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**TEACHING THROUGH *TESTIMONIO*: LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM MADE
RELEVANT TO MEXICAN/MEXICAN-AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS**

BY

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BACHELOR OF ARTS

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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**TEACHING THROUGH *TESTIMONIO*: LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM MADE
RELEVANT TO MEXICAN/MEXICAN-AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS**

by

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B.A., Literary Studies, The New School, 2012

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this self-study is to understand and make visible the process by which one first-year White, middle class, and female teacher in a largely Mexican/Mexican-American community creates curriculum that centers voices from marginalized backgrounds in efforts to engage students' lived realities and challenge the traditional curriculum of a 9th grade English Language Arts classroom. This curriculum was developed while enrolled in a teacher education course titled, EDUC 593: *Teaching Reading and Writing in the Content Area: Engaging Literacy through Latin American Testimonios of Struggle and Survival*. This course serves to the inform choices made in curriculum as well as guide this self-study in order to shed light on how I came to understand literacy and education, especially for marginalized adolescents of Mexican/Mexican-American descent. This paper describes how *Testimonio* as pedagogy advises Culturally Relevant Teaching, and argues for an expanded definition of literacy. Findings from curriculum data are paralleled with data from the teacher education course, the analysis of these two sources reveals the realities of teaching through *Testimonio* in both curriculum and pedagogy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Teaching through <i>Testimonio</i> : Language Arts Curriculum Made Relevant.....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Literature Review.....	9
Findings.....	19
Conclusion.....	32
References.....	34

Teaching through *Testimonio*: Language Arts Curriculum Made Relevant

Everyone reads life and the world like a book. Even the so-called 'illiterate'...

The world actually writes itself with the many-leveled, unfixable intricacy and openness of a work of literature.

- Beverly, 1993, p.1

During the 2015 fall semester, I entered our EDUC 593 course, *Teaching Reading and Writing in the Content Area: Engaging Literacy through Latin American Testimonios of Struggle and Survival* speculating only that the Spanish word *Testimonio* is a cognate to the English word testimony, and therefore, predicted that our professor would ask us to consider learning to teach from the inside out during the following months. According to Dr. Sosa-Provencio's syllabus, this course:

...presupposes the interconnectedness between literacy and social justice. This class prepares teacher candidates to cultivate students' diverse literacies (Multiliteracies) through the genre of *Testimonio*, a Latin American narrative form of resistance and survival amid structural oppression.

- Sosa-Provencio, EDUC 593, 09/2015

I assumed it would be a process of uncovering the self to reveal our lived realities in efforts to eliminate adopted biases, inevitable products of maturation. Albeit, what we learned through *Testimonio* content and pedagogy was how to teach from the outside in: we adopted theory-informed practice rooted in individual and collective resistance. We centered silenced voices and validated lived experiences as a path towards self and community realization and transformation

toward equity. During this course we learned of the potential of narrative to reveal power structures and eradicate the narrowness of epistemology and the us/them binaries that dominate education. Before describing my work as a White middle class female aiming to teach predominantly Mexican-American students an empowering curriculum that speaks to their lives, I will describe my secondary education experience as it stands in contrast to that of my students.

Background Biography

The first two years of my education, all day pre-K and Kindergarten was at a Catholic school in New York City. The summer before my 1st grade year, my family and I moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. There was a park behind our apartment complex with so few visitors I felt it was our own. My parents were immediately concerned with the quality of education. We didn't know anyone in the state and had nowhere to base our first experiences. After a year, I transferred to a school in a neighboring district, a brand new Elementary school in the rapidly growing, predominantly White, North East corner of town. I am unsure if this made any difference in my education, for new teachers and a brand new school is bound for a rocky start, but the choice satisfied my parents' desire to act upon their voices. I have realized now, as a teacher, that this sense of agency is a crucial aspect of education that the structures of k-12 often do not cultivate. Especially in underserved schools with predominantly students of color, we must utilize curriculum and pedagogies to prepare our students to be advocates of themselves and their communities. Students today are more familiar with the language of education than their parents. If we are educating youth to be participants in a more democratic society, then teaching youth today is less about grammar and arithmetic than it is about using language and agency to empower tomorrow's generation to navigate and challenge the school system, and in turn, our society. My parents and I were in a position wherein my secondary teachers taught me

to be my own educational agent; this sense of self-agency is what I encourage daily in the classroom. Seguing my learned sense of academic agency into how I teach is a concept that my course on *Testimonios* taught me: The spaces we learn to navigate are as important as the product of our journey.

An Alternative Academic Foundation

In 6th grade, I entered Bosque School (*bosque* = forest in Spanish), named for its location along the Rio Grande. The faculty was mostly under 40, the class sizes around 12, and our time was split between traditional curriculum and an unorthodox inquiry-based and organic pedagogical model that drew upon our funds of knowledge and the use of physical space. Growing up I did not appreciate this, but now I understand it as fundamental to our learning experience. We spent a lot of time outdoors. We took science field trips to nearby mountains to sample the water and measured fallen leaves in the *bosque*. The outdoor space we learned in played a significant role in our daily activities, it was our teacher. We were allowed the time to explore the outdoor space near our classrooms and given the tools to question this space in academic contexts. The free movement of our bodies in the outdoor space complimented the free movement of our ideas in the classroom; we were encouraged to find continuity between these spaces whenever applicable.

Today where I teach, in a predominantly Mexican/Mexican-American community of struggling economic status, a clear ditch to this same river which flowed through my schooling flows not far from our classrooms, though the policies and structure of our school does not allow us to inhabit the river in the same meaningful ways. There is a chain link fence between our classrooms and the water. Albeit, despite this barrier, when I am feeling maverick, my students and I stand outside of the classroom door, comment on the foliage status, and once a student

caught a pigeon. An administrator would have condemned the moment, but several boys caught that pigeon with such grace I felt an interruption would be obnoxious. I caught a glimpse of their innate curiosity that was not being utilized in the classroom. The physical barriers between my students, nature, and myself, represent a lack of trust and top-down control. Why can't nature be a teacher for my students as it was for me? I cannot deny the differences in race and class that separate my classroom, and my students from the same river. My students come from families of color and struggling economic status, in contrast to my predominantly White, middle to upper class, classmates. However, I think adults in public schools are scared because hegemony dominates our nation's school structure. To allow nature to be a teacher would be to invite the vagaries of natural life into the learning space, and the efforts in public schools, especially those that serve minority and economically struggling children, are to eliminate unplanned time. This control of time leads to a control of student bodies, so that the process of school mitigates cultural and physical exploration, while regurgitating curricula that evade critical thinking skills and self-directed inquiry.

Education Can Build Critical Consciousness

Looking back, there was a rebellious flare to our curriculum at Bosque School. Our curriculum was committed to social critique by revealing traditionally silenced perspectives. Most of the teachers there were White, of European decent, many East Coast Transplants, who grew up middle class; yet the administration had more local roots. At the time, most of our middle school teachers were in their first years of teaching, and while we read canonical literature, it was alongside contemporary texts. Teachers were encouraged to share their personality in the classroom and we were allowed to do the same. My 8th grade year we studied the Atomic Bomb by reading *Hiroshima*, a politicized narration of a survivor hours after her city

was destroyed by U.S. forces. It offered a critical take on war and pushed us to adopt an alternative perspective. Our final project in English of 8th grade was *Writer's Café*, where we invited the public to hear our freshman attempts at slam poetry. To prepare for that night we listened to slam poetry from professional slam poets, mostly young Black men, and explored rap lyrics as a means of social protest.

Bosque School had the largest impact on how I understand education. I spent 7 years there and several classmates remain close friends. I think my detailed memory of this time speaks to the profound impact secondary schooling has on our self-image and social development. My own teacher education journey has shaped me to recognize myself more accurately in 3rd person, while equipping me with the confidence and language to discuss and question the complex identities of myself and my students.

Teacher Education: My Journey

For a quick year I lived in California's Bay Area. At the time The University of San Francisco (USF) had billboards around the city that proclaimed their emphasis on Education for Social Justice. Their curriculum was true to these billboards. The courses I attended there each were rooted in major themes in Social Justice Education: gender, sex, disability, age, curriculum, policy, culture, skin color/race, and resident status. All of the professors were powerful members of their community. One worked at a charter school in Oakland, where I began volunteering.

At the charter school in Oakland I realized the power of traveling outside my comfort zone. While traveling outside of my comfort zone did not compare to living alongside people, seeing another neighborhood opened my eyes. It was one thing for me to sit in the classroom at USF and talk about race after reading an article, which in many cases took the shape of a *Testimonio* by an adolescent who experienced racial or sexual discrimination in his/her

neighborhood or school, but, sitting in a room of students who felt violated by public education transformed my self-perception. While sitting in a circle, reading poetry and talking about books with 10 Black and Latina female adolescents, I felt for the first time how White-American my lens was compared to theirs. I started to see myself the 3rd person. I took off my designer watch, didn't buy a refill of creamy foundation, and threw away a broken Marc Jacobs purse. (I think Marc Jacobs himself would be relieved.) Volunteering at that charter school taught me that we learn with our bodies, by physically positioning ourselves near the voices we want to hear.

During the short time spent at USF, I recognized that the idea of Social Justice in Education meant more to me than a course title. I heard myself in contrast to my White middle and upper class classmates, and saw that I was hungrier than they, and perhaps by hungrier I mean angrier. Many of my classmates took the courses on Social Justice and learned the jargon, but did not feel inclined to act. They were comfortable where they placed their teacher bodies. They were comfortable in their skin; I was not. I wanted to act on what I had learned about on the inequity in public education: that mandated curriculum silences non-dominant voices and perpetuates racism.

I wanted to be on the train of equity in education but did not know how. At the charter school, I was using a student-centered model and a progressive approach to curriculum, but I was unsatisfied. I did not have the tools I needed to teach those students effectively without continuing to uphold dominant power structures. I was looking to efface hierarchy by centering poetry, but I quickly found this was hard to accomplish. After our lessons together I realized I was centering the students, but I was not making their work and the work of others similar to theirs the center of academic inquiry.

My School Context in Light of Social Justice Curriculum

Education can be a means of mitigating stress because organizing your own ideas to make sense of fiction, or to solve math formulae, enables one to organize the less academic ideas in mind. Learning how to think critically can teach people to problem solve everyday life and empowers individuals to make sense of the social world. Rote learning, not inquiry based but memory based, alienates children from the process of learning because rote learning does not account for the questions that children already have. In large part, this rote learning, physical barriers, and a lack of inquiry opportunities is what young people experience at the school where I teach.

There are plenty of reasons why Bosque School and where I teach, Tierra Blanca High School* (TBHS), are distinct educational environments. Economic status, of course, is a factor. However, in my time, at TBHS, I have noticed an emotional difference: my students are stressed. The faculty at TBHS tends to blame this stress on hormonal tension between peers and the struggling economic status of their parents. While these factors undoubtedly contribute to stress, the curriculum of public school also does not speak to the lives of our students. The separation between lived reality and taught reality alienates adolescents from the content and process of learning. Therefore, they are confused because they feel interested in their world, are eager to gain understanding, and the experience of school effectively ‘turns off’ their hunger. Their hunger is silenced by a lack of opportunities for self-directed inquiry projects, an absence of teaching of tools necessary to critique lived realities, and toppled by administrative efforts to control spontaneous movement of their bodies.

In this curricular self-study, I utilize a *Testimonio* pedagogy as the foundation of my inquiry to understand my classroom of primarily Mexican-American youth; this pedagogy

* All names used are pseudonyms

informs how I challenge classroom power structures, canonical curriculum, and center the potential my students have to erase barricades between an oppressed life and self-realization. I approach this inquiry to understand and reveal the process by which I, a first-year White middle class female teacher, strive to empower students through my curricular choices. I use *Testimonio* pedagogies to center students' identities in order to transform current top-down curriculum and teacher centered power dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding *Testimonio* Pedagogy as Theoretically Framed by Critical Pedagogy

This self-study of teaching through *Testimonio* is theoretically framed within a Critical Pedagogy approach to teaching in classrooms with students of color. Critical Pedagogy is grounded in the belief that students who may lack 'basic skills' deserve high expectations and a curriculum that demands critical thinking; a curriculum that demands critical thinking is achieved by inviting the whole student into the classroom and unveiling power structures within the classroom (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Critical Pedagogy recognizes students' lived experiences as valuable information to be shared and centered in the classroom as a point from which new knowledge can be created (Freire 1985; Ladson-Billings 1994). A Critical Pedagogy framework often regards Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as means of engaging students from non-dominant cultures in the classroom; however, critical pedagogy recognizes that all curricula is subject to critical confrontation and should be critically questioned when taught (Beach, Campano, Edminston, & Borgmann, 2010; Delpit 1988; Ladson-Billings 1994).

Guiding my research and writing process is my teacher, Dr. Sosa-Provencio, who has enriched my understanding of literacy while challenging my dominant notions of power and equity in the classroom. Through the University of New Mexico, I have taken 3 Graduate-Level

courses with her; her syllabi serve as the foundation for this research. A set of principals framing her pedagogy, and therefore, the pedagogical approach the University of New Mexico's College of Education are described in a document in progress: *Tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Critical Multicultural Consciousness, Nourished Resistance and Healing*. This set of principles were embodied in the EDUC/LLSS 593 course, *Teaching Reading and Writing in the Content Area: Engaging Literacy through Latin American Testimonios of Struggle and Survival* (Sosa-Provencio, 2015), which I took during the Fall of 2015, and which frames this inquiry. While there are many approaches to achieving these tenets, *Testimonio* pedagogy offers the historicized literary content as well as pedagogical strategies for engaging student voices and lived realities to build students' self-agency.

Literature Review

University of New Mexico's College of Education: Tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The University of New Mexico's College of Education utilizes tenets to center its overarching curriculum. These are described in a document titled, *Tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Critical Multicultural Consciousness, Nourished Resistance and Healing*. An essential aspect of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy rooted in resistance and healing is recognizing who your students are by understanding their collective histories; both on the levels of family life and heritage. These tenets must be understood and integrated curricularly in order to teach them effectively. Since the majority of my students identify as Mexican-American, and/or Hispanic, I aim to reach them by teaching culturally relevant curriculum through *Testimonio* pedagogy, where *Testimonio* serves not only as a genre of Latin American Literature, but also as a pedagogical and curricular approach.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

In a language arts classroom, the first step to engaging *Testimonio* pedagogy requires an expanded notion of literacy. To begin a conversation about culturally relevant or transformative teaching through *Testimonio* pedagogy in the English Language Arts classroom, the goal of the language arts classroom ought to be stated: *The goal of English Language Arts is to improve literacy skills*, but becoming literate involves multiple strategies dealing with print, “as well as developing identities, relationships, dispositions, and values,” (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 256). Becoming literate is most fundamentally the lens with which you choose to perceive the world (Beach, Campano, Edminston, & Borgmann, 2010; Johnston & Costello, 2005). Becoming literate is as much about learning the Latin alphabet as it is about learning how to communicate with people and navigating multiple perspectives in order to establish an identity.

To restructure traditional perceptions of effective literacy instruction would be to overhaul the present canonical curriculum. This overhaul would restructure education paradigms so that educational policy triumphs students’ identities. The system of public education in the United States is historically based upon business ideals, which incorrectly triumph efficiency and accountability (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008). While these words may ring with reform, in practice they advocate a one size fits all curricula, where English is the only recognized language and high stakes testing informs teacher quality (Gutiérrez, 2008). Deciding upon definitions of literacy is a poignant discussion that demands urgency because it inscribes the tools this nation’s youth use to navigate the future. The future is an increasingly technological society and global economy, which has up until this point excluded non-dominant groups from consideration when creating national education reform. This exclusion furthers non-dominant groups’ silence and oppression. It also silences the lived realities of the current dominant culture group, middle class White American culture, because the population of the

United States today is ethnically unique to that of our fathers', and popular culture is more vocal on topics regarding the complexities of race, economic status, and gender, than previous generations; however, this change is not reflected in the curricula of public education. In the United States, while Spanish language and culture have become more demographically prominent, this demographic truth is also not reflected in the curriculum of our public education system.

Redefining Literacy: Engaging Lived Literacies in the Classroom

Lived literacies and institutional literacies can be centered together and developed into powerful literacies (Cruz, 2012, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008). Ideally, a new understanding of literacy will empower people to critique the social structures that dominate their lives, and they will use this understanding to challenge the power structures that ultimately oppress their capacity for growth. Self-realization is in and of itself a literacy: recognizing where you come from as a stepping-stone and not a static hindrance. Validating lived literacies recognizes that individuals are people who exist within a collective, contingent upon place and time (Gutiérrez, 2009, 2008; Rorty, 1989). Evading the culture of our students when writing curriculum, and requiring teachers to teach the same curriculum that their White European-American parents were taught is to deny the idea that a nation's culture is determined by those who populate it. Literacy in general requires a sense of reciprocity; literacy requires earnest recognition of cultural circumstances, for it is not a solitary practice (Carr & Claxton, 2002).

Redefining Literacy: Un-Silencing Voices to Empower Youth

Educational institutions, from elementary all the way through higher education, silence any non-dominant group's perspective by avoiding literature created by members of non-dominant groups, and highlighting through curricula, achievements of the dominant group

(Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Sosa-Provencio, 2012). This not only silences the worldviews of non-dominant groups but also discredits their intellectual capacities. If literacy aims to be rooted in lived reality, literacy requires recognition. It is important to note that the silencing of non-dominant voices from curriculum does more than keep those voices quiet—it keeps the growing minds of the students from non-dominant groups at bay. For when one does not see his/herself represented in academic context, it becomes increasingly less likely that that individual will strive to be a part of the conversation (Beach, Campano, Edminston, & Borgmann, 2010; Behrman 2012; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Cruz 2012; Newman, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Sosa-Provencio, 2012). Some scholars consider the opportunity for a new space to be created; one where students from non-dominant groups are recognized, not only by including representations of their culture in the curriculum, but also by allowing for a new type of atmosphere, one culturally reminiscent of these students' heritage.

Redefining Literacy: Constructing a Third Space

This new space, the third space, is a collective atmosphere of collaboration, where students are encouraged and allowed to “reconceive who they are what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond,” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148). The overarching goal of this space is to create a more democratic society, representative of our entire population, where students of all ages find themselves. Students who see themselves in literature and are centered in curriculum recognize their capacity for growth and mold their own identity (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Sosa-Provencio, 2014). A third space classroom makes educators responsible for teaching all students how to cultivate skills of criticism and transformation by empowering youth to think critically about our social world and “address everyday injustices,” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006, p. 18). Literacy at this level has the potential to make meaning from lived

realities, and bridge the gaps between home, school, work, and heritage. To make lived life academic would be to affect individuals academically at an individual and community level, which is necessary because without the impact of bridging home life and academic life, no lasting impact is made (Pérez-Huber, 2009).

An analogy for this third space might be to the glass ceiling women break in political and corporate worlds. Women who break the glass ceiling have joined men in the power positions that lie above that glass ceiling. This glass ceiling conception of power positions does not change the structure of power, it simply allows for women to be a part of the ‘top’ half. A third space redistributes the power between top half and bottom half by constructing a new space altogether where everyone shares the same floor and ceiling. A third space envisions a space where whole bodies are welcomed and appreciated, so that the purpose of creating this new space is not only to balance power between perceived opposites, but to change and challenge the way we encounter dominant power structures. In a classroom environment a third space is an achievable goal because the members of that classroom, mainly the teacher, has the opportunity to set the power structure and invite whole bodies into the space by welcoming ideas, questions, and lived realities, while establishing a dynamic of potential and transformation.

Teaching through *Testimonio*: Centering Non-Dominant Voices

The purpose of *Testimonio* is to hear voices of the unheard. In literature, hearing silenced voices is a dialogical confrontation with the powerful entities that uphold dominant culture (Bahktin, 1982). Foregrounding *Testimonios* validates oppressed stories by placing them on the same pedestal as the canonized Euro-centric stories that are repeatedly told throughout public schools (Cruz, 2012). By bringing *Testimonios* into the playing field, we do not erase or silence anyone’s history, rather we expand our concepts of history and lived experience in a way that

does not isolate any one ethnicity, but creates a multicultural picture. In modern literature a master subject voice prevails, which upholds normative gender values and the hegemony of individualism (Beverly, 1993; Cruz, 2012). *Testimonios* dismantles the master subject ideology by placing emphasis on collective struggles and resiliency while reinforcing that lived realities are not lived alone.

Teaching from the lens of *Testimonio* has the purpose of dismantling present power relationships within social structures in mind. *Testimonios* are typically 1st person narratives of individuals or groups of people who have been oppressed or are presently living under inhumane oppression (Cruz, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2008; Oesterreich & Conway, 2009). *Testimonios* help restructure power relationships by centering the oppressed as speaking subjects in classroom discussion and making these speaking subjects the focal point from which other social perspectives stem (Beverly, 1993; Cruz, 2012). Therefore, a teacher teaching from the lens of *Testimonio* would see herself as a recipient of the knowledge being shared by the *Testimonio*, not as an authority on that story (Cruz, 2006; Pérez-Huber, 2009). This teacher then learns with the students as a student and repositions the power structure of “the traditional academic roles of [teacher]/researcher – subject relationships,” (Pérez-Huber, 2009, p. 644).

Teaching through *Testimonio*: Redistributing Power

It is important when talking about eradicating present power hierarchies that scholars recognize the inherent contradiction because this eradication is being discussed within the very context and format of present day power structures, which uphold the injustices the discussion aims to erase (Cruz, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2008, 2009; Pérez-Huber, 2009). Teaching through *Testimonio* re-centers academic discourse by recognizing non-European-American traditions and by teaching them in the same atmosphere alongside the United States of America’s definition of

canonical literature. Academic work “positions itself in studies of non-dominate communities as a colonial project,” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p.150) and this is problematic when trying to incorporate alternative perspectives into academic conversation, and when trying to place these voices on the same pedestal as White European-American voices. If we are to enter a conversation of literacy, we must recognize the voices of a multitude of individuals and see lived reality as literacy, as a means of navigating the world. *Testimonio* offers an alternative discourse for navigating the complexity of identities beyond the “pseudo-science of defining race,” (Camarrota & Romero, 2006, p. 17) and for understanding the cultures of collectivity with which many students of color enter the classroom.

Teaching through *Testimonio*: Teaching is a Collective Endeavor

White students are rarely situated in debates of racial tension, schools do not ask for a negotiation of “White American’s historical responsibility in segregation or know about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it,” (Oesterreich & Conway, 2009, p. 152). If history is taught as stagnant events and pieces of information to digest, then students (and teachers) are not required to see themselves as involved in that history. *Testimonio* re-centers voice and story by acknowledging the power of human collectivity and asking all parties involved in the social question to recognize their contribution (Cruz, 2012; Pérez-Huber, 2009). It is a “political approach that elicits solidarity from the reader [and establishes] a sense of solidarity as a first step toward social change,” (Delgado Bernal, et. al., 2012, p. 364). *Testimonio* is the act of teaching and telling stories that build and require community and an understanding of oppression as systematic. *Testimonio* is concerned with a coalition of identities, recognizing historical pain with an end goal of establishing a sense of group empowerment (Delgado Bernal, et. al., 2012; Pérez-Huber, 2009). In curriculum pervasive in schools today, there is little attention paid to the

social constraints students from non-dominant home lives face and the “social supports that address the environmental constraints and risks to which low-income students are exposed,” (Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 279). These constraints impede the developmental processes of youth. Youth from non-dominant backgrounds, who are quickly approaching on the majority of our nation’s youth, are largely ignored in reports discussing how to improve our nation’s literacy skills. This silencing on a national scale begins in the intimate classrooms teachers populate; it begins with the choices teachers like me make on what they teach and how they do so. The following outlines the methodology that informs this critical self-study.

Methodology

I utilize a critical self-study methodology as a first year teacher aiming to teach with the lens of *Testimonio* pedagogy. I am using a self-study methodology to understand my classroom rooted in *Testimonio* as pedagogy that centers *Testimonios* of struggle and resilience and the lived realities of my students. I am a 26-year-old White, middle class, female, monolingual, U.S. citizen, raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I teach today.

Setting

The school that I work in, Tierra Blanca High School (TBHS) offers Universal Free-and-Reduced Lunch, which means that over 85% of the student population is living in poverty and students are served breakfast and lunch for free. The categories of ethnicity for Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) are: White, Pacific Islander, Asian, African-American, or Hispanic. At TBHS 92% of Population checks the box: Hispanic (TGHS, 2016). The term Hispanic describes anyone of Latin American decent, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central and South America; however, the majority of my students are of Mexican/Mexican-American descent with ties to both sides of the U.S/Mexico Border.

In categorizing the home language(s) of my students, there are four boxes: first language English, English Language Learner, Bilingual, Spanish Speaker. Many students choose English Language Learner, even though they speak English without an accent and spoke Spanish as their first language though are now English dominant. These students are now classified as ELL and their home language is Spanish, even though they only say “I love you,” or food items in Spanish and most of the conversation is in English. These students are now tested biannually to track their Spanish language abilities. One might assume that nearly half of my classroom’s population does not use English idioms and speaks with an accent. This could not be further from the truth. My students, the 46% whose home language is Spanish, may speak Spanish at home some or most of the time, but they hear and speak English outside of the classroom and have native fluency (TBHS 2016). I have not observed that this 46% whose home language is Spanish enter the classroom with a deficit in English that differs from their “Home Language: English” peers. I think that this important to note because most of the complaints I hear from my coworkers inscribe these language statistics and deem disenchanting youth unreachable because they are ‘monolingual.’

Data Collection

I began data collection during the first semester of my position, August of 2015, as a 25-year-old female. I teach one section of Honors and 5 sections of General Education English Language Arts to freshman in High School. In this self-study, I collected data through 1) my own daily entries into a researcher reflective journal, 2) my own lesson plans, 3) the PowerPoint or Word Document projected on the Promethean Board during class, 4) Teacher Evaluation Scores from Administration and 5) my own notes taken during my EDUC 593 *Testimonio* teacher education course. The researcher journal has frequent short notes, a sentence or a few bullet

points, and biweekly a longer written reflection. The PowerPoint or Word Document that I project during class is the most important tool that I will be analyzing. Since this is a self-study in Critical Pedagogy, I am focusing on information I am presenting to the class and what I am asking students to do during class. I have a presentation with at least 3 Power Point slides or 3 pages of Word Document for each day in the classroom – most days have 5 slides/pages. This is crucial because while in reflection I may write ‘empowering students’ several times, if I am not transferring those exact words to what my students read during class then I am not teaching my students to use the language of power.

Data Analysis

Throughout this critical self-study, I utilize document analysis across each of the data sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Richardson, 2000) in order to accurately reflect on insights gained during EDUC 593, my classroom presence, the perspective of my Administrator, and how I processed new experiences. Using site words, I color-coded frequently repeated words and themes in my researcher journal, I compared notes from the *Testimonio* teacher education and related lesson plans for my classroom, I counted repeated ideas in the Word Documents and Power Points created to queue classroom instruction, and compiled the questions I ask the class during a given unit. Also, in reviewing my researcher journal, I noticed when I mentioned the Teacher Evaluation and found the specific comments/score related to my concern. To analyze this data, I compared personal reflections, information presented to the class, notes taken on articles in Critical Pedagogy, the course literature on Critical and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Latin American *Testimonios*, which we read during the EDUC 593 course, and notes taken therein in order to draw analyses on emerging themes, as well as holes in my effort to teach through *Testimonio*.

Findings

***Testimonio* Toward Building Language to Name Ourselves and the World Around Us**

The goal of English Language Arts is to improve literacy skills; adopting the pedagogical approach of *Testimonio* allows teachers to teach literacy skills within a meaningful context, which fosters resilience and overcoming ongoing oppressions. In a conversation about literacy, we must recognize the voices of a multitude of individuals and see lived reality as literacy, as a means of navigating the world. By bringing *Testimonios* into the playing field, we do not erase or silence anyone's history, rather we expand our concepts of history and lived experience in a way that does not isolate any one ethnicity but creates a critical multicultural picture. This critical multicultural picture is a part of our lived reality, however, until we name the power structures of our multicultural reality, non-dominant cultures remain silenced.

Identity and Learning the Language of Power

During class my high school students and I discuss identity, ourselves, and the characters in the text. From these conversations, anecdotes from students are shared and I feel as though they are thinking through identity aloud. I wrote in my researcher journal: "Conversation w/Maria[†] re: White people – how she doesn't want to be a part of their culture – then lifts leg to chair to tie Converse," (Coleman, 2015, 11/15). The conversation with Maria brought to mind the importance of naming your identity and learning the language of power so that you can use it to describe why you do not want to be a part of 'their' White American culture.

In EDUC 593 each student was asked to give a 7-minute narrative, in some cases such as this one, a *Testimonio*, on how they became literate beings. The first 7-minute narrative we heard was Ariana, who described a personal transformation once she learned the vocabulary to describe

[†] All names are pseudonyms

the oppression she felt. During that class I wrote: “Give words to feelings is to give voice to what you know,” with *know* underlined as if to say without question, feel it in your bones (Coleman, 2015, 9/2). Racism and oppression are feelings one knows, underlined, because they inscribe a lived reality.

The vocabulary taught to Ariana by some professors at the University gave her the tool she yearned for: language. This language gave her the ability to voice her emotions and put action to her thoughts, this language gave her what she needed to feel self-realized. The words she learned are weighted terms such as hegemony, hierarchy, human rights, and identity. As a White middle class female I have not felt the ramifications of racism; however, as a female I *know* non-dominant gender oppression because it outlines my every experience.

Listening to Ariana’s 7-minute narrative, I understand my student, Maria’s, resistance to being Americanized. However, we had that conversation in a public school in America, and she tied her classic Converse sneakers in fashion with adolescents in America. Explaining that race is not a choice between one and the other, and that culture can be fluid because it is lived and changing, is not an easy conversation to have with a Mexican-American adolescent. Instead of having the conversation by attempting to make her honesty into a ‘teachable moment,’ I listened. Teaching Maria the language of power, giving her the tools to identify why she rejects American culture and what is it specifically that she rejects, will empower her to be proud of both her American and Mexican roots.

Learning about individuals who acted upon this social language and advocated on behalf of a collective for systematic change aided my classmate, Arianna’s, progression to self-realization. University professors and community leaders (past and present) inspired her to pursue a degree and become a teacher. She is not the product of a college-educated family; she is

producing change for her and her daughter by navigating the traps of systematic oppression. For my own students, and in my EDUC 593 course, *Testimonio* pedagogy utilizes literature to teach literacy as a means of navigating the world; and therefore empowers students via the recognition of their lived experiences, histories, and funds of knowledge, as credible stepping-stones.

Como Pez en el Agua: Learning to Name Ourselves and Our Actions through Testimonio

My next class period, the first thing I wrote on the chalkboard was: “*Como pez en el agua*, and fins of wisdom to swim through rocks in front of you,” (Baca, 1990), which is a Spanish expression that translates to *like a fish in water* and a paraphrased line from a Jimmy Santiago Baca poem (Coleman, 2015, 9/9). During that class period my students and I discussed the emotional differences between when they feel comfortable, like fish in water, and when they feel like they are writing with their non-dominant hand.

After a conversation with one of my classmates in the *Testimonio* course who is currently student teaching on the subject of classroom control and feeling comfortable in a teacher position, I write:

At first she thought her CT (cooperating teacher) was crazy strict and the students feared her, but now 3 months later she [the CT] can joke around with them a bit and they do not dare speak out of turn or misbehave... Why in ‘tough’ schools is classroom management viewed as a lecture hall style ‘sit and get’ situation? Is that managing? Managing would be weighting situations as they come and balancing chaos and order. For one does not exist without the other.

–Coleman, 2015, 11/03

I wrote this in my journal because the idea of ‘classroom control’ leaves me with questions, and it is a reoccurring topic between teachers and Administration. This reflection reminds me of own

experience at Bosque School and pushes me to recognize the lived in-school realities of my students today.

Through the month of September, the repeated words in my journal are: *naming*, *identity*, *places*, and *emotion* or *feeling*. During each class period, I wrote notes on the course and have a box to the side with ideas directly related to my classroom. A question I wrote in this box: “Where do you have power in a physical place?” (Coleman, 2015, 9/16). At the time I meant it as a question to ask students about the novel we were reading, *Monster* by Walter Dean Meyers (2004), where a young Black man is on death row for a crime he is only partially guilty for. However it is ironic because I did not consistently feel powerful in my classroom at this time; on November 2, I write: “At least once a day, motivation is drained from me, and I ask myself ‘What am I doing?’... Behavior is such a large hurdle and I did not anticipating it interfering with teaching,” (Coleman, 2015, 11/02). The behavior of my students and myself in the classroom took nearly the whole first semester for me to feel at ease with. Some classes would go well, but like I said, at least once a day I found myself confused. Emotions for myself, and the ones I received from my students were charged. During my EDUC 593 *Testimonios* course, we had conversations about the negative connotations of expressing emotions and the language surrounding emotionally charged moments. On September 23 and again on November 18, I write in my journal, the words, “breaking down,” and, “losing control,” (Coleman, 2015, 09/23 & 11/18). Not until being in front of a group of antsy adolescents did I realize how emotionally strong I needed (and still need) to be as a teacher. I want to teach students through *Testimonio* by teaching them that it is acceptable to have emotional reactions, but the structure of schools, (staying inside all day, one person talking at a time, no shouting), makes it difficult to encourage emotionality because I also have to abide by these rules. Being honest to teaching through

Testimonio without disrupting school policies is to explain to students the structure of school and importance of showing emotion and moving around the room. This honest conversation would teach them the language of power, and also begin a critical discussion on the advantages and restrictions of traditional schooling.

Recently, during one of the post-Observations for my district mandated teacher grade, the administrator docked points for classroom management because one student spoke out when I asked him to move his backpack and not the girl behind him. The comments left in my unplanned observation are: “WONDER: Ms. Coleman after reviewing rules how do you get students to follow the new rules you are establishing along with extending the lesson,” (Teachscape, 2016). The new rule I was establishing was that until students followed the original rule of ‘backpacks hung on the back of the chair,’ we would be placing all backpacks along the wall to the side of the room. Reflecting on the Administrator’s question about how to get students to follow new rules while continuing with the lesson, I recognize that the Administrator and I may have differing definitions of positive classroom behavior. While I encourage students to question classroom procedures, Administrators may condemn student interference with set rules in order to remain in control. The Administrator’s desire to silence student responses to newly established rules speaks to the silencing students experience when their lived realities are not invited into classrooms. I think it is important for students to feel that they have a say in classroom management so that they learn to manage themselves and share responsibility for the classroom’s structure. Further, for me, it is important to welcome all questions in order to model dialogue, so that students feel comfortable to ask more difficult questions, such as those regarding race, gender, and socio-economic status, which seldom have direct answers but deserve a conversation.

***Testimonio* as Pedagogy in Counter-Narratives**

An essential aspect of culturally rooted pedagogies is recognizing who your students are by understanding their collective histories, both family life and heritage. Often in validating lived literacies and teaching through a culturally relevant pedagogy, such as *Testimonio*, a counter-narrative is required to achieve these ends. A counter-narrative provides an alternative to traditional curricula. Through teaching counter-narratives a third space of the classroom is created, by discontinuing us/them binaries common in multicultural education, and maintaining a new space of collective learning and discussion.

Learning Through Counter-Narrative as EDUC 593 Student: 100 Years Curriculum

Since *Testimonio* as pedagogy is about collaborative learning environments and bridging lived and academic realities, we had guests join our class. One evening two Native American Pueblo faculty in the College of Education presented a curriculum project they had been working on, “100 Years of State and Federal Policy: Impact on Pueblo Peoples Curriculum,” which is a collection of K-12 lesson plans that center Indigenous stories and are aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In the notes taken during their presentation, I wrote in my researcher journal: “Balance. Healthy equilibrium between humans and ecology. Key value is: only take what you need,” (Coleman, 2015, 10/21). Later from the notes during the 100 Years Curriculum Project presentation I write: “Interrogate what colonizer wants me to think about myself. At some point we were taught to self-hate. The colonizer could be capitalism,” (Coleman, 2015, 10/16). The ‘we’ in those notes identifies no race or society in particular. The next class period, I write: “WE ALL WALK THE EARTH,” (Coleman, 2015, 10/21).

This presentation of a counter-narrative curriculum supported our work in EDUC 593 because the importance of counter-narratives in public education was repeated. In EDUC 593 we

read *Testimonios* of women who rebelled against their government (Guzmán, 2002) or women of color who defied odds to become scholars (Cantú, 2001). These counter-narratives challenge mainstream notions of ‘*how women should behave*,’ or in the latter, ‘*who can be successful*.’ During our *Testimonio* courses we frequently asked ourselves, “Who gets to occupy which space?” as a way of assessing where we stand, and where we are expected to stand (Coleman, 2015, 11/4).

The 100 Years of State and Federal Policy presentation empowered me as a student and teacher to see how traditional curriculum centers even multiculturalism as a question between us versus them. During this presentation I recognized that this curriculum defines ‘we’ by ‘we humans.’ As if to say we humans, we creatures inhabiting planet earth, we who are responsible for each other because of our shared physical space.

The goal of this project is to offer spaces to un-silence the traditions of the people who inhabit the United States differently. The 100 Years Curriculum Project is a counter-narrative to the traditional canonical curriculum. Each lesson plan was developed around Core Values of Native Pueblo peoples, and each of these values incorporates care of the earth. Balance is one of the core values taught in the 100 years curriculum, which provides a counter-narrative to a White American appreciation of excess. The key to balance is only taking what you need. Embedded within this curriculum in counter-narrative is the transforming power of narration, and sharing stories in education as a means of teaching morality. Education with this perspective is about developing a critical consciousness.

Engaging Counter-Narrative Through Poetry Workshops at TBHS

In my own 9th grade classroom, I involved my students in a poetry workshop that likewise engaged a counter-narrative means of teaching literacy. During this time at TBHS a

community member organized local poets to come present poetry and engage students in poetry workshops during the school day. The first two days of poetry workshops were from an intense and emotionally charged poet, who preformed poems about being both proud and disappointed by his “*Raza*,” (*raza*= Spanish word for race). “I hate my *Raza* but I love you,” (Gonzáles, 2014). Race was centered in all of his poems and he asked the students to write an “I come from,” poem. As well as a poem that started: “I am here today to speak the truth...” After writing with these prompts, students had the opportunity to share their poems, each poem read showed respect for the poet and topic of race. I wrote:

Today was intense... watching a grown man beat on his chest while talking about using an ax to carve his father out of the split tree trunk that is his life... in a crowded room of fatherless adolescents. I couldn’t help but block some of it out, there is so much to feel, and so many that do not want to feel it.

—Coleman, 2015, 11/9

I wrote ‘fatherless’ adolescents because most of the students who read their poetry, wrote about a longing to know their father. These poetry workshops were teaching through *Testimonio* where I was a facilitator of the situation and a student with my students. That week of workshops was a bonding experience for my students and I, for simply having the opportunity to be together outside of the classroom, reminded us that we are in this together. The us versus them wall was demolished as we listened to poetry on the resistance and resilience of *Testimonio* together as students, and took risks by sharing poetry together as amateurs. While much of the poetry was heavily influenced by race, socio-economic status, and gender, these topics were not described to alienate anyone who did not identify with the speaker. The third space created during these

poetry workshops allowed us to share who we are, turn a critical lens on ourselves, and our lived experiences, without pointing fingers outward.

***Testimonio*: The Power of Questioning at a Collective Table**

Teaching through *Testimonio* requires a new conception of power structure in the classroom space. The third space is a collective atmosphere of collaboration where students are encouraged and allowed to “reconceive who they are what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond,” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148). A teacher teaching through *Testimonio* pedagogy sees herself as a recipient of the knowledge being shared by the *Testimonio*, not as an authority on that story. This third space redistributes power so that power is shared with all in the classroom and an authentic table of equitable communication formed.

Meeting of the Minds in EDUC 593: Collective of Community Elders, Educators, and Youth

EDUC 593 cemented the idea that the United States is occupied by a variety of ethnicities and that canonical literature perpetuates a colonialist agenda. There are complexities within this conversation that no one has answers to, but questioning the topic at least starts the conversation. Our *Testimonios* class met on Veteran’s Day to share Native history and discuss ideas on creating a healthier future for systematically oppressed people. Notes taken from that meeting include: “4/5 people federally recognized as Native American grow up in cities, not on reservations, 40% of population is >25 years old, this age group has highest incarceration rate ” (Coleman, 2015, 11/11). There is no settling way to ingest statistics and *Testimonios* describing the hardships Native Americans face. While many Native Americans may not be thriving, the number of Native Americans enrolled in post-secondary schools is on the rise, as are the

numbers describing Native owned businesses and household incomes (National Congress of American Indians, 2016).

The story of Native Americans living alongside dominant colonial powers is a story of survival. For me, teaching Native American perspectives in the classroom is the first step to teaching that competing world-views can coexist. White America's worldview and Native American's worldview can be understood in stark contrast to each other; they survive simultaneously when we recognize the differences by questioning in my own classroom. The meeting of minds in my classroom is daily a complex endeavor between my students' fluid identities and my own teacher identity. The first step in navigating these complexities is to center these complexities through questioning our lived experiences and what we perceive as the status quo. Critical multicultural literature is a useful tool in critically questioning reality because by empowering adolescents to critically deconstruct fiction we teach the tools necessary to deconstruct everyday life.

Questions Asked: *A Place to Stand* and *The Lone Ranger* and *Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Reflecting on the past units taught, I recognize that I think I say words more than I actually do to my 9th grade class. In order to determine how often I repeat key words for the unit, I review the PowerPoint or Word Document I have projected on the board that cue's the class activities and gives directions for assignments.

On a Unit called Power and Creation, I did not use the words 'power' or 'creation' once during the class PowerPoint slides. The texts we read were *A Place to Stand* (a true *Testimonio* of a Latino poet teaching himself how to read and write while in prison) by Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Martin Luther King's, "I Have a Dream," speech. I used the word 'right/s' 3 times and asked the students to relate to an idea or situation only 5 times. I never wrote the word

‘oppressed/oppression’ or ‘social/society,’ (Coleman, 2015, Power and Creation). I did use the words ‘point of view’ and ‘perspective’ each under 10 times, which hints at oppression and society but does not directly address those topics (Coleman, 2015, Power and Creation). During this time I asked students to deeply analyze key passages. One of these I will use as an example is: “But if prison was the place of my downfall, a place where my humanity was cloaked by the rough fabric of the most primitive manhood, it was also the place of my ascent,” (Baca, 2002, p. 4). The questions I asked after presenting the passage were designed to build on each other. For the passage given above, the questions asked were: “1) What does he mean? 2) “Where is the metaphor? 3) Where is the place of your ascent?” (Coleman, 2015, Power and Creation).

I asked students to analyze 6 passages from the text. Another passage is: “We had a kind of gang going; no colors, no rules or rituals, just a bunch of boys who had already been cast off and who didn’t have much else to do but cruise around together and get in trouble,” (Baca, 2002, p. 33). The questions I asked about this passage were: “1) Why did this group of boys hang out together? 2) Were they positive influences on each other? 3) How do you determine who is in your group?” (Coleman, 2015, Power and Creation).

I tried to reach the subjects of oppression, social and personal, through the quotes I asked students to analyze, however my questions were not specific enough. To teach the example quote through the lens of empowerment (and therefore teaching through *Testimonio*) might take the shape of discussing the idea of humanity, breaking down what it means to be human and the discussing when and where your humanity can be cloaked. The third question from the first passage, the one asking students to make the text relevant to their lives is teaching through empowerment. Had I built upon the idea of ascent, especially from bleak places such as prison, this questioning would have been teaching through *Testimonio*. However, I fell short because I

did not focus on one aspect of this quote but asked students to repeat the content and then find a grammatical structure.

I could have taught the grammar structure of metaphor while also driving home the idea of ascent if I had more successfully adopted the lens of *Testimonio*. At the time, however, I did not have the confidence to confront difficult subjects such as social oppression with ease. This situation also speaks to a matter of routine. As a White middle class female, I was raised not to speak about my family's socio-economic status or race. I was taught, mostly out of school but this was reinforced in school since at Bosque School the student population is more or less homogenous, that conversations on topics such as, race, socio-economic status, oppression, and privilege, are unnecessary to have in public spaces. Conversations on these complex topics are especially taboo in groups where not everyone shares a similar story. The silencing of these conversations in public spaces is an outcome of White middle class privilege, because unless one comes from a place of social privilege, then these complex identities are at the forefront of one's minds in public spaces because race, socio-economic status, and gender, determine exactly how one behaves, and therefore why one feels oppressed, in public spaces. In order to consistently teach through *Testimonio*, I must consciously remind myself to engage these complex topics and contextualize all aspects of the class within a social framework.

The most recent Unit I am teaching is on a collection of short stories by Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. These stories are written in 3rd person, however, they are based on Alexie's life (Alexie, 1993). In a quiz given, I ask the students to choose between several loaded questions, such as:

- 1) How does this book discuss what it means to be American? Who is represented in these stories? Who do you usually think of as an 'American?'

2) In these stories Alexie describes some of the challenges that Native Americans face, especially the challenges of holding onto cultural traditions while living alongside White American culture. What insight does Alexie give the reader about these challenges? What advice is he giving other Native Americans?

–Coleman, 2016, Identity and Form

Both of these questions have multiple questions to prod the topic, and both questions ask students to consider the social implications of the story. This collection of short stories is a *Testimonio*, only it is narrated in 3rd person rather than 1st. The questions asked in this quiz allow students to speak to their lived reality while contemplating a lived reality less familiar to their own.

I think that these questions effectively teach through *Testimonio* in terms of teaching a counter-narrative and social situations. However, my pedagogy falls short in the aspect of naming and teaching the language of power. To teach the power of naming while asking these questions I would simply have asked, ‘What does it mean to be named an ‘American,’ who receives this title and why?’ rather than the question: ‘Who do you usually think of as an ‘American?’ These questions are in the same ballpark, however, the simple addition of the word ‘name,’ urges students to use that word and therefore begins to teach the language of power. In the second question to teach the language of power would be to identify the challenges Native Americans face as ‘social’ challenges. Adding the word ‘social,’ suggests that these challenges are imposed by social constructions rather than individual issues.

Navigating My Own Complex Identity in a *Testimonio* Pedagogy

My students recognize that that I did not have a similar high school experience to them. I do not have to say that I enjoyed High School because my teachers made it relevant to my life, it

is obvious in how I teach. The first step in overcoming obstacles of difference in the classroom is transparency. Transparency can be in actions and words; I could tell my students that I believe in them and the power of their neighborhood, they *know* I do by how I treat them. My transparency now has to bridge the gap between the language I use to describe their situation in this paper and our classroom. I will try to bridge this gap in a way that empowers adolescents to use the language. I will engage students in this language via questioning and choosing texts that prove narration is powerful. Further, asking students to analyze power structures within a given text teaches students the tools to analyze power structures in their lived reality. *Testimonios* provides a methodology for teaching the language through content that is relevant to my student lives.

Conclusion

This curricular self-study has explored how one White middle class female employs a culturally relevant pedagogy, teaching through *Testimonio*, to teach students of predominantly Mexican/Mexican-American decent. This study has revealed some gaps in adopting the lens of Testimonio pedagogy, however, I have aimed to teach through *Testimonio*, and this has shaped my choices in curriculum and how I conceptualize relationships in the classroom. The benefits of this work outweigh the costs of making unorthodox curricular choices because of the joy gained in sharing cultures and in learning with adolescents. There are challenges in adopting a culturally relevant pedagogy, especially within school structures that perpetuate top-down control, and likewise in navigating one's own teacher identity especially when it differs across race, class, geography, and language from students; however, this study reveals that with self-reflection, persistent use of the language of power, and questions that ask students to contextualize their social situation, a third space can be maintained.

Implications

My future research will center lessons on key vocabulary terms that negotiate social situation, areas of imposed pain, and collective desires, in order to work on students integrating this language into their daily vernacular and toward building frameworks for understanding power, privilege, and oppression in their lives and in society. My identity as a White female of middle class background has particular implications for educators who do not share the cultural backgrounds of their students. White teachers make up more than half of the nation's population of teachers. These teachers are teaching students from non-dominant backgrounds. Regardless of ethnicity, teaching through *Testimonio* is a helpful tool because it advises classroom structure and curriculum. While the narrative genre of *Testimonios* originates in Latin American, *Testimonios* do not have to be strictly from Latin American people, as mentioned earlier. Centering stories of struggle and resilience of other non-dominant groups navigating complex identities of race, class, gender, sexuality, language, ability, spirituality, and residency status are equally important. Even more traditional pieces of literature, such as Fredrick Douglass's *Narrative Life of a Slave*, can be taught through the lens of *Testimonio*, as it centers a silenced voice and empowers a personal narrative. This work has implications for teacher educators as a means of informing their pedagogies on how to effectively teach teachers to reach all students.

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