

Interview with Paula Crisostomo

Transcript

Audio: 2019CYLC001.mp3

Jasmin: [00:00:01] So this is Jasmin Temblador. I am the interviewer, and I'm meeting today with Paula Crisostomo who is the narrator. We're meeting today at Paula's home in South Pasadena. The date is Friday March 15th, 2019. So just a brief scope of the interview. I'll be asking you about your experience in relation to the Chicano Youth Leadership conference over time, talking about topics of leadership, of cultural transmission, and of traditions within the conference that have contributed to its sustainability over time. The interview is being conducted as part of Goucher college Master of Arts in cultural sustainability and the capstone project that I'm working on. So myself the interviewer and the narrator Paula have known each other for three years through that Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. And so, at this moment when I'm going to do is, I'd like to ask you Paula to stay for the recording that you're aware of and consent to being recorded.

Paula: [00:01:08] OK. I'm aware of and consent to being recorded.

Jasmin: [00:01:13] So, first of all I just want to thank you for the opportunity today to be able to sit down with you and talk about the conference in your experience. Let's go ahead and begin.

Paula: [00:01:23] Sure.

Jasmin: [00:01:24] So can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and a little bit about your family.

Paula: [00:01:33] You've heard this so many times before. I'm from a family of eight children. I grew up in Ramona Gardens public housing the housing project in Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights. I'm the oldest female child, so I was assistant mother. My father was a janitor. My mother was a stay at home mom and was really involved in community activities. And as I grew older, I, she would, older meaning by, ten eleven twelve years old she would enlist my help in organizing various little events for the parents and the families. And I think that's where I started to learn my know the value of community, the value of volunteerism and just how to organize.

Jasmin: [00:02:32] So what were some of these events that you were helping to organize?

Paula: [00:02:37] Talent shows, little Christmas parties, stuff like that. Halloween parties.

Jasmin: [00:02:45] What was your reaction to, you know, being a part of these events?

Paula: [00:02:53] Well, I remember first being very shy because a lot of it, not a lot, but some of it entailed going door-to-door to promote the event itself and inviting people over. And I was a shy kid but, my, you know, my mother would come with me and she would take a turn knock on the door introduce herself and say why we're there and, and I would listen and then when I went to the next door, she said 'Okay, it's your turn, you heard what I said. Now you do the same thing,' and so I would do it and that would be the same on the phone. She would solicit

donations; I remember particularly for Christmas parties. She would try and get free toys. There was Mattel toys where it was located here in Southern California somewhere. They may still be here, I don't know. And she would always call them. She would call them and ask for toys. Or she would call a large company, or, or a department store and asked for toys, and tell them who she was, and blah blah blah. And then she would have like a script of sorts for me, 'Dial the next number and say, okay you do it.' And, and again I was very shy, but I did it because she would be there. Egging me on, 'You could do it. You can do it.' Encouraging me. And when I started to get, 'Sure okay, where do we send it' That's when I got really, 'Oh wow. I could do this.' You know? So.

Jasmin: [00:04:21] Amazing.

Paula: [00:04:21] Yeah it was. It was. And then, to see it all come together, you know, after several weeks of making phone calls. And my mother sending letters because there was no e-mail or anything like that. And helping my mother, you know, address the envelopes and stamp them and stuff like that.

Jasmin: [00:04:36] Were you the only one of your siblings working with your mom?

Paula: [00:04:40] I think so. I think so. I think I was I was known as, besides being the assistant mother, I was also the most book wormy, me you know. Instead of going out to play I wanted to stay home and read and do homework and read my books. So, I was around while everyone else was running the streets, I guess.

Jasmin: [00:05:02] So what is your relationship to CYLC?

Paula: [00:05:05] Wow. It's a long one. I was invited in 1967. I was invited by Sal Castro, encouraged to fill out some paperwork to go to this weekend conference on the beach. Now I'm from a very strict family and I was like I said I was very shy. My world was very small. I knew, I wasn't going to be able to go. But he encouraged me. By that time, he knew my mother because my mother was active, and she went to all the meetings and stuff. And he encouraged her to and told her how much I would get out of it and blah blah blah. So, my mother signed the form and let me go and it was eye opening to me. I had never been, at the time it was sponsored by the Los Angeles County Human Relations Board. So, it took students from all over the county, and there were place, students coming from places that I had never heard of. And you know they might as well have said 'yeah, I go to high, I go to high school in Jupiter.' That's how, you know eye opening it was for me. My world was very, very small. So, exposing me to not only you know different people, different kids my age, who were good students and book wormy (laughs) like me, from all over the place was really, I don't, it was really, really lifted my self-esteem and confidence I'm sure, at that time. Because I was being, I was always teased as being the bookworm and all, you know, being shy and quiet. But here was a whole bunch of other kids who were just like me, "I'm not that weird after all (laughs)." And then, to be able to meet college students because the model was the same high school students, college students, teachers. Then it was mostly all teachers who were like professional staff and facilitators. And then the, whatever speakers they brought in. To meet them, and to hear from them, and to realize that they were giving of their time just to spend an hour or two with us was again really encouraging and

just really lifted my self-esteem. And I think that was most of it. So, a stronger belief in myself as a person, as a student, and as someone who could make a difference because that's what I kept hearing all along, is that you have this personal power. You know, that was like the message. You have this personal power, not only to you know do something better for yourself but for your family and your community. So that's what empowered me.

Jasmin: [00:08:17] Wow, and you serve on the board right now?

Paula: [00:08:19] I serve on the board right now. So that was, I started my first time was as a high school student in 1967. I didn't. I. And I know that the human relations board ran it from 10 to 12 years. And then the human relations board was dissolved for lack of money. And then it went on hiatus. It was then called a Mexican American Youth Leadership conference. It went on hiatus for probably another 10 years. A group of us, all including Sal Castro and a lot of them (student leaders from 1968), a lot of the group wanted to get together to restart it because we all realized how much we got from it. It's one of those things there, you don't realize how valuable it is until you're apart from it. And looking back I think, 'hey I learned that there. Oh wow, that's what they meant when they said this,' you know? So, we started meeting every week to try and put it together and I think it was during at the same time for the 20th anniversary of the walkouts, around then. So, we, we raised a lot of money to put it together and we brought it all together again. All of, all of us grown up [laughs]. We begged borrowed and stole from everyone we knew. We wrote a couple of grants, got a couple of small grants, raised a lot of money through an HBO concert at the Biltmore and we restaged it, and we had it going for, I don't know, a little bit more than five years I'm sure.

Jasmin: [00:10:18] When you all came together to, I know you used the word revive, to revive the conference and commemorate the 20th anniversary, was it a different structure to the conference? Or, was it very much modeled the same?

Paula: [00:10:34] It was very much modeled the same way, yeah. The model still worked. Yeah, yeah. The topics that we talked about, or that we chose to present were different because it was a different generation and issues were different, and we also changed the name because it start, started as the Mexican-American Youth Leadership, and changed it to Chicano Youth Leadership.

Jasmin: [00:10:59] And so the name change was also because of the different issues or the time?

Paula: [00:11:04] Yes, correct. Right. Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jasmin: [00:11:08] And who. How did that conversation start about changing the name?

Paula: [00:11:11] I don't remember. I don't remember. And I'm sure it wasn't like a long drawn out conversation. It was just sort of, "well of course we're going to change it," you know? That sort of thing. Everyone just kind of assumed it was now going to be called the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. And of course, over time there was questioning about "should it be the Latino youth leadership conference? Should it be the Chicano slash Latino youth leadership conference?" And I'm sure there's some, "Should it be the LatinX Youth Leadership

Conference?" And, and, some of the discussion around that, because there has been some discussion around that over the years especially with Sal, is that it was, Mexicans are still the largest Latino demographic here in Los Angeles, here in the US. And so, and they're still the largest demographic who are failing academically. So that was the reason for keeping it that way. And of course, we accept other Latinos, but our focus should still be on who needs it the most. Okay?

Jasmin: [00:12:34] So, you mentioned in our print interview and I quote you said, "the true beauty of the conference is that it has gone on hiatuses, but it always comes back."

Paula: [00:12:44] It always comes back.

Jasmin: [00:12:45] Can you elaborate more?

Paula: [00:12:47] The thing that wouldn't leave huh? Yeah, and again I, it's the folks who are involved in it. They won't, you know, we can't let it die. It's, but it's because it's that important. I, and I get emotional [crying][laughs]. I benefited personally, my children have benefited, and so we know we're just a few of the folks who really have benefited from this conference, from that weekend miracle. So, why wouldn't it need to continue? It should be replicated, you know? I mean with the numbers that we've gotten from that independent study. From you know, everyone we've talked to who have attended, who has attended, the difference in their lives. Talk about the quality of, the impact, quality of lives we've touched. And this should be replicated, you know? So, I think that's why it goes on hiatus, but it always finds a way to come back. Just like the cream always rises to the top. It's that important. And Hess Kramer has always been wonderful to us.

Jasmin: [00:14:20] That's beautiful. So, the conference has been sustained on the back of volunteers for most of, for all of its life for 50 plus years.

Paula: [00:14:32] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:14:32] Why has it been important to have an all-volunteer based conference?

Paula: [00:14:39] I, you know. It's important for. Be-, well first of all because labor is always the most expensive budget item [laughs]. Also, because I think it's nice for the student, it's important for the high school students and the college students who are involved, to know that all of these people have given up their weekends no matter what, you know, what is going on in their lives. You know we leave our families; some people give up work, some you know, whatever. Or just to stay home and watch football. But to know that you guys (students) are more important than whatever it was that was going on in our lives, that we come and shared our time with you (students). I think that was important, and I think that was important for me too. When I was a high school student, I begin to realize like, "what" [laughs], you know?

Jasmin: [00:15:41] So, in thinking about how the conference has changed over time, I'm sure that there's been a couple of changes, and as you mentioned already. Different eras, different

times, different issues happening. Have there been any changes in the structure or content of the program?

Paula: [00:16:02] Yeah, the career fair was an addition. Adding more music to it but that was part of trying to add more to the cultural content. The fashion show is something different. And so those are mostly. Yeah, those are mostly the biggest changes that I see.

Jasmin: [00:16:37] Why have those, how do you feel about those changes? Like why have those changes been added or made?

Paula: [00:16:44] Well there's always group consensus. As you know, we're a very Democratic group. And it's been for various reasons. We, we saw that for the musical stuff. We sa-, we realized that maybe we were hitting them too hard with academic issues, or other stuff and there needed some lightening up, I guess. And to use music as a cultural base was a good idea. The other stuff I think the career fair that was. Charlotte took that on because she was hearing from, this is my understanding or my memory she may tell you differently, that, of course, our students need to know what they can do once they graduate from college. Or they need to know if college is not for you because we know college is not for everyone, "Maybe you can look into these kinds of careers?" And I know that some board members were kind of questioning that. So, that was the reason for the career fair. And it was also a way to involve other professionals, working people. And the addition, oh, that was another cultural thing, was the addition of an art sort of thing, art exhibit.

Jasmin: [00:18:10] The Art exhibit walk through.

Paula: [00:18:11] Yeah, yeah, that was nice. Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:18:14] So, thinking about traditions. Are there traditions of the conference, that have continued since the very beginning of the conference?

Paula: [00:18:26] The dances.

Jasmin: [00:18:29] Say a little more.

Paula: [00:18:31] Well you know, were a bunch of high school students. They wanted to get together and network and dance and stuff so. And it was also, I remember when we were when I was really deep in the weeds and planning was like Oh my God how are we going to get them tired? They're going to be excited the first night. How we're going to get them tired out enough? So, it was doing the dance. The morning wake up with the music that was a big thing with Sal especially in the beginning. That's continued. The Sunday morning prayer thing. That's continued and that's important to keep too because a lot of parents do look at that and then look at the students to, I understand that. But basically, you know I see it as just kind of typical conference model. You have a keynote speaker. You get to break out in groups and talk about it and then come back and say.

Jasmin: [00:19:33] Dialogue that happens with the students. The morning I wake up.

Paula: [00:19:38] I'm sorry go ahead.

Jasmin: [00:19:39] The morning wake up. Why is that important?

Paula: [00:19:44] Well to get you get to get the students out of bed early enough. To get the place, to get this conference started. And it's always really early in the morning. I know. And that was to make sure that they would realize that oh my god it's 3:00 in the morning we better fall asleep because they're going to be playing that loud ass music at 530. So that sort of thing. But also, again it was, Sal used it as a way to introduce them to the kind of music that their parents probably played on the weekend, that not necessarily they would play themselves. And I know that's some of the comments we got back, or we would be told by the end, that they never listened to that music before because it reminded him of their parents but now, they really appreciate it. So that was really nice.

Paula: [00:20:36] Can we be excused I can blow my nose.

Jasmin: [00:20:41] OK so has the conference remained true to Castro's vision over the years?

Paula: [00:20:49] Yes. Yes.

Jasmin: [00:20:51] Can you tell me a little bit more?

Paula: [00:20:54] And you may have heard this story too when Sal was home sick, he sat, sat Charlotte down and said, "this is what's going to happen." And he planned it out, exactly who he wanted on the board and what he wanted them to do. And what. You know the, the gist of the conference was, I think we've, we've stumbled a little with some speakers, but you know, we can't find. You never know what people are going to say when they get up to the mic, unfortunately. And if they're volunteers it's even harder. And if you're asking them to drive two hours from home you know all of that. But in trying to identify other folks and, I think we've done OK. I mean I wish we could find another Sal Castro. Did you ever hear him speak?

Jasmin: [00:21:53] I did not. Only in Charlotte's recordings shared at the conference or the recordings online.

Paula: [00:22:02] He gave his best at the conferences. But yea.

Jasmin: [00:22:06] So how would you describe Castro's vision for the conference?

Paula: [00:22:13] Wow, that's a big one. Mm hmm. His vision was huge. And it was multipronged. And it was. To instill pride in, in these student's heritage, their cultural and historical legacy, and to do that by teaching them more about it. As much as we could in the short time that we have with them. Which is why it's hard to find a speaker who can do all of that. To make them feel proud of themselves and their families and their communities. To make sure they believe they can go to college and graduate. To make sure they know that once they do that, they owe it to themselves and their communities to come back to the community to give

back however way they can. And it's like, do ABCD repeat ABCD repeat. So, it becomes this cycle sort of thing.

Jasmin: [00:23:42] The circle.

Paula: [00:23:43] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:23:48] So we talked to a little bit about Hess Kramer, Camp Hess Kramer. I remember in the conference Rita always says that Hess Kramer is a very special place. So, what contributes, what, in your experience, what contributes to the power of this place?

Paula: [00:24:09] I think the distance from the communities that we're from, and the beauty of the site that we're in. And to know that, these people have welcomed us (pause). Have encouraged us to come back so often. It's like everyone who's a volunteer. You know, what does what does that mean? You know the students may not realize that, but for staff, we all realize that. That's huge, because the place is gorgeous. It's such a, it's a free weekend on the coast (pause). So, everything that it has stood for, you know.

Jasmin: [00:25:07] The location, the place, being somewhere different.

Paula: [00:25:12] Everything, yeah [crying]. I'm still devastated by its loss. I cried out loud. Like right now.

Jasmin: [00:25:30] We can take a couple of minutes.

Paula: [00:25:34] Typically in my room I need a big leather chair and a recliner, and my own refrigerator and it would be there. It's amazing. No questions asked. Okay. You know.

Jasmin: [00:25:48] You've always worked well together there.

Paula: [00:25:50] Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

Jasmin: [00:25:52] The staff there (Camp Hess Kramer).

Paula: [00:25:52] Very accommodating all the time. You know I don't know what your experience has been but I know when I was working closely with all of the different staffs they did and even after, you know after the fire loss, they know that, they, the director John text and Myrna and said well be back. But in the meanwhile, you might want to call these different places because it's important that you guys keep doing what you're doing. So, it's like they understand the importance of sustaining what we're doing.

Jasmin: [00:26:29] So that's amazing. And there might even be some, some crossover there too because they're also working with youth, right?

Paula: [00:26:39] Yep, yep, yep, yep.

Jasmin: [00:26:42] It's like there's a great relationship there and understanding and appreciation for the work that everyone is doing.

Paula: [00:26:51] That all helps, you know?

Jasmin: [00:26:53] Supporters.

Paula: [00:26:55] Allies.

Jasmin: [00:26:56] Allies. So, what do you believe are the important ingredients that make up CYLC?

Paula: [00:27:05] Oh my God. The staff absolutely especially the facilitators because they're the ones who spend the most time with our high school students. Because no matter what's going on the end of the day, and I hate that cliché, is what's important is the experience that the high school student gets from what we're providing. And it's the facilitators, who are really creating that experience with them one on one. You know we do the macro stuff, the big picture, important stuff. You know, but it's the facilitators who do the hands on, you know. And that's why when I spoke to you earlier, it's like I wish we could do more for the facilitators.

Jasmin: [00:28:01] They're doing a lot of heavy lifting.

Paula: [00:28:03] They're, they're all of it. Yeah. Yep, yep, yep.

Jasmin: [00:28:07] And it, helping to shape the minds of students.

Paula: [00:28:11] So they're training is really their training and their commitment and their passion about this is really, really crucial, really crucial. And I know that even though we don't spend time with them and help them navigate college that they're still getting inspired and motivated by what they're hearing and, and by working with the students. You know it just, just. Tangentially.

Jasmin: [00:28:42] Is like that knowledge is being transmitted to both the students and the facilitators.

Paula: [00:28:50] And the facilitators, and you know they might need it up notched up a level but they're able to do that themselves. You know?

Jasmin: [00:28:58] So has your role within the conference changed over time? How many different hats have you worn?

Paula: [00:29:07] Wow. Yeah. My role has changed a lot. I know it at one point it was my house that was where we kept all the boxes and did all the planning. And this was pre computer stuff and trying. I remember Hugo and I sitting at the dining room table and having the lists of students that we had just gotten from the schools. That was all mailed to us and I was going to the P.O. box to get all the mail and the applications and then OK. We have our list of 100

students. How are we going to break them up into 10 different groups you know? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. One, two, three. All the ones are in one group, all the twos are in another group that sort of thing. So, doing a lot of, just the everyday hands on staff, and the logistical stuff. To now being a lot more macro sort of stuff and, and it's been really interesting. And I guess that's a natural progression. That's a natural progression.

Jasmin: [00:30:17] Do you feel like that's also part of the conference of everyone who participates. Is that they start in a certain, they're facilitator?

Paula: [00:30:27] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:30:28] And then you can be in a different position?

Paula: [00:30:31] Yeah, I think you need to learn or be around it before you can really understand how it goes and why it goes and how it can get better you know? You can't step into something and assume that we're going to make it this way now because I know it will be better. Maybe it was trying that way. Maybe it will work with this group you know. So, yeah, I think there's, there's some progression, of volunteerism that needs to happen.

Jasmin: [00:31:05] So what are the common reason is that you think or that you've heard that keep volunteers coming back to CYLC?

Paula: [00:31:12] Common? The students that they know they're making a difference with the students. When you look at the larger picture on the outside what the students are hearing and to again be told over and over again by grown-ups who look just like you who made it through, that everything's gonna be OK. It's going to be hard but it's going to be OK. That's important. I think those are the reasons. Those are the reasons; I'm told by colleagues and friends who have come back to either to be speakers or at the Career Fair or whatever. That's why they'll come back.

Jasmin: [00:31:59] Have you ever spoken with the facilitator or a student that's come back and they've shared with you their reason of coming back to the conference?

Paula: [00:32:08] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You know what. What's nice to hear is that, I get more out of this than they do. Because again I know the facilitators are getting inspired. Yeah, and I know that when I was working in higher education part of it was keeping me going was keeping me grounded. And making me realize OK this is why you're going through hell Monday through Friday. This is why you're going to go to that next board meeting and raise hell. For students of color. So, it's, it was motivating for a lot of the professionals to, you know. And again, in another and another level and tangentially. But it's the high school students you see they're so eager and they're bright eyed and bushy tailed, and they're just so needing to hear that everything's going to be OK. And if you ever you know I've I haven't had a lot of opportunity unfortunately to speak one on the one with high school students. Since the walkout movies, they think I'm sort of some sort of celebrity. And so, you know they get kind of, "oh there she is." And they don't really want to approach me, or if I approach them, they could really shy. So, you know I have to respect that and I don't want to push them and stuff, but I understand. But I'd like to.

Jasmin: [00:33:34] With time.

Paula: [00:33:35] With time maybe, huh? But then I'll get older and they're who's this old lady?

Jasmin: [00:33:42] We'll keep screening the movie. So, you mentioned speakers and the professionals that come to the conference. What significance would you say that they have in the conference. Why is it important for professionals and speakers that are Chicanos and Chicanas to come to the conference?

Paula: [00:34:08] It's really important for the students to see people who look like them who went to their high schools who suffered with their same issues who are now successful, and successful enough to be invited back and I'm standing in front of all of you and you should be listening to me. And it and also, we have found some great speakers Robin especially who has her, that used to be called gender issues. You might remember, and we also we used to have a UCLA professor due for the boys and then female for the girls but there was some friction where it didn't quite mesh. You know we struggled with it for a while. Robin struggled with it for a while, but you know Robin has just this, she's an entertainer to begin with. She loves being onstage, and that's good. But she just has this incredible story and she knows how to deliver it. And she worked you know how she was going to present it was, took her a little while, you know, and I love how she finally came up with oppression. Because for a while she was building it, here's the how to have a healthy relationship because that was the issue then with all that sexual assault stuff going on. But how she frames it as oppression has really, really hit home a lot more. So, did I answer your question, I know I went all around it.

Jasmin: [00:35:49] Yes, thank you. So, what would you say in your own words and your experiences is the purpose of CYLC for you?

Paula: [00:36:04] The same as Sal Castro's, that's what I would say. It's the same as Sal Castro's, it's to make these students believe in themselves. To let them know they're very much loved and expected to do well. We have to let them know that we have high expectations of them. And we know they'll reach them.

Jasmin: [00:36:32] Are there any favorite stories that you have of your experiences with the conference? Anything memorable?

Paula: [00:36:40] Oh I don't know I should say any of them.

Jasmin: [00:36:45] And when you feel comfortable sharing.

Paula: [00:36:47] I know that. No, I don't, none that I can tell you on tape. None that I want to live on in history. But I will tell you off line.

Jasmin: [00:37:00] What does it feel, well how does it feel to be at the conference as an adult, as a, not as a participant but as you know behind the scenes now? And do you ever reflect back on or remember how it felt for you as a student?

Paula: [00:37:23] The first part of your question. It's, it's cool you know to be sort of looking back and, and I try not to be overly critical because that's so easy to do. Well I'm sitting down having my cup of coffee and looking at you guys running around and doing all the work, "Oh they should do it this way. They shouldn't do it that way and how come they did it that way?" But you guys have walkie talkies and you have golf carts. We didn't, you have cell phones. We didn't. We were running over all over the place. So. So yeah, it's cool. It's nice sometimes I feel guilty. Sometimes I do feel guilty that I'm not doing enough that I'm just taking here taking up space and you know being this historical icon you know, and I know how to do this I can do that I can do it. But again, it's about developing leadership for you guys too. And I was, one of my very early mentors told me that a good leader knows when it's time for them to step aside and let new leadership develop. And so, I remembered that. And I thought that was, that's pretty good. That's a good, a good reason to sit here and get another cup of coffee. And what was your second question?

Jasmin: [00:38:49] Do you ever reflect back and just remember how I felt for you as a student?

Paula: [00:38:53] Oh I do. Especially when I speak after the walkout movie. I really do try and remember that. It's Friday night the students have just gotten there, and I try to remember. What was it like on my Friday night? You know. And that's what I try and speak to not necessarily about the walkout, but this is what you're going to see, this is who you're going to hear. And this is why it's important to be here.

Jasmin: [00:39:19] And what a grounding moment for the first day.

Paula: [00:39:24] Yes, I hope so. Yeah, I hope so. To set it up because again you don't know what they got themselves into and why. You know my boyfriend's mad at me because I'm here and I was supposed to go to the football game or in the stands with my girlfriends but I'm here. My cousins quincenera, I'm missing it cause I'm here. You know.

Jasmin: [00:39:45] In thinking about you know setting the stage for the students they may experience a lot of different workshops throughout the weekend so many different topics. But what would you say in your experience, when is that aha moment that happens, the moment where it just clicks?

Paula: [00:40:06] Saturday afternoon.

Jasmin: [00:40:08] And what workshop do you think that is?

Paula: [00:40:10] I don't, I don't think it's necessarily a certain workshop. I think it's just a cumulative effect, cumulative effect. It's usually Saturday afternoon.

Jasmin: [00:40:21] I've heard sometimes it might be the at the bonfire.

Paula: [00:40:27] Maybe.

Jasmin: [00:40:28] The Camp Fire.

Paula: [00:40:29] I think that might be a little too late. Actually, yeah. Yeah. But that's the bonfire is a real bonding, bonding experience and that's important to.

Jasmin: [00:40:42] So, day two of the conference it just starts to manifest for people.

Paula: [00:40:47] I think so, has that been your experience, or? Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:40:52] So, what has your participation in the conference meant for you over time?

Paula: [00:41:01] Wow. What has it meant? It's always been very important. And again, when I was working it, it meant it was big, grounding for me and letting me know why I was doing what I was doing at Occidental College. Because that was always a struggle, to be a woman of color. You know, in a managerial white ivory tower. But it was also important for me to, to let the students know that were there. And I think my continuity kind of surprises people, you know when I come in and I say, "I was first here in 1967, and I'm still here believe it or not. You know. and they say wow, you know. And then, that I'm not. It's not because I don't have anything better to do it's because I really believe in this. So that continuity is, I think inspired students, I hope, has helped to teach students and everyone else how important it is.

Jasmin: [00:42:20] And I think it's not every day where the students of today get to see someone that they can relate to that looks like them.

Paula: [00:42:28] Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:42:31] That is the person that created change with other people.

Paula: [00:42:36] Oh OK here we go.

Jasmin: [00:42:39] But.

Paula: [00:42:39] I'm all of that in a bag of chips.

Jasmin: [00:42:40] All that and a bag of chips. But, but I can see that you know that it is important for them.

Paula: [00:42:50] Yeah, I understand. I just.

Jasmin: [00:42:53] And the continuity is important. So, so another, another question.

Paula: [00:43:06] Uh oh.

Jasmin: [00:43:06] So when you're observing the conference and attending the different workshops from your perspective what do you see going on? Like what's going on in the workshops? What's going on with the students?

Paula: [00:43:21] I, I like to try and see the facial expressions of students.

Jasmin: [00:43:28] What are some of the expressions you're noticing?

Paula: [00:43:33] Most of them are very interested, wide eyed like some in disbelief. A lot of them are hearing a lot of the stuff for the first time. That's what I like to see most of, not only this, but the facilitators to especially if they're first time facilitators. Like how are they receiving this? I like to see their, not only facial expressions, but body language to.

Jasmin: [00:44:06] And so what are you thinking to yourself when you're seeing all these expressions?

Paula: [00:44:10] I'm trying to key in and say Oh they like that. OK. That's a, that's an important topic. Wow, Oh I didn't think that joke was that good. You know, to whatever it is that I'm seeing people react to.

Jasmin: [00:44:24] Observing.

Paula: [00:44:25] And then yeah. And then, because you know the four of us or sometimes five or six depending on how many of us are there. We'll we will always get together and meet. And that's the sort of stuff we'll share.

Jasmin: [00:44:38] And so what, what, what's the key? What's the key what above all else defines CYLC, that that makes it special? What's the key that makes it special?

Paula: [00:44:52] As corny as it sounds, I think it's just the love that they feel that we all feel the entire weekend. You know the togetherness the unity, the knowledge that it's safe because we try. And I remember that was very intentional to make this a very safe space. You can be whoever you, you are, and say whatever you believe, and know that it's not going anywhere.

Jasmin: [00:45:22] So in thinking about leadership we talk a little bit about leadership in your pre interview about people saying that you're a leader and your reaction to being a leader. But how do you describe leadership?

Paula: [00:45:39] Oh wow. I don't know.

Jasmin: [00:45:39] What are some examples of leadership?

Paula: [00:45:48] I think realizing or seeing an issue or a problem that affects you or your family or your community. And doing whatever you can to solve it. Make it better. And for me it was being all in. You know, cause as a high school student I could have walked away many, many, many times. But when I realized that it was this important and we weren't asking for anything crazy we were asking for better education, isn't that something we were supposed to be asking for? So yeah realizing how important it is and maybe how broad ranging it is. You know?

Jasmin: [00:46:42] So why has building leadership been an important part of the conference. It's called the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. Why has that been important?

Paula: [00:46:51] Because we want them to be change agents, and because part of the purpose is so that they will come back to the community and do what they can. To contribute back.

Jasmin: [00:47:02] To contribute to contribute back.

Paula: [00:47:05] Yeah, and to be a leader.

Jasmin: [00:47:07] And how do you see leadership being modeled at the conference?

Paula: [00:47:12] I think that facilitators, staff, and board members and other volunteers are all, we're all seen as being a leader, leadership positions there at the conference. Again, it's the experience and the eyes, through the eyes of the high school students that's utmost important. It has to be at all times. It's what we know will work to develop these young leaders, and to inspire them.

Jasmin: [00:47:48] We move on to the towards the interview. So, when you think about the present what are some of the issues that you see today that are impacting the students who are coming to the conference?

Paula: [00:48:03] Oh absolutely. The immigration issue. You know that wasn't something that was something that we never had to deal with second generation Mexican Americans never had to deal with that. So absolutely the immigration issue and if it's not happening inside their home, it's happening on their street, in their school people around them. And that is very stressful. And given all of that climate, it's also playing out in school as we see all the time, you know with other students.

Jasmin: [00:48:42] And how, I know that there's been some additions scholarships section about support for DACA students. And so, there's been some additions in the conference to be able to support those issues. So, are there traditions of organizing that are passed down within the conference?

Paula: [00:49:09] Traditions of organizing. What do you mean?

Jasmin: [00:49:13] So we talked about the blowouts very early on in the history of students coming together and organizing at the conference and then coming back out into the community and continuing that. How do you see that coming through in the conference?

Paula: [00:49:34] Oh I think with showing the movie and having me speak and then having me there all weekend helps with that. But I think it's repeated in different ways and in almost every strand that we go through. The importance of giving back and being a leader in solving the myriad of issues that our communities and those families face. I hope we're doing that. I don't know. Again, I'm just sitting back drinking a cup of coffee. Well, while you guys are doing all the work.

Jasmin: [00:50:10] Writing notes. So, what do you believe is the reason why an event like CYLC that happen a half century ago still has a continuing resonance today?

Paula: [00:50:27] Because unfortunately it's still needed. It's sad but true. After all of this time. But of course, demographics change. You know we come and go. It's still needed, and there's a lesson in that. We still have to remain vigilant and continue to fight. That's part of leadership too.

Jasmin: [00:50:57] There's different issues coming with every generation and some who, that have remained.

Paula: [00:51:03] Yeah or some that have gotten better and then are coming back. I mean this whole affirmative action with, Oh my God. Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:51:13] So I'm thinking about cultural sustainability within the conference. Sustainability at the conference. When you think about the future, how do you see the legacy of the conference continuing?

Paula: [00:51:26] That's a big one. I don't know because, you know the first thing comes to mind of course is economics. And we're good with the school board but we don't know for how much longer. So, but there's also again the need and the folks who have always been there too. I mean if we have to go on hiatus again maybe in five years you and your cohort will sit down and say, "how could we bring this back?"

Jasmin: [00:52:12] We call you.

Paula: [00:52:12] Thanks, I'll be in a nursing home by then.

Jasmin: [00:52:21] Well in your experience. Well it's clear to me that the conference has been a source of empowerment. It's been a source of helping people connect with their identity, and their culture, their heritage and also about connecting to equitable access to education. What is your view on that? Do you believe that, that's very much as well true?

Paula: [00:52:46] Oh that's very much as well true. Yeah. Oh yes. Educational Justice is still necessary and cultural identity and pride is still necessary for all of our high school students and continues to be. And if that's our job that's our job. We accept it.

Jasmin: [00:53:08] So why is the sustainability of CYLC important for the future generations?

Paula: [00:53:15] Because it's still necessary, because although we're getting great, great numbers we're still only doing 100, 200 students at a time. I personally don't think we can do any more than that a year as volunteers. But we could probably do. I mean if it can be replicated once a month it would help. We would see a much more empowered cut group of youth coming up. But if we can only reach two hundred a year, you know that's the tip of the iceberg. That's just, scratching barely, scratching the surface.

Jasmin: [00:54:08] It sounds like there's a lot of great work that still continues and will continue.

Paula: [00:54:13] Yeah, and I'd like to see. You know unfortunately other school districts haven't replicated it or other.

Jasmin: [00:54:21] You think there could be an opportunity for collaboration in the future?

Paula: [00:54:26] Sure.

Jasmin: [00:54:31] Well we've reached the end of our interview and I just want to say thank you so much for your time today. And the final thing is I just want to ask you to state for the recording if you grant me permission to use a recording of the interview to write a reflection paper for the capstone project.

Paula: [00:54:48] Yes you can use this recording Jasmin to write your reflection paper.

Jasmin: [00:54:53] Thank you so much.

Paula: [00:54:54] You're very welcome