in the rest of the projects initiated by CEAC allowed the identification of key conditions that enabled the introduction and dissemination of the core pedagogy of LCP in the social and political arenas.

***Examining the distinctive features of the pedagogical practice of tutorial relationships and how it is learned, consolidated, and disseminated.*** The examination began with a description LCP's core practice as observed in a group of 8 LCP schools from 4 out of 8 school regions in the State of Zacatecas representing a broad range of implementation contexts and involvement in and experience with LCP (Figure 1). Classroom observations focused on the tasks students were asked to do (Doyle, 1983), the relationships between teachers and students, and the interactions within the group. Evidence was collected to describe, with as little judgment as possible (City et. al, 2009), of the activities at the level of the instructional core. In each classroom, the researcher had the opportunity to sit with some

students individually or in small groups, observe their work, and ask about the work they were doing. To gain access to a wide range of degrees of mastery of the practice within the group, the researcher in some cases took a cursory look at the work in the group and picked a few students based on the subject area of their selected topics or the apparent degree of difficulty of their topics. In other cases, teachers were asked to identify some students they would consider to be in the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of mastery of LCP’s practice, and at least one student in each level was approached. Observations in each classroom lasted between 2 and 3 hours, mostly uninterrupted. Based on the classroom observation notes, descriptive accounts of the observed activities were created. These descriptive accounts were then utilized as data for analysis.



*Figure 1*

Graphic display of site and participant selection

Note: Approximately 90 schools in Zacatecas had an assigned coach by 2011, whereas the total of schools supported by PEMLE in Zacatecas was 250. Three of the regions had between 12 and 15 schools participating in LCP, two regions had between 6 and 9 LCP schools, and two regions had between 3 and 4. As a whole, the

eight selected schools represented variation in size: four had one single teacher, two had two teachers, one had three teachers, and one had 12 teachers.

In addition to classroom observations, in-depth, open ended, semi structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) were conducted with 24 LCP participants, including teachers, teacher coaches, and local administrators. Interviews were carried on in the course of two one-week visits to the state of Zacatecas in 2011. In one or more 30 to 90 minute sessions, participants were asked to talk about their involvement in LCP, the current instructional practice in their school(s), how they had learned the new pedagogy of tutorial relationships, the constraints and enablers they encountered in their efforts to transform pedagogy, and the ways in which they perceived – if at all – to have influenced their surrounding institutional environments. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

A backward mapping logic (Elmore, 1979/1980) was used as analytical strategy to examine the data collected through classroom observations and interviews, which involved:

1. Describing and predicting student learning in each classroom as a function of the tasks students were asked to do.
2. Identifying consistency and variation of instructional practice in LCP classrooms
3. Classifying classroom practice by level of observed practice and predicted student learning
4. Identifying commonalities and differences among groups in different levels of practice, in terms of their experiences, knowledge, and access to enabling/constraining conditions.

To identify major themes in the interview transcripts, raw data was summarized or paraphrased, while attempting to keep the essence and tone of the individual accounts. For each interview, a 2- to 4- page document of reduced data was created. The reduced data was grouped by role of the interviewees (teacher, coach, local authority, LCP leader), and each group was then reviewed to identify common themes within the group. Once common themes were identified by group, overarching themes across groups were searched for. Five overarching themes were identified (See Code of overarching themes in Table 1).

Table 1  
*Code of overarching themes*

<b>Label</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Qualifications/ Exclusions</b>	<b>Example</b>
Counter-hegemonic practice (CH)	Reference to regular LCP activities, practices, or understandings that are qualitatively distinct from the default culture of schooling	Interviewee describes a qualitative shift in any of the following relationships: adult-content, adult-student, student-content, student-student.	When an account is coded with this label, it should be easy to discern the counterpart to the activity, practice or understanding in the default culture of schooling. Do NOT code when referred shifts refer only to one element of the instructional core (teacher change, student change, content change).	"I sit next to them, rather than standing in front of them" (change in the teacher-student relationship), "Now students know where to look for the information they need" (change in the student-content relationship).
Motivation (MOT)	Accounts that provide insight into the reasons, changes or outcomes that motivate LCP actors to join/support LCP.	Explicit use of sentences like "I am/we are doing this because..." "I/we support this because..." or expressions of excitement/ emotion when describing specific activities or perceived changes.	Do NOT code when account is merely descriptive, but with no identifiable sign that helps understand why the interviewee joins/stays in/supports LCP.	"[Previously] there was a session we had to complete, no matter who stayed behind. And that hurt me. I was accountable to the official program. But not to the students."
Learning the practice (LRN)	Reference to what needs to be known to master counter-cultural practice and/or how the practice is learned.	Narratives that describe processes of learning the practice; statements on what one needs to know to be a tutor; statements on how the practice is/can be/should be learned.	Do NOT code when interviewee mentions he/she is learning or has learned new things but without specifying what the learning was or how it was gained.	"Coaching was fundamental. Any week I had with my coach [...] I would not do anything else that receive his coaching [...] see how he tutored my students. [...] I would observe what he did, how he did it, his questions, even his attitude towards kids."

Table 1. *Continued*

Label	Definition	Indicators	Qualifications/ Exclusions	Example
Interacting with Institutional Environment (INST)	Accounts that illustrate the relationship between LCP actors and their institutional environments as then attempt to access, learn, consolidate or disseminate the counter-cultural practice	Accounts that describe, illustrate, or provide insight into how institutions facilitate or constrain the learning, consolidation or expansion of LCP's practice. Accounts on interactions between LCP actors and: 1) educational authorities, or 2) other actors not in LCP	Code when any of the following can be identified: Institutional enablers, institutional constraints, resistance to the new practice, support of the new practice.	“When I was allowed to skip, say, a Union meeting to work with my coach, other teachers in the region would say: <i>It is not fair that some people don't show up, engaged in their fake projects that don't work at all, that's not work.</i> And that was demoralizing for me. And sometimes I would tell myself: Why don't I just leave LCP and avoid this?”
Consolidating/expanding the practice (EXP)	Reference to mechanisms, practices or strategies whereby counter-practice is talked about, presented, tried out, and/or disseminated.	Stories or statements that illustrate exchanges of information or knowledge (through talk or hands-on experience) about LCP. Explicit mention of spaces or practices to showcase, refine or disseminate the practice.	Code when any of the following can be identified: Communities of practice, workshops, public presentations, school visits, school interchanges, informal networking and outreach, parent involvement, promotion/publicity.	“This is contagious [...] I have talked to teachers who were in this school a while ago and then have seen it again recently. And they talk, about what they saw in a student presentation or in their work as tutors: their confidence, their mastery. So then it is like <i>I want this for my classroom.</i> ”

To assess the reliability of the code, an interview was randomly selected and its reduced raw data document shared with two members of the researcher’s interpretive community at graduate school who had gained familiarity with this research project through weekly writing group meetings held over the previous 3 years. In a one-hour session, these colleagues were asked to code the reduced raw data document independently. Inter-rater reliability was measured using simple percentage agreement scores (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 153, 154). Percentage agreement scores among the three coders and between coders are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Inter-rater Reliability as Percentage Agreement Among Three Coders*

	<b>Coders A, B &amp; C</b>	<b>Coders A &amp; B</b>	<b>Coders B &amp; C</b>	<b>Coders A &amp; C</b>
Overall % agreement*	75%	86%	86%	79%
% agreement CH	60%	70%	80%	67%
% agreement MOT	80%	80%	100%	80%
% agreement LRN	75%	100%	75%	75%
% agreement EXP	100%	100%	100%	100%
% agreement INST	71%	86%	71%	86%

\* Overall % agreement = no. of times agreement in coding/28.

As a next step, the complete interview transcripts were coded using the 5-theme code as a guide, while identifying emerging sub-themes to capture in more detail the content, essence, and tone of the data. In order to stay close to the accounts of interviewees, the researcher moved back and forth between identified themes and transcripts through the whole process of data analysis. After coding all the transcripts, excerpts grouped under each label were reviewed to double-check that every excerpt fit its assigned label and that the name of the label was an accurate description of the excerpts. Identified themes were organized on a single list indicating the frequency with which themes were identified in each interview (Table 3).



Table 3

Identified themes and their frequency in the interview transcripts

	Teachers					Teacher Coaches					Local Ed. Authorities									
	S	P	D	Mc	I R Mg Te	Fu	G	L	M	To	Fi	J	D	P	E	B	Ge	F	JM	
<b>LCP AS COUNTERCULTURAL PRACTICE</b>																				
<i>Transforming the Teacher-Content Relationship</i>																				
Bringing the guard down	1				1						2		1		2			4	1	1
Discovering gaps in own knowledge	2		2	1	2	1				3	1	3		3		2	2		2	
Becoming a learner	5	2	2	3	1	2	1			3		5		1	1	4	1		2	2
<i>Transforming the Teacher-Student Relationship</i>																				
From teacher to tutor	8	1	1	1			1	3	2	1	3	2	3		7	2		4	1	
From ritual to dialogue	7		1	10		2		6	4	1	7	2	4	2	6	2		2		
Friendship (i)		1		2			1		1		2	1		2	1		1	1		
From withholding control to transferring agency			1	7				2	3	2		1	1	5	2	1	2	1		
From tutor to tutee of students	6	1	2	3				2	2	1	1	2	3		4	2		2	4	1
<i>Transforming the Student-Content Relationship</i>																				
From coverage to mastery				9	1	2	4	1	3		3	1	3	1	2	3		3		
From dependence to autonomy	3	1	1	2		1	3	1	1		1		1		2	2		2		
Witnessing student learning (ii)	2			2	3			3			2	1		3		1		2	2	
Witnessing student engagement (iii)	4	1	1	1		1				2				1	2	1	1	1		
Witnessing student confidence (iv)	1	2		1	1			2			4	4			2	2	1	2	1	2
<b>MOTIVATION</b>																				
<i>Teacher-content - Need/desire to learn</i>																				
Teacher-student - Care & Commitment	1	1	3	5	2	1	1	2	2	2	6	2	5	1	2	5	1	7	1	1
Student-content - Inspiration & Satisfaction (v)	3	1	4	6		1	1	4	2	2	3	3	2		3	2	2	3		
Seeing contradictions of previous practice	5	1	5	3		4	1	5	1	5	6	2	4	1	9	6	2	7	4	4
<b>LEARNING THE PRACTICE</b>																				
Mastering content	1	3	2	5		1		2	3	1	5		1		1	2				2
Mastering tutoring	6		1	2	1		1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1				1
Artisanal transmission	4		1	3	1	1		2	4	3	3	1	3	2	1	1		2		1
Learning in/through practice	4		1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	6	1	2	1	4	2		2		2
Becoming a student	2		1	2		3		2	3	3	3		1	2	1		2			1
Coaching	6	4	2	4	3	3		3	1	3	2	2	2	2	1	1		1		2
Observing practice/expertise in action	9		3	2		1				5		1	3	3	1					1
<b>CONSOLIDATING AND EXPANDING THE PRACTICE</b>																				
Communities of practice		1	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	4	2	6	3	1			4		5
Workshops	2	2		1					2		4	2		1	1	1		1		1
School visits	4	1	2	2	1	3		1	1	2	4	1		1	5	5	1		1	3
Exchange visits	1	3	2	2		1			1				2		3			3		
Contagion	4	1		4					3	1	2	2	3		7	6	1	3	1	1
Parent involvement (vi)	1	3	2					3		1					1	3	1		2	3
Word of mouth through social networks		2	1	3	1	2		3	2	4	4	1	3		6	3	5	5	3	3
Promotion/publicity/publications	2				1			1	1	2	2	1			1	2		2	2	

Table 3. Continued

	Teachers							Teacher Coaches							Local Ed Authorities								
	S	P	D	Mc	I	R	Mg	Te	Fu	G	L	M	To	Fi	J	D	P	E	B	Ge	F	JM	
<b>INTERACTING WITH INSTUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT</b>																							
Resistance to new practice	5	3		4	2	2			4	4	3		5	1	4		3	6	3	1		1	
Overcoming resistance													5	1	5	2	4	1	3	7	2	3	1
Authority support - Constraining	1	3	1		1				2	11	2		6		5		1	9	2	1			
Authority support – Enabling	4	5	3					1	4	2	4	1	7	2	8	10	5	9	6	4	6	2	
Time – constraints	4				4			1		2	1			1	2	2		2	1	3			
Time - availability	1	1	3	3	1		1		2	3	2	2	3	2	4	2	1	6		4			
Coaches - unavailability		3		2	2			2	5	3	1	2	2	8	3		1	2		3	4	1	
Coaches - availability		2	1		1	3				2	2			1	4		2	1		1	1	1	
Bureaucratization of program	1	1			1			3	4		1	5	2	4	1							2	
Bureaucratization of practice	1	10	1	1	1		2	1		1	2		4	4				2		2			
<b>COUNTERINSTANCES</b>																							
(i) Teacher as distant observer of student activity														1									
(ii) No student learning					1																		
(iii) No student engagement		2	1		3					1				1									
(iv) No student confidence		1																					
(v) Teacher motivation wanes down					1																		

To capture the collective experiences and understandings of LCP actors, only those themes identified in at least eight interviews were kept for analysis.

To interpret the data and themes in the context of the research question and theoretical framework, the identified themes and the relationships between them were looked at while keeping in mind the overall research question: how and under what conditions can a counterhegemonic pedagogy be brought to scale? To address the *how*, themes were examined with the explicit intention of understanding the specific activities LCP actors engaged in to learn and disseminate their practice. The *conditions* for expansion were identified through examination of the themes that indicated how participants interacted with their wider institutional environments as they attempted to transform their practice and disseminate it to new sites.

**Researcher Stance, Reflexivity, and Validity.** The author of this study is aware of his strong predisposition to seeing LCP and PEMLE in a positive light, which comes from his personal involvement with both initiatives, his close relationship with several of its actors, and his personal identification with their underlying educational philosophy. This close connection to LCP and PEMLE presents several benefits in terms of the associated in-depth knowledge of the contexts in which these programs have emerged and developed, relatively easy access to important information and research resources, and the possibility of quickly developing trust and rapport with interviewees. From the perspective of the author, these benefits outweigh the potential costs of a close proximity to the actors, the approach, and the underlying educational philosophy of LCP and PEMLE. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the personal connection of the author to LCP does play an important role in how the data is interpreted.

Being aware of the author's deep involvement with LCP and PEMLE and his strong interest in its success, some strategies were designed to keep a reflective eye (Luttrell, 2009) on his role as an interpreter of the data at each stage of the research process. First, the sites and participants selected for this study represented varying levels of experience and consolidation of LCP's core practice in classrooms. This helped prevent a biased selection of "bright spots" and granted access to a wide range of degrees of consolidation and sophistication of instructional practice. Second, archival analysis included records of projects that failed to introduce or sustain the pedagogy under examination in classrooms, which brought my attention to failure as well as success. Third, the researcher participated as an interviewee himself and included documents authored by him in the collection of documents to analyze. This helped to objectify the author's own views and include them as one of several other views among LCP actors. Fourth, throughout data collection the focus was kept on the descriptive aspects of the instructional practice and related activities of the interviewees, to create a base of evidence that closely described the actual practices taking place throughout LCP and PEMLE rather than the researcher's personal beliefs and assumptions. Fifth, an iterative process of theme and code development helped keep the analysis anchored on the data, preventing possible tendencies to impose predetermined explanations to the phenomenon under examination. Sixth, during data analysis the researcher endeavored to select every theme that repeated across interviews to address his possible inclination to focus on themes of personal interest with no robust evidence in

the data and to incorporate themes that the author would otherwise feel inclined to leave aside. And seventh, the data analysis included an intentional search for counter-instances – evidence that could contradict the researcher’s interpretations of the experiences of LCP participants. These counter-instances were incorporated into the final summary tables of themes. The rest of this paper presents the main research findings in three sections: the role of a critical community in developing the counter-hegemonic practice under examination; the key strategies and conditions that allowed the dissemination of LCP’s core practice in the social and political arenas; and the latent risk of the default culture of schooling re-emerging under the guise of counter-hegemony.

### **The role of a critical community in developing a counterhegemonic pedagogy**

The origins of the core practice of LCP can be traced back to the work that Gabriel Cámara had been promoting since the 1970's through grassroots initiatives aimed at building conditions for productive learning encounters between learners and tutors, mostly in historically marginalized communities (Bargellini, Cámara, & Salomón, 1974; Cámara, 1972; Lavín de Arrivé, 1986).

Gabriel Cámara completed theology studies as a Jesuit and went to the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he obtained a doctoral degree on educational planning. During his years at Harvard, Gabriel met and developed a close relationship with Paulo Freire and, upon completing his Ed.D, was invited by Ivan Illich to join the CIDOC, a centre Illich created to convene prominent figures in the educational field to engage in the radical critique of educational institutions and to develop radical alternatives to schooling. At CIDOC, Gabriel engaged in conversations and discussions with prominent radical thinkers such as Eric Fromm, Jonathan Kozol, Paul Goodman, and Paulo Freire. The influence of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich can still be found today in Gabriel's thinking and action. His life-long commitment to working with historically marginalized communities and his firm belief that reality is best understood in the deliberate effort to transform it readily bring to mind Freire's work with peasants in Brazil and his theory of praxis (Freire, 1970). From Ivan Illich's thinking, Gabriel shared a radical critique of schooling (Illich, 1970) and his view of powerful education as an act of friendship. But unlike Freire, whose major field of engagement was

adult literacy, and unlike Illich, who envisioned a society with no schools whatsoever, Gabriel's personal path led him to promoting productive learning encounters between teachers and learners within the confines of schools and school systems.

In the mid-1990s, Gabriel was invited by Edmundo Salas, then director of the National Council for the Promotion of Education (CONAFE, for its initials in Spanish), to design and lead the Post-primary Project, a program to promote independent learning skills in the small, remote communities where CONAFE operated. The Post-primary centers were conceived as settings where students and any member of the community interested would be allowed to choose their topics of study and receive tutorial support of an instructor. Independent learning took central stage and, from the outset, the Post-primary left aside standard teaching: no fixed program, syllabi, or internal certifying system. The project represented an important deviation from the policy and instructional practice that characterized CONAFE. (Cámara, 1999, 2003).

A distinguishing aspect of the Post-Primary Project was a strong link between design and implementation, whereby the leading staff would assume the endeavor of demonstrating that the educational model envisioned for Post-primary centers could work in practice. Frequent visits to Post-primary centers to work directly with students and instructors informed the continuous adaptation and adjustment of the model so that it could effectively promote academic self-learning skills among young instructors and students. The most radical step in the development of the Post-primary occurred when the leading staff – specialists in different subject matters, initially responsible to deliver training exclusively in their area of expertise – reorganized themselves as a learning community (Cámara, et. al, 2004; López & Rincón Gallardo, 2003). This experience revealed that though proficient in their area of specialization, each specialist lacked some of the basic knowledge and skills they were supposed to have learned in elementary and middle-school. At the same time, through tutorial support from the specialists in each area, the leading staff gained mastery of topics from areas other than their specialty and developed confidence to become tutors of others interested in learning the topics they had gained mastery of. The learning community became the core practice in Post-primary centers, in professional development sites, and even in the headquarters of the Post-primary (Cámara, et.al, 2004; López & Rincón-Gallardo, 2003).

The Post-Primary project reached 360 communities in 27 out of the 32 Mexican states and was appraised positively in both national and international evaluations (Departamento de Análisis Estadísticos, 2002; PAREIB, 2002; Turner, 2000; Turner & González, 2001; Universidad Veracruzana, 2003). Despite its relative success, the project came to a halt after a new administration arrived in CONAFE. The new director of brought an agenda that was at odds with the philosophy and practice of the project. Escalating tensions between the leadership of the Post-primary and the new administration led to the whole leadership of the project deciding to leave CONAFE and regroup around a new organization. Reorganized around a civil association called Convivencia Educativa, A.C. (CEAC), Gabriel and his team launched a series of small-scale pedagogical change initiatives in elementary and middle-schools in historically marginalized communities (Cámara, 2006, 2008).

### **Bringing a counterhegemonic pedagogy to scale**

This section presents an overview of the main strategies and conditions that allowed LCP actors to disseminate the core practice of tutorial networks to 9000 schools in the country and across the educational system. These are intentionally stated in imperative form, in an effort to turn the description of a relatively successful movement of cultural change in classrooms into strategies for action. As such, the principles/strategies outlined below provide the foundations of a theory of action for widespread counterhegemonic work in classrooms and across educational systems.

To advance countercultural work in the **pedagogical arena**:

*1. Start by directly transforming the instructional core.* The LCP turned conventional relationships within the core into horizontal relationships of dialogue, autonomy, and mutual learning. The small “victories” in student learning, confidence, and engagement of students and educators nurtured the drive to push counterhegemonic work forward.

*2. Teach the practice through modeling, direct observation of the practice, and classroom-based coaching.* LCP actors learned the practice of tutorial relationships through direct exposure to the practice and multiple opportunities to exercise it. In addition, direct support and coaching for

teachers in classrooms helped teachers develop and improve their technical skills, but also established relationships of reciprocal accountability – teachers valued having someone invested in the messy work of figuring out how to make the new practice work in the context of their own classrooms.

*3. Use and create multiple opportunities for one-on-one encounters between tutors and learners.* Classroom visits, communities of practice, and workshops worked well as spaces to showcase, consolidate and disseminate the practice of tutorial relationships. These were crucial to develop a collaborative culture focused on the new pedagogy, a key condition for sustainability and improvement.

*4. Document learning and progress.* Keeping track of the processes of learning occurring in schools and teacher professional development sessions, as well as the conditions that enable or constrain progress, served the double purpose of disseminating results and encouraging organizational learning.

To advance countercultural work in the **social arena**:

*5. Start in the margins.* The margins – schools serving historically marginalized groups – were and continue to be the spaces educational institutions have the greatest need to serve and yet most struggle to influence. This may make them more willing to open room for radical departure from conventional practice. Such was the case of the classrooms in historically marginalized communities where CEAC started to introduce its counterhegemonic work. The relatively weak presence of institutional controls over the everyday activities of students, teachers, and local administrators in these communities opened more opportunities for radical innovation.

*6. Get the support – or at least the permission – of educational authorities.* Most teachers in Mexico are proud to be part of the educational system, and knowing that their efforts to radically transform their practice are backed, supported, encouraged and enabled by their immediate authorities fueled their commitment and engagement. Whenever possible, alliances were developed to dissolve tensions with the surrounding institutional environment that arose from attempts to change pedagogy in classrooms and schools.

*7. Spread the practice through contagion.* Inviting parents, teachers, local authorities, and other potential allies to observe the new practice and its

visible results, and visiting other classrooms with students to demonstrate what they're able to do were common strategies to spread the practice of tutorial relationships. Word was spread across informal networks on the impact of your work on the learning and engagement of teachers and students. Infiltrating the system with “organic intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971) – teachers, teacher coaches, local educational authorities and other staff within the Ministry of Education – who were well prepared and willing to embark in the journey to advance pedagogical change in classrooms and across the educational system was another useful strategy. Finally, spaces of collegial discussion were created where actors from all levels in the institutional structure – teachers, project leaders, educational authorities – discussed progress, identified institutional constraints and reached agreements to create enabling conditions and weaken constraints to consolidate and disseminate the new pedagogy.

8. *Keep design and execution tightly connected.* The deliberate commitment of LCP leaders to demonstrate that their ideas are possible in practice and figure out the way to make them a reality in classrooms was a crucial aspect of a strategy that shaped and reshaped ideas in the process of building capacity and ownership.

To advance countercultural work in the **political arena**:

9. *Organize to access capacity building resources.* Organizing and the creation of alliances with likeminded local authorities granted LCP actors access to time and space for ongoing professional development, as well as classroom based support. Whenever possible, existing time and space for professional learning were occupied with the new pedagogy.

10. *Activate informal networks to access institutional power. And, once you have power, change its logic.* Without access to institutional power, grassroots efforts by CEAC waned and died. In contrast, access to institutional power catapulted their counterhegemonic work into a whole new dimension. The important point was not only taking power, but changing its logic (see points 1-3 and 8 above).

11. *Show results.* Demonstrating impact help4r gain new allies and deflect opposition.

12. *Attract the support of influential policy decision makers at the state or regional level.* Such support made the crucial difference between the new



pedagogy taking roots and disseminating in the case of Zacatecas and not in the rest of the sites where CEAC initiated pedagogical change projects.

### **The default culture of schooling strikes back?**

Upon closer examination, that is, after taking a closer look at the interactions within the instructional core, the practice of tutorial relationships in some classrooms seems to reproduce, rather than radically shift, dominant relationships of vertical authority and control between tutor and student. Among the 8 classrooms observed, six featured relationships of dialogue between tutor and student as the modal form of interaction, while in the other two the most prevailing practice was tutors instructing students to repeat a series of pre-determined steps of inquiry. In these later cases, the interaction between tutors and students, while one-on-one, consisted on the tutor dictating the students which steps to follow, and the student passively complying these external requests. In a way, these are cases of social relations of domination under the disguise of counterhegemonic practice. The constant risk of re-emergence of the default culture of schooling makes the examination of the pedagogical arena – closely and constantly monitoring the instructional core – crucial in any endeavor aimed at disseminating counterhegemonic practice.

Upon examination of the conditions, experiences and contexts that vary among observed classrooms, it is possible to identify that LCP actors have differentiated access to the conditions that facilitate the learning of the practice of tutorial relationships, and that different actors have access to different levels of mastery of the practice. Most prominent among such conditions is regular access to other teachers, classrooms, or coaches to observe, exercise, and refine the practice of tutorial relationships, as well as the degree of explicitness with which the core practice at the level of the instructional core is examined and discussed during encounters with other practitioners. A future paper that will provide more detailed descriptions of the practice of tutoring as observed in classrooms and an analysis of the conditions that explain the variation in degrees of sophistication of the practice.

### Concluding remarks

With this paper, the author has endeavored to illustrate how theory and knowledge on instructional improvement can be combined with theory and knowledge on widespread cultural change to advance our understanding of how and under what conditions it is possible to bring counterhegemonic work to scale. Keeping a counterhegemonic practice as the unit of analysis allows for a sophisticated yet highly focused examination of social and political phenomena that could otherwise feel scattered, unrelated, and overwhelming. Rochon's formulation that widespread cultural change occurs when new ideas or practices are spread by movements in the social and political arena brings to the educational change field a focus on the social, and political nature of reform in education. Adding the pedagogical arena to this formulation brings focused attention to the question of whether and to what extent new practices are indeed radically transforming the instructional core into relationships of dialogue, solidarity and mutual learning among equals, or simply perpetuating dominant social relations of authority and control of experts over acolytes.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Learning Community Project in Mexico should not be confounded with the *Comunidades de Aprendizaje* Project ([www.comunidadesdeaprendizaje.net](http://www.comunidadesdeaprendizaje.net)) originated in the Basque Country in the late 1970s. While both projects may have similar philosophies and aspirations, the LCP in Mexico originated independently from the Basque experience.

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