CREATING COUNTER-HEGEMONIC SPACES IN A SPANISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

Mercedes Valenzuela

University of New Mexico

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/educ_llss_etds

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, and the Language and Literacy Education Commons

Recommended Citation


This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Education ETDs at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.
Mercedes Valenzuela
Candidate

Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies
Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Glenabah Martinez, Chair

Dr. Carlos López Leiva

Dr. Mia A. Sosa-Provencio

Dr. Nancy López

Dr. Sylvia Celedón-Pattichis
CREATING COUNTER-HEGEMONIC SPACES
IN A SPANISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

BY

MERCEDES VALENZUELA

B.U.S., Spanish, Health Education, Bilingual Education, University of New Mexico, 2000
M.A., Spanish, University of New Mexico, 2003

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2022
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, José Valenzuela López and Jerónima Pulido Hernández. To my sisters, whom I love unconditionally and beyond this time and universe—Norma, Elisabeth, Maribel, and Lucy, las amo para siempre. Su apoyo durante este largo camino de mi vida has impacted my life in beautiful ways. Thank you for always being there for me; each one of you has impacted my life in many ways. Thank you for always uplifting me specially through this journey called life. Thank you for always lifting my spirit during my health issues.

To my beloved grandparents, Don Porfírio Pulido Lazarín y Doña Fidencia Hernández. Gracias de todo corazón a mi tío Lucio Pulido Hernández, mi tío Victor Gerardo Valenzuela, and my cousin Victor Adrian Valenzuela, who were taken to early and were unable to beat cancer. You always believed in me, and your encouragement has made me a better person and an even better teacher and a survivor.

Mil gracias to all my estudiantes, who have always believed in me and who shared their beautiful and inspirational testimonios with me. I teach for you, and I dedicate this dissertation and future research to all those whose voice is silenced in classrooms.

I thank Cesar for changing his life and believing in me. I thank Arturo for sharing his struggles and being a brave soul; so proud of you becoming a teacher.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my professors and mentors: Dr. Glenabah Martinez, for her devotion to social justice and her arduous task and unconditional support in the field of education. Thank you for going beyond the task of just being my chair and mentor. You have inspired me in many ways and have encouraged me to be a better teacher and a better human being. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, for all those encouraging words and feedback. Thank you, Dr. Sylvia Celedón-Pattichis and Dr. Nancy López, for your valuable patience and unconditional support. ¡Gracias!

I'd like to thank Dr. Leroy Ortiz for his inspirational work with the maestros in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Dora Ortiz for giving me the opportunity to teach at Dolores Gonzales. Lastly, I'd like to remember Dr. Ruth Trinidad-Galván for her inspirational work and assistance with my doctoral studies.
CREATING COUNTER-HEGEMONIC SPACES
IN A SPANISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

by

Mercedes Valenzuela

B.U.S., Spanish, Health Education, Bilingual Education, University of New Mexico, 2000
M.A., Spanish, University of New Mexico, 2003
Ph.D., Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies, University of New Mexico, 2022

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study used practitioner research methods to address the question: How does a Mexican American teacher create counter-hegemonic spaces in a Spanish Language Arts classroom utilizing critical race and borderlands theories? The research focused on how I as a teacher-built trust and respect through place—here, the classroom, classroom activities, and discussions—thereby creating a place for students to express their thoughts and feelings and to build relationships with the teacher and their classmates for learning to occur. This study also analyzed how using critical race and borderlands theories influences and shapes Mexican American students’ educational experiences beyond a Spanish Language Arts classroom and employed a pedagogical lens that privileges students’ cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge while centering their testimonios, thus creating a space of nepantla in which la pedagogía del cariño is at the heart of transformation.

Keywords: borderlands theory, critical race theory, counterhegemonic spaces, testimonios, Spanish Language Arts, high school
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Statement of the Problem ................................................................. 3
- Racial Microaggressions ...................................................................... 6
- Purpose and Significance of the Study ................................................ 9
- Overview of Methodology .................................................................. 12
- Delimitations ...................................................................................... 14
- Definitions of Key Terms .................................................................. 15

CHAPTER 2: CRT, LATCRIT, AND BORDERLANDS THEORY .................. 18

- Mexican American Historical Context of Schooling ......................... 22
- Assessments/Testing ........................................................................... 25
- Curriculum/Language ......................................................................... 30
- Culturally Relevant/Sustaining Education/Pedagogy ......................... 34

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 40

- My Position as a Researcher ............................................................. 40
- General Perspectives .......................................................................... 42
- Critical Race Methodology ................................................................ 42
- Borderlands/Chicana Feminist Methodology ....................................... 45
- Methods ............................................................................................ 49
- Research Context ................................................................................ 49
- Research Participants ......................................................................... 51
- Trustworthiness .................................................................................. 56
- Instruments Used in Data Collection .................................................. 57
- Data Analysis ...................................................................................... 57
- Conclusion .......................................................................................... 63

CHAPTER 4: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PARTICIPANT PORTRAITS ............... 64

- Carlos .................................................................................................. 66
  - Carlos and His Family .................................................................. 67
  - Value of Schooling ....................................................................... 69
  - Early School Memories ................................................................. 69
  - Middle and High School Experiences ............................................ 70
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRT/LatCrit/Borderlands Theory</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogía del Cariño</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Educators and Teacher Preparation Programs</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as the theory for women-of-color... *Necesitamos teorías* that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that boundaries new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods... And we need to find practical applications for those theories. We need to de-academize theory and to connect the community to the academy. Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv

In the above quote, Anzaldúa calls for new theories that counter Western dominant thought. She calls for educators within the educational system to deconstruct the Eurocentric curriculum, to move students of color, and particularly for this research, Mexican American voices and experiences, from the margin to the center.\(^1\) As teachers, we are in desperate need for these *teorías* [theories], which need to be co-created with our students in spaces and places like the classroom and in the curriculum. For far too long, teachers and educators have been accountable for what is classified as legitimate theory in the dominant Eurocentric educational classroom without having the slightest opportunity to reconstruct our own lived experiences. Critical race epistemologies are greatly needed within the educational realm to create a place and space (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010) to allow these interactions to occur; this space permits for *nuevas teorías* [new theories], as proposed by Anzaldúa. Such practices are of utmost importance in the field of education, as this space and place will transform the educational scripted curriculum.

---

\(^1\) *Mexican American* refers to Mexicans and Americans of Mexican heritage who are citizens of the United States (Meier & Gutiérrez, 2003).
In 2013, two of my bilingual students asked me the following question: “Miss, why did you become a teacher?” Not sure why my students were asking this or why their sudden interest in my chosen profession, I remember looking at them and saying, “because you guys are the future, my future.” Maybe this answer came as a surprise to them; I remember their smiles to my response. Later during that class period, I recall a female student blurted out, “I love you, Miss!” I remember looking toward her area when another student also stated, “I love you too, Miss!” I responded with an “I love you guys more!” This valuable exchange of words with my students allowed me to reflect on my teaching.

When I began teaching in public schools, I was very curriculum oriented and structured. I never strayed away from what I was told to follow, like the state standards, for I truly thought my simple presence and teaching was enough to make an impact on students’ learning. I believed teaching the official curriculum would be easy. Students would walk into the classroom, take their assigned seats, open their textbooks, work in small groups, raise their hands if they had questions, and complete their homework, and all I had to do was teach the lesson. I was wrong. Once I began taking doctoral classes on critical race theory (CRT), this and many of my other misconceptions changed. When I was assigned to teach 8th grade Language Arts and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, my teaching philosophy shifted. The scripted curriculum mandated by the state and school district was no longer the driving force in my instruction. I adjusted the curriculum to meet the needs of students. Having a critical-theory consciousness permitted me to develop a curriculum and a classroom environment where my students and I formed convivencia [cohabitation] (Villenas, 2005). Villenas (2005) explains convivencia as communalism “centered on faith and spirituality, and humor central to creating compassionate spaces of resilience, and innovation” (p. 273). For
some teachers establishing an environment centered on *convivencia* is a true challenge. I, however, do not fit into the traditional teaching model or definition. In my experience, students will not learn if their teacher does not develop a caring relationship based on *confianza* [trust] and *respeto* [respect] within a classroom environment (Valenzuela, 1999). Students do not automatically trust teachers. Teachers must earn their students’ trust. One way I created an environment of trust was with the use of food. I used food to establish *convivencia*. I found that permitting students to bring homemade food allowed them to see the classroom as an extension of their *hogar*, their home. It was a way for students to bond and to feel at ease. In addition, this *convivencia* allowed me to meet with my students’ parents via a telephone call or in person. I started the conversation by asking students if their parents or grandparents were willing to cook for us. I allowed for students to call or text their parents on the spot, or I wrote a note to ask their parents to cook for our class. In exchange, I asked the rest of the students to donate one to two dollars to pay for the food preparation and ingredients. For example, on one occasion the mother of one my students made enchiladas, rice, and homemade flour tortillas. In return, this sharing of food allowed me to begin the process of creating a caring community and a classroom based on respect, compassion, and understanding for my students’ culture.

**Statement of the Problem**

When I decided to become a teacher, I wanted to teach Mexican students, particularly first-generation Mexican students. I believed I would connect with their struggles and possibly have a positive influence in their schooling experience. I knew it was not going to be easy, because I had no secondary school experience at the time, but I never imagined it was going to be such a major challenge in my life. It was challenging because I did not have
a mentor or a support system during my first 3 years as a teacher. I was very much alone dealing with classroom challenges by myself.

Thinking back to these early years of teaching and to the racial microaggressions encountered by my students, I began to reposition myself.\(^2\) I began to witness an educational system where racial microaggressions toward Mexican American students were very common. As a result, my students, like many students of color, learned modes of resistance; they acquired the *facultad* to sense racism from a mile away. Anzaldúa (1987) argues that “this shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul)” (p. 61).

In my classroom, students were able to bring in their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to expose their traumatic experiences, regardless of what language they used. Through their personal narratives they were able to identify these overt experiences of racism and thus continue to navigate the educational system. When they wrote, spoke, and shared their lived experiences, they learned to *double move* (Bejarano, 2005; Cruz, 2006; Elenes 1997), subverting and challenging the dominant pre-colonial paradigm. My Mexican American students learned the basic tenet of Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory. They learned to navigate, recognize, and resist racism, thus subverting the paradigm.

Providing a space where my students were able to maneuver within the school system became the overall driving force in my curriculum and classroom environment. The majority of my Mexican American students learned to cope with overt micro- and macroaggressions.

\(^2\) *Mexican American* refers to Mexicans and Americans of Mexican heritage who are citizens of the United States (Meier & Gutiérrez, 2003).
They learned to navigate between two cultures, two languages. This hybridity and double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) was acknowledged within my classroom and allowed me to create a sense of belonging and a sense of community and respect (Yosso, 2005). As educators, the dominant predetermined curriculum deters our creativity and distances us from our true and authentic passion for teaching. Sharing similar experiences with my students widened my lens to develop a critical and a counter-hegemonic curriculum. I no longer operate with a White consciousness or follow the traditional scripted curriculum; instead, I operate with a mestiza consciousness, a critical and radical sense of teaching (Anzaldúa, 1987). I utilize borderlands pedagogy because it integrates my students’ racialized experiences, which are continuously excluded from White curriculum.

In using borderlands pedagogía, I provide a space and place for my students to use their community cultural capital wealth and become active participants in their learning. This opens a space for an engaging learning experience. This can only occur when educators are willing to create a space for students of color and culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teachers who listen critically to students’ voices can maneuver within a traditional White Eurocentric curriculum because using the students’ voices and racialized narratives broadens students’ knowledge. When teachers can use these narratives (i.e., students lived experiences), they open spaces where knowledge becomes power and students can become critical thinkers. Giroux (1992) explains it this way:

knowledge and power come together not to merely reaffirm difference but to also interrogate it, to open up broader theoretical considerations, to tease out its limitations, and to engage a vision of community in which student voices define
themselves in terms of their distinct social formations and their broader collective hopes. (p. 35)

Critical educators engage in a deeper world of understanding with their students; they speak to and engage in social, political, and cultural issues that challenge the educational system, and they allow students to question their own understanding of the political and social issues they encounter. How is this created in borderlands theory? Adapting Anzaldúa’s theory to the educational field, Elenes (1997), Delgado Bernal (2006), and Villenas (2006) speak to the negotiating of Latina/o students in academia within the different hegemonic spaces they inhabit.

**Racial Microaggressions**

In 2008, I taught at a middle school in the U.S. Southwest. This middle school had 702 students identifying as Hispanics; 220 of those were considered English language learners and received some instruction in Spanish. In that school year, I was assigned to teach Spanish Language Arts. The class was composed of mostly Mexican and Mexican American students. To protect their privacy, all students and teachers involved in this research have been given pseudonyms for the purposes of this dissertation. Erin was one of my students in this 8th-grade class. I remember Erin and her enthusiasm; she participated in all classroom activities. She was an intelligent and respectful young lady. But what I remember most was her bravery. She was always the first one to stand up to any injustice and speak her mind on racism. Therefore, when she was confronted with overt discrimination by a school official, she was crushed.

I recall Erin being upset and very angry when her food tray was taken away from her because she had not paid or was not current on paying her lunch dues. Erin had gone through
the lunch line only to later have her tray taken from her. She owed a couple of dollars, and according to school policy, if you did not receive free and reduced lunch, you had to pay a certain percentage. Erin was upset and cried because the cafeteria manager had taken the tray away. Her friends were very supportive and soon told me that at one point, they too had suffered racial microaggressions from the cafeteria manager. Thankfully, I always kept snacks in my room, which I shared with my students. After hearing my students speak of these microaggressions, I felt anger and sadness. I did not know what to say or do, but I did know I wanted to be strong for them. I decided at the time to do two things. The first was to always keep snacks in my room, and the second was to allow the students to write about the racial microaggressions they encountered daily. Therefore, the cafetería narratives became a focal point in my class because they helped my students find an outlet by writing and sharing these experiences. As a result of that year, I incorporated students’ experiences of racial microaggressions through reflective writing into the classroom curriculum.

As I reflected on my students of color’s racialized testimonios, I recognized how they were able to articulate their reality—the racism and dehumanization they encountered—and hence the importance of having students tell their testimonios in my classroom. Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) emphasize this importance and the significance of storytelling and counter-storytelling as a “tool that allows one to tell the story of those experiences that are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) and to analyze and challenge the stories of those in power” (p. 70). I provided the place (the physical location where groups are located) and space (the position groups or individuals occupy in a society because of their race, class, gender, and sexuality) for my students to express their feelings and emotions (Elenes & Bernal, 2010). Through the process of storytelling, they were able to hear others
share similar injustices. Through this *testoniesando*, [the process of offering testimonio] the students were able to compare the racial microaggressions they had experienced with those of their peers. They were able to speak about the racial microaggressions their friends encountered at school and with their parents in public places. They were able to distinguish the racist and non-racist comments in these spaces. At their young age, they had already learned how to resist these racial microaggressions and navigate between these spaces. Most students documented these racial microaggressions and selected to research and write their persuasive essays on topics like immigration, driver’s licenses for undocumented people, and voting rights for undocumented students. These topics were of interest and valuable for them to explore and inform themselves on the topic.

Salazar (2013) asserted, “educational scholars have long documented the struggle of students of color to resist assimilation, maintain their cultural roots, and merge their double selves” (p. 123). It is within this race and borderlands critical consciousness that I approached this qualitative research study. Utilizing my students’ *testimonios*, I sought in this project to analyze how I attempted to create a counter-hegemonic classroom where space and place were provided for my students. I did this by seeking “to humanize the lexicon that litters academic spaces, which is often presented through the discourse of whiteness including detached, objective and linear modes of expression” (Salazar, 2013, p. 122). I had students select research topics that were important for them as a way to have their lived experiences connect to the curriculum, and I had the students challenge ahistoricism and analyze traditional policies through their readings. Collectively these were avenues to counter the traditional White hegemonic discourse.
Purpose and Significance of the Study

Henry Giroux (1992) in Border Crossings questioned the truth about education reforms and cast doubt on the educational philosophy behind them. He asked, “What has been the thrust of these reforms? Back to basics, merit pay, a standardized curriculum, raising test scores, evaluation criteria, and the like. This is just another version of the technological fix that ignores the philosophical questions” (p. 12). In pushing for such technological fixes, students of color are left out of the equation. Giroux concluded, “we have to ask what the purposes of education are, what kind of citizens we hope to produce. To say that test scores are the answer is to beg the question of ‘What do test scores measure anyway?’” (p. 12). Giroux summarized the sentiments of teachers in the 21st century who are dealing with educational reforms that are scripted and focused on assessments. New programs like the Common Core State Standards (2013) initiative claim to promote college readiness and were pushed by educational reformers who lacked any understanding about counter-hegemonic teaching. Students of color need to feel secure, comfortable, and loved in the classroom. Duncan-Andrade (2007) in Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas: Defining, Developing, and Supporting Effective Teachers in Urban Schools discusses the qualities that teachers must have to fully engage students in radical education. Duncan-Andrade (2007) states how a Rida teacher is one who engages their students in challenging curriculum and who must possess five pillars: critically conscious purpose, duty, preparation, Socratic sensibility, and trust:

These teachers understood that government institutions, such as schools, have a negative history in poor and non-White communities. No matter how good their intentions, they were aware that as ambassadors of the institution of school they were
connected to that history. This awareness allowed them to be conscious of this obstacle to build trust with students and the community, and also helped them understand the importance of standing in opposition to school policies that were oppressive, racist, colonialist, and that perpetuate the cycle of inequality. (p. 633)

These Ridas were teachers who were not afraid to engage their students in a challenging curriculum, to build trust with their students, and, most importantly, to see their students as members of their extended families, with the same expectations and demands they would have for their family members. Rida teachers did not become enslaved to the educational reforms; instead, they opted to encourage their students to succeed and become active agents in their schools and in their communities. Ridas teach educators that schools should not be run by reforms or educational policy that “silence[s] the voices of the people it is supposed to teach” (Giroux, 1992, p. 15).

For this reason, education must be meaningful. When it is, students become engaged and interested. As Giroux (1992) described, “if you believe that schooling is about somebody’s story, somebody’s history, somebody’s set of memories, a particular set of experiences, then it is clear that just one logic will not suffice” (p. 14). In my own experience as a Mexican American educator working at a school with a 95% Mexican American student population and a 95% White faculty, I found myself attending professional development trainings and faculty, grade-level, and content area meetings that continued to operate from a deficit notion and a banking model of education toward Mexican Americans. Salazar (2013) asserted:

Although students of color may resist overt tactics that strip them of their cultural resources, in recent times, systemic approaches to assimilation are often masked in
the language of measurement and quantification that is rampant in 21st-century educational discourse. The focus on measurement and quantification in U.S. public schools results in pedagogical practices that favor high-stakes test-taking skills ...; foster memorization and conformity ... ; promote reductionist, decontextualized, and fragmented curriculum. (p. 124)

Why are we going back to the banking model of education system? Why does public education in general continue to see Mexican American and other students of color as noncontributing members in schools, classrooms, and society? Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* addressed the “banking model of education system” (p. 72) in which students are seen as empty vessels that need to be filled by the knowledge of their teachers. Disenfranchised students of color are forced to be in classrooms with what refers to as Atlas teachers.3 This paradigm operates from a misinterpretation of the historical relationship between communities of color and schools, in which schools historically have not provided an equitable education to Mexican American students.

After my first year of teaching and well into my second year in the doctorate program, I had my first encounter with CRT. I recall my professor discussing the historical and present-day context of White supremacy. Although I had some understanding of what it meant to be a Mexican American female living within the borderlands, the concept of Whiteness/White supremacy presented a new lens for understanding the role race and racism played in the educational experience of my students of color. This newfound lens prompted

3 Atlas complex is a state of mind that keeps teachers fixed in the center of their classroom, supporting the entire burden of responsibility for the course on their own shoulders.
me to critically analyze my own teaching practices and to understand how I was perpetuating White supremacy through the White Eurocentric curriculum and White instructional practices. I thought of my students of color, mainly Mexican immigrant students, and the racism they encountered through their schooling experiences based on their immigrant status, language, phenotype, and culture. By utilizing a CRT lens, I began to deconstruct and reflect on how the traditional White curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices at my school could be counteracted in my classroom. How could I create a counter-hegemonic space in my Spanish Language Arts class? This led to my main research question: How does a Mexican teacher create counter-hegemonic spaces in a Spanish Language Arts classroom utilizing critical race and borderlands theories? My sub-questions were: How do CRT and borderlands theory shape teacher–student relationships that nurture and cultivate Mexican American students’ self-identity, self-esteem, and sense of purpose and hope? How do CRT and borderlands theory influence curriculum that privileges a student’s cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge?

**Overview of Methodology**

I started in this field teaching a traditional White curriculum, ready to teach whatever was assigned to me. My class sizes were always around 27 to 31 students per period. Most of the students were “low performing,” according to their state standardized assessment. This state assessment evaluated the students in reading and writing. The students who scored low on these sections were categorized as “beginning steps.” I recall being assigned to teach ESL in my third year of teaching. The class was large because I was new to teaching and therefore was assigned to teach big classes. I did not question this teaching load. At the time, I thought having a Bilingual Endorsement License meant having all sorts of students with different
levels of reading and writing in Spanish. I was assigned students who were classified as being in special education and who had behavioral problems and were not classified as bilingual students.

I remember small interactions with teachers who were not as subtle with their comments when it came to the students who spoke Spanish. It soon became clear to me how these White teachers were the first to explicitly say, “I don't know Spanish,” and “I can't help these kids.” They protested and complained when they were assigned a Mexican student, commenting “those kids are so loud and rude” and “they don't want to learn; they misbehave and are so disrespectful.” My colleagues expected me to interpret for them when they had to call Spanish-speaking parents. At that moment in my teaching career, I would acquiesce to their requests and interpret. I believed it was my obligation as a bilingual teacher to modify curriculum, call parents, and assist White teachers who spoke no Spanish with Spanish-speaking students. It took a while before I noticed a pattern not only among the White teachers but also the front desk personnel who would call and interrupt my teaching so I could assist them with translations from English to Spanish. It was not until my doctoral program when I started taking classes on critical race theory that I began to see my profession through a critical race lens. In Miller's (1990) “Creating Spaces and Finding Voices: Teachers Collaborating for Empowerment,” a participant speaks about this same feeling and how he followed the curriculum and participated in every school activity without questioning until he reached an important realization:

[He] finally realized that teaching is a political thing. Its politics remain under the table. I know that I have deliberately and consciously avoided this for many years... so I taught each and every class with exactly what I was given, did exactly what I was
told. I never questioned class size, supply procedures, curriculum requirements or extracurricular demands. I volunteered for everything... But, now I'm no longer willing to do all that, or at least I now ask why? I know I'm different now than I used to be as a new teacher, I know I'm thinking differently, I know what I'm involved, because teaching is involvement! (p. 26)

Like this teacher, I was ready to transform my pedagogy. I did this through a practitioner qualitative research study. Practitioner research, according to Anderson et al. (1994), is “'insider’ research done by practitioners (educators) using their own sites (classrooms) as the focus of their study” (p. 2). Furthermore, practitioner research consists of qualitative methods which helped me analyze educational reforms and policies currently saturating curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices for students of color. This study offers a critical lens into how educators can exercise agency and provide their students curriculum that has relevance and is reflective of their students’ lives, thus creating counter-hegemonic teaching practices that can be enacted through curriculum and instruction decisions that allow for Mexican American students’ voices and experiences to take center stage.

**Delimitations**

No research study can truly capture all the different variables that impact the particular social or human problem being researched. Therefore, this practitioner qualitative case study is not generalizable, nor is it representative of all Spanish Language Arts classrooms within public schools. I cannot say I was non-biased with my research. However, I maintained the utmost respect toward my participants, my school, and myself for this research. Speaking the language of my participants and knowing about their culture did not
make my research easy. As their former teacher, some participants saw me as an authority figure, and some voiced their true feelings and opinions about the topics and questions they were asked. Prior to the interviews, I had already developed a sense of trust with them; however, one participant did ask a couple of times if it was OK to speak freely about other teachers, particularly one I had previously worked with. I assured participants everything they said was confidential.

Time was a delimitation in this research, as simultaneously conducting a study and teaching full-time was time consuming and stressful. Analyzing and interpreting the data forced me to rethink my teaching philosophy and methodology. During the study, I experienced some health issues which made me rethink my teaching career. I also changed teaching assignments, moving from teaching middle school to teaching high school.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

- **space**: Defined by Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) in “Latina/o Education and the Reciprocal Relationship between Theory and Practice: Four Theories Informed by the Experiential Knowledge of Marginalized Communities” as “the position groups or individuals occupy in a society as a result of their race, class, gender, and sexuality; as well as the roles people might play in a society or location such as students, teachers, mothers or cultural workers” (p. 75).

- **place**: Used by Elenes (2006) and Mckenna (2003) to refer to the physical location where groups are located, whether in the border region or a classroom.

- **convivencia**: Defined by Villenas (2005) in “Latina Literacies in Convivencia: Communal Spaces of Teaching and Learning” as communalism “centered on faith,
spirituality, and humor central to creating compassionate spaces or resilience, resistance, and innovation” (p. 273).

- **la raza**: Has origins in early 20th-century Latin American literature and translates into English most closely as “the people” or, according to some scholars, as “the Hispanic people of the New World.” (See more at http://www.nclr.org/index.php/about_us/faqs/the_truth_about_nclr/the_translation_of_our_name/#sthash)

- **facultad**: Coined by Anzaldúa (1987) in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* as: the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is the acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. It is anything that breaks into one’s everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one’s defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one’s habitual grounding, causes the depths to open up, causes a shift in perception. (p. 60)

- **counter-hegemonic**: When subordinate classes, in this case students, contest the powerful dominant culture in society.

- **borderlands**: Defined and utilized with a feminist lens by Anzaldúa (1987) as “a third space between cultures and social systems” (p. 100). Denotes that space in which antithetical elements mix, neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways.
• **Whiteness:** Defined by Helfand (2011) in “Constructing Whiteness” as a “system or societal advantage of being white,” which serves “to preserve the position of a ruling white elite who benefit economically from the labor of other white people and people of color” (p. 2).

• **Mexican American:** Describes a wide category of people who live in the United States and have a familial link to Mexico or Mexican culture. Can include people who have roots in the territory conquered by the United States in the Mexican American War and who might not speak Spanish, as well as recent immigrants, some of whom might speak an Indigenous language.

• **testimonio:** Described by Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) as a pedagogical, methodological, and activist practice that transgresses traditional paradigms; challenges objectivity; and equally values the mind, body, and spirit as sources of knowledge, creating a “space of reclamation” (p. 366) from which to theorize and develop transformative pedagogies” (Urrieta & Villenas, 2013, p. 516).
CHAPTER 2: Critical Race Theory, LATCRIT, AND BORDERLANDS THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from the work of Freeman (1970) and Bell (1970), both legal scholars within the field of critical legal studies (CLS). CLS was created by a leftist movement in which scholars argued that the legal system’s structure, discourses, and practices contributed to the creation and legitimization of the class hierarchies in U.S. society (Crenshaw, 1988). In the mid-1970s, both Freeman and Bell were concerned and disappointed with the lack of progress made within all aspects of U.S. society after the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, according to Ladson-Billings (2000), “CLS scholars critiqued mainstream legal ideology for its portrayal of U.S. society as a meritocracy but failed to include racism in its critique” (p. 12). Bell and Freeman’s frustration with CLS paved the way for the creation of CRT, which places race and racism at the center of analysis within the U.S. legal system. Parker and Lynn (2002) described CRT as “a legal theory of race and racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and in society” (p. 7).

Latina/o CRT emerged from the critique of scholars who felt CRT centered on a Black/White binary that ignored the intersection of race, class, gender, language, immigration status, and other issues related to the Latina/o experience in the United States. In addition, LatCrit in education has been utilized along with CRT to “form a theoretical lens that addresses issues such as immigration, language, culture, gender, and sexuality with a focus on the education of Latinas/os” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 65). Even though LatCrit shares the same five tenets, it supports and expands researchers’ ability to articulate the specific lived experiences of Latinas/os.

Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) utilized CRT/LatCrit as a way to merge these two theories in their analysis of the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice within
Latina/o education. They utilized the following three conceptual tenets of CRT/LatCrit to address the education of Latinas/os:

- Theorizing about race while also addressing the intersectionality of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression
- Proposing raced-gendered epistemologies that challenge Eurocentric epistemology and dominant ideologies such as meritocracy, objectivity, and neutrality
- Utilizing counter-storytelling as a methodological and pedagogical tool

LatCrit theory lends itself to my research interest by addressing the education of Mexican American students since it “opens up a space for alternative epistemologies and the examination of physical place (i.e., schools, courtrooms) and social space (i.e., positions people occupy)” (Elenes & Bernal, 2010, p. 72). Since CRT/LatCrit does not directly theorize space and place as borderlands theory does, I combine these two approaches; LatCrit addresses forms of subordination through the tenets of CRT. LatCrit also addresses the unique experiences of subordination Latinas/os endure based on language, immigration status, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and gender (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) applied Anzaldúa’s (1987) conceptualization of “mestiza consciousness, facultad, and nepantla to springboard for alternative methods of experiencing the world” (p. 72). Anzaldúa’s (1987) Borderlands/La Frontera addresses three main themes: moving toward a new mestiza consciousness, la facultad, and nepantla (an Aztec word meaning in between worlds; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). Moving toward a new consciousness addresses the importance of Chicanas/os and their constant struggles to straddle or live between two worlds culturally, spiritually, and linguistically. La facultad is
the process of sensing or seeing beyond what is at the surface. In this case, when racially/ethnically diverse students are constantly discriminated against for being “different” or are not accepted by the social norms of a capitalist society, they develop this sense of acute awareness. They can recognize and are forced to develop this faculty because they no longer feel psychologically or physically safe and thus are more apt to develop this faculty. LGBTQ+, outcasts, and races that are marginalized are among those who develop this sense (Anzaldúa, 1987). Mexican Americans as students of color are racialized and are marginalized in society; very early they develop this sense. They sense discrimination in society, in everyday life, and, most importantly, in their educational experience. Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory allows me as a researcher to incorporate these themes within a CRT/LatCrit framework.

The third concept utilized within Anzaldúa’s (1987) theory is nepantla, “torn between ways or the land in the middle” (p. 100). Commonly students of diverse cultural backgrounds who are bilingual, trilingual, and tri-cultural are in a constant state of transition. Mexican Americans and students of color are subjects who are in constant transition; as they are “sandwiched between two cultures,” (p. 100) their reality is a form of transformation. Within this navigation process, Mexican American students become aware of the inequalities in their daily schooling and educational experiences. When teachers create a place (a physical location), such as the classroom, they are opening a space where students are allowed to situate themselves within their society; they can position their race and the role others play within society. In addition, from this place and space, Mexican American youth can build the resilience and resistance that will help them navigate through the daily racist aggressions they are subjected to throughout their educational experiences.
In combination with CRT/LatCrit, my research utilized borderlands theory to further stress the positionality of the Mexican American students’ testimonios and their lived experiences in the classroom. This place and space allow for Mexican American students’ voices to be part of their schooling. Taking Pérez’s (1999) definition of the border “as a form of cohesive metaphorical linchpin” (p. 73) and linking it to what she and others describe as a decolonial imaginary, this historical decolonizing paradigm recognizes the “diversity and richness of the knowledge produced by Latinas/os and other people of color from their perspectives and lived experiences” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 73). Borderlands theory encompasses this, as it specifically focuses on the educational institution as the place to decolonize White Eurocentric curriculum.

Borderlands theory allows for a theorizing lens where Mexican American students’ strengths, such as language, bilingualism, immigration status, ethnicity, culture, identity, community, and gender, take primary focus within the classroom; this is the actual physical place to validate their lived realities. CRT/LaCrit allows for this to happen by integrating critical race curriculum (CRC) based on CRT tenets, yet borderlands theory “anchors on the relationship between land and identity, place and space and body as the center of colonial relations” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p.75). This relationship is something Eurocentric curriculum does not allow in its traditional forms of instruction.

The integration of a CRT/LatCrit framework with borderlands theory can be seen through the testimonios of my Mexican American students, which recount the racist microaggressions they are subjected to on a daily basis in schools. These testimonios prompted me to create a place and space within the classroom and curriculum for students to
tell their stories. Fernandez (2002) emphasizes this regarding the importance of the methodological functions and benefits of CRT/LatCrit for people of color:

First, it allows the participant to reflect on his or her lived experience. Second, narrative allows the marginalized participant to speak or make public his or her story. Third, storytelling or counter-storytelling also subverts the dominant story or reality that is socially constructed by Whites... Finally, storytelling can also be transformative and empowering. Sharing one’s stories with others raises the individual’s consciousness of common experiences and opens up the possibility for social action. (p. 48)

The use of a CRT/LatCrit framework in conjunction with Borderlands theory is instrumental in analyzing the educational and schooling experiences of Mexican American students. As Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) emphasized in their use of CRT/LatCrit, borderlands, and Chicana feminist theories in their own scholarship, “We have chosen these perspectives because they each (in their own way) emphasize the importance of the experiential knowledge of marginalized peoples and how this knowledge links the interdependent relationship between theory and praxis” (p. 64). This theory and praxis are instrumental in implementing CRC in the classroom. Students can connect their lived experiences and those of their peers with the curriculum and with the instructional material being taught. Students can also share and learn from home knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

**Mexican American Historical Context of Schooling**

After the Southwest became part of the United States in 1848, schools began to be established, but they were exclusively for Anglo children. Mexican students or Mexican
American students were prohibited from attending such schools because they were seen as an inferior race (Donato, 2007; González, 1999). When schooling was made available for Mexican American students, they were segregated from their Anglo peers and largely taught by White educators. Most often schoolhouses were old, run-down buildings or shacks that were supposed to accommodate students from kindergarten through 5th grade (Cockcroft, 1995; Donato, 2007; Flores, 2005). After the Industrial Revolution, a call for education reform ensued. Schools during this period were exclusively designed to Americanize all immigrant and minority children, even while they did not enjoy the rights of citizenship or basic human rights. Mexican American students who were allowed to attend schools were denied the right to use their first language, culture, and heritage. This process was the beginning of deculturalization (Gonzáles, 1999).

In the early twentieth century, another education reform was established and promoted: IQ testing, which quickly gained popularity. It was a major way for those delivering traditional, White, Eurocentric curriculum to justify their racist agenda, label Mexican children as culturally backward using psychological theory (González, 1999), and place Mexican students at the lower division of labor force. As a result, Mexican American students have a long history of experiencing discrimination in schools and being labeled as deficient in all areas. In the 1920s, the Mexican and Spanish child was seen as “the problem” (Flores, 2005, p. 76). This deficit model or “Mexican Problem” took form in the following ways:

[1]In 1920’s it was seen as having mental retardation; in 1930’s “the problem” was bilingualism; in the 1940’s “the problem” was assimilation through education; in the 1950’s “the problem” was their “language barrier” a “dual handicap;” in the 1960’s
these students were culturally and linguistically deprived; in the 1970’s “the problem” was “Equal Education Opportunity for the Culturally and Linguistically ‘Different Child;” in the 1980’s the problem was the “semilingualism and limited English proficient (LEP) students;” in the 1990’s the “problem” was the children were ‘at risk;’” and finally in the 2000’s the “problem” is seen as the lack of English. (Flores, 2005, p. 76)

Much of what Flores (2005) found in reviewing literature about “the Mexican Problem” is still the prevailing thought in schools today. It was particularly prevalent in the school where I taught. This “problem,” or the supposed deficiencies of Mexican American students, is also explained in Valdés’s (1997) “School Failure: Explanations and Interventions;” in this, Valdés explained the concept of school failure is based on three categories—the genetic argument, the cultural argument, and the class analysis argument.

These three arguments explain how schools blame non-White ethnic and racial groups for their performance in schools. The genetic argument argues that these groups are genetically predisposed to low performance because of their genetically inherited abilities; in other words, based on their ethnic or racial group, they are inferior. The cultural argument is based on children of low socioeconomic status being seen as “trapped in a culture of poverty” (Valdés, 1997, p. 17). This argument emphasizes that ethnicized and racialized children are bound to fail if they are not traditionally mainstreamed and holds language as one of the main reasons students are mismatched with school culture. Within this argument, parents are seen as the ones to blame for not emphasizing the value of education.

Lastly, in the class analysis argument, culturally diverse students are tracked into categories; these divisions derive from the model of reproduction discussed by Giroux
This cultural reproduction theory highlights how schools track culturally diverse students to continue to reproduce the working class in a capitalist society. Valencia (1999) stated that the “acceptance of schooling intended to resolve the Mexican problem ensured the reproduction of the Mexican community as a source of cheap labor” (p. 56).

Assessments/Testing

Historically, the Mexican American student has been seen as a second-class citizen (Acuña, 1972; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). This deficit model continues to be seen in many forms in today’s schooling. In 21st-century schools, assessments have become a popular way to measure IQ. Assessments are therefore a critical tool used in today’s classrooms to determine the success of Mexican American students in school. Valencia (1999) addressed the issue of testing in his article “Educational Testing and Mexican American Student: Problems and Prospects.” He stated that in 1997, 46 million students (according to the U.S. Department of Education) took at least one group-administered standardized test each year. This data point is imperative to understand. In New Mexico’s public schools in 2015, students were tested with the following assessments: New Mexico Standard Base Assessment, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC), Assessing Comprehension in English State-to-State (ACCESS) for English language learners, and End-of-the-Year Exams (EOC). Currently, testing issues are at the forefront of education in the public schools. Valencia (1999) addressed such issues as:

1) Cultural bias; 2) problems in the assessment of students with limited English proficiency; 3) underrepresentation of Mexican American students in gifted and talented programs; 4) the disparate, negative impact of high-stakes testing; 5)
inequalities of curriculum differentiation; and 6) the adverse impact of testing on admissions to institutions of higher education. (p. 126)

These very same issues still impact students’ overall assessment results. Students are penalized for not knowing assessment content. For example, Mexican American students are penalized by taking strategy classes and losing elective classes, and they are placed on an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) and judged and categorized as failures for not reading at grade level. Valencia agreed that “testing children on what they have not been taught and then stigmatizing their failure to learn is a fundamental form of discrimination” (p. 135). Therefore, Valencia offered options for alternative assessments that would be applicable to Mexican American students in today’s assessment age. He recommended an alternative way to assess Mexican American students, stating that assessments could improve through:

1) The establishment of the psychometric integrity of tests; 2) the use of alternative forms of assessment of intelligence; 3) emphasis on the importance of language assessment of students with limited English proficiency; 4) greater emphasis on the monitoring role of tests; 5) the use of multiple data sources in assessment; and 6) the unification of science and ethics assessment. (p. 132)

Spring (2001) contended that from “colonial times to today, educators have preached equality of opportunity and good citizenship, while engaging in acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and discrimination against immigrants and students of color” (p. 5). In this scenario, schools become places to indoctrinate Mexican American students.

---

4 An AIP is a document required for students in grades K–12 who have not met district and/or state proficiency levels in reading, writing, science, and/or mathematics. An AIP carries the same requirement for completion as an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.
students. It is also clear that Mexican American students, like other students of color, are educated in the discourse of historical racist and discriminatory practices that schools carry out against students of culturally diverse backgrounds. In analyzing the educational and schooling experience of Mexican American students, it is obvious that racism is at the center of the policies and instruction implemented through traditional curriculum. As pointed out by Yosso (2002), “traditional curricular discourses distort, omit, and stereotype Chicana/o, Latina/o, African American/ Asian Pacific Islander, and Native American experience. These deficit discourses serve to rationalize discriminatory curricular processes that maintain structures of racial, gender, and class inequality in schools” (p. 93). Since the development and implementation of education and schooling in the United States, Whites have utilized schools as a platform to educate and indoctrinate all students of color; to assimilate them; and to teach them to accept an inferior racial, cultural, intellectual, and class status.

It is important to understand how race plays into the politics and policies enacted in education today and how these enactments are a reflection of the past. It is also essential that such analysis critically deconstruct policy and legislation enacted at the macro level, detailing how it trickles down to the micro level and how schools are sites used to reproduce such inequalities. It is equally important to understand how race and racism are constructed through policies and disseminated through public spaces such as schools. This Whiteness ideology is still very much alive in schools today and is enacted through policies camouflaged as educational acts to help students of color. Du Bois (1903) and Fanon (1963) addressed and acknowledged the systems that have subjugated and dehumanized all students of color. These two scholars wrote powerful literature to enlighten future generations about the racialized society we live in. Unfortunately, the schooling experience for students of
color has not changed. The little success these students have achieved is used by schools to validate their White-supremacist ideology of equal educational opportunity and meritocracy.

To further emphasize how White ideology is still implemented by teachers who fall into this ideology and carry it out, I utilize the following anecdotes. In 2007, I was assigned to a professional learning community (PLC) that focused on bilingual education at the middle school where I taught. We met twice a week to discuss students’ academic concerns, academic growth, and/or behavioral challenges. The PLC was composed of three males and two Mexican American females—the chair and myself. Each meeting started with the math teacher, who was a White male, making a negative comment about the Mexican American students being lazy because they did not turn in assigned homework. His comments were then followed by those of the science teacher, who was also a White male; he made sarcastic comments about Mexican American students smoking weed and referred to them as criminals who did not care about education. These two males had multiple meetings with the principal to address how low achieving the bilingual students were and how they had no respect for themselves; I know this because the men would tell me during the PLC meetings. These two men were known to write most of the referrals in school. In another meeting, the science teacher joked about a Mexican American kid who did not have lined paper to write on. He added that the student’s dad was a drug dealer—an assumption he made based solely on the vehicle the dad drove. His allegations were unfounded; they were simply false claims and racist comments. These racist comments were mentioned in PLCs and also in staff meetings. During a staff meeting regarding standard-based assessment results, the science teacher stood up and addressed the rest of the staff. He stated that bilingual students could not perform at a nearing-proficient level because their parents were illiterate. Again, his
racist comments targeted Mexican American students, and he was not the only one who verbalized these types of comments.

As a Mexican American teacher and woman of color, I found the comments made by these teachers as racist, cruel, and dehumanizing. In all the PLC meetings, I challenged these people and questioned their statements, asking them to substantiate their racist claims with evidence. On many occasions, I returned to my classroom disgusted to work with people who thought this way and who called themselves teachers. However, the White teachers with their White privilege were allowed to speak their minds at that school. They were entitled to use derogatory terms like thugs, drug dealers, criminals, or illiterate when they referenced Mexican American students and parents in PLC meetings and other sites of public discourse (McIntosh, 1989). Sadly, I never recalled the principal intervening to address these comments. Mexican American students had been criminalized before they even entered the classroom; how could they learn and grow in a classroom with a biased, racist teacher and a discriminatory curriculum? In the last century, this problem has been further exacerbated by rising xenophobia. Racist immigration policies fuel the discrimination students encounter from the instructors who teach them and from administrators who fail to intervene during these times of racial microaggression. Villenas and Deyhle (1999) wrote that “under a CRT lens, an analysis of Latino schooling experiences cannot take place without addressing the racism behind the ant-immigrant, anti-Latino xenophobia of this country and the exploitation of transnational labor and migration” (p. 441). These students as well as their parents are being exposed to daily racial aggression not only by teachers but also by the curriculum, instruction, and assessments that label them as the problem or deficient.
Curriculum/Language

In her article “Toward a Critical Race Curriculum,” Yosso (2002) used a CRT framework to analyze and challenge racism within all aspects and multiple layers of school curriculum as it pertains to the schooling experiences of students of color. Yosso’s deconstruction of school curriculum sought to go beyond the notion of curriculum as related to knowledge included in and excluded from textbooks; she defined curriculum as the set of structures, processes, and discourses in place within schools from pre-K to higher education. Yosso (2002) stated,

Curriculum includes what structures are in place so that specific classes are designated to present specific knowledge. Curriculum also encompasses the processes designed to place students in certain classes, wherein they are presented with specific knowledge. Furthermore, curriculum is supported by discourses that justify why some students have access to certain knowledge while others are presented with different school curriculum. (p. 93)

As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, many schools were judged by the standardized assessments they gave once a year. If a school did not meet the standard for Adequate Yearly Progress, it would be overwhelmed by scripted curriculum. Programs like Navigator, a scripted remedial reading program, were mandatory. Students were forced to read for 25 to 30 minutes daily on topics which were unfamiliar even to the instructors teaching the curriculum. These scripted programs left very little time for teachers to deliver lessons that critically engaged students and no time for CRC. As Yosso (2002) explained, “Chicanas/os tracked in a vocational program or placed on a terminal [ESL] track may not be granted access to the basic requirements to be eligible for a four-year college” (p. 93).
As a former middle school English teacher who taught English language learners, I was in a constant battle with my positionality as an educator. The language arts curriculum was and continues to be driven by a Eurocentric canon of literature and communication skills. In the case of schools that do not meet the standard for Adequate Yearly Progress, the scripted curriculum contributes to the deskilling of teachers and does nothing to develop a critical consciousness among students, thus reinforcing through curriculum and pedagogy the structural inequalities of larger society (Apple, 1990). Textbooks are assigned to teachers and lesson plans are outlined daily. A teacher cannot skip or omit any scripted material from their curriculum. In addition, biweekly observations by the state are mandatory, and students take short-cycle assessments called checkpoints to measure their comprehension level. This push for standardization, privatization, and scripted curriculum comes from neoliberal ideology. As Harvey (2005) stated,

Neo-liberalism is in the first instance of theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individuals entrepreneurial freedoms skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (p. 2)

Educational reforms and policies have yet to be revisited for students of color, even after the 2018 Martinez/Yazzie case in the state of New Mexico. Still the state has done almost nothing to uphold equal and fair educational opportunities for these students. Instead, policies that began taking shape in the early 1980s remain crucial in determining the contemporary educational field. The push to privatize schools was forced on the educational system. Apple (1990, 2001) stated that neoliberal ideology positions education as a commercial product. The push for vouchers and choice programs where parents were able to
select the “perfect” school was a neoliberal method that sounded “good” but “works the opposite way once it reaches the classroom level” (Apple, 2001, p. 5). Apple made an important point regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment by claiming the pressure to embed the common core standards and the rush to test as a means of addressing “accountability” were all part of the neoliberal agenda. National standards and curricula were constructed as a means of establishing commonality, or as Apple (2001) stated, as a call for “return to common culture, in response to a declining economic productivity, and the high rate of unemployment, poverty, a loss of international competitiveness” (p. 35). The real reason behind the push for commonality was neoliberals privatizing education and seeing students as human capital, yet parents were sold on the idea of having parental choice to remove their children from failing schools through vouchers and choice programs. When analyzing how these state policies address education through the neoliberal ideology, it is seen “as simply one more product like bread, cars and television” (p. 39), according to Apple. Neoliberals falsely advertised their ideology to parents because they wished to promote that ideology as giving students of color equal educational opportunities, when in reality neoliberal ideology places the blame on parents and failing schools for a “financial draining society” (Apple, 2001, p. 39).

Overall, the policies of neoliberals and neoconservatives have direct effect on students of color. Bilingualism and multiculturalism are seen as “cultural pollution” (Apple, 2001, p. 48). English-only movements focus on solely Western tradition, placing a high focus on what is considered “legitimate knowledge.” Therefore, the demand for standardizing education and setting forth traditional curriculum is their main goal.
Language is vital in analyzing the role it plays in schools and how students of color can access language in a classroom for self-advocacy is crucial. Language, to students of color, is a marker that can include or exclude them from certain classes and certain groups of people in society overall. Giroux (1992) argued, “language in all of its complexity becomes not only the production of meaning and social identities but also as constitutive condition for human agency” (p. 19). As a language arts teacher, I find it critical that students of color see their language not as a deterrent to their learning but as a powerful tool and as additional knowledge. I utilize Giroux’s (1992) oppositional paradigms, in which he provides a new view of language:

Oppositional paradigms provide new languages through which it becomes possible to deconstruct and challenge dominant relations of power and knowledge legitimated in traditional forms of discourse. The oppositional paradigms offer the possibility for producing constructive language that provide the opportunity for educators to understand and engage the experience of both the classroom and other cultural sites. This opposition often reflects major changes in thinking that are mediated and produced through related shifts in new ways of speaking and writing. Oppositional languages are generally unfamiliar, provoking questions and pointing to social relations that will often appear alien and strange to many educators. What is at stake here is whether such languages offer a vision and practice for new forms of understanding, social practice, and collective struggle. (p. 21)

This oppositional paradigm often reflects major changes in thinking and teaching. Oppositional language is also addressed by Yosso (2005) as she continues with Giroux’s (1990) argument. Using Anzaldúa’s (1990) theory, Yosso emphasized the need to use theory
to empower communities of color. She specifically focused on changing the paradigm of students of color who are seen as culturally deficient. Utilizing CRT as an anchor, Yosso (2005) introduced the concept of community cultural wealth based on six forms of capital: (1) aspirational capital resiliency, (2) linguistic capital, (3) familial capital, (4) social capital, (5) navigational capital, and (6) resistant capital. These are just some of the alternative ways to deconstruct how we see our Mexican American students and students of color as cultural capital holders instead of deficient students. CRC allows for Mexican American students to see their experiences and their community cultural wealth as part of the curriculum.

**Culturally Relevant/Sustaining Education/Pedagogy**

In 1995, Ladson-Billings produced the theoretical model known as *culturally relevant pedagogy*. Her research on effective teachers of African American students led her to the development of this pedagogical model that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing a critical perspective that challenged inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson, Billings, 1995 p. 469). Ladson-Billings’ study of eight teachers led her to understand that their effective pedagogical practices were deeply connected to their relationships with students, families, and community. The three domains that resulted from this work were academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Academic success centered on the intellectual growth that students experienced as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences. Cultural competence refers to the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture. Sociopolitical consciousness is the ability to take
learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems. (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 75)

Duncan-Andrade (2007) identified five indicators of effective teaching in urban schools. Like the teachers Ladson-Billings studied, the teachers in Duncan-Andrade’s study had a clearly defined pedagogical lens that centered on having a “critically conscious purpose” and “process” (p. 625) which includes curriculum choices and modes of delivery for that curriculum. The teachers in the study “prepared fertile ground for all their students to succeed, particularly the students that would be risk takers, these teachers worked at understanding the history of the communities where they worked and the people that lived there” (p. 625). In addition, the teachers utilized a pedagogical strategy that redefined success for their students by talking to them “about using school as a way to return to their communities, rather than as a strategy for escaping them” (p. 625).

Bartolomé (2003), in “Beyond the Methods Fetish: Toward a Humanizing Pedagogy,” discussed the great need for teachers to reject the established teaching methods that benefit White, middle-class students. Bartolomé called on all teachers to support social change in their classroom:

A teacher’s political clarity will not necessarily compensate for structural inequalities that students face outside the classroom; however, teachers can to the best of their ability, help their students deal with injustices encountered inside and outside the classroom. (p. 176)

Political clarity then permits teachers to engage students in “explicit discussions” (p. 176) in which students of color can become aware of their experiences and therefore place

---

5 Bartolomé (1994) defined political clarity as the process by which individuals achieve a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical and economical realities that shape their lives and their capacity to recreate them.
themselves on a macro level as citizens of this country. Bartolomé was asking for teachers to acknowledge this politically clear notion. She stated,

[I]t is important to point out that it is not the lesson or set of activities that prepares the student; rather, it is the teacher’s politically clear educational philosophy that underlies the varied methods and lessons/activities she or he employs that make the difference. (p. 176)

By developing my own political educational philosophy, I can make a difference in the schooling of Mexican American students.

Paris and Alim (2014), in “What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward,” advocated for educators to adopt and enact pedagogies that are,

not filtered through a lens of contempt and pity (e.g., the “achievement gap”) but,
rather are centered on contending in complex ways with the rich innovative linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of Indigenous American, African American, Latina/o, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and other youth and communities of color. (p. 86)

Through culturally sustaining pedagogy, educators must strategically refine the notion of success that has been framed by White, middle-class standards and values to one that standardizes multilingualism as the norm within this global world.

Ochoa (2007), in Learning from Latino Teachers, described the overwhelming strength these teachers possess and use in their own lives and in their classrooms, highlighting the essential need for teachers who are culturally sensitive to the communities they teach. These teachers prefer to return to their communities—the same communities they left as young adults—because their sense of community worth and care for future generations
pulled them back to these schools. One of the teachers in Ochoa’s book stated how comfortable she felt in a class where her teacher was bilingual: “It was the only class I felt comfortable singing, dancing, and talking out loud” (p. 123). The sentiment expressed by the student is one routinely echoed by students of color. When students feel comfortable enough to speak and to share their cultural capital, the classroom environment changes. The climate is clearer, and the learning begins. Teachers of color who can establish a space for students also decrease their students’ affective filter (Delpit, 1998) and therefore allow for learning to occur.\(^6\) All the narratives in Ochoa’s study address the inspirational quality of teachers of color. However, these teachers also speak about the negative effects of testing and the lack of multicultural curriculum that many times forces them to feel restrained. Many of these teachers assert how vital it is for Latino students to see themselves reflected in their teachers.

Morris (2004) emphasized the need for establishing links between schools and the community. It is not only teaching that asserts a teacher’s success with his or her students; it is also the time they invest in the community and the ties they forge with students that extend outside the classroom environment. In Morris’s study, African American teachers lived three blocks from the school, and most of the staff attended church with the parents of the students and coached at local boys’ clubs. Schools worked with the community. Not only were community ties established, cultural affirmation and consciousness arose from the curriculum. Students’ cultural capital was intertwined in the school’s curriculum and throughout the school structure. Students were able to learn their history and culture in the lessons taught, and “the ambience in each school and the educators’ pedagogical and

---

\(^6\) Delpit (1998) defined how affective filter operates in stating, “when affective conditions are not optimal, when the student is not motivated, does not identify with the speakers of the second language, or is overanxious about his performance…. [causing] a mental block …. [which] will prevent the input from reaching those parts of the brain responsible for language acquisition” (p. 288).
interaction styles created an environment in which African American children could see themselves and their culture within the schooling process” (p. 93). Bridging the community and school establishes a unique and profound bond that encourages classroom learning.

Delgado Bernal (2002) stated,

CRC that begins with pedagogies of the home interrupts the transmission of official knowledge and dominant ideologies. This can facilitate student’s development of an oppositional language to challenge the deficit societal discourses with which they bombard daily. (p. 624)

Ochoa (2007) also highlighted in her research with Latino teachers the importance of “going outside the curriculum” (p. 198), viewing the concept of educación over education. Educación is defined as the way one behaves and interacts; it includes being respectful and well-mannered (Valdés, 1996). As Martinez (2010) explained in “Construction of the Educated Person,” schooling and what it means to be educated are very different.

In “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” Yosso (2005) took Anzaldúa’s (1990) theory and reverted the roles of subjugation. It is this reverting and transforming process that teachers of color are doing in the classroom and with their students. Meaningful learning experiences using their cultural capital are extremely valuable. Delgado Bernal (2002) stated that most culturally diverse students don’t see themselves “as holders and creators of knowledge” (p. 106); rather, most of their cultural capital is repressed and hidden away, and “their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal education setting” (p. 107). As a Mexican American educator of racially/ethnically diverse students, I believe that our students’ knowledge is valid. Their cultural capital must be connected to the
curriculum and weaved into the learning environment. Their epistemology, as discussed by Ladson-Billings (2000) and Delgado Bernal (2002), should be seen as a “system of knowing that is linked to worldview based on the conditions under which people live and learn” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106). When the students can make this connection through a counter-hegemonic approach to curriculum, they are able to bridge the abstract with the concrete. They can grapple with challenging topics, critically analyze themes in all genres studied, and thus place themselves as learners in a system that is otherwise oppressive to them.

In this chapter I provided a review of literature that set the foundation for this study. I used this literature to highlight the importance of having culturally diverse students see themselves as holders and creators of knowledge (p. 106). In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of methodology.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses my position as a researcher, the general perspectives of the research, and the methodology used for this study—CRT, borderlands theory, and community cultural wealth. I also discuss the methods, research context, research participants, trustworthiness, instruments used in collecting data, and analysis of the data. The research context section begins with an overview of the sociocultural landscape of the region and the city. I then present an overview of the demographic make-up of public schools in the state and district. Next, I provide a description of the participants in the study and the instruments used in data gathering, including the interviews, observations, and documents that were used. Last, I provide information on how I acquired access to the school, contacted students, and scheduled the interviews.

My Position as a Researcher

My personal experience has been that of a Mexican American female educator teaching in a predominantly Mexican American community located in an urban city within the southwestern United States. I engaged in this research from a personal understanding and a commitment to include my students’ personal testimonios as a valid source of knowledge within the White, Eurocentric curriculum. Latina/o, Mexican American, and Mexican immigrant students are in a constant struggle within the public schools; they are pressured daily to assimilate and face racism and discrimination on a regular basis due to their language, racial identity, immigrant status, and ethnic background. Like my students’ schooling experiences, I spent my first years in elementary school as a silent observer sitting in the classroom, being so quiet that teachers often forgot I was in the room. I could not verbally communicate with anybody. To make matters worse and even more terrifying was
when I was called on to speak English. I remember being constantly corrected and asked to repeat many words. I never asked to go to the bathroom. I was afraid of the words that would come out of my mouth. Would it be Spanish, English, or a mix of both?

I was so quiet that I was referred to the school nurse to have my hearing checked. At times, I felt isolated and very alone during these early school years. Besides my sisters and I, there were not many Mexican immigrant children at the school. This childhood experience informs my positionality as a researcher. These experiences have shaped my understanding of how one’s lived experiences are closely related to the political decisions educators make regarding curriculum and instruction in the classroom. Consequently, my pedagogical, epistemological, and methodological stances inform this research. Employing raced-gendered epistemological and methodological frameworks like CRT, cultural community wealth, borderlands, and Chicana feminism allowed me to challenge the concepts of neutrality and objectivity that permeate Western, Eurocentric research methods and methodology. These approaches encourage researchers like me to create “new kinds of theories” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2009, p. 63) from which to decolonize the research process, creating new possibilities that recognize the reciprocal relationship between theory and praxis.

Throughout this research, I was deeply connected with my participants and their experiences. I was also aware of my positionality and my political stance as an immigrant and teacher who can enact change within her own classroom. I understood how my participants would directly affect the way I conducted my research and analysis of my data. Therefore, my ethical loyalty has been to my participants, to improve my profession, and to deconstruct Western curriculum in the schooling process of Mexican American students.
The intent of this research is to contribute to the literature that looks at the ways critically conscious educators can enact pedagogical and curriculum decisions that counter White, Eurocentric ideologies and practices within public schools. In addition, the hope is for this research study to describe the ways in which CRT and borderlands theories can be utilized to shape teacher–student relationships that help nurture and cultivate Mexican American students’ self-identity, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and hope.

**General Perspectives**

The research reported here is the result of a qualitative study within a practitioner research lens. The research looks at daily experiences of Mexican American youth in an urban, public high school. Arroyo Grande High School (a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality) contains grades 9 through 12. The theoretical foundations of this analysis are CRT, borderlands theory, and community cultural wealth. Combining my experiences as a Mexican woman, a Spanish teacher, and a student of CRT and borderlands studies, I consciously made the decision to take the methodological approach of a practitioner researcher and analyze the data with a critical Chicana feminist perspective.

**Critical Race Methodology**

I come to CRT with the understanding of the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992) within all aspects of U.S. society. Being cognizant of the permanence of racism within this society informs my understanding of how racism has historically operated within the educational and schooling experiences of Mexican American students. To provide a space for these marginalized narratives and testimonies to be told and heard, I position my ideological stance and educational research within a CRT framework. The reality experienced by most people of color, in this case Mexican American students, guides my decision to use CRT as
my methodological framework to analyze the traditional curriculum used to teach in a Spanish Language Arts class.

I believe that CRT can support my analysis of racism as a normalized and permanent structure within our educational system and the traditional modes of instruction. This is because “it challenges the racialized gendered, and classed structures of educational inequality… accompanied by its approach to creating more equitable conditions in schools and society by drawing on the knowledges of people of color” (Yosso, 2002, p. 95). CRT centers the voices of the marginalized peoples and their views through their oral history and narratives. Delgado (1995) and Crenshaw et al. (1995) stated that CRT methodology focuses on the roles that voices and experiential knowledge have in bringing about racial justice. Furthermore, Solórzano and Yosso (2000) emphasized that “CRT in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how education, theory, policy and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 40). Storytelling or counter-storytelling is the ability to use stories based on lived experience to better understand how people of color experience race. Ladson-Billings (2000) spoke to this as the condition and experiences of how people live and learn, which shapes their knowledge and worldview. This plays an essential role since it addresses the schooling and education experiences of Mexican American youth. The CRT methodology utilized for this research focused on the following five CRT tenets as a foundation for understanding how a Mexican American educator created a counter-hegemonic space and how Mexican American students’ community cultural wealth goes unnoticed and unrecognized in their schooling experience. By employing CRT, borderlands theory, and community cultural
wealth, this research countered, acknowledged, and recognized these assets in a Spanish Language Arts class.

First, CRT methodology in education aids in the integration of multiple layers of subordination based on race, immigrant status, language, gender, class, and so on, which are embedded in the curriculum, school policies, and practices. Tenet one—the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination—aided this analysis by exposing, analyzing, and challenging Mexican American students' majoritarian *testimonios*.

Tenet two—the challenge to dominant ideology—centers on rejecting White privilege and “neutral” and “objective” research that has distorted epistemologies of Mexican American educators, students, families, and community. Tenet three—the commitment to social justice—seeks to expose how the multiple forms of oppression, racism, and xenophobia directed toward Mexican American students are met with various forms of resistance. The centrality of experiential knowledge in CRT, as posited by Ladson-Billings (2009), “recognizes the validity of storytelling and the voices of the oppressed” (p. 347). Employing storytelling as a method helps counter the deficit discourse regarding Mexican American students. In addition, the lived experiences of Mexican American students and educators can be used as a source for teaching and learning that interrupts the transmission of dominant histories or what Apple (1999, 2001) called “official knowledge” (p. 55). The transdisciplinary perspective helps to analyze race and racism in historical and contemporary contexts. By combining perspectives from ethnic studies, sociology, law, and history, one can gain a deeper understanding of how educators can create a counter-hegemonic curriculum that builds on the lived experiences of Mexican American students within a CRT, borderlands, and community cultural wealth framework.
Using CRT methodology gives us a vehicle to analyze the importance of students’ position in the Western historical context. This concept of rewriting/re-right is applicable within the context of this research question. CRT tenets allow researchers to construct a new narrative based on the experiences of Mexican American students. CRT acknowledges that people of diverse backgrounds encounter White supremacy and racism daily, making it a normal part of their reality. Using CRT and counter-story as a form to delineate this ignored reality within a White-supremacist society emphasizes how “counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32).

**Borderlands/Chicana Feminist Methodology**

In addition to using CRT, I utilized a borderlands and Chicana feminist methodological approach that allowed me as a researcher to use my own conocimiento [knowledge] and lived experiences as a guiding tool for analysis (Anzaldúa, 1990). Borderlands and Chicana feminist methodologies aided me in challenging the concept of objectivity and repositioning my “subjective and lived realities to inform” (Gaxiola Serrano et al., 2017, p. 242) my inquiry and the ways in which I engaged with the data. A borderlands and Chicana feminist methodological framework addresses the following concepts: (a) the importance of place and space, (b) the formation of hybrid identities, and (c) border pedagogy. Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2009) state that

The metaphorical meanings of the borderlands, borderland theories, when applied to education permit us to study the various aspects within formal and informal educational settings. Such aspects include educational policy, curriculum, school practices, language, and culture. (p. 74)
This concept of borderlands is essential because my participants were first and second-generation Mexican Americans whose daily experiences include crossing many borders, both physical and metaphorical. They are students who cross imaginary borders daily, specifically institutional borders as well as racial, gender, class, linguistic, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and often citizenship borders that affect them directly and indirectly throughout their educational experiences. Villenas and Foley (2002) stressed the ways in which borderlands theorizing helps “valorize the lived realities of Latinas/os in the face of insidious new forms of racist and deficit thinking” (p. 218).

A Chicana feminist theoretical methodological framework informed the ways in which I as a Mexican American educator struggle against various forms of oppression on the basis of race, class, gender, language, culture, and sexuality with the White-dominant institution of schools. Delgado Bernal (2001) stated that,

Chicana feminist pedagogies focus on the ways Chicanas teach, learn, and live the foundations for balancing and resisting systems of oppression. In other words, the teaching and learning of the home allows Chicanas to draw upon their own cultures and sense of self to resist domination along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. (p. 624)

Using a Chicana Feminist methodological framework allowed me to analyze the ways in which I enact woman-centric curricular practices to create counter-hegemonic spaces in my Spanish Language Classroom using a CRT and borderlands framework. The use of testimonio validates my students and my own lived experiences/realities as marginalized peoples within public schools. Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) described testimonio as a pedagogical, methodological, and activist practice that transgresses traditional paradigms and
challenges objectivity. Testimonio equally values the mind, body, and spirit as sources of knowledge, creating a “space of reclamation” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 366) from which to theorize and develop “transformative pedagogies” (Urrieta & Villenas, 2013, p. 516). Lastly, the use of a borderlands and Chicana feminist epistemological and methodological framework provided me with the sitios y lenguas [decolonizing spaces and discourses] (Pérez, 1999) from which my students’ and my own lived experiences and culturally specific ways of knowing and being in the world were at the center of the research.

Community cultural wealth was also part of the analysis for this research. Mexican American students walk into classrooms with rich cultural experiences and conocimiento (Delgado Bernal, 2012). Many of the participants in this study survived family separation when one of their parents was deported or a close family member was detained in an immigration detention center. Other students had to work night shifts to help pay rent and utilities. Using Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth approach was a way to counter traditional schooling and what is considered knowledge and to highlight what most of the time is unrecognized or unacknowledged about these students.

Yosso (2005) discussed how students of color are often not seen as students with knowledge, or at least not knowledge valued by traditional schooling. Yosso offered six forms of capital that acknowledge this unrecognized knowledge:

1. **aspirational**: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers, in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals.
2. **linguistic**: the multiple language and communication skills students of color (including children) arrive at school with. These students often have been engaged participants in a storytelling tradition, which may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, *cuentos* [stories], and *dichos* [proverbs].

3. **familial**: cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* [kin] that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. Acknowledging the racialized, classed, and heterosexualized inferences that comprise traditional understandings of family, this capital is nurtured by extended family, which may include immediate family members (living or passed on) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends.

4. **social**: networks of people and community resources that provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions.

5. **navigational**: the skills to maneuver through institutions not created for communities of color; strategies used by communities of color to navigate racially hostile university campuses.

6. **resistant**: knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. (Yosso, 2005, p.80)

A community cultural wealth approach (Yosso, 2005) was used in this research and focused on these six forms of capital. Participants’ cultural capital was seen as an asset for Mexican American students. Using community cultural wealth countered traditional schooling curriculum and challenged the dominant ideology by rejecting White capital. Using community cultural wealth exposed how Mexican American students brought to the
classroom from their homes and communities vital underutilized assets that contribute to their schooling process to enrich their learning.

Methods

My research design consisted of a qualitative study that used practitioner research methods described by Anderson et al. (1994). This research design assisted me in examining the counter-hegemonic teaching practices in a Spanish Language Arts classroom. My research question was: How does a Mexican American teacher create counter-hegemonic spaces in a Spanish Language Arts classroom utilizing CRT and borderlands theory? My sub-questions were: How do CRT and borderlands theories shape teacher–student relationships that nurture and cultivate Mexican American students’ self-identity, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and hope?

Research Context

The urban city where this research took place is located 230 miles north of the United States/Mexico border and has a population of about 564,559, according to the 2020 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Census data is necessary to describe the ethnicities that populate the state. In 2020, these were White 73.9%, Black 3.3%, Native American 4.4%, Asian 2.6%, Hispanic/Latino 47.6%, foreign-born 9.9%, and 28.0% identified as speaking a language other than English. The youth population between the ages of 5 and 18 accounted for 28.0% of the state’s population. In addition, 16.9% of the city’s population lived below the poverty level. All these factors were essential in helping me document and examine the need to create counter-hegemonic spaces for Mexican American youth and their educational and schooling experiences within U.S. public schools.
This Southwest state is very close to the El Paso–Juarez border. This proximity to the Mexican border is important because Mexican immigrant labor has been a critical part of the state. Many immigrant families migrated to the state and have been part of its agricultural, construction, and service industries (Garcia-Acevedo, 2000). Historically, Mexican immigrant families have migrated to the state from northern Chihuahua and from places as far away as Mexico City.

Demographic and census information are essential to this study because they highlight the importance of creating a space and place within a physical location—in this case, a school—for Mexican American students to see themselves as part of the curriculum. The high percentage of Mexican American students in the school system shows the need to include students’ community cultural wealth in their schooling process and how important it is for students to see themselves reflected in what they are learning. CRT in education provided the methodology to examine the intersectionality and intercentricity of multiple layers of subordination based on race, immigrant status, language, gender, and class saturating the school curriculum, policies, and practices.

Arroyo Grande High School was established in 1967. This school is located on the west side of the city. Arroyo Grande High School has been known for its large student population. Its enrollment for the 2017–2018 school year when this study was conducted was 1,654 students; enrollment for 2018–2019 was 1,698 and 100% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch. The school is near a busy highway and a major street where businesses and established neighbors all meet. Students from the neighborhood attend the school and walk or get dropped off, and some students are bused.
The principal at the time of this research was a Hispanic male, and the school also had two assistant principals who were both White females. The faculty was composed of 83 teachers, and the student population was primarily of Hispanic descent, with 98.7% of its students identifying as Hispanic. Tables 1 and 2 describe the school district’s demographic profile for the student population it serves. At the time of this study, 99% of the students at the school received free or reduced-price lunch.

Table 1

*Public School Student Ethnicity in Study School District, 2017–2021*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian / Alaskan</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>84.0%</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Caucasian</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Public School Enrollment in Study School District, 2017–2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84,309</td>
<td>82,126</td>
<td>80,440</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Participants

I was interested in investigating my practices as a teacher as well as how I created counter-hegemonic spaces in a Spanish Language Arts classroom and how using CRT and borderlands theories in my lessons provided spaces that shaped teacher–student relationships that nurtured and cultivated Mexican American students’ self-identity, self-esteem, sense of
purpose, and hope. As a result, I did not seek out or pick students who were not enrolled at Arroyo Grande High School. I was aware of the importance of issues like sampling bias and selection bias. However, I decided early on to conduct interviews with the students who volunteered to take part in my research. I selected former students who were 18 years of age, were seniors at Arroyo Grande High School, and were interested in sharing their testimonios with me. The participants were mature enough to make their own decisions, and since they were no longer in my class, there would be no conflict of interest.

Over the years, I had stayed in contact with many of my former students via texts, emails, and/or in person. The middle school where I taught for 7 years is a feeder to Arroyo Grande High School; therefore, high school students often return to the middle school to visit or volunteer community service. This middle school is only 1.1 miles walking distance from the high school. Some of the seniors who volunteered for this research were former students of the middle school. I moved from the middle school at the end of my 7th year to Arroyo Grande High School because one of the Spanish teachers at the time retired and the bilingual coordinator had been my mentor teacher and knew I had always wanted to teach at the high-school level. I also liked the community I was working with. The bilingual coordinator then asked me to apply for the position, and I applied and transferred to Arroyo Grande High School High. At that time, I taught Spanish Language Arts I and II in grades 9 through 11. Some of the study participants had younger siblings who were in my Spanish Language Arts classes as 9th graders the first year I transferred to Arroyo Grande High School, which allowed me to have continued contact with the participants.

Table 3

Participant Demographics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self-reported)</th>
<th>Spanish Language Arts I</th>
<th>Spanish Language Arts II</th>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guadalupe</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>12th grade (2016–2017)</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>12th grade (2016–2017)</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* One academic year is from August to May. X means participant did not take the class.

I selected six students who were all seniors at Arroyo Grande High School, except for one participant who had recently graduated. When I approached the participants, I spoke to them privately and shared my research topic. Out of the six participants, only three had taken my Spanish Language Arts I class in middle school. Due to the *lazos de confianza y respeto* [ties of trust and respect] that had been established during their time in my classrooms, they agreed to share their *testimonios* for this research. Even though in the Mexican community, *maestras* [teachers] are regarded with high esteem and respected, I took the time to speak to each of the participants’ parents. María’s mom welcomed me and invited me into her home. During the 2-hour interview, María’s mom offered me food, coffee, and snacks. She too shared her *testimonio* and her journey to this country and struggle to provide for her two kids. I did not offer any reimbursement or compensation to participate in the research study. I explained to the participants how their participation was on a volunteer basis. I emphasized
to them that at any moment they could choose to remove themselves from the research and would not be penalized; no penalties or loss of benefits would occur.

When I spoke to José’s grandmother, she encouraged him to participate because she knew how challenging schooling had been for him. She asked me to write about his story because maybe it could help kids like him succeed in high school. Guadalupe’s mom welcomed me into her home and shared her lucha [struggle] in this country. I explained to her the purpose of the research, and she was honored I had invited Guadalupe to participate. She told me it was the first time Guadalupe had been excited and happy to participate in anything for school. Carlos was already working at the time of the research and had graduated, but he had maintained contact with me via email or occasional visits to school with his friends to say hi and check up on me. When I explained the research to him, he laughed and could not understand why I was still at the university studying, but he was eager to tell his testimonio. He had been a student of mine in middle school. He said he would do the interview because he had a lot to say and wanted teachers to see students, hear their voices, and learn from them. All the students were given a consent form to sign. The participants were three males and three females. I did not plan to have three males and three females; it happened that one participant had to leave the country and I asked another person. The participants were 18 years old. Five were seniors, and one had recently graduated.

All participants identified themselves as Mexican American and were very proud to have parents who were born in Mexico and had immigrated to the United States. All their parents had immigrated and were working full time. Three participants had attended school in Mexico and had moved to the United States when they were in elementary or middle school.
One of the limitations I encountered was looking for students who were available after school to be interviewed. I wanted to interview students who were able to speak to me without losing time from work or practice if they were in a sport. I didn't want them to be late for work if they worked after school. Hence my participant pool consisted of 3 males and 3 females who were all 18 years of age. These students self-identified as first-generation Mexican American and were bilingual in Spanish and English. Four of the six participants were born in the United States, one was in the process of becoming a resident, and one did not wish to share his birth country.

I was able to meet with some after school and some via a phone call to share my proposal and help them understand what exactly I was researching. For participants who were unable to meet in person with me, I scheduled a time after school or during lunch to sit with them and explain the research. During the first contact with the participants, I only explained the research, and I told them to think about it; I would then contact them again to see if they were interested in participating. The second contact I had with the students was to ask them if they were willing to be part of the research, to re-explain it, and to set a time to meet and conduct the interviews. The participants saw the interview questions at the time they signed the consent forms.

Five of the participants preferred I interview them at their home. The remaining participant I interviewed in my classroom after school hours. I explained the consent forms and had them sign the forms the second time I met with them. Each participant received copies of the consent forms and the interview questions.
**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is vital in the qualitative research process. Although I have many years of experience as an educator working with students of color and particularly Latina/o youth, I am aware that it takes time and hard work to establish trust, I did have prolonged engagement in this research site. After my first contact with the participants, I explained in detail the research design and process. I also discussed the time frame for the study and the short- and long-term purposes. Once the students agreed to participate, I made sure they were aware of their rights and institutional protections. I provided internal review board consent forms for them to sign. I explained their right to decline at any moment if they felt they no longer wanted to participate in the study. I also shared with them the interview questions and/or any information pertaining to them in English or Spanish, and I informed them they could speak in either of those languages.

I provided participants with copies of all the written documents (consent forms and interview questions). They had access to my notes and research, and nothing was included without the participants’ consent. Three of the participants listened to their recordings and added more to their answers; by this I mean students asked their parents where they were from, for example, or where had their parents had gone to school in Mexico and what was the name of the city or town where they grew up. These were questions they had to ask their parents directly by calling them at the time of the interview or after the interview had ended. Two female participants had to double-check with their parents about their birthplace, and I made a note of these changes on my notes and recordings.
Data Collection

The questions for the interview (Appendix A) were prepared in advance, as required by my university’s human subjects study process and by the school district’s internal review board process for conducting research. There were three categories in the student interviews: (1) autobiographical portrait (Who are you? Who is your family?), (2) schooling experience, and (3) the Spanish Language Arts classroom. The first category had 18 questions, the second category had 17, and the last category had 9. The questions were written in English and Spanish to suit the individuals being interviewed.

Before each interview, I collected consent forms and restated the goals of the research. I asked each participant for permission to tape the interviews and I also told them they can speak in English or in Spanish. I explained to them I would transcribe the interviews and after the project was over, I would give them their tapes for family history purposes if they wanted a copy; however, none did. I offered to take the transcripts to the participants or mail them directly to their homes. Only two participants listened to their interviews, and neither requested a transcript. The interviews were recorded with a tape recorder and the iPhone Voice Memos application. I transcribed each interview. I stored the interviews on my personal computer and on a USB drive.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is crucial within a qualitative research process. In thinking about the methodology that assisted me in examining the narratives of Mexican American youth and their schooling, I relied on Studying Our Own School: An Educator’s Guide to Qualitative Practitioner Research by Anderson et al. (1994). They suggested that:
The first step is to put all your data together, reread your initial questions, and then reread all your data, starting with observations, then going to field notes, your journal, and interviews. Wander through the data making notes of items that strike you. (p. 157)

Following Anderson et al.’s recommendations, I first organized my participant interviews. I began typing the questions on a Word document; during this time, I read each question and began the process of listening to the participants’ interviews and transcribing their responses. After I transcribed each response, I listened to the interview a second time to verify that I had transcribed the participants’ answers correctly. I proceeded to do that with all the interviews.

Some of the participants used Spanish to answer the questions, and for those interviews I took a longer time to transcribe their answers. I listened to the interviews, transcribed the answers in Spanish, then translated the answers from Spanish to English. I verified with the participants the translations from Spanish to English. I asked if their answers in English were authentic and captured the responses they had given in Spanish. Once the interviews were transcribed and translated, I listened to them one last time. I then proceeded to code the testimonios categorizing by themes.

I began the process of analysis using critical race methodology. I began by using the interview questions and clustering the answer into each question. I used the five tenets of CRT to interpret and analyze the data and to connect with the interview themes and topics. Tenet one is the intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination, integrating the intercentricity of multiple layers of subordination based on race, immigrant status, language, gender, and class, saturating the curriculum, school policies, and practices
racial realism, interest convergence with other forms of subordination. Tenet two is the challenge to dominant ideology; CRT refutes the claim that educational institutions make towards the challenges objectivity, meritocracy, and equal opportunity. Tenet three is the commitment to social justice; CRT offers a transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression. Tenets four and five are the centrality of experiential knowledge and the transdisciplinary perspective for this process. I used a graphic organizer and table to organize this information. The graphic organizers and tables were in my observation notebook and not on a Word document.

Table 4 shows how I organized the data. Under each tenet I wrote examples from participants’ schooling experiences, starting from middle to high school and lastly ending with Spanish Language Arts class. I placed each example under each tenet then analyzed which experiences had reoccurring themes. For example, participants’ life histories and experiences in schooling were placed under the CRT tenet of the centrality of experiential knowledge. Their experiences with microaggressions based on their immigration status, ethnicity, and phenotype were placed under CRT tenet of the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination. After doing this, I turned to my research questions and started to develop the written analysis of the themes that came from the data.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Schooling Experience</th>
<th>Tenet 1: Intersectionality of Race</th>
<th>Tenet 2: Challenge to Dominant Ideology: White Privilege</th>
<th>Tenet 3: Commitment to Social Justice</th>
<th>Tenet 4: Centrality of Experiential Knowledge</th>
<th>Tenet 5: Transdisciplinary Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Sample Participant Schooling Experiences and CRT Tenets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Schooling Experience</th>
<th>Tenet 1: Intersectionality of Race</th>
<th>Tenet 2: Challenge to Dominant Ideology: White Privilege</th>
<th>Tenet 3: Commitment to Social Justice</th>
<th>Tenet 4: Centrality of Experiential Knowledge</th>
<th>Tenet 5: Transdisciplinary Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>When debating in Government class freedom of speech Jose used the example of Whites learning and using bad words in Spanish. He argued his language was more than just bad words and goes on to speak about the AP History textbook limits information on the Mexican – American War</td>
<td>Spoke about teachers and how sharing their immigrant stories inspired him to continue with his schooling by this he saw the value of family histories and storytelling was valuable in his relating and trusting the teachers he had.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these CRT tenets, I also used borderlands theory. This allowed for a methodological framework that addressed (a) the importance of place and space, (b) the formation of hybrid identities, and (c) border pedagogy. This theorizing as applied to education allowed me to examine the diverse facets within formal and informal educational settings. My research focused on educational policy, curriculum, school practices, language, and culture (Elenes & Delgado, 2010). The importance of place, space, and border pedagogy were important themes that emerged from the data analysis. The use of CRT and borderlands theory challenges the dominant ideology discourse of what is considered “official knowledge” (Apple, 2019, p. xxxi). Other themes like race and interest that convergence in the school setting emerged throughout the interviews. For example, if students had experienced similar microaggressions in the schooling setting and they resisted, this was placed under intercentricity of race and racism. I used a similar table to identify the themes that came from coding the data.
To keep track of the emerging themes, I used a table with themes from the participants’ family that were reoccurring and nurtured their experiences in building knowledge of self, self-esteem, and critical hope, and interrupting the stereotypes. I maintained a record in a notebook with handwritten notations under each theme. Table 6 is an example of my notations in this chart.

**Table 5**

*Sample Thematic Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Builds Knowledge of Self</th>
<th>Builds Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Builds Critical Hope</th>
<th>Interrupts Stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Carlos parents at the dinner table spoke about how beautiful their city is in Mexico. Grandfather speaks about their Mexican traditions and celebrations and how important it was to keep these traditions. His grandfather spoke about Carlos and his Tarahumara/Rarámuri indigenous roots.</td>
<td>Knowing about Aztec cultures and learning what we know now as soccer. This had a big impact on his self-esteem it made him feel proud to be Mexican.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important that I note that my research was shaped by the experiences that I brought to the field as a Mexican immigrant woman, a bilingual teacher, and a student of critical race and Chicana feminist theory. Throughout the data analysis I also acknowledged my status as an educator and what that symbolized to the participants. I used my own schooling experience, my bilingual teacher positionality, my participants’ *testimonios*, and curriculum materials/resources to triangulate the data. My curriculum resources included Indigenous topics I researched. I used YouTube to include a short film called “Cortometraje
Marías” by Yosoyoho Jugetes, which is a documentary about Indigenous communities fighting negative racism in Mexico's schools and society. To add to these harmful stereotypes, I used a short clip of La India Maria’s first airplane ride. This short film shows how this character is used as an exaggerated parody of the Indigenous female in Mexico. In this curriculum unit, these two resources were used to critically analyze the intercentricity of race and racism in Mexican society and for students to critically challenge their own stereotypes about Indigenous people within their culture and traditional upbringings in their Mexican families.

Another resource I included in this critical analysis was Donald Trump's famous presidential campaign video from June 16, 2015, in which he accuses Mexico of sending only their criminals, drug lords, and rapists to the United States. The goal was for my students to critically challenge mainstream ideologies and be able to refute this meritocracy and race neutrality they believed in through traditional schooling.

Triangulation of data is vital in any research. Triangulating with my other data sources, including participant interviews, field notes, and primary documents, was vital in my data analysis process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the importance of triangulation because it allows for “the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible” (p. 305). In my research, I re-read the interviews and went over my themes. I was able to expand my knowledge by researching and viewing videos of Dr. Duncan-Andrade; his research topics on youth wellness, curriculum change, critical pedagogy, and trauma responsiveness in urban schools influenced my data analysis. I also researched films that helped with my curriculum; such films and videos addressed the issue of Indigenous portrayals in Mexico (e.g., La India Maria, Cine Mexicano, and Cortometraje Marías Sin Sub
by Yosoyoho Juguetes). Lastly, my own narrative and personal experiences were used as a source of data check and triangulation.

**Conclusion**

I must say analyzing the data was a very challenging and transformative process. The participants’ *testimonios*, their voices, and their experiences were all very personal to me as a teacher and as an immigrant who had similar experiences as a child in my schooling. As a result, this entire research endeavor has been very personal and emotional for me because it has forced me to confront my own identity as a Mexicana immigrant. It has made me reflect and evaluate my teaching profession and my teaching. I am aware that my status as a United States citizen has given me a privileged position in academia and in the school system where I work. I say this because as I listened to each participant's stories and experiences, I began to rethink my own privileges.

In the next chapter, I provide autobiographical life *testimonios* from the participants in their own words. The chapter gives insight into the ways in which they experienced teaching and learning in their K–12 schooling.
CHAPTER 4: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PARTICIPANT PORTRAITS

The participants portraits in this study is only a snapshot of the experiences of Mexican American and Mexican immigrant students in their schooling process. Mexican American and Mexican immigrant students walk into classrooms in the United States with a rich history and a wealth of knowledge based on their lived immigrant experience. As part of establishing a culture of trust and cariño with my students, I assigned a project titled the ¿Quién Soy Yo? Presentation (Appendix B). I assigned this project at the beginning of the school year to get to know the students. The interview questions for this research were very similar. The questions were divided into three sections and each section had questions that corresponded to each participant’s family, their schooling experience from primary to secondary, and their experience in their Spanish Language Arts classroom. The first section had questions about the participants’ family background; these questions evoked background information from each participant and their family. The second section was about their schooling experiences from primary to secondary, and the last section was about their experiences in their Spanish Language Arts classroom. I asked the questions about their schooling experiences to see if participants could identify teachers who developed and nurtured a pedagogía del cariño and or experiences with teachers that challenged their schooling learning (Valenzuela, 1999).

The 2016-2017 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States unleashed a wave of discrimination targeted directly at Mexican American and Mexican immigrant students. In Trump’s presidential campaign, he said, “Mexican immigrants are bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Philips, 2017, page 3). This dehumanizing xenophobic discourse has shattered Mexican
American and Mexican immigrant students’ families through family separation and random deportation, resulting in an instilled fear in millions of young kids. Mexican American and Mexican immigrant students learn quickly to cope and manage their fear in secret. Most of these young people also see their educational opportunities as limited. As a result, some must put aside their educational goals and focus on their family’s financial needs. The participants in this study had no choice in their parents’ decision to immigrate to the United States.

This study addresses themes essential to teacher preparation programs such as establishing deep and meaningful relationships with students, creating relevance in what is taught (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, 2019; Ochoa, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999), conveying a sense of familia within the classrooms, and building a sense of connectedness and responsibility toward the community in which one will teach. These themes have been highlighted in studies like Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring by Valenzuela (1999), who highlighted this topic by using the word caring as a vital component in an educator’s teaching career. Caring is a characteristic that has the most impact on students’ learning, even in 21st-century schooling. It is imperative to create una familia, a family, and an atmosphere of caring because when caring is communicated, an educator can do it in a way that makes every student feel cared for as they walk through a classroom door. hooks (2004) termed this ”teaching community” (p. 103), and Valenzuela (1999) termed it “an authentically caring pedagogy” (p. 21).

It is important to keep in mind the participants in this study come from mixed-status families. Some were either born in the United States or immigrated with their parents from Mexico at a young age. It is vital for educators to understand these narratives to have some understanding that the students’ personal histories are of survival and resiliency. The
personal narratives in this study are compelling, and it is with utmost respeto and cariño that I present my brave participants’ stories/historias. I substituted San Jesús as a pseudonym for the city in the Southwest where this research was conducted and Arroyo Grande High School as a pseudonym for the school.

Carlos

Carlos was in my 8th-grade Spanish Language Arts class in 2013. Due to his soccer skills, he was very popular in middle school. He was captain of the soccer team. In class, he was a quiet and reserved child. He would participate, but only when I would ask him to do so. Part of the Spanish Language Arts curriculum involved teaching a cultural piece. I had planned to focus on a unit on Mesoamerica. I wanted the students to have a historical overview of the contributions their Indigenous ancestors made. During this lesson, I saw a drastic change in all my students and particularly in Carlos. I made the unit objective very clear in describing the key historical and cultural role Indigenous groups in Mesoamerica had and their impact on today’s Spanish-speaking world. Within this unit, I addressed topics such as traditional food, clothing, government, religion, sports, and education. I spoke about the different Indigenous nations and people and their interest in sports and how important it was for these groups to play certain games. After the lessons were presented, the students got into groups to research a topic of interest to them based on the unit themes. Carlos and his group decided to research the Aztec’s el juego de pelota, which we know today as soccer. During this research project, Carlos mentioned how he enjoyed learning about the Aztecs and how they were experts on el juego de pelota. During this research project, I saw Carlos become more active in his learning and less passive. The unit’s research assignments consisted of a formal group presentation. Carlos and his group presentation included a demonstration of el
juego de la pelota. He took the class to the soccer field, where he and his group members demonstrated a couple of soccer moves. This was such a highly engaging presentation that it prompted my male students to conduct further investigation on the sports played by the Mayas and Olmecs.

Carlos and His Family

Yo soy nacido en Juárez, Chihuahua. Mi mamá es de Juárez, Chihuahua, y mi papá de Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. La razón por la cual venimos a Estados Unidos fue porque tengo un hermano con necesidades especiales y las ayudas en México no eran tan buenas como las de aquí en Estados Unidos. Primero nos movimos para Denver y luego aquí a San Jesú. Mis padres hablan puro español, pero de repente sí entienden una que otra palabra en inglés, las palabras básicas. Pues la verdad mis papás cuando vivimos en México los dos sí fueron al colegio, tenía buen trabajo, pues estable. Yo me imagino they went to college. Pues de chico mis papás si fueron muy estrictos sí me golpearon cuando me lo merecía, pero ahora de adulto ya no me dicen nada. Pues me motivan porque ellos quieren lo mejor para mí. Mi hermano también me motiva mucho por su estado de salud. Mi papá trabaja en una compañía de plomeros y mi mamá no trabaja; mi mamá hace pasteles. En mi familia somos cinco. Que viene siendo mi mamá, mi papá, mi hermano de 26 años, mi hermano de 17 años, y también mi sobrino que tiene 9 años. Mi hermano sí se graduó de high school y también fue al colegio comunitario y se me hace que agarró un certificado de electricista. Mi hermano menor es hándicap sí va a la escuela. Él va a la escuela los veranos por su estado de salud. Él casi no puede salir en el invierno porque se puede enfermar muy
rápido, pero en el invierno sí van los terapistas y trabajan con él. Mi sobrino sí va a la escuela.

[I was born in Juárez, Chihuahua. My mom is from Juárez, Chihuahua, and my dad from Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. The reason why we came to the United States was that I have a brother with special needs and the medical aid in Mexico was not as good as here in the United States. First, we moved to Denver and then here to San Jesús. My parents speak only Spanish, but they do understand some words in English, basic words. Well, the truth is that my parents when we lived in Mexico, both of them had a stable job. I think they both got a college education. They had good work, I imagine; they went to college. Well, as a kid, my parents were very strict, they would physically punish me when I deserved it. Now I am an adult and they do not tell me anything. My parents, well, they motivate me because they always want the best for me. And my younger brother also motivates me a lot because of his health condition. My dad works in a plumbing company and my mom does not work; she bakes cakes. In my family we are five. It is my mom, my dad, my older brother who is 26, my brother who is 17, and my nephew who is 9. My older brother graduated from high school, and he also went to the community college and got his electrician certificate. My brother who is handicapped, he goes to school during the summer because of his health condition. My younger brother can hardly go out in the winter because he can get sick very quickly, but in winter the therapists go and work with him. My nephew also goes to school. (Interview translated August 5, 2017)
Value of Schooling

When I asked Carlos how important schooling was to his family and what his parents told him about school, he stated schooling was not as important so long as one is bringing money home. However, due to his parents’ financial challenges, being financially stable was a priority for his parents and him.

Pues la verdad casi no es importante mientras uno este trayendo dinero a la mesa; eso es lo que cuenta. Pues claro que sí life is getting harder; it seems like nowadays you need school to be successful in life.

[Well, the truth is, it is not important as long as you're bringing money home; that's what counts. Of course, yes, life is getting harder; it seems like nowadays you need school to be successful in life.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Early School Memories

Pues la verdad empezar una nueva vida de México para acá pues claro estaba muy nervioso. Nunca se me olvidará la primera vez que llegué a los Estados Unidos. Estaba en una clase y se rieron de mí porque no sabía inglés, nunca se me olvidará, nunca. Cuando nosotros nos movimos a Denver a mí me pusieron en clases de español allí y yo casi no entendía inglés. Fue cuando me moví para San Jesús empezaron a ponerme en clases con americanos, con gringos yo me imagino que fue en el 4/5 grado cuando me pasó eso y nunca se me olvidará. Pues me sentí como una basura; me sentí como yo no valía nada porque no sabía nada de inglés y los niños se burlaba de mí.

[Well, the truth of starting a new life from Mexico to here, of course, I was very nervous. I will never forget the first time I arrived in the United States. I was in a
class and they laughed at me because I did not know English, I'll never forget, never. When we moved to Denver, they put me in Spanish classes there and I did not understand English. It was when I moved to San Jesús that they started putting me in classes with Americans, with gringos. I remember it was in the 4th or 5th grade when that happened to me. I will never forget it. Well, I felt like trash; I felt like I was not worth anything, because the students would make fun of me.\] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

**Middle and High School Experiences**

I remember a lot about middle school. I liked middle school. Yes, I remember a lot of Mr. White even though he was also a gringo, it seems he spoke better Spanish than me. But he was also a teacher that had an impact in my life. I remember the way he would carry himself, the way he would do the lectures, the way he would talk to us. Yeah, he was a teacher, but it just seemed like he was another student. Everything to
a limit, but he played with us and he would joke a lot. He told us jokes, for example, we liked to read a lot. He was reading us this clown book, *It*. When he was describing the clown *It*, he said that he had a very round head and I remember he stopped and laughed and said a stupid big head like me.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

La verdad que sí, pues me gustaba la verdad la clase de artes de lenguaje. Yo no sé muy bien de mis raíces de México y yo me imagino me gustaba mucho su clase porque todo era como deletrear bien, las sílabas, los acentos y pues yo me imagino que eso me gustó mucho de ella, de Miss Valenzuela. Me gustaba su clase porque fue muy diferente porque yo no estaba preocupado de decir una palabra mal, decir una palabra mal en inglés y alguien se reíría o que alguien me miraría diferente por mi color o forma de pronunciar. A mí me gustaba mucho la clase porque pues era puro mexicano y yo me sentía a gusto. Yo me sentía a gusto porque allí yo tenía muchos amigos. La verdad sí era una buena clase y sí me gustaba ir a la clase. Aprendí mucho de mi cultura que no sabía, me acuerdo del proyecto de los aztecas y el juego de la pelota que presentamos.

[The truth is I do not know very much about my Mexican roots. I remember I liked your class a lot because everything was like spelling correctly, the syllables, the accents and well I guess that I liked that from Miss Valenzuela’s class. I imagine it was very different because I was not worried to mispronounce a word or saying a word in English and someone laughing or someone looking at me differently because of the color of my skin or how I pronounced. I liked the class a lot because there were a bunch of Mexicans and I felt comfortable. I felt comfortable because there I had
many friends. The truth was that it was a good class and I liked to go to class. I learned a lot about my culture things I didn’t know. I remember the Aztec project and the *juego de pelota* we presented.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

**José**

José grew-up with his paternal grandmother from the time that his mother passed away when he was a young boy. José’s father gave him to his grandmother so that she could raise him. In elementary school, José was placed in special education. His grandmother told me José he was placed there because he refused to speak. Based on his refusal to speak, his teachers assumed he had a learning and language disability. He spent his elementary and middle school years receiving services for a disability. When I asked him what his disability was, he could not tell me. He said he never knew what was wrong with him.

When I met José in 8th grade, he was a very angry young man. He didn’t speak to the other boys in the class and was an introvert. But I knew he liked to write poems. I remember during my poetry unit his poems stood out. He had a talent for writing poetry. It was through this that I was able to speak to him about a rap club that our school offered. I encouraged him to join. He refused but I insisted and would remind him every day to give the Rap Club a chance. He liked to write poems, which I encouraged and told him that joining the Rap Club would help him express his emotions and feelings. He joined the club and found that he loved it and the sponsor teacher. The sponsor teacher had the students perform in talent shows and during assemblies. Through his participation in the Rap Club, I saw a secure and confident José. He actively participated in class activities and projects, and he even auditioned for the role of Romeo in the 8th-grade play *Romeo and Juliet*. 
At the end of his 8th-grade year, Jose asked me to advocate on his behalf so he could exit from special education. I was able to participate in his individualized educational program (IEP) conference. I spoke to his grandmother and case teacher about his desire to exit the special education program. Due to this, José’s high school experience differed from his primary years in school. Once in high school, he was able to register for advanced placement USA/World History and English. He enrolled in electives such as piano, metals, and Spanish. In his interview, José spoke about the teachers who had grown up in situations similar to his and who had overcome major obstacles. José stated his educational goals and ambitions were highly influenced by these teachers. He told me at the end of the interview he was going to major in education and become a middle school teacher.

**José and His Family**

I was born in Mexico, Sombrerete, Zacatecas. My parents are both from Mexico and I don’t know why they immigrated to the United States. I don’t know much about my parents because I did not grow up with them. I grew up with my grandmother and she tells me that school is like a tool to success. Like not everyone needs school to succeed but the road I am walking on I need that tool to succeed. So, she tells me like think of school like a hurdle you got to jump over. I think it is important because most of my family didn’t graduate. It’s my generation and the generation below mine and below that are going to school and hopefully graduate. My grandmother tells me that she wants me to graduate because I am going to be the first one to graduate from high school and hopefully from college. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)
Middle and High School Experiences

In middle school the teachers were all supportive because those teachers knew what it was like to grow up in areas, we [students] grew up. And most of those teachers had humble upbringings and some didn’t, but the ones who didn’t they still understood the situation that the students were in. Like Mr. White, Mrs. Moreno, and Miss Valenzuela. Mr. White, I remember when I met him, he told me he could tell I was a kid with pent-up anger, and I didn’t know how to release it. He told me you can use that frustration to hurt people, cause harm, or you can use that pent-up frustration and help people. Mrs. Moreno taught me the importance of school and why you should go to school because culturally our people [Mexican immigrants] don’t really go to school in America [the United States]. Americans view us [Mexicans] as not coming here to the USA to succeed. We [Mexicans] just come here to work but that’s not always true, and then Miss Valenzuela taught me the importance of speaking my language and English and why it is important to go to school and succeed. I really liked middle school. The classes I like the most were Social Studies in middle school and ESL. I liked those because I had Mrs. Moreno and Miss Valenzuela. As teachers and the way they taught was different and was suited to our culture [Mexican culture]. Because culturally they were like us, so it wasn’t like teacher and student; it was more like friend and friend. Not that we were equals but we could relate to them culturally. They were like us; they were humans, they been through what we been through and so they understand … Like when Mrs. Moreno was telling us when she was trying to cross the border illegally, we all had respect for her because she was coming here to make money and make her life better and that’s what a lot of people
from Mexico do. You know that’s like the stereotype, but then she figured out there is
a better way do to this [to live]. She did it the right way, and all of us view that there
is always a second option. We don’t always have to live up to our culture stereotype
[that Mexicans just cross into the United States to work undocumented]. Their classes
were powerful and impacted me as a student to continue and try my best. (Interview
transcribed August 5, 2019)

Gloria

I met Gloria in 2014, the first year I taught high school. She was in my Spanish
Language Arts class. She was very timid and hardly ever participated in class. She kept to
herself and never spoke to anybody. She spoke Spanish fluently and seemed to struggle with
English. Gloria, like Carlos, knew very little about Mexican history. She went to school in
Mexico but had forgotten a lot of her history. When I began the Mesoamerican unit, Gloria
seemed more interested and began asking questions about the Indigenous groups. She was
curious and I remember her exceptional interest in the topics presented. She and her partner
selected an Indigenous group from Chihuahua, Mexico—the Tarahumara—and were highly
engaged in the research process because Gloria’s grandparents were from Chihuahua. At the
end of her presentation, Gloria told everyone her view on history had changed. She
commented on how she spoke about her research with her family and how she felt an
immense sense of pride to be Mexican.

Gloria and Her Family

I was born in the Southwest at a hospital. I started preschool when I was 4. For me it
was different; I did pre-school for 2 years, I was held back because of my birthday.

My mom is from Jalisco, Mexico, and my dad is from Chihuahua, Mexico. My mom
came to the United States because my grandpa and her older siblings and her
godmother were already here, so they wanted to move over here and have their family
together. My dad came over here because his dad had passed away, so my
grandmother wanted to start somewhere new, so they came over with her brother. My
parents speak English and Spanish, but my parents prefer to speak in Spanish, but
they are both pretty fluent in English. But if they need to have a conversation in
English, they will do it with just a slight hesitance because of their accents but my
dad is pretty fluent, so is my mom. My dad went to middle school and high school
here but then dropped out. He went back to the community college to get his GED
then to college to be an electrician. My parents are both strict and easygoing. They
have certain rules, like when it comes to school and going out, but they are pretty
chill, and easygoing. My mom likes to set examples of how I should take advantage
of the opportunities I have. And how I have the support of both of my parents and a
lot of people don’t. Since I have that support system, I should continue doing what I
can and strive for whatever I dream. That way I could accomplish anything I can.
Like right now, I am undecided of where I might end up going to college, so my mom
is like if you need to go out of state, we will support you. You don’t have to stay here
if you have the opportunity and you’re smart enough to go out of state and get all
these scholarships, then we will support you the whole way through even if it’s a
small career. Like I wanted to go for art but then I was like nah I prefer to go for a
doctor. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)
Value of Schooling

School in my family is very important. It shows how interested you are on how far you want to get in life. Like if you want to be someone; it’s like if you want to be someone, you have to go to school. You have to pursue something like, within college, not just graduate high school and that’s it. You have to go further than that to prove how educated you are. I think school is important because it is something you need in this country. You, well, nowadays you can’t get any job without having a high school diploma. That’s just for minimal. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Early Schooling Experiences

I remember in 1st grade I would be excited to go to school. I liked getting my new backpack, my school supplies, going into a classroom being all small but with a really big backpack. That interested me, I guess. I actually got up on time for school. A teacher that stands out would be my 4th-grade teacher. She helped us enjoy learning because she connected learning with fun activities, not just straight bookwork or worksheets. For example, we have recess and when we come back instead of getting straight to work, she would read to us. And we play a game for maybe 15 minutes, and she say ok, we are going to read a book, but you guys are going to try to act out scenes from the book. She tried having us relate to it in a different way instead of just here is a book, read it and write a summary. I can say because of her I enjoy reading. Middle school was something else for me. I hated middle school up until 8th grade. I didn’t like my 6th-grade year; 6th grade was horrible for me because it was a big change for me. I felt so awkward specially because I am tall, so I felt like I stood out and it was weird, and we never actually had a proper education in science up until
8th-grade year. We didn’t have a science teacher, so it was kind of hard going into high school not knowing the basics that everyone knew, so that made middle school kind of hard. The teacher that stands out in middle school is Miss S. She really helped me with my writing. Miss S stood out because if she saw you were struggling, she helped you. She helped me with my writing. I enjoy reading and that was the easy part from her class, but when it came to writing it was hard, it was hard to put my thoughts onto a piece of paper, so she would come next to me and help me at my desk. She would explain and work one-on-one with us. She would say like this is how you can plan something, and then she helped you put it [ideas] in these different categories, and from there she says you can start writing your paragraphs and then your essay. She motivated us to do our work and helped us individually. My favorite class in middle was band. I enjoyed band. It helped me get over being shy because we have to play in front of all kinds of people like parents and students. It helped me in 8th grade. The class helped me get confidence in myself because I always wanted this necklace of a little flute and my mom pushed me into doing a solo. I don’t like doing anything by myself because I feel like I will mess up or I am not good enough, and she pushed me to do that and it helped me get a lot of confidence. In high school, it was honestly your class. Your class really helped me because up until my sophomore year, I was not motivated to speak in Spanish or learn about my culture at school. I only spoke in Spanish if I was with my friends or with someone who also spoke Spanish. Other than that I wasn’t really motivated to learn or to speak Spanish, but with your class, I felt motivated and encouraged to learn about my culture and speak Spanish. At the end of your classes, I became more fluent and knowledgeable about
who I was, and I felt secure presenting to people in Spanish because before I felt weird. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

**Esperanza**

I met Esperanza in my Spanish Language Arts class. She spoke Spanish fluently and was extremely timid when it came to her presenting her work in front of her peers. She liked to talk to her group members, but when it came to presenting her work in front of the entire class, she would get anxiety and at times would ask to be excused. Since she spoke Spanish fluently, I would often ask her to “step it up,” meaning to participate and demonstrate her language skills. However, that made her even more nervous. She began participating more and more as the year continued. Her engagement peaked when I spoke about Mesoamerica, the stereotypes Mexican culture has about Indigenous Mexican people, and how media perpetuate and reinforce these stereotypes. I spoke about these themes to set the tone for the unit on Mesoamerica.

**Esperanza and Her Family**

I was born at Lovelace hospital. I know a lot of people don’t usually like San Jesús, but I like it. I like being from here. I started preschool when I was 4 or 5, I think, and as soon as I ended preschool I went to kinder. My dad is from el DF [Mexico City] and my mom is from Chihuahua, México. They both are immigrants, and my dad was the one who wanted to come over here because he didn’t have anything over there [in Mexico]. Yes, all his family was over there, but as in money-wise, jobs weren’t available at the time. And I guess my oldest brother was born and he wanted to give him a brighter future and better college to attend, and so he thought that if they migrated here before he was born, he would be a citizen, but my mom gave birth over
there, in Mexico. My parents only speak Spanish like *si entienden inglés pero* [they do understand English but] like rarely. They don’t like talking because they have a strong accent, so they think people are going to make fun of them. I try to help them; I really do. I talk to them a lot in English because they tell me, *me dicen que quieren aprender inglés* [they tell me they want to learn English]. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

**Value of Schooling**

My dad dropped out his freshman year of high school and my mom she didn’t graduate, but I think she went until her senior year. Both my parents went to school in Mexico. Yeah, my parents they want me to have a good education and all this. They are cool; they let me go out as long as I have my priorities straight. Even with work, like they say if you can’t work, go to school only, they are OK. My parents always support me with everything that I do. They are always going to be there, you know. They are my parents. My parents always encourage me by relating my life to their life. They don’t want me to end up like they were in Mexico. They want me to have a good education and I have always known that. So usually I try my best at school and so they are always telling me how they want me to graduate. They want me to have a career and they don’t want me to end up like them because my dad didn’t go to college; neither did my mom. So they didn’t really major in anything. They don’t have papers [legal documents to be in the United States] so it’s hard for them to get jobs. They are working in whatever they can. My mom isn’t working anymore; she quit her job like a week ago, but my dad works in welding. School is the biggest priority for me right now, because work—I can do it whenever I graduate high school
so that’s not really important. I can rely on my parents right now but high school and school in general is my number one priority. I want to succeed in life. I want to have a brighter future than my parents. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

**Early School Experiences**

I would have to say one of my favorite teachers was my 1st-grade teacher because like I guess I would have a really hard time in school, and she would always pull me aside and like help me with everything. I needed the help because I really suck at math. I am really horrible at math and she would pull me aside and take her own time after school and help me read and re-do all this math, and she would always bring us [students] things. After we were done with the essay or math projects, she would go to her house and collect any material that would relate to what we were learning or she would cook for us food and whatever she could. She would always relate everything to something she could physically give us; I really liked that. In middle school, we were in the bilingual team, and we were known as the Mexican kids, we didn’t care what they called us because we were all Mexican, but honestly, I really liked it, because sin a alguien se le atoraba algo [if someone would be stuck doing something] everyone [Mexican classmates] would jump in and help out. I remember one time someone’s car turned off and I rode the bus, and I didn’t know what to do but we [Mexicans kids] got off the bus to help push the car. It was nice; we all got off together like a family. In middle school, I also had an awesome science teacher. My favorite class was science because the teacher always had animals in his class and since I wanted to be a veterinary, I loved the animals. Mr. Wolf knew I wanted to work with animals and I wanted to be a veterinary, and so he would always have me
take care of his snakes, gerbils, and the rest of the animals he had in the classroom. I liked that. In his class, there were plants and animals, it brought science to alive. Another thing I liked about Mr. Wolf was the way he would always like to use his life experiences and connect it with science. He would give us a lecture about science then connect it or real experiences so we could apply what we were learning and learn from these experiences. I remember he would say to us, and it stuck with me, whatever you want to do lo tienes que hacer con ganas, echarle ganas a todo lo que haces [you have to do everything with enthusiasm, give it your all in everything you do] and that’s a motto I still use. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Juan

Juan was placed in my 8th-grade English Language Arts and ESL class. He had transferred from another middle school. Juan was a recent arrival to the United States and did not know English. He was very quiet. I remember speaking to him in English and asking him simple questions in English, like what is your name? What do you know in English? He remained quiet the whole year. It was not until the last 2 months of the school year that he began to say hello and participate somewhat in English. I remember Juan telling me how he wished the class was taught in Spanish; this way he would be the first to volunteer and participate in all the activities. A couple of years passed, and I moved on to teaching high school, where I met Juan again in his senior year. He was in my Spanish Language Arts class and was very surprised to see me, but he was happy he was in my class. I remembered what he had told me in 8th grade, and he was a very different student in Spanish class. He participated in all the activities, read out loud, joined in during debates, and explained grammar topics to his group members.
Juan and His Family

Mi madre es de Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Mi padre es de Gómez Palacios, Durango, pero vivo con mi padrastro y él es de Juárez. Yo nací en Ciudad Juárez y tengo 19 años. Mi mamá siempre me cuenta de lo que ella pasó por todo de que ella no tuvo. Ella no tuvo la oportunidad de seguir estudiando y por eso ella no quiere que me pase lo mismo. Quiere que yo tenga una buena vida, tener una buena casa, una buena familia, tener pues no carros del año, pero un buen carro que pueda servir, un buen trabajo para poder tener bastante dinero y no andar batallando y tener comida. Pues cosas así porque hemos pasado por muchas cosas, como mi mamá a veces no le pagan bien, no le llega bien el cheque y a veces esos días tenemos que durar sin comida y pues buscamos lo que hay en la cocina y comemos lo que tengamos allí. Pues yo estoy muy agradecido por mi mamá por todo lo que está haciendo para mí, para poder tener una buena educación.

[My mother is from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, my father is from Gómez Palacios, Durango, but I live with my stepfather and he is from Juárez. I was born in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and I am 19 years old. My mom always tells me what she went through, all that she did not have. She did not have the opportunity to continue studying and that’s why she does not want me to have the same thing. She wants me to have a good life, to have a good house, a good family, to have cars, not necessarily brand-new cars but a good car that works, a good job to have enough money, and not to struggle and have the essentials like food. We have gone through many things, like my mom sometimes does not get her full pay, and sometimes we had to go without food and then we look for what is in the kitchen and eat what we have there. Well, I]
am very grateful to my mom for everything she is doing for me to be able to have a good education.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Mi mamá, se metió a cuidar niños chiquitos en una guardería algo así. Va a empezar a estudiar para ser maestra, así como cuando una maestra tiene una urgencia en la guardería ella está como suplente. Mi padrastro trabaja, él escribe las quejas de los hospitales. Mis hermanos pues el mayor de repente me motiva diciendo que haga mi universidad que no la deje. Se enoja, pero es muy impaciente, pero él sí quiere que sean paciente con él. Pero el que sigue de mí entre mi hermano mayor, él me motiva un mucho. Me da muchos consejos que no dejé que agarré la carrera de mecánica porque a él también le gusta y a mí. También como él está trabajando de mantenimiento de apartamentos; él me enseña las cosas que él sabe para qué cuando yo este más grande yo saber de eso. Me motiva un mucho y me dice cualquier problema o duda que le diga, y hasta me dice que yo voy a hacer la motivación de mi siguiente hermano más chiquito que yo voy a hacer el que lo voy a motivar para que salga adelante. El más chiquito lo motiva a usted. Sí, yo doy consejos que la prepa va a hacer más dura que la secundaria porque en la prepa hay a veces que tú solo tienes que resolver los problemas y a veces no te pueden ayudar los maestros.

[My mom, she went to take care of little children in a nursery or something like that. She is going to start studying to be a teacher, just like when a teacher has an emergency in the nursery, she is the substitute. My stepfather works at the hospitals, taking patient complaints. My brothers, the oldest motivates me by saying continue with a university career to not leave it. He gets angry, but he is very impatient, but he}
does want us to be patient with him. But the [second-born brother], he motivates me a lot. He gives me a lot of advice to pursue the mechanic career because he likes it too and so do I. Also, he is working on apartment maintenance; he teaches me the things that he knows so that when I am older, I know about that. He motivates me a lot and tells me any problem or doubt that I have to tell him, and he even tells me that I am going to motivate my younger brother, that I’m going to be the one to motivate him to get ahead. The youngest motivates you. Yes, I give him advice that high school will be harder than middle school because in high school there are times when you just have to solve problems and sometimes teachers cannot help you.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

**Value of Schooling**

My mom motivates me to go to school by telling me about her past, of how hard her life was because she did not have her parents. She tells me that I have more
opportunities than she had. She tells me to finish my career because she does not want me to suffer like my brother, who works at night and is working hard for very little money. Well, [my mother] puts my brothers as an example because they could not graduate or get a career. My older brother has not been able to finish a career in Mexico because he didn’t have the money [for tuition], and my mother says that here I have more opportunity because here they do not charge [to attend school]. And my brother motivates me more because he knows that I like to work on cars and sometimes we are without a car. He tells me to pursue a career in mechanics to help the family when our car breaks down.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Pues a mí me lo ha explicado mi mamá y mi padrastro, también mis hermanos: que entre más estudio tengas, tendrás mejor trabajo. Me dicen que si acabo la prepa de allí un mejor puesto y luego a la universidad dicen que te pueden pagar mucho más. Para mí la escuela se me hace importante porque es donde yo voy a aprender lo que yo quiero ser y para yo salir adelante tengo que saber, debo tener una carrera.

[This has been explained to me by my mother and my stepfather, also by my brothers: the more schooling you have, the better your job will be. They tell me that if I just finished high school and then the university, they say they can pay you much more.]

(Schooling translated August 5, 2017)

Schooling

En México entré a la primaria, pero pues nunca me ha gustado ir a la escuela. Yo le lloraba a mi mamá que no me dejara allí pero siempre me obligaba ir. En la secundaria cuando llegué a Estados Unidos yo aprendí mucho con usted. Cuando
recién llegué aquí pues yo no entré las primeras semanas a la secundaria porque la verdad yo no quería, estaba bien asustado porque iba hacer puro inglés. Pues cuando llegué a la otra escuela era mi primer día y le dije a mi mamá quedate conmigo. En mis clases de español era puras As. Pues como eran 4 clases o 5 aprendí rápido porque eran en español. Después me tuve que ir a la clase de inglés batallé porque no quería ir a la clase porque esa maestra no enseñaba le valía gorro si aprendía hasta me iba mejor y me acostaba en el gimnasio. No estaba motivado porque a la maestra no le importaba. Después cuando cambié de escuelas fue él maestro White que me motivó porque yo no sabía nada no entendía nada de inglés pues has de cuenta que mi hermano me dijo que las preguntas de lectura y de actividades que tienen no son nada difíciles hasta el maestro me dijo las preguntas en inglés no son difícil. Lee con cuidado hay palabras que significan igual que en español. Más o menos saqué la idea al leer y presentar los exámenes es como se me fue haciendo un poco fácil y echándole ganas y pues tuve mucha ayuda en esa escuela también con su clase, la de usted, Miss.

[In Mexico I entered elementary school, but I never liked going to school. I cried to my mother asking her not to leave me there, but she always forced me to go. In middle school when I came to the United States, I learned a lot with you. When I first arrived here, I did not go to school the first week. I did not want to; I was really scared because the classes were going to be in English only. When I went to school, I told my mom to stay with me. In my classes, I earned pure As because I had 4 or 5 and I learned fast because they were in Spanish. But then I had to go to English classes. I struggled a lot. I didn’t want to go to that teacher because the class was
worthless. I would go to the gym and sleep. I was not motivated the teacher didn’t care. Later, when I changed schools, it was Mr. White that motivated me because I did not know anything. I did not understand any English. My brother told me that the reading activities and the questions in English were not difficult. Mr. White told me the same. He said carefully read the words; some words mean the same in Spanish. More or less, I got the idea I was able to understand the reading and take tests. I had a lot of help in that school, also with your class, Miss. (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

**Guadalupe**

Guadalupe was in my Spanish Language Arts class. She was very vocal and used a lot of foul language in Spanish. I remember I made a deal with her and that every time she used foul language to express herself, she would lose 10 participation points. She agreed. However, she soon realized how quickly 10 points started accumulating and she began to substitute foul language with alternative words. The whole class helped her out and she was able to recover her points. She spoke fluent Spanish and always asked why questions, like why do we need accents? Why are we learning this? She was most surprised when we began the Mesoamerica research project. Her group was one of the groups who volunteered to present first.

**Guadalupe and Her Family**

Mi mamá es de La Junta, Chihuahua, y mi papá es de Juárez, Chihuahua. Yo soy de Chihuahua, pero fui criada en Juárez y tengo 18 años. Mis padres son amables, pero pueden ser un poco duros, quieren que tenga buenas calificaciones y pues no quieren que nomás esté, distraída en otras cosas quieren que nomás esté enfocada en poder
tener una educación. Para que ellos estén felices de tener una hija que ya tenga su carrera porque no pudieron tener una carrera ellos. Mi papá me dice que tengo que seguir mis sueños también que no quiere que pase por lo que él ha pasado. Me dice que se friega por el trabajo porque a veces tiene que pasar por frío. Porque él trabaja afuera en el frío. A veces cuando está afuera está poniendo piso o piedra afuera y pasa por mucho calor y por frío. Quiere que no sufra quiere que tenga una buena vida y un buen trabajo.

[My mom is from La Junta, Chihuahua, and my dad is from Juarez, Chihuahua. I am from Chihuahua, but I was raised in Juarez, and I am 18 years old. My parents are kind, but they can be a bit hard, they want me to have good grades, and they do not want me to be distracted by other things and focus on being able to have an education. They are happy to have a daughter who already has her career because they could not have careers themselves. My dad tells me that I must follow my dreams too, that he does not want me to go through what he has gone through, he tells me that he works hard because of the work he does sometimes he has to be out in the cold putting in flooring or rock outside and he has to endure the extreme heat and cold. He just wants me not to suffer he wants me to have a good life and a good job.]

(Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Guadalupe and Her Parents

Mi mamá trabaja, es una home health caregiver, ayuda a gente mayor, este, les limpia las casas les da como servicio les hace de comer, los baña, como cuidar a un niño chiquito se friega mucho hacienda eso. También mi papá hace construcción y landscaping pone tierra en un lugar pone piedras, pone cemento en un lugar, este hay
a veces como pone como tubos abajo para conectar el agua para los jardines. Yo
nomás tengo un hermano mayor. Él ya tiene su carrera. Él es asistente de dentista y
pues sí me dice que, aunque esté burra, aunque no sé nada, a veces no le entiendo las
cosas en la escuela tengo que tratar de entender todo para que salga de la escuela y
hacer mi carrera. Estudie lo que yo quiera, él siempre me dice que él estaba igual que
pues no está fácil esto del estudio, no es fácil y me dice tienes que fregarte, tienes que
trabajar por lo que quieres ya cuando alcances tu meta vas estar libre y vas estar bien,
vas a tener una vida buena. Pues sí me motiva mi hermano. Él fue igual como yo en la
escuela a veces no aprendía. También, pero a veces no le entiendo a las cosas y
cuando me dicen algo no lo entiendo luego tomo tiempo para entenderlo y él es igual.
Pero él me dice que todo es igual que tienes que tratar lo posible para tener lo que
quieres y es lo que me motiva.

[My mom works, she is a home health caregiver, she helps the elderly clean the
houses she gives them as a service, she makes them food to eat, she bathes them, it’s
like taking care of a small child, she works hard doing that. Also, my dad does
construction and landscaping and he also builds fountains. I just have an older
brother. He already has his career, he is a dentist assistant and yes, yes, he motivates
me. He tells me that even though he does not know anything, sometimes I do not
understand things at school. I have to try to understand everything so that I can
graduate from school and make my career. Study what I want, he always tells me that
he was the same as this is not easy, it is not easy you have to work hard yourself. You
have to work for what you want and when you have it you will be free and you will
be fine, you will have a good life and everything. Well yes, it motivates me that my
brother is almost the same as me because sometimes he gets a little stubborn like me. But sometimes I do not understand the material being taught explained. I do not understand it and it takes time for me to understand the material. My brother is the same and he tells me you have to try to understand. He motivates me.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

**Value of Schooling**

Es muy importante pues yo pienso que es importante. Mis padres, son los que siempre me dicen que es importante porque sin la escuela uno no voy a poder tener una carrera. Mis padres siempre me dicen échele ganas a la escuela, aunque de perdido tengas una C o una D, si es lo mejor que puedes hacer nomás con que hagas el esfuerzo para poder levantarla hasta una B. Pues yo digo la importancia de la escuela es que es algo muy grande. Sin la escuela uno no tuviera buenos trabajos, un trabajo que tienes una pasión de hacer lo que te gusta hacer. Por eso se me hace muy importante, aunque no me guste de todos modos tengo que seguir adelante para poder conseguir lo que quiero ser en la vida.

[It is very important because I think it is important but at the same time not, but I do not know why my parents are the ones who always tell me it is important because without school one will not be able to have a career. My parents always tell me to try at school, even if I have a C or a D if that is the best thing I can do, you can make the effort to raise it [grades] to Bs. So, I say the importance of the school is that it is something very big. Without school one cannot have a good job, having a job that you have a passion to do what you like to do, that's why it’s very important, although
I do not like it very much, I must keep going to get what I want to be, in life.

(Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Schooling Experiences

Yo de chiquita veía a mi hermano tenía amiguitos. Yo la verdad sí quería entrar a la escuela. Yo le decía a mi mamá cuándo puedo entrar a la escuela, ya quiero ir para tener amigos se me hacía divertida la escuela. En México comencé la primaria y en primero lo hacen hacer las tablas. También en México nos enseñaban hablar en inglés, pero nomás lo básico nomás como tener una conversación: hola, cómo estás, el día, esto los números, colores lo más básico. Para la secundaria llegué a Estados Unidos y me acuerdo de que lo que me sacó de onda fue como explicaban las matemáticas es muy diferente, no me acuerdo mucho pero cuando entré a la secundaria me dio miedo porque decían que era similar como la prepa. Y yo dije aquí no voy a salir, se van a reír de mí, se van a burlar porque no puedo hablar inglés y pos a la mejor van a hablar mal de mí. Pero la verdad tuve un maestro, él sí me ayudó mucho porque yo sí me molestaba conmigo misma. Me enojaba conmigo misma porque no le entendía a las cosas. Yo decía aquí la dejo, porque no le entendía y él me decía cálmate sí puedes, si yo lo puedo hacer tú también lo puedes hacer y pues eso se lo que agradezco mucho por la ayuda de él porque sin él no hubiera estado aquí en la prepa. Porque supuestamente no hablaba yo muy bien el inglés y no entendía por eso me iba a dejar en el mismo grado. Pero él no dejó que eso pasara, me dijo haz un esfuerzo y sigue adelante y vez que sí vas a poder. También otra maestra que hablaba español. Ella me ayudaba y me decía lo mismo, me motivaba. La maestra de matemáticas también me ayudaba y me decía sí yo te entiendo, aquí, en Estados
Unidos tienen diferente manera para enseñar las matemáticas, si quieres yo te enseño como las aprendiste en México. Pues ella me ayudó porque ella era de Juárez y ella misma dijo que ella vino para acá a seguir estudiando porque allá era mucho dinero para pagar y por eso se vino para acá. Ella término su carrera logró su meta, por eso era mi maestra y pues nos enseñaba las matemáticas de la manera juarense como le dicen. Con ella aprendí más las matemáticas. Pero ahora las maestras que tengo no le enseñan de esa manera. Las maestras de México si no le entiendes siguen contigo explicando, y explicando y aquí nomás le dicen a uno si le entendiste bien si no ni modo voy a tener que seguir porque no puedo estar atrasada. Pues le siguen y pues uno se queda con no aprendí esto, cómo voy a aprender lo demás. Por eso uno se retrasa aprendiendo cosas que uno no aprendió para seguir aprendido cosas que uno no sabe sin dar explicaciones bien para poder captarlo. Así enseñan aquí.

[When I was little, I saw my brother had friends. I really wanted to go to school, and I told my mom when I can go to school, I want to go to have friends, so school was fun for me. In Mexico I started elementary school and in the 1st grade one learns the multiplication tables, and in Mexico we were taught to speak some English, but only the basics just like having a conversation: hello, how are you, the days, the numbers, colors, the basics. For high school, I came to the United States, and I remember what threw me off was how they explained mathematics it is very different. I do not remember much but when I entered high school I was scared because they said it was like middle school. I said I'm not going to leave [graduate] they're going to laugh at me they're going to make fun because I cannot speak English and maybe they'll talk bad about me. But the truth was I had a teacher, he helped me a lot because it
bothered me. I got mad at myself because I did not understand things and I said here I quit because I did not understand him and he told me to calm down. If I did it, you can do it, and that is what I really appreciate. Because of his help, without him I would not have been here, because I supposedly did not speak English very well and I did not understand it. That is why they were going to leave me in the same grade; the good thing was he did not let that happen. He said to make an effort and go ahead, continue, and once you are able to, you will see you can do it. Another teacher who spoke Spanish, she helped me and told me the same thing; she motivated me. The teacher of mathematics also helped me and told me I understand you; here in the United States they have a different way to teach mathematics. If you want, I will show you how you learned them in Mexico, and she helped me because she was from Juarez. She said she came here to continue studying because there [Mexico] it would have been a lot of money to pay, and that's why she came here and finished her career, and she achieved her goal. That's why she was my teacher and she taught us mathematics in the same way, as they say, the Juarense way. With her, I learned more mathematics. But now the teachers I have do not teach that way. The teachers in Mexico, if you do not understand a concept, they continue explaining and explaining until everyone gets it. Here the teachers continue to teach they move on and do not stop to explain in a different way the math concept. They tell us it is because they cannot get behind, so they continue to teach new concepts and one stays behind struggling to learn the old with the new. I think, how I will learn the rest? That is why one falls behind. How can we learn new concepts if we never mastered the old ones? But that's how they teach here.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)
Concluding Thoughts

Great teaching will always be about relationships and programs do not build relationships, people do. (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. xx)

The life histories or testimonios of Carlos, José, Gloria, Esperanza, Juan, and Guadalupe contribute to the collective narratives of Mexican immigrant youth living within mixed-status families during the xenophobic era of the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. Their narratives provide us with a glimpse of how their educational and schooling experiences have been shaped by the unconditional support of familia and teachers. The students’ families offer them aspirational and familial capital by encouraging them to continue with their schooling despite their legal status and xenophobic experiences at school or in society. Their teachers offered them a space and place to use their linguistic capital by incorporating in their curriculum projects and other assignments that foster this linguistic capital. These students also were encouraged to build on critical hope; their teachers, like their parents, provided a safe space where their knowledge was valued. One example is when Guadalupe spoke about her lack of understanding in math, yet her teacher in middle school was able to provide this aspirational and critical hope for her to continue forth with her math class. This was pivotal for Guadalupe because she had learned math very differently in Juarez, Mexico, and she was about to quit middle school altogether because of her trauma in this middle school. Guadalupe’s math teacher, who also was from Juarez, spoke with her and shared her story instead of following the traditional methodology of teaching math. Instead, she built self-esteem in Guadalupe and encouraged her and others in her class to stay focused and taught them using knowledge they already had from their home country.
As students related their life histories, it was those teachers who dared to care and would not let them fail that contributed to their academic success within our public schools. It is clear from the research in education, child psychology, cognitive theory, and ethnic studies that positive teacher–student relationships are crucial to learning. (Akom, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Valenzuela (1999) and Ochoa (2007) provided insight about caring pedagogy. They spoke about Mexican teachers bringing out the best of their Mexican immigrant students through their caring sense and love for what they bring into the classroom. Valenzuela (1999) stated,

An authentically caring pedagogy considers the strengths that youth bring with them to school alongside the subtractive social- and school- related forces that disrupt what would otherwise be a more natural development of those strengths where schools were more additive in vision. (p. 115)

After fourteen years of working as an educator in the public schools, mostly in middle and high school, I have learned one of the key elements to foster motivation among our linguistically diverse Mexican and Mexican American students is creating an authentic bond with them; first, you must create trust with them. Highly effective or exemplary teachers demonstrate their personal support and develop bonds with their students. They establish a community of learners based on authentic caring relationships with students. These teachers strive to create lessons that empower their students and connect them to their cultural roots. They challenge their students to express themselves bilingually without the pressure of feeling out of place. Teachers in these classrooms value the community cultural wealth that their students bring to school (Yosso, 2005).
Within the autobiographical portraits of the participants, similarities and differences stand out. For example, the participants all had a strong knowledge of self that contributed to strong self-esteem. This strong knowledge of self and strong self-esteem began with their cultural upbringing. All the participants also had in their schooling experience a teacher who established a meaningful relationship with them and who built and sustained true hope when the students didn’t think they had any. Last, these participants had strong family ties to their culture and language. Yet one can see differences too. Some participants migrated at a very young age, some were born in the United States, and some arrived in the United States in their teen years, which made their schooling experience different from their U.S.-born counterparts. Some participants’ first schooling experience was in Mexico, while some attended school only in the States.

The next chapter examines ways in which authentic caring relationships, relevance in curriculum, and teaching that connects to students’ lives, communities, and cultural and linguistic identities/histories are at the center of counter-hegemonic pedagogy. Through the narratives of Carlos, José, Gloria, Esperanza, Juan, and Guadalupe, we can understand how this counter-hegemonic pedagogy shapes their self-identity, self-esteem, sense of hope, and teacher–student relationship.
CHAPTER 5: RECLAIMING MY INDIGENISMO

I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They’d like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven’t, we haven’t. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 108)

Mi mamá siempre nos recuerda a mis hermanas y a mí que mis bisabuelos eran indígenas. Mi bisabuelo, José dejó su estado siendo solo un jovencito a los 10 años. Él se unió a la revolución como revolucionario. La revolución lo llevó a San Luis Potosí allí él empezó a trabajar en el ferrocarril. Fue en San Luis Potosí, México donde conoció a mi bisabuela, Gregoria “Goyita”. Ellos formaron un hogar y tuvieron a mi abuelita materna Fidencia Hernández de Pulido, a quien yo recuerdo con mucho amor y aprecio. [My mom always reminds my sisters and me that my great-grandparents were Indigenous. My great-grandfather, José, left his state as a young man at the age of 10. He joined the revolution as a revolutionary. The revolution took him to San Luis Potosí, Mexico, where he began to work on the railroad. It was in San Luis Potosí where he met my great-grandmother, Gregoria “Goyita.” They formed a home with my maternal grandmother, Fidencia Hernandez de Pulido, who I remember with much love and appreciation.]

Sadly, in 1979 my parents immigrated from Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico to New Mexico with my two older sisters and me. Our lazos with our grandparents were severed, yet my maternal grandmother’s enseñanzas remained in my soul. My grandmother was my idol. She was my superhero. Her long trenzas and her apron were part of her superhero costume. She always wore her hair in braids and an apron. I was her shadow growing up. I would spy on her and wherever she went, I went too. My abuelita was short, morena, y fuerte de carácter, but to me she was my idol. I learned many things from my grandmother. I learned
how to slap the corn on the metate, plant corn, feed the chickens and pigs, and light the wood stove.

I remember my grandmother showing me the difference between *yerbabuena* and *epazote* and how to prepare manzanilla tea and recognize other traditional herbs found in her beautiful garden. My grandmother was a great gardener. She planted her chile, *tomates*, and anything she needed to cook. She grew corn, *nopales*, and plenty of other vegetables. When my mother and father migrated to the United States with my two older sisters and me, those memories began to fade, and my grandmother became a distant *recuerdo, una memoria a la distancia*.

It wasn’t until the reclaiming of my memories that I began to understand why my grandmother gave my sisters and I oregano for a bad cough and epazote for our tummy aches. My grandmother was *indígena* and she wanted us to love the *tierra*, to respect the earth and love ourselves. My short time with her meant the world to me because part of her spirit lived in me. Every time I looked in the mirror at my brown skin, my brownness, my squinted eyes and dark hair, my shortness—all that is my grandmother’s reflection. Yet I grew up not knowing more about my *cultura*. In many ways, I was missing part of my identity. Later in my life when my grandmother was ill, I remember seeing her fragile body and looking at her hands and seeing her fingers deformed by arthritis, and her *trenzas* and apron were gone. I felt a great emptiness and an overwhelming sadness. Soon after my visit my grandmother passed, all that connected me to my culture, language, and customs was buried with her.

Hence my search for learning and re-claiming my identity began. Like my students, I did not question or challenge stereotypes about *los indios de México* and how being *indio*
meant being dumb and ignorant. The stereotype that indios were not intelligent and begged for money in Mexico’s border states continued to shape perceptions as truth. These stereotypes were reinforced by the media, primarily the telenovelas and films where Indigenous people are depicted with historically and culturally inaccurate representations. These messages distorted my Indigenous identity. No positive images of Indigenous peoples were portrayed in popular culture, and as I began my schooling I was confronted with images and photographs in history textbooks where the Indigenous were described as savages and murderers. This was prevalent not only in my schooling but also in my home on Spanish-language television, where Indigenous people were presented with stereotypical images. On Spanish television, Indigenous people are portrayed as ignorant, dumb, dirty, and rebellious.

So these distorted images of what it means to be Indigenous began for me at a very young age, much like my student who spoke about a well-known Mexican pop culture film where the protagonist was La India María. As best described by Tumbaga (2020) in “Indios y Burros: Rethinking “La India María” as Ethnographic Cinema:”

La India María is a film representation of Mexico’s economic underdogs and Indigenous rural migrants who try their luck in Mexican cities seeking employment opportunities largely absent in their communities. As a caricature of the Mazahua migrant, she embodies would-be ethnographic Indigenous traits conventional to Mexican film: limited formal education, excessive modesty, traditional attire, and Indigenous speech. Consequently, she is portrayed as the unassimilated, backward Indigenous woman navigating the perils of urban Mexican modernity, though her picaresque personality allows her to deliver unexpected sociopolitical critiques.

(p. 759)
All my students except for three or four knew who this character was. Stereotypes are very hard to combat when society normalizes them. According to Hall (1997),

Within stereotyping, then we have established a connection between representation, difference, and power. However, we need to probe the nature of this power more fully. We often think of power in terms of direct physical coercion or constraint. However, we have also spoken, for example, of power in *representation*; power to mark, assign and classify; of *symbolic power*; of *ritualized expulsion*. Power, it seems, has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way—within a certain “regime of representation.” It includes the exercise of *symbolic power* through representational practices. Stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence. (p. 259)

These stereotypes became so embedded in my everyday life and in the lives of my students we began to normalize them. Yet even though I watched all these films about Indigenous people, I didn’t laugh or enjoy these representations. There was no difference between the way my grandmother, my great-grandparents, my mom, and I looked and these characters.

In creating the Mesoamerica lesson, my main objective was to allow students to become fully conscious about their Indigenous backgrounds and how their Mestizo culture was and is very much connected to this Indigenous identity. As I became a teacher, these images became even more unpleasant and the word *indio* was used as a put-down, a negative connation about Indigenous peoples. At the beginning of my teaching career, I would hear students get angry when they were called *indios*. In middle school this *eres indio* [you’re an Indian] or *no seas indio* [don’t be an Indian] became common insults among the Spanish
speakers. I remember thinking “Well, we are Indigenous. What is the problem?” However, at the time I did not have a critical lens to develop lessons nor curriculum to counter this racist ideology. It was not until later in my teaching career that I began reclaiming my indigenismo. As a high school teacher, I overheard a conversation among a group of girls who were my students at the time. These girls talked about another student who was pro-Donald-Trump. The girls were confused about why this student defended Trump’s racists comments; they mentioned that they had no idea why she was racist if she was “a María.” Unaware of what that meant, I remember asking them why they were calling her María. They responded by stating the girl had dark skin, wore her hair long, and wore sandals, and that’s what an india looked like, so they were not sure why she was trying to “act white” if her physical appearance was that of an india.

In my research to counter this stereotype, I discovered that María was a term used in the 1960s by Mexican people to reference Indigenous females. As stated in the short video by Yosoyoho Jugete (2017), “María es un término ocupado en México desde la década de los años sesenta para referirse a las mujeres indígenas, mismas que emigramos de nuestros pueblos a las grandes ciudades” [Maria is a term used in Mexico since the 1960s to refer to Indigenous women, the same ones who emigrated from our villages to the big cities.] These phrases and words were all very damaging and contributed to the self-hate of our Indigenous cultural identity. Therefore, to counter these negative images and language I began my lesson on indigenismo.

I began by using Anzaldúa’s (1999) concept of nepantla. I, like the students I taught at the time, was in “a state of in-betweenness” (p. 177-178). As Anzaldúa described, nepantla is “a state or stage between identity that’s in place and identity in progress but not yet
formed” (pp. 177–178). It was this place, this identity in progress and state of confusion where I began to reclaim by Indigenous identity. This reclaiming of my Indigenous identity began on my trips to Mexico and in remembering my great-grandparents and my grandmother. When I was able to return and visit Indigenous communities in Yucatán, I listened and learned from Indigenous peoples who looked like my great-grandparents and my grandmother. To counter my students’ negative stereotypes, they had learned in school and at home about Indigenous people, I decided to create a counter-hegemonic space, so they too would be able to find this lost identity or this identity in progress. By seeing ourselves as part of this forgotten or unknown identity, the students and I were able to recognize the differences between our cultural identities and to see each other by respecting any differences we encountered in reclaiming this Indigenous past.

**Mi Testimonio**

I begin this chapter with *mi testimonio* of how I came to acknowledge and view my Indigenous identity not as erased or forgotten but acknowledged and reclaimed. I grew up with nonexistent knowledge of where I came from, who my ancestors were, or the origin of my maternal language. I only had vague memories of my Indigenous grandmother. As a result, I had no knowledge of where my ancestors were from. One way I began to reclaim my Indigenous identity was attending university and taking classes in the Spanish department. There I was able to take language, history, and culture classes about Chicanas/os/Latinas/os in the United States. Here I was first exposed to *mi historia, mi lengua, y mi cultura*. This was a critical moment and time in my life when I began to recall these memories I held near my heart about my grandmother and her *enseñanzas.*
I remember the first time I read about Chicanas/os in the Southwest, and I read authors like Lorna Cervantes, Pat Mora, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, and other powerful Chicana writers. I read Anzaldúa’s *Linguistic Terrorism* and La Chrisx’s poem *La Loca de la Raza Cósmica*. I realized I was not alone in my American immigrant experience. Through these classes I began to see myself in relation to my culture, language, race, class, and immigrant status. I began to see my experiences through a CRT lens, to see the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism. I began to see my cultural wealth as a tool and not as a deficit. I learned that community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) was important and valuable to me and my future. Hence my journey to reclaim my language and history began. Soon after, I began to take bilingual classes and prepare myself to become a Spanish Language Arts teacher. My determination and goal was to teach students like me about our history, language, and culture. My awaking occurred when I was able to see my Indigenous identity as something powerful and transformative. I remember reading Anzaldúa’s (1999) poem “To live in the Borderlands means you...”

...are neither hispana india negra española

ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed

captured in the crossfire between camps

while carrying all five races on your back

not knowing which side to turn to, run from;

To live in the Borderlands means

knowing that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,

is no longer speaking to you,

the *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*, that denying the Anglo inside you
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

_Cuando vives en la frontera_

people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,

you’re a _burra, buey_, scapegoat,

forerunner of a new race,

half and half—both woman and man, neither—a new gender;

To live in the Borderlands means to

put _chile_ in the borscht,

eat whole wheat _tortillas_,

speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;

be stopped by _la migra_ at the border checkpoints; (p. 216)

When I first read this poem, I was able to counter all the stereotypes I had seen and learned about being Mexican and Indigenous. Anzaldúa’s poem was a _testimonio_ of what it is to live in a state of in-betweenness. As Ortega (2005) later described, “Those who live an in-between life because they are multicultural, multivoiced, multiplicitous, because their being is caught in the midst of ambiguities, contradictions, and multiple possibilities” (p. 79).

However, like my students, I did not know we were in this _nepantla_ state because our schooling experiences had stripped us from seeing ourselves as holders of knowledge and creators of _conocimiento_ and, more importantly, from acknowledging our Indigenous identity as something beautiful and worthy of pride.

As a result of reclaiming my history, I began to see my educational _testimonio_ and the impact it has had on my identity and in my journey as an immigrant child, teen, and adult and ultimately as a Mexican migrant public-school teacher. It is this body of knowledge that
cemented my commitment to CRT, LatCrit, and borderlands theory, which have helped me as a teacher to take a critical approach toward curriculum that “emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge of marginalized peoples and how this knowledge links the interdependent relationship between theory and praxis” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 64). I utilize this perspective, adapt it, transform it, and implement a critical race/borderlands curriculum in my Spanish Language Arts class. Utilizing diverse, culturally relevant reading materials and project-based learning helped create a space and a place where students’ testimonios are at the center of learning. Such a space privileges their cultural and linguistic assets while developing a sense of community and hogar and creating a pedagogy of cariño. In this space, students can learn about their cultural heritage, use their cultural capital for learning and processing new information, and use trust and love as elements to create understanding and embrace their education. The goal is that students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and they see themselves as “creators and holders of knowledge” (Delgado, Bernal, 2002, p. 105).

Soon after I became a teacher, my sister took my mother and me on a trip to Mexico City, Chiapas, Veracruz, and Yucatán. We visited several historical and archeological sites, and with each visit my knowledge of where I came from, my ancestral knowledge, became more present. The conocimiento I acquired from these visits changed my life. I was visiting archeological sites that my ancestors had built. I learned about the numerous contributions my Indigenous ancestors made to the world that are minimized or erased from history. Soon after my first trip to Mexico City, I became a completely different person and teacher. I felt an overwhelming sense of pride. I began to stand taller, to speak louder, and to walk with confidence. I had never felt this way before. I realized my history and culture are valuable
and important, and I also realized I had been robbed of this *conocimiento*. I also saw my grandmother’s and grandparents’ faces in many of the Indigenous groups that migrated to the north of Mexico. I realized in those visits how Spanish was never my ancestors’ language; it was a language imposed by the colonizer.

After my first visit to Mexico City, my sister invited me to go with her on more trips. On these trips I was able to revisit the pyramids in Teotihuacán, Mexico City, and the National Museum of Anthropology to learn about the many Indigenous tribes of Mesoamerica. Many of the Indigenous groups resemble my family’s and my students’ physical appearance. I kept going back to the southern part of Mexico to learn more about the Maya, Olmecs, Toltecs, and others. Each archeological site had an overwhelming amount of information, which I collected and brought back to the classroom through readings, videos, and pictures. During this time, I was teaching Spanish Language Arts and was fascinated with this knowledge. Through this experience and reawakening, I finally understood the power of knowing my cultural heritage and the impact cultural and historical knowledge has on students’ self-value, self-esteem, and self-love. I remember replaying the Los Tigres del Norte song “América” and thinking specifically on this stanza,

\[
\text{Del color de la tierra yo he nacido} \\
\text{Por herencia mi idioma es castellano (de América)} \\
\text{Los del norte dicen que soy latino (yo soy)} \\
\text{No me quieren decir Americano.} \\
\text{[I was born from the color of the earth} \\
\text{By inheritance my language is Spanish (from America)} \\
\text{Those from the north say that I am Latino (I am)}}
\]
They don't want to call me American.

Even the geographical place of what was Mexican territory became something valuable for me to rediscover. Los Tigres del Norte spoke about place and how many of us who are born in North America are simply denied by Whites the privilege of being called American; we—Mexicans and Central and South Americans—are not allowed to use this term because anything outside of la frontera (the border) is considered illegal. As Anzaldúa (1990) reminded us, la frontera is used to keep us out because “borders are set to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (p. 25). This was the beginning of my development as a Chicana feminist epistemologist. It was this reclaiming and recognizing my nepantla state.

These experiences aided me in incorporating this counternarrative into my classroom instruction. My goal was to draw inspiration from the work of feminists of color, who “have drawn on alternative systems of knowing that have the potential to disrupt Western colonial assumptions” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002; Elenes, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2005; Villenas, 1996, 2010). It allowed for my students of color to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, to see themselves as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

In the sections that follow, I use critical race and borderlands theories to critically analyze how using these theories humanized the curriculum and shaped my students to see themselves as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, year). After being exposed to this curriculum, students can apply their learned skills and make connections in other classes, as it allows them to learn to be critical of what is being taught. Finally, students were able to connect their daily lived experiences with these theories.
Creating a Counter-Hegemonic Curriculum

Throughout the history of the U.S. educational system, the schooling of students of color has been that of second-class citizens (Acuña, 1988; Flores, 2005; Gonzales, 1999; Spring, 2001). The educational system has failed Mexican students who have not achieved academic success. Still today the educational system perpetuates the deficit myth of students of color and their inability to achieve academic success because of their language, skin color, socioeconomic status, and/or culture (Carger, 1996; Valdés, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999 Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). This myth is still prevalent in schooling practices today. However, critically conscious teachers have changed what the traditional curriculum looks like in the classroom. When I first started teaching Spanish Language Arts, there was no set curriculum or standards to adhere to. Teachers had benchmarks they could follow according to state requirements. The levels of Spanish each student possessed varied, so teachers had to find ways to assess each student’s language and needs. There was one overall characteristic all the students I taught shared, and that was that they were not aware of their community cultural wealth or the power that knowing about their ancestors held. Most of the students were only seeing their Indigenous identity through what they had learned in school textbooks and in mainstream U.S. and Mexican media. For example, when Guadalupe said her history textbook did not include truthful facts about Mexican history, she went on to say Pancho Villa was seen as a villain and his image was distorted into the negative stereotype of a villain, unlike in Mexico’s history textbooks.

One of the ways I was able to deconstruct these images was by having students write about stereotypes. In my Spanish Language Arts class, I made the decision to start with a historical, cultural lesson plan about Mesoamerica. The lesson began with breaking down the
myths and stereotypes of Indigenous people of Mexico and Mexican people in the United States. An important student learning outcome was for students to critically see themselves in terms of their culture and their language in American society. It is critical to analyze the stereotypes media have about students’ culture as well as how media in turn instill in them a negative label that they internalize. Martinez (2010) stated, “the impact of stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples on self-image and worldviews of Indigenous youth and their teachers cannot be discounted. Of primary concern to me is that the image has become a point of reference rather than the individual” (p. 49). In Martinez’s study, Indigenous students were struggling with the stereotype of Indigenous people as the drunken, lazy, good-for-nothing Indian. These same commonalities I found with my students.

The objectives of the unit on Mesoamerica were for students to answer the following essential questions:

1. ¿Por qué es importante estudiar los grupos precolombinos de Mesoamérica? [Why is it important to study the pre-Columbian groups of Mesoamerica?]
2. ¿Cuáles fueron las contribuciones de estos grupos indígenas? [What were the contributions of these Indigenous groups?]
3. ¿Cómo podemos cambiar los estereotipos que tiene la gente de los grupos indígenas en los países latinoamericanos? [How can we change the stereotypes that people have of Indigenous groups in Latin American countries?]

One of the main objectives was for students to break free from learned stereotypes. The lesson began with students individually defining what stereotypes are and writing examples of them. Students quickly identified the stereotypes Donald Trump expressed about Mexicans in his 2015 speech, called them rapists, murderers, and drug addicts/drug lords.
Then I had the students look at different images that popular Hollywood films use to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Mexicans. The goal was for students to critically understand the stereotypes about us that society has and how they were like the stereotypes we had of Indigenous people. As a result, we were perpetuating the same self-hatred and whitewash mentality that we had learned in our schools, families, and communities. Ultimately, the objective of this lesson was for the students to become critically conscious of the harm of stereotyping. As Anzaldúa (1990) reminded her readers, “Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people” (p. 108).

The unit was designed for my students to examine race, representation, and power vis-à-vis stereotyping of Indigenous people. The curriculum was structured for students to define what stereotypes are and/or were and what general stereotypes not specific to race or ethnicity they had heard. I implemented this critical cultural curriculum by prompting students to write down on an index card what a stereotype was and examples of any stereotypes they could think of. Then they described stereotypes they had about Indigenous people in Mexico. Most of the students gave examples of Mexican culture, language, and race. It is important to keep in mind this topic was taught during the 2015 presidential campaign of Donald Trump. These are some of the responses the students gave:

- **Gloria and Esperanza:** Todos los mexicanos son narcotraficantes, son criminales, son cholos, drogadictos, desmadrosos, violadores, y alcohólicos. [All Mexicans are drug dealers, criminals, gang members, drug addicts, rapists, and alcoholics.]
  
  (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

- **José:** Mexicans do not want to learn English and Mexicans don’t want to go to school and are lazy. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)
• **Guadalupe:** Todos somos ilegales, todos trabajamos limpiando casas o limpiando yardas o en construcción. [We are all illegals we only work cleaning houses and cleaning yards or work in construction.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

• **Juan:** Los americanos creen que todos los mexicanos vendemos drogas, somos alcohólicos y criminales. [Americans believe that all Mexicans sell drugs and we are all alcoholics and criminals.] (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

These responses demonstrate the critical cultural awareness each student already had about how Mexican immigrants were racialized based on these stereotypes. They were aware of the intercentricity of race and racism within U.S. society and how this concept functions based on class and immigration status. Participants understood how their immigration status had an overwhelming impact on how they and their parents are perceived in terms of race, class, and citizenship status in society. These stereotypes have been embedded in larger society and disseminated in media, politics, and educational spaces the students inhabit. In turn, students internalize these stereotypes. The students’ comments were no different from the responses they were hearing about themselves. Students said Indigenous groups in Mexico and Spanish-speaking countries were dirty, ignorant, simple-minded, and dark-skinned. Gloria, Esperanza, Juan, and Guadalupe stated their family members referred to Indigenous females as Marias. This reference was to La India María, the stereotypical underdog and backwards Indigenous woman from popular Mexican films.

Students’ prior knowledge of Indigenous people was based on these stereotypes, which prevented them from being able to identify any positive Indigenous role models in any profession. When shown images of gigantic Olmec stone heads (Figure 1), some students responded with “it’s of African culture.” When shown images of the pyramids in
Teotihuacán, they responded by saying the pyramids were from Egypt. After the students stated their opinions, I went over the pictures and gave them the answer to each picture to pave the way to the unit.

**Figure 1**

*Olmec Heads*

Students could only associate the pyramids with what they had learned in history class about Egyptian culture. After my explanation about the background of these pictures, Gloria mentioned how most of the textbooks she had read in school were “American-driven, because they are written by White Americans and drive the way Americans see history and culture, and therefore the government wants us [Mexicans] to see how history has been portrayed and what cultures have value.” Guadalupe and Juan also stated how they didn’t know much about Indigenous groups from Mexico because the only thing they learned in history class was how Natives were savages and were civilized by White Americans. Like the findings by Martinez (2010) that Indigenous high school students “positioned White people as a reference point for success or achievement” (p. 41), I found that my students were engaging in the same process. What Hall (1997) would call a “set of binary oppositions” (p. 13) in which White people are seen as clean, brave, and civilized, Indigenous people are considered savages. In my attempt to have the students counter this
discourse, I placed great emphasis on student voice and opinion, providing them a space where they could dialogue and critically analyze the power of their words.

Guadalupe stated,

La clase de historia debe de explicar de las culturas e historia de todos los grupos y sí explica pero explican de una manera que no es, nos dicen cosas que no son ciertas. [History class should explain the cultures and history of all the groups and it does explain but they explain in a way that it is not correct; they tell us things that are not true.] (Interview translated 8/05/2017)

Her response to what is taught in history classes and what students read in textbooks is connected to what Apple (2000) refers to as “official knowledge” (p. 64). The participants were aware at a certain level of what official historical knowledge is taught in school versus what is not. Through exposure to the counter-hegemonic curriculum, students begin to think and analyze what is being taught and to express and engage in critical discourse and challenge oppressive structures. They then can challenge these dominant ideologies of knowledge in textbooks. Students can then challenge the dominant history by being exposed to critical race curriculum.

Implementing relevant and current curriculum that addresses social issues provides meaningful connections for students. During this lesson, Donald Trump was running for president and was using racist rhetoric against Mexicans immigrants. In is infamous speech from 2015 he stated the following about Mexican immigrants; “When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”
The Mesoamerica project began with stereotypes and how to critically analyze the misconceptions about our Indigenous roots. This was the project mentioned by all the participants because it changed their historical knowledge of Indigenous peoples in Mexico. This project challenged the traditional curriculum as described in tenet 4 of CRT, the centrality of experiential knowledge. The Spanish Language Arts classroom offered a space for students to feel pride in their knowledge, culture, and language as part of the learning process. Students in class were asked to research topics such as the origin of Indigenous peoples and their contributions to the language and society we live in today.

Giving the students a space to counter the traditional White curriculum legitimized their knowledge and countered their schooling experience about stereotypes and untold history. Because of these imbalances in education, the need for Chicana epistemologies is critical for educators because they provide “a different standpoint that challenges traditional way of knowing and shapes every aspect of the research process” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 515). Carlos stated,

I remember a project with a group of students. It was about the Aztecs and how they played soccer and that had a huge impact on me because I love soccer. I learned how they played soccer how they organized themselves and its similarities to the soccer we still played today as it did with my ancestors. That had a great impact on my life at the moment because I didn’t learn anything like that in the textbooks in school.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Gloria stated,

It was your project where we had to choose a native tribe from Mexico. It made me realize how advanced our people were despite all the hate we get. We had to present;
it really helped me realize how our people [Indigenous] were able to rise despite colonization from Spain and not having all the technological advances we have now. I felt a sense of wow, that’s really cool those were my ancestors. This information we didn’t learn in elementary school. It’s not in the textbooks or history we learn.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Esperanza stated,

I have to say that same project because we researched the Tarahumara. My parents are always talking to me about how when they lived in Mexico siempre los ayudaban a los Tarahumara [they always helped Tarahumara people] and I thought that was very cool. Honestly, I have respect for everything, like every culture, everything. I just thought that was pretty cool because I got some insight on how they were and how they are still, and I learned new things I really didn’t know about them. I didn’t learn about them in world history class, so I just thought why I didn’t learn this.

(Interview translated August 5, 2017)

These three participants spoke about not finding information about these Indigenous groups in traditional U.S history classes. Looking back on their experiences in middle and high school, they found that textbooks in the White curriculum did not provide accurate historical accounts that Mexican students deserve to know.

Yosso (2002) used a CRT framework to analyze and challenge racism within all aspects of school curriculum as it pertains to the schooling experiences of students of color. Yosso’s deconstruction of school curriculum sought to expand the notion of curriculum as it pertains to knowledge included in and excluded from textbooks. She defined curriculum as
the set of structures, processes, and discourses in place within schools from pre-kindergarten through university, stating that:

Curriculum also encompasses the processes designed to place students in certain classes, wherein they are presented with specific knowledge. Furthermore, curriculum is supported by discourses that justify why some students have access to certain knowledge with others are presented with different school curriculum. Traditional curricular discourses distort, omit, and stereotype Chicana/o, Latina/o, African American, Asian American / Asian Pacific Islander, and Native American experiences. (p. 93)

In order for these structures to be disrupted, students of color must be exposed to a curriculum that challenges the White knowledge that is studied and presented in textbooks. Presenting a curriculum that showed students their Mexican history and culture in a positive light gave them a sense of pride and empowerment; thus, traditional stereotype threat was interrupted, allowing students of color to see themselves in a different light.

**Nepantla**

The third concept utilized in Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory is nepantla, the land in the middle. *Nepantla* describes students of diverse cultural backgrounds who are bilingual, trilingual, and tricultural and who are in a constant state of transition. Anzaldúa (1987) referred to this state of transition as “nepantilism,” which she described as “an Aztec word meaning between ways, la mestiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another” (p. 100). Anzaldúa’s nepantilism speaks about the constant transitional stage students face when they are in schools, in society, in public spaces, and at home, and how this “perpetual transition” (p. 100) is what students of color face. Nepantilism
is not a negative place to be in; however, what is most important is what you do when you are in this state. Many of the Mexican students in this study learned for the first time about their ancestors and their history. They became aware of their historical cultural reality that was not based on historical narratives presented in mainstream history textbooks.

Gloria stated,

A good amount of the stereotypes that we are all 100% Native Mexicans, Indigenous people, but like that’s not true. A lot of us have Spanish blood. Because a lot of people landed in what we now call Mexico and a lot of people call us Natives. Not all of us are Natives. Personally, coming from my mom’s side, my mom is mainly half and half [Indigenous and Spanish] and my dad is half and half, Spanish and Native/Indigenous. So, it’s like just because we are all Mexicans doesn’t make us all Native. However, like for me, I am not fully Mexican, I mean 100% Indigenous, nor fully American. I am not from here, ni de aquí ni de allá [not from here nor from over there]. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Gloria used a phrase spoken by some Mexican American youth who were born and raised in the United States and who have Mexican-born parents yet do not feel they belong or are accepted in either culture: ni de aquí, ni de allá. Therefore, they live in this state of nepatilism, or in this in-betweenness. Gloria was racially aware of her status and added how even though she was born in the United States, she did not identify 100% as an American or as White. For Gloria, being enrolled in bilingual classes gave her a sense of pride in her culture. She recalled that after participating in bilingual classes, she became aware of her bilingualism and was proud to be bilingual. Gloria, like Esperanza, participated in the bilingual track in high school. Beginning in 9th grade, they were in content core classes
taught in Spanish and English until they graduated. They presented a portfolio and took an assessment in Spanish to be considered bilingual by the state and the district. I asked Gloria if overall her self-image changed by taking Spanish Language Arts classes, and she stated it had:

It did. I agree it’s one thing to say I am proud, but then it’s another thing to show how proud you are. Some students are embarrassed because they are taking bilingual classes, and I am not. I am doing my bilingual seal. I am taking Spanish Language Arts, and I am just relearning something I already knew or learning something I didn’t know, so it actually helped. I feel some students are embarrassed to take Spanish classes. Some students will say “you’re taking Spanish, I thought you already knew Spanish,” but what some students don’t understand, it’s like taking English but in Spanish. It’s language arts but in Spanish; it’s Math but in Spanish. We are learning. They are not teaching us to speak Spanish; they are teaching us *in* Spanish.

(Interview transcribed, August 5, 2017)

At the end of her senior year Gloria realized the importance of being bilingual. She stated she would use her bilingual skills in the future and would continue to take classes in Spanish once she entered the university.

José engaged in this new consciousness that Anzaldúa poignantly expressed as a way of realizing and an act of counternarrative. Anzaldúa (1987) stated when this happens, a person “leave[s] the opposite bank’ and is ‘on both shores at once’” (p. 100). Through this awareness, José demonstrated his nepantilism. Unlike Gloria, he was able to act in the educational space and exercise agency to clarify misconceptions about his culture, as seen here when asked about using personal examples based on his culture for schoolwork:
In our government class we were debating how freedom of speech should be limited, and then I told them it should be limited because some people say harmful things. Then this girl said, those harmful things should not affect you. I told the girl what if it is discriminating your culture? and she said that still shouldn’t affect you and I told her that it is a big deal, because our culture is what makes us, and “you are putting down our culture. Because our culture has built-up history, life, and beauty, and by saying that, you have torn thousands and thousands of years of all that hard work, torn down our heritage. I told her it’s like the White people only use the bad words in Spanish, and that’s bad when people only use those words, the bad words. It’s like we didn’t develop years and years of language just for you to use those words. If you are going to speak my culture’s language, you are going to learn to speak it right because my culture’s language doesn’t revolve around those words, bad words. (Interview transcribed, August 5, 2017)

On the path to a new consciousness, José was “jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101). José articulated his opinion on what he considered harmful speech, demonstrating his ability to be fluid within nepantilism. Jose’s experience in history class addressed his ability to critically analyze the situation, and instead of being upset about the comment his classmate made, he addressed his concern. José clearly understood that learning Spanish bad words is not learning a language; instead, it is an insult to that culture. José was able to articulate his sentiments and challenge this hegemonic view in front of his peers. His concern was for his peers because he wanted them to understand that learning bad words is not learning a language; it is undermining the heritage of the very people you are speaking about. Jose’s
counter-hegemonic view challenged dominant ideologies by actively engaging in
deconstructing the freedom of speech myth. José took an oppositional stance in which he
actively engaged in rearticulating the freedom of speech discourse.

In moving beyond White middle-class experiences and hegemonic curriculum,
¿Quién Soy Yo? was another project that centered on the lived experiences of students of
color. hooks (1994) asserted, “If the histories, languages, and cultures of students of color
move to the center of school curriculum, then White middle-class experiences lose
exclusivity as the ‘standard’ by which everyone else is judged” (Yosso, 2010, p. 98).

Similarly, the ¿Quién Soy Yo? project drew explicitly on the student’s familial and linguistic
capital (Yosso, 2005). I provided a space for students to share and made it a place for them to
be able to use their entire cultural and linguistic repertoire. I wanted to provide a space for all
the students to share personal accounts of their lives, including communicating with their
parents and in their schooling experience. When students shared their narratives and heard
the narratives of their classmates, they connected at a higher personal level, which became
transformative for them. Students realized they were able to share their writing with the
teacher and, most importantly, in the classroom. Pizarro (2005) mentioned the disconnect
Chicana students face when they enter school. He noted that students become aware of the
racial differences that exist in schools:

If a Chicana/o student is made aware that she or he is racially and socioeconomically
distinct (and inferior) from the authority figures, this racial-political climate can be
linked to feeling a lack of ownership of the schooling process and to feeling distance
between self and school. (p. 61)
Yet if students are allowed to express their cultural experience within the classroom and link it to the curriculum and learn from it, that creates a meaningful experience where students can connect and own this learning.

Educators need to use their students’ community cultural wealth. It is extremely valuable because most culturally diverse students do not see themselves as part of the traditional curriculum, nor do they see themselves reflected in textbooks. When students’ community cultural wealth is included and reflected in the curriculum, they feel comfortable and can share their familial capital in their written work or their projects. My students for this course unit were able to include their linguistic and familial capital (Yosso, 2005). As a Mexican educator of culturally diverse students, I believe our students’ knowledge is valid and that their community cultural wealth must be connected to the curriculum and woven into the learning environment. Their epistemology, as pointed out by Delgado Bernal (2002), should be seen as a “system of knowing that is linked to worldview based on the conditions under which people live and learn” (p. 106).

Moll and Gonzalez (1995) addressed the importance of funds of knowledge and the need to know a child as a whole person, not merely as a student. Through their research, Moll and Gonzalez identified the hidden skills and multiple levels of skills students possess in their home. They described the importance of teachers using these skills in the students’ learning process. Like Moll and Gonzalez (1995), my goal was for students to express themselves and showcase what they know, their funds of knowledge:

What I do advocate, however, is that teachers become acquainted with their students through an ethnographic, not just a teacher, lens in order to get beyond a superficial and stereotypical familiarity with them. Through this process, which is the aspect of
this project that can and should be replicated, ideas and themes will emerge for integrating students’ cultural experiences into different areas of the curriculum, which go far beyond the current standardized routines. More importantly, this process gives students and their families a sense that their experiences are academically valid. (p. 138).

Moll and Gonzalez emphasized how valuable it is for teachers to utilize a student’s funds of knowledge in their everyday teaching. It is not merely getting to know the students you teach; it is establishing a meaningful relationship that allows students to showcase their strengths in the classroom setting. If the teacher–student relationship is developed and not limited, students are able to have some fluidity and move between two spaces: their home and the classroom.

In the next chapter, I address how a counter-hegemonic curriculum in the Spanish Language Arts classroom can be enacted using critical race and borderlands theories. It includes an analysis of how these theories influence and shape Mexican American students’ educational experiences beyond the Spanish Language Arts classroom. Additionally, it analyzes the pedagogical lens that privileges students’ cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge while centering their testimonios, thus creating a space of nepantla in which la pedagogía del cariño is at the heart of transformation.
CHAPTER 6: BUILDING COMMUNITY, CONVIVENCIA, Y SOLIDARIDAD

Students do not care what we know until they know that we care. (Kohl, 1994)

Pedagogical Metamorphosis

I open this chapter with this quote because it was not until my third year of teaching that I truly understood the significance of teacher–student relationships and the power they have in transforming and humanizing education for both the teacher and students. In the fall of 2006, I started my student teaching at a high school which had close to 2,000 students. I held a master’s degree in Spanish and was enrolled in an alternative licensure program that would allow me to teach at the secondary level. During my master’s program, I had the opportunity to teach at the university level. Upon graduating, I was able to continue teaching Spanish I and II at a community college while substituting for the public schools at the primary level. I enjoyed my role as a substitute teacher. Through this experience as a substitute teacher, I was able to connect with students and gain valuable teaching experience. That fall, I learned that I would have to student teach in a high school classroom to complete the license requirements for secondary education. I was very happy and anticipated that it was going to be easy. I immediately met with the Spanish teacher who was going to be my mentor. At that time, he was very popular and well-liked by students. In our conversation, he told me that he had very large classes. I told him not to worry because I had taught at the university and the classes there had high enrollments of 25 or 26 students. I quickly learned that big classes really meant BIG classes. My mentor teacher’s first period had 48 students, and the smallest class had 38. Students were on the floor and sitting up against the walls. It was very intimidating. My mentor teacher was very encouraging, and he felt it would be best if I took over teaching all his classes. On my third day he had me teach all his classes, and it
was very challenging. I really liked how he managed the students. He made them laugh and had high expectations for all of them. My second week of student teaching was probably the hardest week for me. My mindset at the time was walk into the classroom, teach, and go home. I truly thought and believed that all I had to do was to have great lesson plans, deliver the lesson, speak in Spanish to the students, assign work, and be done with it. At the beginning, the students were well-behaved and participated all the time. What I did not know was that in education this is called the honeymoon stage; after the honeymoon stage was over, reality set in. I learned students were not eager to learn Spanish. At times, I felt lost and wondered what was wrong with the students because I had amazing lesson plans. It was a tough semester and there was a point in my student teaching when I broke down and cried. I did not think I could finish my student teaching. I recall packing my belongings and telling my mentor teacher that I was leaving, literally out the classroom door. I remember telling him, I had not signed up to teach 48 students, most of who did not pay attention and had no desire to learn. I told him I had to reconsider my teaching career but did not feel I wanted to continue. He took me to our bilingual storage room and told me I could do it. I did not believe him. I could not teach students who did not want to learn. He firmly told me, “Miss Valenzuela, you have to know your students, you have to get to know them, know who you are teaching, and then everything is easy after that.” I, however, was unconvinced, and I was not interested in buying into his philosophy. All I wanted to do was get out of that school and away from all those ungrateful students.

A year later, I found myself teaching at a middle school. I was teaching Spanish Language Arts and ESL. I still had not taken my mentor’s advice into consideration; I didn’t do so until I was in my third year of teaching middle school. At that time, I began to really
listen and build relationships with my students. I began to ask them about their lives, what they liked, and what they wanted to learn. I started to incorporate my own struggles as an ESL student, and I shared how I had grown up in poverty. I shared memories of my childhood living in the shadows and facing racial microaggressions from students at school. I was called “wetback” without knowing what the word meant. Acknowledging the similarities between my childhood struggles and those of my students allowed me to begin to better understand them. The pedagogical utility of acknowledging and affirming the commonalties in our lived experiences opened a new world of teaching for me. The students felt encouraged by my story and applauded my successes. They learned how poverty affects our minds and can determine the goals we set for ourselves. They also discovered that it can sometimes push us to break free from stereotypes. As a result, it is easier to speak up, stand up, and be proud of who you are, to pursue your dreams, and to not let anything hold you back.

I tell this story because it is important in contextualizing how I came to understand the importance of teacher–student relationships in urban schools that primarily serve Mexican immigrant, bilingual/bicultural, transnational students of color. Today, the research is clear regarding what makes teachers effective when working in urban settings with students of color: “From child psychology to pedagogical theory to cognitive theory, our most basic understanding of the necessary conditions for learning suggest that positive self-identity, a sense of purpose, and hope are critical prerequisites for achievement” (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 635). In this chapter I examine the ways in which Carlos, José, Gloria, Esperanza, Juan, and Guadalupe narrated how they experienced “deep and authentic caring” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 21) with their teachers and how these teacher–student relationships
nurtured and cultivated their self-identity, self-esteem, and sense of purpose and hope. They also addressed how their teachers’ pedagogical practices made the curriculum relevant to their lived experiences, their communities, and their cultural and linguistic histories.

**Teacher–Student Relationships**

A teacher–student relationship is important in the process of nurturing and cultivating a student’s self-identity and in building self-esteem. This process begins in elementary school, and positive teacher–student relationships become increasingly important in middle school. According to the students I interviewed for this study, teachers who had the most impact in cultivating strong cultural identity and positive self-esteem were those who displayed the following attributes: respect/respeto, ethnic and cultural similarities with their students, and connecting with students through the process of sharing narratives/testimonios. When asked about their middle school experiences, participants named and described teachers who had a major impact in their schooling process. José’s perspective illustrates how a teacher had an impact on his schooling:

Mm... [laughs] They were all supportive because those teachers knew what it was like to grow up in areas how we grew up. And most of those teachers had humble upbringings and some didn’t, but the ones who didn't still understood the situation that the students were in—Mr. White, Mrs. Moreno, and Miss Valenzuela. Mr. White, I remember when I met him, he told me he could tell I was a kid with pent-up anger and like I didn't know how to release it. He told me you can use that frustration to hinder, hurt people, cause harm or you can use that pent-up frustration and help people. It was true; at the moment I was very angry with people. Mrs. Moreno taught me the importance of school and why you should go because culturally our people
[Mexicans] don't really go to school like Americans. We don't come here [the United States] to succeed; we just come here to work, but that's not always true. Then Miss Valenzuela taught me the importance of speaking my language and English and why it's important to go to school and succeed and be proud of your heritage and people.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

José was influenced directly by these teachers. These teachers were able to openly speak about their own experiences and challenges, allowing José to first connect to the teacher as a person, then as a teacher, and finally as a role model. He continued with his experience in Mrs. Moreno’s 8th grade class:

Classes I liked the most was social studies in middle school and ESL. I like those because I had Mrs. Moreno and Miss Valenzuela as teachers, and the way they taught was different and was suited to our culture [Mexican culture] because culturally they were like us. So it wasn't like teacher and student; it was more like friend and friend. Not that we were equals, but we could relate to them culturally and they were like us. They were human, they had been through what we been through, and so they understand. Miss Valenzuela grew up poor and in poverty, and Mrs. Moreno struggled with learning English. For example, like when Mrs. Moreno was telling us when she was trying to cross the border illegally, we all had respect for her because she was coming here to make money and make her life better, and that's what a lot of people from Mexico do. You know that's like the stereotype, but then she figured out there is a better way to do this; she did it the right way, and all of us view that there is always a second option. We don't always have to live up to our cultural stereotype.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)
José went on to speak about my class and how we made a connection through reading Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

In Miss Valenzuela’s class we read a lot of poems and a lot of Shakespeare, and I remember reading *Romeo and Juliet*, and it’s not really the story that stuck with me. It stuck with me because Miss Valenzuela talked about how it took her a while to learn English and Spanish. She shared with us how she would repeat words 100 times to get the pronunciation correctly and how she would do other people’s homework because her father had injured his back and her mom was the only one working in a household of five. I remember her telling us about her sister stealing money from DECA [description] to purchase a milk gallon. She told us all these things because she wanted us to know it was going to be hard to understand certain things like Shakespeare, but we had too. She told us she would just go above and beyond trying to be the best that she could be, and it was around that time we were reading *Romeo and Juliet*, so it just stuck to me. She had a humble upbringing and she just wanted to do good just for herself and it taught me like I should do the same thing. There is no reason why I should lack in any subject. I should try and be the best I can be.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

The pedagogical practice that José describes speaks to my use of the CRT/LatCrit raced-gendered epistemologies (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010), which challenge Eurocentric epistemology and question dominant notions of meritocracy, objectivity, and knowledge. I was aware that due to historical and contemporary structural inequalities within public schools, my Mexican immigrant students had not had access to the English literary cannon. For me, it was more than teaching students about puns and figurative terminology in *Romeo*
and Juliet. I strove for my students to draw connections between the play and their own experiences by performing and embodying the play. I discussed the difficulties the students might face as they read through the play, and I advised them to practice as I did when I was learning English. I insisted that the difficulties and struggles would be difficult to overcome, and I made a conscious decision to tell the story of my family—*su lucha y sobrevivencia como inmigrantes mexicanos*. It is this familiar and collective narrative that most impacted José’s recollection of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

Similar to José, Carlos shares the positive impact of a teacher–student relationship on his educational life.

Sí me acuerdo mucho del maestro Mr. White a pesar de que él también era gringo hasta parece que hablaba mejor que yo pero si él también fue un maestro que me impactó en mi vida yo me imagino claro todo a su límite pero él jugaba con nosotros y nos regañaba claro jugando él solo se la regaba nos contaba chistes nos gustaba leer mucho y nos estaba leyendo un este un libro de del payaso *It* y cuando estaba describiendo el payaso *It* decía que según tenía una cabeza muy redonda y me acuerdo que él paró y riendo dijo una pinche cabezota como yo.

[Yes, I remember a lot of Mr. White. Even though he was White, it seemed he spoke better than me, but he was a teacher who made an impact on me. I imagine the way he would carry himself, the way he would do the lectures, the way he would talk to us, Yeah, he was a teacher, but it just seemed like he was like another student. Clearly, everything had its limits, but he would play with us and would have one up on us. For example, he would read to us and while he read to us the book *It*, when he would describe the clown *It*, he would say *It* had a big round head, and I remember he would]
stop and laugh and say, a big ass head like mine.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

The example we see here with Carlos and Mr. White is clearly that of a teacher using humor to create an environment comfortable enough for students to truly engage in the reading through the use of jokes and sarcasm. The teacher’s ability to connect and make fun of himself allows the students to see reading not as a tedious task but a fun task where the students and the teacher connect, and students can see the teacher as relatable. Mr. White was an Anglo male teacher born and raised in the Midwest. He grew up poor, in his own words as “white trash,” eating animal organs, shopping at the flea market, and living in run-down trailer parks. He drew on these lived experiences to connect and build a community of learners (Ladson-Billings, 1994) among his Mexican immigrant students. Furthermore, Mr. White’s pedagogical practice reflected culturally relevant approaches to teacher–student relationships that are “fluid, humanely equitable, and extend to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 60). Mr. White was highly involved in all aspects of the school community—tutoring after school, directing a rap group, and coordinating bilingual parent night. He also attended former Mexican immigrant students’ birthday parties, quinceañeras, and other community gatherings. For the students, Mr. White was buena gente; he embodied the Mexican cultural practices of solidaridad and convivencia, supporting la lucha de los inmigrantes mexicanos.

Like Carlos, Guadalupe had a similar experience with a teacher in middle school. She was able to connect with this teacher. In fact, his unconditional support outside the classroom allowed her to not drop out of 8th grade:
Él sí me ayudó mucho porque yo sí me molestaba, me enojaba conmigo misma porque no podía hacer lo que quería hacer y no le entendía a las cosas. Y yo decía aquí la dejo, aquí porque no le entendía y él me decía cálmate sí puedes, si yo lo pude hacer tú también lo puedes hacer. Pues le agradezco mucho por la ayuda de él porque sin él no hubiera estado aquí todavía o sea ya en la prepa porque supuestamente no hablaba muy bien el inglés y no entendía. Me iba a dejar en el mismo grado. Lo bueno que él no dejó que eso pasará dijo haz un esfuerzo y sigue adelante y vez que sí vas a poder.

[He did help me a lot because I would get mad at myself because I couldn’t do what I wanted to do, and I didn’t understand things. And I would say “I quit” because I didn’t understand. He would tell me, calm down. You can do it. If I did it, you can do it too. Well, I appreciate all his help because without him I still would be in middle school and not in high school. Supposedly, I didn’t speak English well, and I didn’t understand it, and I was going to stay another year. The good thing is that he didn’t allow it. He said try and you will see you can do it.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Guadalupe compared this teacher with her math teacher, who was born in Juárez, México. This teacher was encouraging and taught her math in a way similar to how Guadalupe had learned it in México. This teacher stood out because she never gave up on Guadalupe. She did not move on from a math explanation until all her students learned the concept. She also modified lessons, allowed for extra time, and provided tutoring for Guadalupe. All of these accommodations were administered without passing judgment or putting down Guadalupe or her classmates.
Una maestra de matemáticas ella es la que me ayudaba y me decía, yo te entiendo, aquí tienen diferentes maneras para enseñar las matemáticas si quieres yo te demuestro como lo haz aprendido en México. Pues ella me ayudó, porque ella era de Juárez y ella misma dijo que ella vino para acá [a los Estados Unidos] para seguir estudiando lo que ella quería seguir estudiando, porque allá [en México] era mucho dinero para pagar y por eso se vino para acá y termino su carrera por eso era mi maestra y nos enseñaba como hacerlo la manera juarense como le dicen. Con ella aprendí más las matemáticas. Entonces ella sabía que muchos de nosotros éramos de Juárez y ella nos preguntaba y hablaba con nosotros de nuestras vidas en México nos explicaba con mucho respeto. Por eso creo yo que ella quería ayudarnos.

[A math teacher, she is the one who helped me and told me, “I understand you, here they have different ways to teach mathematics if you want, I can show you how you learned it in Mexico.” Well, she helped me because she was from Juárez and she herself said that she came here [to the United States] to continue studying what she wanted to continue studying, because there [in Mexico] was a lot of money to pay and that’s why she came to the U.S. Here she finished her career. That’s why she was my teacher, and she did teach us how to do it the Juarez way, as they say. With her I learned more math. Then she knew that many of us were from Juárez, and she asked us and talked with us about our lives in Mexico. She explained to us with great respect. That’s why I think she wanted to help us.] (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

In Guadalupe’s view, her math teacher’s pedagogical praxis centered on building what Valenzuela (1999) referred to as “deep and authentic caring” (p. 21) with students based on
“reciprocal opportunities to share their lives and connect with students at an emotional level” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006, p. 128). Moreover, this teacher also demonstrated deep and authentic caring by ensuring that students understood the math curriculum; she adjusted her teaching to meet their diverse learning styles. For Guadalupe, this middle school math teacher embodied the Mexican cultural values of *respeto, cariño* and *paciencia*.

Similarly, Gloria talked about her 4th-grade teacher, whom she stated encouraged her to enjoy reading when she was a student in elementary school.

My 4th-grade teacher I believe it was. She really helped us [students]. I enjoyed learning because she connected it [reading/learning] with fun activities not just straight bookwork, and so we would have recess and when we would come back instead of getting straight to work, she would read to us. Then say we were going to play a game for 15 minutes and she’d be like, “OK, we are going to read a book, but you guys are going to try to act out what we read.” That was the game. So she tried teaching us in a different way instead of just, here is a book, write a summary.

Because of her, I really enjoy reading. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Both Gloria and Esperanza had positive experiences with the teachers who allowed them to take ownership of their learning. Esperanza spoke about a middle school teacher who, after she told him she wanted to be a veterinarian, allowed her to oversee the classroom pets. This teacher had snakes, gerbils, and birds in the classroom. Aware of Esperanza’s high interest in working with animals, he provided her with the opportunity to lead in the care of the classroom pets in middle school:

Oh, I have to say science was my favorite class, because I was always with Mr. Wolf, in his classroom. He would always have animals in his class and I wanted to be a
vetranian. He had asked us what we were interested in, and I shared my interest and desire to work with animals, and so he would always have me take care of his snakes, gerbils, birds, and everything else, and I really liked that. He trusted me and allowed me to supervise the animals and I felt empowered. I loved it. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Esperanza went on to speak about her experience in middle school and feeling she belonged because she was in the bilingual track. Her teammates and everyone in the bilingual track formed a family—a sense of belonging and having each other’s back in times of need. In the event that one of them needed help with homework or did not understand a concept, they were there for one another.

Esperanza was able to experience a sense of community at her middle school. The Mexican immigrants were grouped in the bilingual track, where they were able to convivir and support each other. This convivencia allowed her to feel accepted, supported and, most importantly, it gave her a sense of belonging. Anzaldua’s (1987) concept of nepantla highlights how Mexican Americans are subjects who are in constant transition; they are “sandwiched between two cultures” (p. 100), and their reality allows for a form of transformation. It is within this navigation process that Mexican American students become aware of the inequalities in their daily schooling and educational experiences. Therefore, when teachers create a place (a physical location such as at the classroom) like the one Esperanza described, they are opening a safe space where students are allowed to assert their cultural and linguistic identities.

In response to my question how do teachers show they value your culture and language in their classroom?, Juan described his experience:
Notably, Juan’s teachers created a sense of critical hope with their students. They saw their students as their own children (Delpit, 1995; Duncan-Andrade, 2007). Juan’s teachers developed meaningful relationships and maintained high expectations of all their Mexican immigrant children. Their purpose as educators was not just teaching; it was also building hope and developing a positive self-identity and self-esteem. It was about encouraging those students who normally are not encouraged to believe in themselves (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).
Knowledge of Self Begins at Home (*La Educación y la Pedagogía del Hogar*)

I remember my mom telling my sisters and I how we had two choices: to work or to attend school. I also remember her telling us she would support us 100% if we decided to continue with our education. She never once complained because we had to work on assignments or read a book; instead she encouraged us to complete our degrees and continue with education. She sacrificed her own educational development to have her daughters earn master’s and doctoral degrees. It is this *pedagogía del hogar* that I implement in my teaching.

In my pedagogical practice, I use *testimonios* and *consejos* and set high expectations for all my students. I first get to know them. I ask about them—who they are, where they come from—to build a solid relationship that is rooted in “deep and authentic care” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 140). When I taught in middle school, I would go out and play soccer with my students, and I would find out what they disliked in a teacher and who they respected. I always try to include everyone in my classroom by building a *familia y comunidad*. I would tell them we were all a family and we all needed to help each other. When one was weak, we were all weak. I learned this again from my mother and her struggle to keep her daughters united and her family together in a foreign country. She taught my sisters and me to always look after one another and care for each other. My teaching pedagogy is not only driven by theory and traditional methodology; it is also driven by compassion, hope, unconditional love, and support from my upbringing and current disposition in life. I always tell my students I am the teacher but that what holds me in this place is my *familia*, my sisters, my *comunidad*, and my mentors. All these people have believed in me and have never stopped holding me up. They are my pillars.
The participants in this study shared very strong family cultural upbringings, which helped them in building knowledge of self. The participants stated how their parents and/or guardians encouraged and motivated them to pursue their dreams and meet their desire to graduate and have a stable future. Their families were imparting familial capital (Yosso, 2005)—cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. In response to my question how do your parents encourage you? Guadalupe spoke about her parents’ desire for her to have a stable, non-difficult life:

La verdad son amables, pero pueden ser un poco duros, quieren que tenga buenas calificaciones. Bueno no quieren que nomás esté distraída en otras cosas, quieren que esté enfocada nomás en eso en poder tener una educación buena, para que ellos estén felices de tener una hija que ya tenga su carrera. Mi hermano mayor, él ya tiene su carrera, él es asistente de dentista. Y pues sí, sí me motiva sí me dice que, aunque esté burra, aunque yo no le entiendo a las cosas en la escuela tengo que intentar de entender. Hacer mi carrera y que estudie lo que yo quiera. Él siempre me dice que él estaba igual y que no está fácil. Tienes que trabajar por lo que quieres ya cuando lo tengas vas estar libre y vas estar bien, vas a tener una vida buena. Sí me motiva bastante mi hermano. Pero mi familia me apoya y me dice que sí se puede que no tengo que trabajar solo estudiar. Mis padres me dicen también que ayude a los demás que con hablar dos idiomas puedo ayudar a mucha gente pues hablo los dos idiomas en la escuela y donde pueda ayudarle a la gente a traducir. Eso sí mis padres me inculcaron ayudar a mi comunidad, mi raza.
[The truth is they are friendly, but they can be a bit tough. They want me to have good grades. Well, they don't want me to be distracted by other things. They just want me to focus on that to have a good education, so they are happy to have a daughter who has a career. My older brother, he already has his career; he is a dentist's assistant. And yes, he motivates me. He tells me that although I am slow and I do not understand everything at school, I have to try to understand, do my career, and study what I want. He always tells me that he was the same and that it is not easy. You have to work for what you want, and when you have it, you will be free and you will be fine; you will have a good life. Yes, my brother motivates me a lot. But my family supports me and tells me that I don't have to work, just to study. My parents tell me also to help others, that by speaking two languages I can help many people because I speak both languages at school and where I can help people translate. Of course, my parents instilled in me to help my community, my race.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Like Guadalupe, Juan spoke about being proud of his culture and speaking Spanish to show his loyalty to his home country of Mexico. Most importantly, he spoke of how his mother fostered this convivencia here in the United States. Juan mentioned how he considered himself Juarense before anything else, then Mexican. He talked about his mom’s insistence on keeping the family close, and this made him very proud of being a Mexican. Juan stated that in 2011 his mom, as a single parent, made the decision to migrate to the United States because of the violence terrorizing Juarez, Mexico:

Aquí siempre hacemos lo mismo que hacíamos en Juárez, celebramos y convivimos todo el tiempo, celebramos cumpleaños y La Navidad. A mi mamá le gusta que
salgamos juntos en familia y así como salíamos en México. También preparamos comida y ayudamos a mi mamá limpiar la casa. A mi mamá también le gusta contarnos historias de México para que no se nos olvide como México es. Nos motiva mucho, a mí me motiva contándome de su pasado de cómo fue su vida dura porque ella no tuvo sus padres. Me dice que yo tengo más oportunidad que las que ella tuvo. Me dice que acabe mi carrera porque no quiere que sufra como mi hermano que trabaja de noche y se friega mucho por poco dinero. Me pone de ejemplo a mis hermanos porque ellos ya no pudieron estudiar no pudieron terminar la carrera en México porque les hacía falta dinero.

[Here we always do the same as we did in Juarez. We celebrate and live together all the time. We celebrate birthdays and Christmas. My mother likes to go out together as a family like we went out in Mexico. We also prepare food and help my mom clean the house. My mom also likes to tell us stories about Mexico, so we don't forget what Mexico is like. It motivates us a lot. She motivates me by telling me about her past about how hard her life was because she didn't have her parents. She tells me that I have more opportunity than she had. She tells me to finish my career because she doesn't want me to suffer like my brother, who works at night and works hard for little money. She uses my brothers as an example because they couldn't study anymore. They couldn't finish their careers in Mexico because they needed money.] (Interview translated August 5, 2017)

Through Guadalupe’s and Juan’s narratives, I learned that their parents taught them life lessons. The participants heard accounts of how their parents faced life challenges in Mexico and, through hearing these accounts, they were encouraged to keep going and to know and
sustain their culture. At the same time, these accounts conveyed the importance of taking advantage of whatever opportunities they have in the United States. Storytelling by parents and elders during celebrations helped foster this knowledge and self-esteem in the students in this study.

Gloria spoke about certain cultural celebrations that helped her build knowledge of her culture and how she gained an understanding of her mother’s love for and pride in that culture. In turn, these values of love and pride are at the foundation of confidence and self-empowerment. When I asked how do your parents show they are proud of their culture? Do they celebrate a special holiday, cook certain foods, or carry on a tradition?, Gloria responded:

My mom has more pride because she was born in Mexico, so she will blast her Mexican music without any shame because I know there are people who are proud to be Mexicans but hide it because they are in a different country, and they say, Oh no, we are in a different country. We can’t be showing how Mexican we are, and my mom doesn’t care. I love that from her because my mom will blast the radio with all her old-school Mexican music. She doesn’t care. For the holidays like for Christmas, my family likes making tamales, and then for New Year’s they like making menudo and posole. We celebrate in a family setting. A lot of the same celebrations my parents grew up in Mexico they continue to celebrate here. Plus, my parents are Catholic, so in Mexico they celebrate El Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe, so my parents celebrate this day here. We go to church and see the Matachines dancers.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)
Esperanza responded similarly to other participants when asked this question. Her parents instilled a sense of pride through storytelling and narrating events they experienced in Mexico. They celebrated like they did in Mexico. They cooked the same food, listened to music, and watched Spanish-language TV shows. Esperanza and Gloria both visited Mexico often to spend time with their relatives. Esperanza said:

I would have to say my parents encourage me, the way they relate my life to their life. In a sense they don’t want me to end up like them. They want me to have a good education and I have always known that, so I usually try my best at school. They always tell me how they want me to graduate. They want me to have a career, and they don’t want me to end up like them because my dad didn’t go to college; neither did my mom. They don’t really major in anything. They don’t have papers, so it’s hard for them to get good jobs, so they are working in whatever they get. They tell me the reason they left Mexico was because they couldn’t get any good jobs. My dad was the one who wanted to come over here [the United States] because he didn’t have anything over there money-wise. Jobs weren’t really available at the time then my mom was pregnant from my older brother. And I guess my oldest brother was born and my dad wanted to give him a brighter future and better college to attend and so he thought that if they migrated here before he was born, he would be a citizen, but my mom gave birth in Mexico. (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

Esperanza’s mom, like the rest of the participants, had a sense of high familial capital. Esperanza’s extended family as well as her nuclear family nurtured and sustained their cultural traditions within their family circle. According to Yosso (2005), “from these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its
resources” (p. 79). These communal bonds are also seen in African American communities (Foley, 1997). The narratives of participants’ parents encouraged participants to help others like them. Carlos, who has a brother with special needs, spoke about the responsibility of translating for his mother at doctor’s visits. He stated how his dad encouraged him to play soccer to stay connected to his culture.

Soy mexicano, porque así me enseñaron mis papas, claro nací en México pero me criaron aquí, en Estados Unidos. Pero mis padres me motivan mucho, mi papá siempre me empuja a jugar soccer, en nuestra casa siempre estamos viendo un partido de soccer.

[I am a big soccer freak, love to play it. I feel proud when I play soccer it reminds me of my culture and that’s how I show I am a Mexican. That is not the only way to show I am proud of being a Mexican. My parents during our meals when we gather with the family, my parents talk about Mexico. My grandparents live with us and they tell us about the good days, the ranch days. It is nice to hear them talk about the rancho, how their life used to be in Mexico.] (Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

José, who lives with his grandmother, stated that his grandmother’s tough life encouraged him to be focused and go to school. He also stated that his grandmother encouraged him to celebrate his culture through cooking, speaking, and carrying out Mexican traditions. These cultural linkages have grounded him:

Mostly, it is my grandmothers’ lifestyle that encourages me because they [grandparents] had a rough lifestyle because they didn’t go to school and succeeded in having a career. She sits and talks to me about her lifestyle, and I always ask her questions about their life in Mexico. My grandmother also likes for us to celebrate
our culture’s holidays; we always eat our Mexican food, we speak Spanish, we go to restaurants and stores that are centered around our culture. I am proud of my culture. I am proud to speak the language and eat our Mexican food. I also like correcting other people when they are ignorant about my culture. My grandmother only speaks Spanish, and she speaks a lot of Spanish with me. I think it’s important to know my culture.

(Interview transcribed August 5, 2017)

As Mexican immigrants living in the United States, the parents of my students’ had firsthand experience of the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination based on their ethnicity, class, immigration status, and language. Having experienced racism in its various forms, they nurtured and cultivated their children’s cultural and linguistic identities and armed them with strategies of resistance. The testimonios of Guadalupe, Gloria, Esperanza, Carlos, and José reveal how their parents were enacting pedagogies of the home through their consejos, cultural stories of lucha, sobrevivencia, y resistencia and encouragement and how they privileged familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Since parents play a vital role in familial capital, the participants were able to access students’ cultural and linguistic capital. Their parents not only emphasized going to school and getting an education; they nurtured their children’s cultural and linguistic capital to apply it to their real-world experiences and to communicate with different audiences (Yosso, 2005).

Furthermore, the parents and siblings in Guadalupe’s, Juan’s, and Carlos’s cases provided them with aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). These parents and older siblings were vital in keeping the participants motivated and focused on achieving their educational dreams amidst their struggles and challenges at school. Yosso’s aspirational and familial capitals are demonstrated and highlighted in how these participants’ teachers conducted their classes and
in the support the parents and siblings provided for them. Mrs. Moreno’s, Mr. White’s, and my *testimonios* and *funds of knowledge* inspired and encouraged these students to accept their cultural and linguistic capital and allowed for students’ cultural knowledge to enter a “learning space” (Prieto & Villenas, 2016, p. 55).

In the next chapter, I provide recommendations regarding curriculum and instruction. I speak about centering our classroom as an extension of our home and building deep, authentic, meaningful relationships with students to acknowledge their humanity and develop their self-esteem, self-love, and sense of hope.
CHAPTER 7: TOWARD A PEDAGOGÍA DEL CARIÑO

I want to be a teacher because I feel teachers have very important jobs to do. They teach children, the younger generations, and that’s important because the younger generations are eventually going to become the future, and I feel teachers are similar to doctors, because doctors can perform heart surgery and save a person, but teachers can reach into that person’s heart and save them, and for that reason they are both as valuable. (José, participant, interviewed August 5, 2017)

José told me at the end of his 8th-grade year he wanted to be a teacher. I was very surprised when he told me he would be back, not to visit me but as a colleague. I told him I would be glad to see him and work with him. He had struggled a lot in middle school and was labeled as a troubled student with a learning disability. After his last IEP in late May before his 8th-grade year ended, he was happy and excited because I made the recommendation for him to exit special education services. His grandmother agreed, and I gave her my cell number to call me if he fell behind in his high school classes. José had lived with her since his mother passed away early during his elementary years.

José’s dreams didn’t end in 8th grade; they continued as he went on to high school. Three years later, our paths crossed again when he was a senior, 18 years old, and ready to graduate. I was so proud of him. He took my Spanish Language Arts class and was ecstatic to see me. He was taller and very mature. He came up to me and said he was going to be a teacher and teach middle school ESL and that he was going to teach Shakespeare just the way I had. He told me he was taking AP World History, which he earned an A in during his senior year. He also asked me to gown him for his May graduation—a privilege reserved for a parent.
José, like other students of color, scored below average on a standardized test and could not complete a packet of homework because there was nobody who could help him. In elementary school, José cut his hair and left chunks of long and short hair all over his head. His grandmother had no choice but to shave the remaining hair off. When José returned to school, he refused to remove his hoodie or participate in any classroom activities. His teacher never called his grandmother or asked him directly why he had his hoodie on or why he refused to remove it during class. Instead, his elementary school teacher considered it defiant behavior toward adults and labeled him learning disabled with behavioral problems. If the school had contacted his grandmother, they would have known why he refused to take his hoodie off. After his grandmother shared this experience with me, I asked José, and he simply replied he was afraid of getting bullied and made fun at. He did not want to call attention to himself because of him being bald and therefore refused to participate in class.

José’s educational experience is only one example of what some Mexican students face in the classroom and educational system. Like José, many of these students are categorized as behaviorally deviant, students with disabilities, or language deficient in English. Similarly, José’s educators continued to perpetuate this deficit paradigm of thinking that has detrimental consequences in the educational development and achievements of students of color. Such “Mexican problem” deficit thinking overtly distorts, omits, and stereotypes Mexican, Chicana/o, Latina/o, African American, Asian Pacific Islander, and Native Americans (Acuña, 1998; Flores, 2005, Gonzales, 1999; Spring, 2001; Yosso, 2002). José’s lived experience illustrates how early in his schooling years he was facing racial aggressions as a student in the educational system. His schooling experience, like that of many of his counterparts in this study, reflects the intercentricity of race and racism. In
elementary school, José had no meaningful relationships with his teachers. His grandmother felt she had no power to advocate for her grandson, making it easy for José to be tracked into special education and labeled as a troubled student.

I began this chapter with Jose’s narrative because counter-storytelling is an essential part of CRT. It illustrates how the intercentrality of race and racism with other forms of subordination continues to be a detrimental factor in the academic outcomes of students of color. Additionally, the significance of experiential knowledge within CRT acknowledges that the lived experiences of people of color are central to challenging the dominant discourse and ideologies found within their schooling experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Founded in borderlands/Chicanx/Latinx theories, the counter-storytelling of students of color shifts their knowledge and cultural and linguistic experiences from the margins to the center.

I came to know José in 8th grade and discovered his love for writing when I taught my unit on poetry. José was what you call a loner; he did not speak to anyone, nor did he have friends to “hang” with at lunch time. During his 8th-grade year, he would show up at my classroom during lunch. Sometimes I thought he would lie about not having his work completed just to hang out in my classroom. I normally had students work in my classroom during lunch when their assignments were not completed or when they needed extra help. When he showed up, I noticed he was always writing in a black notebook. One day I asked him what the notebook was for. I remember him handing me the notebook and reading what he had in it. I was surprised because he had poems and songs. His writing rhymed, and poetry was a way for José to cope and an outlet for his frustrations. José had become a regular in my classroom, and we had developed a bond of trust. My classroom had become a space of
where he felt comfortable. As described earlier, I encouraged José to join the Rap Club at school. I told him I did not see why he was letting his talent go to waste if he already had a notebook filled with rhymes. He was very hesitant and always replied with a firm “no.” I did not let that deter me from insisting he join the club. On maybe my fifth attempt, I was able to convince him, saying, “at least give it a shot, try it.” During his visits with me at lunch, I also slowly began to ask him questions about his family, and at times I shared my food with him. I quickly gained his trust, and soon he was able to disclose his concerns and doubts about his future. For many of my students, our lunch time gatherings in my classroom became a place of convivencia in which confianza, respeto, cariño, and solidaridad were established. I use Villenas’s (2005) definition of convivencia as communalism; Villenas explored themes “centered on faith, spirituality and humor central to creating compassionate spaces of resilience, resistance, and innovation” (p. 273). I expand her notion of convivencia to include a space centered on building caring and meaningful relationships based on trust, respect, and a sense of critical hope.

Through convivencia, José told me about how he helped his grandmother prepare meals because of her diabetes and its effect on her daily activities. He spoke of his hatred toward his dad and how he loved his five siblings. José was not the only student who would join me for lunch. My classroom became a space centered on building caring and meaningful relationships. Some students were not in my classes but would convivir with us anyway. I can say we developed a sense of familia, and sometimes students would bring home-cooked food and share it with rest of the group. As a result of this connectedness through convivencia, I noticed students participating more during regular class time. These students
that I had *convivir* with participated more freely in class. I realized they seemed more likely to raise their hands and answer questions during class.

My classroom became a place of *convivencia* created by my students and me that allowed for a compassionate space centered in authentic deep caring. This was a space and place in which my students’ humanity was asserted and where their self-love and self-esteem thrived. Speaking to the concept of *convivencia*, Cammarota and Romero (2006) stated that educators attend to students’ overall well-being when they connect with the students on an emotional level by (a) providing reciprocal opportunities to share their lives, (b) demonstrating compassion for the dehumanizing experiences students of color encounter, and (c) situating learning in social issues that are relevant to the experiences of marginalized communities. (p. 22)

My students and I developed this connectedness and meaningful relationships 30 minutes a day during lunch time, and it made a tremendous difference in all our lives. Often, educators underestimate the impact of building meaningful relationships with our students. Teachers benefit from meaningful relationships. Unfortunately, other factors such as preparing our students for high-stakes assessments or adhering to state-sanctioned curricular standards get in the way of cultivating strong teacher–student relationships. Kohl (1998) reminded us that we forget how. A teacher's job is to not only engage students’ imaginations, but also to persuade them that they are people of worth who can accomplish something in a difficult world, even if it is through brief connections and daily conversation at school.

As a critically conscious educator, my goals have been to engage my students, to gain a deeper understanding of who they are and how their life experiences have shaped them, and to create a sense of hope, respect, and trust through a culturally relevant curriculum. Having
students of color see themselves as creators of knowledge through relationships, relevance, and responsibility in the classroom space has allowed me to use this framework to structure culturally relevant curriculum and to challenge the dominant ideology that refutes the notion that everyone can succeed if they only try. For some educators, setting up an environment centered on relationships, relevance, and responsibility may be a genuine challenge. In any case, I don’t fit into the conventional educator model or definition. In the process of developing meaningful relationships, teachers also create a sense of hope and a sense of self-esteem. In the case of José, he came into my classroom as a timid young man who would rather spend his lunch break in my classroom. By providing a space where he and other students developed confianza and trust through our convivencia, he was able to build a sense of self-esteem that allowed him to join a club and rap about his anger and fears. José learned to trust me enough to join a club, and he later went on to perform in the school’s talent show and at local elementary schools.

Kohl (1998) spoke about developing hope and meaningful relationships with our students of color. He addressed the importance of projecting hope to our students and the importance of maintaining hope as a key component in our classroom; without hope, “what’s the point of passing a Regent’s exam if you believe the college won’t accept you? What’s the point of doing well in school if you know at the end of schooling all you will get is a McDonald’s job?” (p. 3). Kohl’s (1998) concept of hope was a key component in developing relationships with my students. In establishing these relationships, my students developed a strong sense of self-esteem fostered from a sense of hope. To establish this sense of hope, I began my lessons with an anecdote in which I spoke about my own sobrevivencia and resiliency. I shared stories of critical hope about my life as an immigrant child living in
poverty to build knowledge of self in my curriculum. I explicitly used projects where students were able to use their cultural capital as a source of knowledge and in which their counter-stories were as valuable as what we read in a textbook.

**Relationships, Relevance, and Responsibility**

My *pedagogia de cariño* centers on my life experiences as a student and teacher. Further, it builds upon Duncan-Andrade’s (2019) noted research in which he identifies the practices of the most effective educators and their success when teaching any students relationship, relevance, and responsibility. These three domains are what I identify as my pillars in establishing a counter-hegemonic curriculum. I define relationships as a meaningful, trusting and authentic *cariño* between teacher and student. Students must know they are loved and cared for in a classroom. They need to feel assured they are safe and respected by their teacher. José spoke about teachers who stood out or had an impact on him:

> These teachers taught us differently. [Their teaching] was suited to our culture because culturally they were like us, so it wasn’t like a teacher and student relationship; it was like friend and friend with respect, because they [the teachers] could relate to us and us to them.

In terms of establishing relationships, Duncan-Andrade (2019) specified that without deep, meaningful relationships, students cannot connect and will not learn from their teachers. Within the field of neuroscience, scientists have found that without the connectedness that comes from attached relationships, it is much more difficult to learn (Duncan-Andrade, 2019; Sapolsky, 2004).

Relevance is another pillar I use to create a counter-hegemonic curriculum. After a teacher has established a meaningful relationship with her students, she must focus on the
curriculum having relevance. Duncan-Andrade (2019) emphasized the importance of curriculum that reflects students’ lives, communities, families, and ethnic, cultural, and linguistic history. The students must be able to learn about their linguistic history and use their community cultural capital in ways they have not been given the opportunity to. Centering these lived experiences allows students to build knowledge of self. When I asked Carlos if any teacher other than me had taught lessons that reflected his lived experiences, his community, or his culture, he replied, “Nunca. Never, never. Most of the time the teachers in other classes made eye contact with everyone but me, so it’s like, you know I was there but not there.” Carlos skipped classes such as history, English, and math because he felt uncomfortable and unwelcome. In contrast, in his Spanish Language Arts class, he wanted to attend and was ready to participate: “I actually wanted to go to your class and be ready for you to ask me questions. I was ready to raise my hand and participate and get the right answer.”

Relevance builds self-esteem and critical hope. Having meaningful teacher–student relationships and connections with what is being taught allows students to develop a strong self-esteem that will then allow them to self-actualize (Maslow, 1943). José is an example of a student who was able to develop self-esteem and thus self-actualize. He was able to exit out of special education, enroll in AP courses in high school, graduate, and apply to a university. Currently, José is in his junior year of college, earning a bachelor’s in secondary education.

Critical hope is also a key component of relevance in countering the hegemonic curriculum. Duncan-Andrade (2019) described critical hope as the impetus for students to navigate toxic stress. Hope is critical when students are trying to effectively navigate stereotype threat (Steele, 2010). Stereotype threat can block neuropathways in the brain and
blocks students from reaching their full potential. It stops students from achieving any growth because they believe they cannot perform well on tests, pass a class, or complete an assignment because they have been told they are not smart, not good enough, or are inherently inferior. Yet when students can interrupt stereotype threat through critical hope, they see themselves beyond the stereotype created by dominant White ideology and they are able to break away from this blockage to excel and self-actualize (Steele, 2010). José clearly engaged in critical hope when he described, “we [Mexican immigrants] don’t always have to live up to our cultural stereotypes, because we don’t all just come here [the United States] to work.”

The last pillar I utilize is responsibility. This pillar focuses on teachers having a growth mindset, where they can see their students as intelligent beings and are responsive to students with the most trauma. Those students who have been hurt emotionally and physically need the most from us (Duncan-Andrade, 2019). As teachers, we must avoid all forms of inequality in our classroom; we need to establish more responsive and equitable classrooms. This pillar recognizes a teacher’s responsibility to find other forms of negotiating student behavior and providing students alternative pathways to manage their behavior. As educators, we need to meet the needs of all our students, especially those who need the most support from us in the classroom. I provided critical hope for José as I acknowledged my responsibility to advocate on his behalf to exit him out of special education.

CRT/LatCrit/Borderlands Theory

Historically, students of color have been faced with many deficit myths about their learning abilities and their lack of educational success. Mexican students have faced a deficit narrative when trying to achieve educational success (Carger, 1996; Valdés, 1997;
Valenzuela, 1999, Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Therefore, it is imperative to use CRT to challenge this dominant ideology which is harmful to students of color. I deconstructed this deficit myth and challenge these claims by focusing on CRT’s second tenet, which refutes the claims of educational institutions that they engage objectivity, meritocracy, equal opportunity, colorblindness, and race neutrality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In addition, I used CRT’s fourth tenet, which speaks to the centrality of experiential knowledge and building on Mexican students’ lived experiences when developing a counter-hegemonic curriculum. My goal in this research was to use student’s family histories, biographies, cuentos (stories), testimonios, and storytelling to challenge the dominant ideology. I used students’ cultural, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2006) as means to build from student’s knowledge and deliver a curriculum that addressed and challenged the deficit narrative. Because I did so, the students were able to understand how the intercentricity of race and racism works in the schooling process. Students were able to learn how racism works in relation to immigration status, phenotype, class, and gender (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). José, Guadalupe, Carlos, Gloria, Esperanza, and Juan attended school during Donald Trump’s racist political campaign. These students were still in school when Trump became president. They had to witness and experience racism directed at them and their family because of their immigration status and physical appearance. In my classroom, they were in a safe place and space to write, speak, and share their lived experiences while learning to “double move” (Bejarano, 2005; Cruz, 2006; Elenes 1997) and subvert and challenge the dominant colonial paradigm. My Mexican American students learned to navigate, recognize, and resist racism, thus subverting the paradigm. In this space, I was able to create a sense of
belonging and a sense of community and respect with my culturally and linguistically diverse students (Yosso, 2005).

When I asked Gloria and Esperanza if their school valued their culture, language, and family, they were able to identify how their English teacher’s race neutrality was nothing more than a camouflage for racism. Esperanza said, “our English teacher always said ‘My favorite students have always been immigrants,’ but yet she voted for someone who is against immigrants and still says, ‘Oh, I did it for you guys.’ It’s like, ‘No, you didn’t; you can’t be saying you’re doing something for us when those immigrants he [Donald Trump] is bashing on are our family members.” Esperanza recognized the hypocrisy she encountered in teachers who were supposedly pro-immigrant. She said,

You tried to help us through everything [Trump’s campaign] but... you know a certain teacher voted for Trump, and it’s not like I have anything against them voting, but I find it hypocritical how she would always tell us that she knew what we were going through, she knew about our struggles, and yet she voted for Trump after she said she wouldn’t let any harm come to us or our parents.

Because of their facultad, Gloria and Esperanza were able to “sense, or to see beyond what is at the superficial surface” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 61) in school and had learned to recognize how dominant groups use color blindness to cover their racism and political agendas.

Founded on CRT and borderlands theory, LatCrit allows for a theorizing lens that acknowledges Mexican American students’ strengths, such as language, bilingualism, immigration status, ethnicity, culture, identity, community, and gender, as part of school curriculum. LatCrit theory is central to my research interest because it addresses the education of Mexican American students since it provides “a space for alternative
epistemologies” within a physical place and social space like my classroom during lunch or after school (Elenes & Bernal, 2010, p. 72). Anchoring my own pedagogical practices in CRT/LaCrit allowed me to integrate a critical race curriculum founded “on the relationship between land and identity, place and space and body as the center of colonial relations” (Elenes, Delgado 2010, p. 75). Such relationship is something Eurocentric curriculum does not allow in its traditional forms of instruction.

The strengths my students brought to class took a primary focus and were interwoven into what was learned and taught in the classroom. Most of the students I taught were living in one or more cultures and spoke more than one language, and they learned to straddle these two worlds (Anzaldúa, 1987). My Mexican American students were constantly discriminated against for being different or not accepted by the social norms of dominant society. My students developed an acute awareness and utilized la facultad when they no longer felt psychologically or physically safe. Living in what Anzaldúa (1987) theorized as nepantilism, “torn between ways” (p. 100), students of diverse cultural backgrounds who are bilingual, trilingual, tri-cultural, and “sandwiched between two cultures” (p. 100) are in a constant state of transition and transformation.

**Pedagogía del Cariño**

I often begin my teaching with a ¿Quién Soy Yo? presentation about myself as a way to deconstruct the stereotype of the traditional teacher. I start with my immigrant journey and the many borders I have crossed and am still crossing—those physical, imaginary, and metaphorical borders we as immigrants straddle. I tell my testimonio not as an example to follow, but because of the human value it possesses. When I embarked on this journey to
become a Spanish teacher, I made a promise to myself to provide all my students a space to learn their language, history, and culture.

When I began this teaching journey 14 years ago, I wanted to provide my students the space to tell their own narratives. As a young kid, I struggled with English and was placed in remedial programs and tested for special education. Fortunately, I did not let that define what I became. Instead, I was able to reclaim my history in the process of becoming a teacher.

Pedagogía del cariño has the power to transform schooling for immigrant, bilingual/bicultural, and transnational students of color. Pedagogía del cariño is rooted in the core tenets of cariño, convivencia, familia, respeto, and solidaridad. It is deeply rooted in educators acknowledging, honoring, and affirming students’ full humanity. The following pillars of pedagogía del cariño do not happen in isolation but instead are interwoven together.

Cariño is rooted in the notion that the classroom needs to be a place and space in which teacher–student relationships are based on authentic caring and in which both the teacher’s and students’ humanity are valued and affirmed. Valenzuela (1999) stated, “Caring theory addresses the need for pedagogy to follow and flow through relationships cultivated between teacher and student” (p. 21). Decades of research have demonstrated that teaching and learning are about building deep, meaningful relationships between teachers and students. The classroom must become an extension of the hogar where students and the teacher convivir together as a familia con cariño for the social-emotional well-being of each other and the whole.
One of the ways in which cariño was created in my classroom was through acts of compartir and convivir. On many occasions, students arranged to bring homemade comida to compartir with their classmates during class time. We would collect $1.00 or spare change from everyone to order pizza on Fridays, and sometimes we would have yogurt and granola or pancakes. I was very aware that some students relied on food stamps and didn’t have money to purchase pizza or pancakes, and many students had not had breakfast. Once, we did not have any savings left and one of my students found $20.00 while playing basketball at the park. Without telling anyone beforehand, he showed up that week with a gallon of orange juice and two boxes of doughnuts; he was very proud he had money left over to buy milk for his two younger siblings.

Through this collecting of money and sharing of food, juntos as teacher and students we connected, and “the feelings of caring that came with loving, serving, and giving” (Prieto & Villenas, 2012, p. 426) thrived in the classroom. Another example of how cariño was at the core of my pedagogy is an incident in which one of my students, Mariana, was faced with an injustice. She walked into the classroom upset because she was accused of taking a container of Wite-Out from her math teacher’s desk. Mariana was so frustrated and unable to focus as I explained our lesson that I stopped and asked her directly what had happened. The whole class sat still and listened to her recount the incident.

My classroom cariño created a place for my students to share their testimonios, family concerns, and problems. They were able to speak about parents being deported and students not having legal status and to ask questions about politics and where to call about issues concerning their familias. For me, “enacting and fostering cariño involved cultivating student’s wholeness and inner selves” (Prieto & Villenas, 2012, p. 426). It centered on
building deep, authentic, meaningful relationships with students that acknowledged their humanity and developed their self-esteem, self-love, and sense of hope.

*Convivencia* centers on the belief that spaces of teaching and learning must be built by forging relationships where students are able to *testimonial*. Classrooms are a space and place for students to tell their stories; they allow for the emergence and creation of compassionate spaces of resilience, resistance, and agency. Honoring students *testimonios* and allowing them to share their stories helped create compassionate spaces of healing, resiliency, and resistance. I recall one of my students who was absent for more than a week before finally showing up to class. I was very concerned and called her several times to ask what was going on. At the time she was a senior, and I was concerned about her absences. When she finally came to class, she shared how her mother had been picked up by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and she was trying to work double shifts to pay for the lawyer to help her mom. It broke my heart to hear her speak about her mother; nevertheless, this student showed her resiliency, courage, and agency by mobilizing to get her mom out of the detention center.

My students’ most powerful *testimonios* were those describing their journey to the United States. The racism they experienced and their willingness to *sobresalir* by any means is central to their resiliency. One student at the age of 12 traveled the desert with a group of adults to cross to the United States. His mom had arrived a couple of years earlier, but he was left behind, and finally when she had enough money, she sent for him. He shared how scared he was and his fear of dying alone in the desert. He was known in class as a student who defended others from discrimination.
*Familia* is rooted in the belief that the classroom is an extension of the home. It is a place where the teacher and the students are a family, “always acting together to promote the well-being of the whole” (García et al., 2017, p. 157). In the Mexican community, it is not uncommon to acknowledge teachers as kin, as *familia* who play an important role in the *educación* of students. Growing up in a Mexican family, the way one addresses family members has a huge impact on how those individuals, especially young kids, react. Many times, students say they know when their mom is mad because she calls them by their full name. Because I too experienced this, I can address my students in a way that demonstrates *cariño*, using words like *mijitola* as a term of endearment. I also spoke to them using English and Spanish and sometimes a combination of both, especially when I knew they were frustrated. Most of the time students gave me permission to call them by their *apodos* (nicknames). Because of the caring relationship that we had developed, he said it was OK for me to also address him as Silverback.

Through these relationships I built, my students came to see me as an extension of their kin and often asked for my support. This assistance took many forms, like filling out job applications and reading and interpreting police documents and immigration status letters. It was not uncommon for me to call and ask about parole status for my students or about electric bills to set up payment plans. Calculating weekly pay and rent and sometimes inquiring about places of food distribution was typical. Because I was part of their *familia*, students felt they could come to me to inquire about resources and services. They were not embarrassed or scared to ask for my support. Once I spent my lunch time calling a parole officer because my student had been charged for threatening his stepfather with a knife. The police were called, and the student was charged. He didn’t understand the letter that was sent
to him, and he waited until the following Monday to show me the report and letter from the police. Fortunately, I was able to explain to the police officer he was defending his mother from a domestic abuse situation. The student didn’t say anything about that to the police because his mom didn’t have legal status and he was scared she would be deported. My student knew he could tell me and there would be no judgment. Through my actions, I validated the trust he had in me.

*Respeto* centers on the notion that teacher–student relationships are founded on trust and respect. *Respeto* is an integral part of my teaching. I firmly believe that one must respect every student one teaches. As Kohl (1998) stated, “If you don't respect the people you teach and you don't have a feeling that your students are of equal value to yourself—that they can become potentially almost anything—then you won't teach much to your students” (p. xx). My students often mentioned that teachers had to respect them for them to respect the teacher. Too often we neglect that *respeto* in the classroom space is key to maintaining authentic teacher–student relationships. Showing you care, allowing your students to see you make mistakes, and apologizing when you are wrong models *respeto* for students. It also acknowledges the importance of respecting oneself and the extended individuals that form the classroom *familia*. In our Mexican culture, our mothers teach us *respeto*—a key cultural value. Showing *respeto* in the classroom space was as simple as listening to the students’ *testimonios* when they were suspended, when they were accused wrongfully, or when they misbehaved or were sad, worried, or stressed. This *respeto* was reciprocal, and students also cared and listen to my *testimonio*.

*Solidaridad* is rooted in the belief that as educators we must also be willing to stand by our students in times of adversity. We must advocate on their behalf for equitable school
policies, programs, and curriculum that support and nourish their social–emotional well-being and academic performance. Numerous times my students commented, “We have your back, Miss.” Students had this sense of standing in solidaridad with me because it was mutual. Solidaridad was exemplified when I advocated for my students to have equitable access to classes. I recall a couple of my students registering for high school and selecting regular English instead of Honors English, even after they had scored at the advanced level in their state assessment and above average in their reading. Clearly, they had tested into Honors English. The same occurred when I was called for IEP meetings. José was one student who I shadowed and mentored after I asked for him to exit special education.

Meeting with the school principal and arranging conferences to advocate for my students’ behavior as per referrals was also a component in my pedagogía del cariño. On more than one occasion, I rushed to the main office and spoke on behalf of my students or wrote letters about their character to counter the effect of proposed suspensions.

On one occasion, in solidaridad several students came to tell me that one of their classmates, who was selling Mexican candy from his backpack, had been taken to the principal’s office. I was able to act quickly and speak on his behalf to let administrators know he was selling candy to buy his soccer uniform and cleats. Students often sold candy because their families couldn’t afford to pay for uniforms to participate in sports. The students found it hard to get sponsors, and the uniforms cost anywhere from $200 to $500—a luxury my migrant students and their families could not afford.

The pedagogía del cariño pillars of cariño, convivencia, familia, respeto, and solidaridad are the fundamental tenets that have allowed me to create a counter-hegemonic space within my Spanish Language Arts classroom. These pillars emphasize the ways in
which cariño, convivencia, familia, respeto, and solidaridad nurture and cultivate students’ self-identity, self-esteem, and sense of purpose and hope. These five pillars were weaved through all pedagogical practices in my classroom.

**Recommendations for Educators and Teacher Preparation Programs**

That is the thing: no one showed me appreciation, no one showed me respect. I was just another illegal, just another Mexican kid that doesn’t want to learn. I wanted [my social studies teacher] to at least get to know me, to at least have a conversation with me about who I am, to at least see me, not see through me. (Carlos, participant, interviewed in 2017)

This research was conducted to bring awareness to those educators who are trying to include some sort of critical race curriculum into their classes. My goal was to demonstrate that our culturally and linguistically diverse students deserve a challenging curriculum and an opportunity to share their cultural experiences in what they learn. The classroom and by extension the school is a space and place where students interact daily with teachers who most of the time do not look like them. My research question was: How does a Mexican teacher create counter-hegemonic spaces in a Spanish Language Arts classroom utilizing critical race and borderlands theories? This question referred to the development of trust and respect and how it was established through a place-based curriculum. Our culturally and linguistically diverse students are those whose schools label, track and eventually push them out. Yet by rethinking and reconstructing our teacher preparation programs, we as a society can impact what is taught and what counts as knowledge.

Sadly, a great majority of educators perpetuate anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, racist, xenophobic rhetoric in their classes and in their curriculum, purposefully leaving behind
culturally and linguistically diverse students. These educators are toxic to such students. As a society, we cannot continue to miseducate our future educators, who hold all the power in their curriculum to destroy, distort, and damage our students in their classrooms. Teacher preparation programs need to start by redefining their programming. These programs must include three important objectives and address student’s basic needs, teacher quality and recruitment, and teacher education. As Duncan-Andrade (2012) stated, we must not continue to see “the education of the poor in this country [as it] has often been treated as a glass half empty, [we must] meet every child’s basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, and safety) before we can address their educational needs.

Schools teach students who face hunger and whose essential needs are not being met and ask them focus during class time. In rural communities, schools can be the only places where students can get a meal and stay safe and warm. Research tells us students’ basic needs must be met for them to learn and function. Yet we tend to believe all students who sit in our classrooms are well and live a life like ours. Throughout my 14 years as an educator, I have always kept snacks, extra school supplies, cereal, clothing articles, and even sanitary napkins in my classroom for my students to have access to. In my first year of teaching high school, the students ordered pizza and brought homemade cupcakes and chips to celebrate the end of the school year. I recall everyone getting their pizza and eating except for one student; he packed up two slices of pizza, two cupcakes, and some chips. He asked me for a plastic bag, and I whispered to him that the food was to eat in class. It was a moment of *convivencia*, a time to share with his classmates and to enjoy his food. I insisted he eat and not pack anything. After class ended, he told me he was packing the food for his younger siblings, because he knew they loved pizza and cupcakes. His family was struggling
financially, and pizza was an expense they could not afford. He said he preferred that his sibling eat the pizza instead of him.

I share this narrative to highlight the importance of food. Food is as an essential need. In schools, students are not allowed to take food out of the cafeteria. However, I taught older students who always stuffed their jacket pockets with oranges and/or apples to snack on during the evenings at their home. Teachers acknowledging and understanding the communities where they teach plays an essential role in students’ classroom experiences. Teacher preparation programs tend to focus on theory and practice but not on a community’s real needs. As a society, we neglect to acknowledge the basic needs of our students. Educators need to recognize that often students are not acting out because they are lazy or need an SAT referral because they fell asleep in class or suffer from short attention span in the classroom because they are bad kids or not interested; rather, it is because they lack the means to meet their most basic needs for food and security. It is unfortunate that we live in a first-world country in which children and families are homeless and suffer from hunger. Future teachers should be mentored and advised to research the community they see themselves teaching in. Teacher preparation programs need to embed this research into their programs so that future teachers will be better equipped when they begin their teaching careers.

Rethinking teacher quality and recruitment is another must. Teacher preparation programs must recruit and grow their own teachers. Future teachers must be recruited from communities that need the most support. We have a shortage of teachers of color, and by offering educational assistance and recruiting within these communities, schools can improve
teacher retention and the quality of teachers. Teacher preparation programs must network with high schools to establish relationships and grow their own future teachers.

Critical research and reflection on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity as it relates to schools and schooling for culturally and linguistically diverse students are desperately needed in teacher education programs. Pre-service education curriculum must also provide an examination of how historical policies are shaped by race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Teacher preparation programs must offer classes to pre-service teachers and current teachers in which they are provided a place to deconstruct the deficit paradigms and explore the community cultural wealth their students enter the classroom with (Moll, 1992; Yosso, 2005). Lastly, these programs must invite teachers who teach in rural communities. Rural teachers show immense potential to serve as role models for the students they teach and as mentors for new teachers; they can help the next generation of teachers to succeed in this field.

Future Research

My objective as a teacher was to create a space for my students to share their knowledge as we learned together in class. This objective developed into my current research. This research was vital for my own personal growth as an educator. It allowed me to critically see myself as a teacher and to see my students as critical thinkers. Future research needs to focus on teachers who continue to implement critical race curriculum in the classroom and who continue to form important connections with students.

Further research needs to be done on mentoring pre-service teachers and pairing them with teachers from the communities where they will teach. Two years ago, I had the opportunity to meet a high school senior who was undocumented, and she graduated with her
bilingual seal and was set to continue to university and become a Spanish teacher. In our conversations, she emphasized how important it would be to work with the same community that helped her graduate. She is currently at a nearby university and keeps in contact with the teachers she credits her success to. How amazing it would be to research and speak with students like this and to follow them in their journey to become teachers.

My participant José, who faced many challenges during his education, will soon return to the classroom as a teacher. His success is something I respect and am very proud of. He exemplifies how mentoring and advocating for students as teachers can make a difference in any student’s life. José recently wrote a rap and uploaded it to YouTube, and he sent me the link. I listened to his rap, and I think this last stanza exemplifies his resiliency and resistance:

Born in the storm, no umbrella for the drizzle, section 8,
granny had food stamps, stomach always empty and hurting
and it’s insane but I had to pull through, that’s really the only way,
sun’s always out hiding behind the rain,
there is always happiness just hiding behind the pain,
I hated my life, but I didn’t quit!

I end this dissertation with this stanza because teachers do make a difference in their students’ lives. The connections teachers establish with students have an enormous impact on students’ futures, our society, and our communities. They have the power to be transformative. As a teacher, I know I am still learning, and I try to modify my teaching methodology with every class I teach. As I conclude this project, we are living through a
pandemic, and teachers are teaching online. It is a challenge, but there is nothing a teacher cannot do for their students.
References


https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800107


https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800102


https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006
Appendix A

Participant Interview Questions

**Autobiographical Portrait** (Who are you? Who is your family?)

1. What is your name?
2. Where were you born? If you were born in another country tell me the city and the country.
3. How old are you?
4. At what age did you start school?
5. Where are your parents from (country, state, city)?
6. If your parents are immigrants, do you know why they decided to immigrate to the United States?
7. What language or languages do your parents speak? Do they prefer one language over the other? Explain
8. What is the highest level of education your parents have? Do they have a university degree?
9. Tell me about your parents. Are your parents strict?
10. How do your parents or family encourage you?
11. Where do they work?
12. Tell me about your siblings? How many siblings do you have, and do they live with you? How old are they? In what grade are they? Did they graduate from high school?
13. How important is school (education) to your family? What do your parents tell you about school?
14. Tell me what value or importance school has in your life?
15. What languages do you speak? What language do you prefer to speak and why?
16. What conditions determine which language you use? For example, in what places or situations do you use one language versus the other?
17. How do you identify racially? Do you consider yourself white, brown, black? Latina/o, Hispanic, Mexican, Mexican American and why?
18. If you could select a song, a quote, a verse, a poem that describes your culture what would it be and why?
19. How do you show you are proud of your culture? Do you celebrate a certain holiday, eat a certain food, do you speak a certain way?
20. How do your parents show they are proud of their culture? Do they celebrate a special holiday, cook certain foods, or carry on a certain tradition?

**Schooling Experience**

1. What were your thoughts on school as a young child? (Were you interested in school, were you eager to attend school?)
2. What do you remember most about your early school years? (Activities, teachers?)
3. Tell me about your experience in elementary? Does a particular teacher, book, or activity stand out?
4. Tell me about your middle school experience.
5. Does any teacher in middle school stand out? Why?
6. In your school experience, what classes have you liked the most and why? Give examples.
7. What teachers made you feel comfortable, comfortable enough to speak and use your first language?
8. In your schooling experiences what class assignment or projects have motivated you to think critically? Give examples.
9. During your schooling experiences what classes have valued your culture, language, and family? Give examples of what was said or done to make you feel your culture was valued?
10. Think about a school experience when your culture or language was taken into consideration, and you were able to speak about and why this made you proud of your culture and language. Describe this experience in detail.

11. How do teachers show you they value your culture and language in their classroom?

12. Tell me in what classes are you comfortable enough to use examples from your culture during class activities?

13. How many times have you been able to use personal examples based on your culture to answer questions for your schoolwork, activities and/or debates?

14. During your schooling, have you read a book or a story where your culture or race was portrayed negatively? If so, please describe the experience. This can be a textbook, movie, a short story, a play, where your language, skin color or your culture was stereotyped.

15. Have the teachers taught lessons in class that reflect your lived experiences? Did these lessons touch on immigration, language issues, stereotypes in society and/or issues that affect your community?

16. Have the textbooks used in your classes reflected the lived experience of your culture?

17. Do you think textbooks represent your culture and race positively?

18. In what way can schools show they value and respect different cultures.

**Spanish Language Arts Classroom**

1. What was your perspective or thoughts about the class in the beginning of the semester? If they changed tell me why?


3. How did the activities in Spanish language arts help you see your culture?

4. What were your feelings and thoughts about the textbook activities used in Spanish language arts versus the activities used by Ms. Valenzuela?
5. How did the information you learned in your Spanish language arts class change your opinion on the representation of Mexican Americans in other class readings? Explain.

6. Tell me, how learning about your language and culture in Spanish language arts changed your participation in the class?

7. Do you think you will be able to identify stereotypes about your culture and express them after taking this class?

8. List 3-5 things you will take from Spanish language arts class and how you will continue to use them through your educational experience in school and beyond?

9. Would you recommend this class why or why not?

10. How has being part of this class improved your overall self-image?
Appendix B

Artes de Lenguaje Niveles 1 y 2: ¿Quién soy yo?

E.Q.: El ¿por qué? de esta actividad.
Para conocerlos y poder aprender de ustedes, su familia, sus experiencias escolares, y su cultura tenemos que conocernos. Las preguntas para esta actividad son personales y tal vez un poco difícil de contestar por esta razón traten de pensar en sus respuestas y si es necesario hablen con sus padres.

Sean creativos en su presentación y no limiten su creatividad.

**Importancia:** La importancia de narrar sus experiencias. ¿Quiénes somos, por qué es importante contar nuestra historia a base de narración, cuentos, y nuestras experiencias?

**Objetivos:**
Los estudiantes podrán utilizar el presente y pasado para describir sus experiencias escolares.
Los estudiantes podrán presentar en español, entre cambiar ideas en forma oral y escrita.
Los estudiantes utilizarán un iPad o celular para crear una presentación.

Standards: Communication: Communicate in Languages Other Than English

**Standard 1.1:** Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

**Standard 1.2:** Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

**Standard 1.3:** Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

**Instrucciones:** Contesten las siguientes preguntas en su cuaderno o usando un programa de computación en su celular.

**A. Mi familia**

1. ¿De dónde son sus padres? (qué país, estado, ciudad)
2. ¿Si son inmigrantes, por qué decidieron emigrar a EE.UU.? (pueden preguntarles a sus padres esta pregunta)
3. ¿Qué idioma o idiomas hablan sus padres/tutores?
4. ¿Qué tipo de educación escolar tienen sus padres?
5. Cuénteme de sus padres. (¿Cómo son?)
6. ¿Cuántos/as hermanos/as tiene? ¿Viven juntos?
7. ¿Cuántos años tienen sus hermanos/as? (practica de números)
8. Cuénteme de sus hermanas/os. ¿Cómo son? (use adjetivos)
9. ¿Qué importancia tiene la educación en su familia?
10. Cuénteme de sus abuelos.
11. ¿Qué valora más de su familia y por qué?
12. Describa cómo es usted. Es diferente en casa que en la escuela explique. (Puede usar imágenes)

**B. Mi vida como estudiante**

13. ¿Qué importancia tiene la educación para usted?
14. ¿Qué idioma/idiomas habla usted?
15. ¿Cuál idioma prefiere hablar usted y por qué?
16. ¿Qué condiciones determinan que idioma utilizará?
17. En su experiencia escolar, ¿cuáles han sido las clases que más le han gustado y por qué (la maestra, las actividades, el ambiente del salón, la combinación de las dos cosas). Dé un ejemplo (forma narrativa).
18. En su experiencia escolar, ¿cuáles clases valoraron su cultura, idioma, y familia? Narre cuáles fueron estas clases, cómo fue esta experiencia, que hizo o hicieron para que usted se sintiera valorada/o?
19. Usando solamente adjetivos (por lo menos 5) describa el ambiente de sus clases preferidas y sus clases no preferidas

**C. Mi cultura**

20. ¿Usando imágenes cómo se identifica usted racialmente (latino, anglo/blanco, asiático etc.) y por qué?
21. Escoja tres canciones que describan su cultura, escriba el título de estas canciones. Explique por qué escogió estas canciones.
22. ¿Cómo demuestra usted que está orgulloso/a de su cultura? ¿Qué hace para demostrar este orgullo?
23. ¿Cómo le inculcan (teach) sus padres el orgullo por su cultura y su idioma? (puede incluir video familiar)
24. En qué forma (el ambiente escolar) demuestra usted respeto por otras culturas.
25. Escriba una carta al director/a donde describe cómo puede la escuela valorar las diferentes culturas en la escuela este año? Escriba por lo menos 5 cosas.

**D. ¿Qué puedo usar?**

Para contestar estas preguntas pude usar Word, Powerpoint, Pages, Keynote, Google slides, iMovie

**E. Todos los estudiantes tendrán que presentar.**