

*HISTORIAS DE LA FRONTERA: BORDER PEDAGOGY AND ITS ABILITY TO
BUILD WRITING COMMUNITIES AND ENACT PERSONAL HEALING*

by

Lindsey Villalpando, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Octavio Pimentel, Chair

Rebecca Jackson

Nancy Wilson

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DEDICATION

To my plants and crystals for providing me with the tools needed to produce this thesis,
and to the stars and planets for guiding me throughout this process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation

Description

UTRGV
ESL

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
English as a Second Language

I. INTRODUCTION

“I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently.” (Moraga, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color).

Statement of the Problem

¿Pero, porque no puedo hablar español?

As a young Mexican American girl growing up in the border city of Brownsville, Texas, I grew up only knowing Spanish because that was the primary language my parents spoke at home. I was never encouraged to speak English with my parents; the only English I would hear would be sitcoms or commercials or when *mi apa* would speak in English to his boss over the phone. When I began elementary school, I felt as if I was forced to assimilate into the school system and speak nothing but English. Many of my classmates were experiencing the same situation, as students predominantly spoke Spanish or a combination of Spanish and English.

Whenever my friends and I, in between *chistes*, would speak Spanish, we were corrected constantly by our teachers. *Esto es para hacerlos más inteligentes*. We didn't think we were doing anything wrong—we were just communicating in the language that our families talked at home. We were young, and unbeknownst of the expectations the American school system had set for us. The odds were already against us.

I remember a specific memory in kindergarten when I was pulled out of class so the teachers could ask me a multitude of questions to see if I was an ESL student. At that time, I didn't know what they were doing; I just knew I had to sit down and take various tests to see if I was “qualified” enough to be in a regular class with my classmates. “Try

to do good in these tests, mija. It'll be the only way you can stay with your friends.” The *preguntas* included questions such as, “*Manzana en inglés es _____.*” “*Perro en inglés es _____.*” I tried my best to translate the words in my head and say it in the allotted time, but it was challenging. I felt anxious, uncertain of myself, and belittled when I failed the test and was forced to take ESL courses until they saw I was “intelligent” enough to go to a regular classroom with my friends.

This forced assimilation of speaking and writing in standardized English in the classroom continued until my high school English classes, where my classmates and I were continuously punished for speaking Spanish in the classroom. This penance caused many students, including myself, to despise the “English” subject because we could not communicate in our native language. Additionally, most of the students were ESL writers, so English teachers would take off points whenever there was an “ESL marker” on our essays. This discouraged students even more because the English we believed was clear enough to be communicative in our essays was still not up to the standards they had previously set up.

It was not until I was in higher education when I realized that my classmates and I, students who come from border spaces, can tap into our own culture and language to strengthen the articulation of our thoughts and arguments and transfer it to writing. In rhetoric and composition I and II at my alma mater, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, our professors encouraged us to speak and write in our language. Whenever we needed to have discussions in the classroom, the professors would recognize the border setting and community that we were in and help weave this into our conversations of rhetoric and writing. Living in a border city meant that many students would cross the

border every day to get to school, we were one of the poorest cities in the United States, we would face constant school shutdowns because of “immigrants crossing the border,” and we would have to deal with the ways our border city, our hometown, was portrayed in the media. These factors contributed to border culture, and our professors encouraged us to use writing and reading to analyze the power systems at play in border communities. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) defined the U.S.-Mexico border as an open wound “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture” (3). My theory is that when students are made aware of their environment through writing and discussion in the classroom, they have the ability to push toward critical engagement in a first-year composition classroom.

When students were encouraged to discuss and analyze how our first language was denied in the classroom as an actual, intelligible means of communication pushed for an increase in critical engagement. We were able to reflect on our own traumatic experiences of being placed in a classroom where we did not understand the language that everyone around us is using to communicate and then being punished every time we choose to communicate using our mother tongue. When we began writing and sharing our stories with one another, we realized how similar our stories were and how most of us were denied and punished if we spoke Spanish in the classroom. I noticed that the students in the class responded better and were more engaged when the pedagogy was critical, and it involved their writing communities and the problems surrounding that specific community. My classmates and I became a family—a united front formed out of oppression to question the treatment of our literacy development. We had collectively

pushed toward personal healing from our oppressors and from the constraints of the language that does not belong to us. We did this through writing, discussion and reflection in our FYC classroom.

As enacted by my professors at UTRGV, border pedagogy became a means of understanding the power systems at play in our literacy experiences while reflecting and healing from the chains that our educators imposed on us since we were children. As Juan Carrillo and Claudia Cervantes-Soon write, “The process of ‘border crossing’ is a conscious, deliberate effort to move out of our comfort zones and challenge oppressive forces that hamper our full potential as human beings” (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo 284).

Research Questions

The theory of border pedagogy is rooted in power and resistance, critical pedagogy, and restorative justice. Drawing from Pablo Freire, border pedagogy analyzes how power and justice work in border cities by cultivating students’ ability to read the world through these lenses. Border pedagogy is used by teachers to improve critical thinking and to promote Latinx justice. As an English professor who regularly teaches first-year composition courses, I am concerned with making sure my students engage in the material by observing how their identities clash with the world, and how their language and environment influences how they approach literacy. Because of my current interest in the intersectionality of border pedagogy in enacting critical engagement and healing in writing classrooms, my research questions are as follows,

- How can reflecting and writing about specific traumatic literacy experiences concerning language and border issues push for critical engagement in the FYC classroom and enact personal healing?
- Because justice often depends upon the realization of community, how can border pedagogy be utilized to build a writing community in my FYC classroom?
- What pedagogical practices can be employed in my FYC classroom to enact liberatory border thinking, rhetorical healing, and build a writing community?

Positionality

My positionality as a Mexican American woman who has lived in a border city their entire life has influenced my research since it is so personal and because I have experienced border pedagogy firsthand. For my research, I decided to primarily start to look back at my own literacy history and how it was developed and encouraged in border spaces. When I was taking English classes at the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, I noticed that a majority of the pedagogy revolved around the community and relevant border issues that we were facing. I noticed that the students in the class responded better and were more engaged when the pedagogy was critical, and it involved their own writing communities and the problems surrounding that community.

Additionally, UTRGV is located right behind the U.S./Mexico border, so it was hard to ignore the prevalent issues concerning the border. That, and many of my peers would have to travel back and forth from Matamoros, MX to Brownsville, Texas every day; I

believe that these experiences of crossing from one geopolitical space to another influence many students' performance only when it is constituted in discussion. This type of border pedagogy pushes students to engage with the material and build writing communities.

For my research, I plan to analyze previous professors that have enacted border critical pedagogy in their classrooms and use my Alma Mater as the source of information in my research. I will have a bias for my professors and my alma mater, because I believe they did an effective job in building writing communities through border pedagogy. Lastly, and the most important bias that I possess in my research, would have to be my belief that ESL students (esp. Spanish speaking students) in composition classes engage more in their writing when it's relevant to their community and issues with border rhetoric and pedagogy.

Literature Review

To narrow the focus of my thorough research, I have centered my research on including the intersectionality of critical and border pedagogy, border thinking, and writing communities. To understand and review various border pedagogical practices that have been successfully incorporated into FYC classrooms, it is important to review the rhetoric and composition field and understand what we already know about critical and border pedagogy and writing communities.

Before we begin to understand border pedagogy, it is first essential to analyze the roots of this approach. Paulo Freire, in "The 'Banking' Concept of Education," believed that teaching and instruction should engage students in examining power structures and

inequalities in social structures (1968). Freire's belief in combating social justice issues in the classroom later developed into "critical pedagogy." This pedagogy aims to empower and liberate individuals to transform social structures of inequity and oppression. Through critical pedagogy, gaining knowledge in the liberatory sense is not solely done in the classroom; it is an ongoing process that encompasses acting and evaluating that action. Critical pedagogy challenges everyday understandings, such as the social constructions and functions of knowledge. Moreover, critical pedagogy calls to analyze how some social forms of knowledge have more power or authority than others and how hegemonic power structures can be disrupted instead of encouraged and manipulated in classrooms. This type of education is coined "problem-posing" education, as students are made more aware of their surroundings and the problems in the world by making them more conscious in the classroom with instruction. The teacher actively plays a role in informing the students, and actively attempts to be informed by the students. "Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are 'owned' by the teacher" (Freire 80). Critical pedagogy, then, becomes the basis of border pedagogy, as they both are interested in analyzing power structures present in society.

Adding on to the conversation of critical pedagogy, Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza*, describes U.S./Mexican borderland culture and how the border is caught between a third and first world, and this clash of worlds brings about its own unique border culture. Anzaldúa states that the borderland acts as a dividing line; one that is in a constant state of transition and is influenced by the ethnic, political, social, and cultural collisions between two nations. "People who inhabit both realities are forced to

live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes” (37). Moreover, the youth living in these borderlands are caught in two cultures: Mexican and American. They are the result of a synergy of two cultures. Students from the borderlands understand educational standards from a completely different perspective, because their culture is vastly different from non-border individuals. In Anzaldúa’s book, she states that as a queer Chicana, she has experienced much trauma and oppression, and this is a shared experience among Latinx individuals whose upbringing took place in the Borderlands. She offers seven stages of *conocimiento* to *la facultad* in order to bring about healing. These stages include looking back at our own experiences and how they were manipulated and influenced by colonial perspectives. Because Anzaldúa is the framework for my research, I will be expanding on her ideas in my methodology chapter. *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza* is a vital source to start with, because to understand border pedagogy, border culture would need to be defined first.

Furthermore, in “The Border Pedagogy Revisited,” Christopher Kazanjian defines border pedagogy as a multicultural educational approach that helps students understand their histories and experiences and the impact it has on their identities and culture, and on the cultural and political barriers that are present in their community. Kazanjian states that border pedagogy contains theories of postmodernism, culture, identity, and critical pedagogy. He describes border pedagogy as a democratic public and political philosophy of rehabilitating the historical and ideological institutions that have benefitted (power) from the exclusions of identities and cultures. According to Kazanjian, there are three categories that educators must consider when implementing border pedagogy in their classrooms.

The first category states that students and educators should understand the boundaries of their knowledge and the privilege from where they speak. “Border pedagogy advocates an understanding of the ‘epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins’ that structure the language of history, power, and difference” (9). Through the practice of border pedagogy students are allowed to develop cultural literacy by analyzing how these borders perpetuate power and difference. The second aspect encourages students to critique border culture and reassess dominant notions of the ‘Other.’ Lastly, the third aspect of border pedagogy calls students to create a new lens for reexamining historical and social factors of the border to understand their limitations and qualifications. All of these aspects of border pedagogy ask students and educators to be more aware of their culture. Another point that Kazanjian mentions is the negative display of the border crisis in the media, and how border pedagogical practices are needed in the classroom to improve the borderland’s relationship with the national media and how it is depicted in the world.

Kazanjian does not describe exact pedagogical practices that can be instilled in the classroom, but Loebick and Torrez, in “Where You Are from Defines You: Intersection of Community Engagement, Border Pedagogy, and Higher Education,” introduce several border pedagogical practices. Loebick and Torrez define border pedagogy as a community-engaged pedagogy that engages students to analyze how their own culture differs from others and how to become more aware of the social inequities and power relations to envision a more united society. Like critical pedagogy, border pedagogy asks educators to push students to become more aware of inequitable power structures that are reflected and reproduced in various texts.

The first pedagogical approach involves in-class experience. This includes course readings focused on the presence of Latinx youth in different areas of the U.S., introduction to community building through storytelling and narratives, and exploration of culture through discussion and intercultural dialogue. “Students contributed to course materials by way of facilitating course discussion on student-selected readings, identifying community-building activities that they then would facilitate in class, as well as sharing reflections of their engagement experience” (25).

The next pedagogical practice is out-of-class experience, which includes individual groups submitting a Tumblr blog post that allows students to share stories through writing to build a sense of community. The last pedagogical practice incorporates storytelling and dialogue. Loebick and Torrez both came up with a pedagogical approach, *Nuestros Cuentos*, a course organized to support Latinx youth within the community by asking students to share their perspectives of the local border and Latino history through narratives. Narratives are potent tools for producing border thinking as the storytelling approach counts for natural, firsthand perspectives.

While Loebick and Torrez introduce the pedagogical practices of narratives, Dr. Mark Noe uses his own autoethnography as research on border pedagogy. In his narrative, Dr. Noe enacts border pedagogy in his classroom by allowing students to engage in discourses of power to achieve social mobility. Dr. Noe additionally introduces a pedagogy of “transculturation,” which is described by Juan Guerra as “a notion grounded in the idea that members of historically excluded groups are in a position to cultivate adaptive strategies that help them move across cultural boundaries by negotiating new and different contexts and communicative conventions” (299).

Moreover, autoethnography can serve as a pedagogical tool in which students can share their own lived experiences and situate them in academic discourse—both genres allowing students of color to enter academic realms without having to assimilate. Dr. Noe describes border stories as an academic approach, as these experiences are embedded in the culture that they are a part of; these narratives are mostly centered on family relationships and socio-economic influences.

While Dr. Noe focuses on one border pedagogical practice, Claudia Cervantes-Soon and Juan F. Carrillo describe multiple pedagogical practices to enact border thinking in the classroom. These include straddling, translanguaging, and testimonio. Straddling is centered on scaffolding power, naming inequities, and engaging in critical dialogue. Students are asked to enact humility, critical reflexivity, and humanization. Teachers are responsible for engaging students in their cultivation of critical hope. Straddling includes navigation of power differences, social and cultural discourses, and analysis of the various forms of marginalization embedded in border pedagogy. Power and social justice are the core components of straddling. This means that students are asked to analyze the straddling of power in everyday life in societal conceptualizations. Students will also be asked to analyze and read on loopholes in hegemonic power structures and social justice issues.

Another pedagogical practice is translanguaging, which focuses and analyzes disrupting ideologies of monolingualism and linguistic power structures that shape much of the language pedagogy that Latinx students face today in the classroom. Translanguaging can foster the emergence of students' border thinking; it is the analysis of contrasting, conflicting worldviews, such as social languages, accents, or voices.

Translanguaging draws on the languages available to each group, in this case, border groups. Such examples of translanguaging is Spanglish, code-switching, and code-meshing. “In translanguaging, the speaker is situated in a space where alternative representations and enunciations can be generated because buried histories are released and alternative, conflicting knowledges are produced (291).

Lastly, the third pedagogical practice is testimonio. *Testimonios* are pedagogical tools that can take various forms through problem-posing education, which include oral, written and digital, and can involve both student and teacher. *Testimonio* calls for the ability to critically historicize the body, mind, spirit, and experiences and connect them to larger societal structures that can enact theory in the flesh and border thinking. It is the sharing of personal narratives and connecting them to problems in society today. Engaging in *Testimonio* acts as a solution for dialogue in the classroom, as dialogue can result in the silencing of already marginalized voices. Additionally, by enacting a decolonizing discourse that historicizes the body, mind, and spirit and connects it to larger societal structures, Chicana/Latina feminists have utilized *testimonio* as a tool to expose “oppression, disrupt repression and build solidarity in education” (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo 291).

Shifting from specific border pedagogy practices, Lee in, “They Are Doers’: Writing to Advocate With Immigrant Youth in Community-Based Organizations,” analyzes Latinx immigrant youth’s voices and writing by drawing upon critical literacy and pedagogy theory in school’s community spaces. Within critical literacy and pedagogy, students are allowed to analyze and transform sociopolitical systems. Lee states that integrating critical literacy perspectives in community spaces can lead to

transformational outcomes and push for immigrant adolescents' collective learning and growth in justice-based classrooms. In this study, Lee states that intentional writing communities move publication to social action. Students who participate in border pedagogy have the opportunity to voice the rights of immigrant students. "Critical literacy enacted the mode of togetherness, allowed the reconstruction of ideas, and moved the students to social action as they worked actively toward one goal: to make the immigrant community known" (508). Lee brings forth five steps to advocate with students and create a writing community with them. This includes creating a community space, or a safe environment, that allows students to choose when to share, knowing they will not receive any retaliation. It also includes writing and engaging by doing short or long-form writing exercises that ask students to look within the community they are a part of. By enacting critical pedagogy and literacy in classroom spaces, students are pushed to use their voices for activism and change in society.

Lastly, students are not the only ones that reap the benefits of border pedagogy in the classroom. In "In a World of Disposable Students: The Humanizing Elements of Border Pedagogy in Teacher Education," Reynaldo Reyes discusses how border pedagogy can prepare educators to become critical engagers of information and empower individuals in their classrooms to pursue a more just and equitable education. Reyes calls for the integration of border pedagogy into teacher education study in dehumanizing policies that target marginalized Latino youth and their communities. He defines border educators as individuals who see complexities of identity; are personally invested in the success of their students by understanding the importance of student voice; are willing to challenge their own beliefs through self-reflection; show care and trust; adapt curriculum

to students; and bring nonstandard resources to teaching and learning and apply life experiences to learning” (34).

The voice of the educators is essential to empower the youth and push students of color to become active social agents of the world. Additionally, educators gain a new sense of reality when examining systemic educational implications of poverty, class, race issues, and border issues. Educators must engage in service-learning for their pedagogy to be authentic. It must be rooted in a critical and collaborative community effort that includes a critical self-reflection and contextualization within the social, political, and economic realities of a border space.

Conclusion

To integrate border pedagogy into higher education to build a writing community, it is essential first to recognize the geopolitical complexities of power dynamics which include oppression and privilege. Border pedagogical practices influence empowering diverse communities to take part in learning, literacy, and the understanding of culture in a student’s community. In a multicultural world, students must be aware of their own culture and language as it is a part of the community that surrounds them and formulates their identity and ideologies. Another reason to analyze the implications for border pedagogy is because of its power to influence students to become activists and a voice for the voiceless by analyzing their own experiences in a border city.

Border pedagogy does not just deal with the critical, but it also involves the spiritual and emotional influences that drive students to enact a social transformation in their thinking and the world around them through writing. The goal of building a writing

community that enacts border thinking and pedagogy is to push a process of interpretation, transforming, and exploration. *Los estudiantes del Valle siempre han sido silenciados por instituciones que prometen una educación que es white-washed y dominated by standardized English. Ya no más.*

Organization of Thesis

The rest of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 covers the research's specific qualitative methodological approach. Chapter 3 includes the stories that guided and framed my research. Chapter 4 analyzes the stories' data by linking it to border pedagogical practices that I can include in my FYC classroom, and Chapter 5 concludes the study, summarizing its implications and sharing how border pedagogy can be integrated into the classroom to promote personal healing.

II. METHODOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING BORDER PEDAGOGY THROUGH STORYTELLING

To answer the research questions and enact these findings into my pedagogical practices, I will be reflecting upon my own literary experiences in a border city to understand the importance of the implementation of border thinking and pedagogy in the FYC classroom to increase critical engagement and push toward personal healing. By looking back at my own literary experiences that developed my engagement with writing, I can analytically pinpoint the ways in which border pedagogy caused me to become more passionate in writing, form a writing community with my classmates, and heal from the insecurities and abuse of speaking and communicating in own language, amidst the previous negative experiences that hindered my engagement with literacy. As I document and analyze my journey in this project, I gathered stories of some of the experiences of my literacy history and enacting self-reflection and self-healing.

Dominant research methodologies and narratives are sustained by the white heteronormative patriarchy, and Latinx stories are overshadowed and unheard. Therefore, for my research, I will be conducting a specific autoethnographic approach, autohistoria-teoría, to understand the effectiveness of border pedagogy as a tool for critical engagement and rhetorical healing. With elements of storytelling, my methodology is informed with personal experiences and reflections. I will first start by describing autoethnography and *testimonio*, because I will be taking elements from both methodologies to inform my research. Although my overarching methodology is autohistoria-teoría, which I will be expanding on in this chapter, I describe both

autoethnography and *testimonio* because both methodologies require me to enact storytelling modes and analyze my identity formation in an academic manner.

Autoethnography & *Testimonio*

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner states that autoethnography

Combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. When writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (1).

Autoethnography is a method that researchers utilize to write about epiphanies and explore identity formation that stems from being a part of a culture or identity, and they typically utilize conventions of storytelling. My research is grounded in autoethnography because of its capacity to represent my journey in a grounded academic manner.

Autoethnography engages in life stories as a technique of producing some theoretical understanding of the world. Ellis and Bochner state that “Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate” (433). The focus on narratives and researching with evocative stories is vital to study human relations in “multicultural” settings because researchers can look within the self as the self relates to others (Chang 52).

Many scholars, as a critique of autoethnography, state that this methodology is not rigorous and, instead, self-absorbed. Bochner addresses the concept that autoethnography is not a rigorous methodology by arguing that,

The sad truth is that the academic self frequently is cut off from the ordinary, experience self. A life of theory can remove one from experience, make one feel unconnected. All of us inhabit multiple worlds. When we live in the world of theory, we usually assume that we are inhabiting an objective world. There, in the objective world, we are expected to play the role of spectator. It is a hard world for a human being to feel comfortable in, so we try to get rid of the distinctively human characteristics that distort the mythological beauty of objectivity. We are taught to master methods that exclude the capriciousness of immediate experience. When we do, we find ourselves in a world devoid of spirituality, emotion, and poetry—a scientific world in which, a[s] Galileo insisted, there is no place for human feelings, motives, or consciousness (434).

When coupled by human emotions and experiences, theory is important in identity formation and how the researcher interacts with the world around them. In my research, I take elements of autoethnography, as I incorporate self-exploration and reflexivity. With autoethnography, I will enact a theoretical insight that is key in understanding the contextualization of an individual or individuals within a larger social construct.

Moreover, in my research, I will utilize elements of *Testimonio* to expose oppression and disrupt repression of the types of educational approaches that literacy educators utilize in border cities. In Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo's article, "Toward a Pedagogy of Border Thinking: Building on Latin@ Students' Subaltern Knowledge," they state that *Testimonios* as a personal narrative are "the means for agency through which the testifier not only has the opportunity to expose injustice and pain, but also to resist and counter dominant narratives, connect with others in profound ways through the

confession of experiences, and to provide advice based on the wisdom gained” (Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo 292). *Testimonio* is a tool that is used to push toward a recreation of new identities, a wave of new knowledge and “the cultivation of collective healing” (Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo 292).

My autoethnographic research has been developing throughout the years, but the construction of my narratives and research happened in the span of a semester. The steps to form my own narrative, with elements of autoethnography, included enacting self-reflexivity, critical narrative, secondary research, primary research, and synthesizing information into a complete autoethnography.

When I began collecting my data, I followed Chang’s ten strategies for analysis and interpretation of the data for each step of the process (131):

1. *Search for recurring topics, themes, and patterns.*
2. *Look for cultural themes.*
3. *Identify exceptional occurrences.*
4. *Analyze inclusion and omission.*
5. *Connect the present with the past.*
6. *Analyze relationships between self and others.*
7. *Compare yourself with other people’s cases.*
8. *Contextualize broadly.*
9. *Compare with social science constructs and ideas.*
10. *Frame with theories*

These strategies helped in situating my stories in an academic manner. Aside from including Chang’s ten strategies for analysis and interpretation of the data for each step of

the process, my primary methodological approach, Autohistoria-teoría, draws from autoethnography and *testimonio*. This method is the overarching methodological approach used in my research.

Autohistoria-Teoría as Method

When attempting to narrow down a specific autoethnographic qualitative methodological approach for my study, *mi ama*'s words continued to loop in my mind. "*Quiero que escribas un libro, hija.*" "*Ya mero, ama. Nada más tengo que estudiar primero.*" Storytelling has always been a form of writing I felt connected with, but not being able to analyze systems of oppression or social justice issues caused me to distance myself from narratives and focus more on analytical, standard research essays. It wasn't until I read Lea Colchado's thesis, *Making Face, Making Soul, Making Space For Chicanas' Traumatic Narratives: Autohistoria-Teoría As Method And Genre*, when I discovered autohistoria-teoría as an effective autoethnographic qualitative mode of inquiry for my research. Colchado describes autohistoria-teoría as "the analysis and evaluation of the writer's autohistoria, participating in a meaning-making activity, and is the methodological process of autohistoria" (Colchado 56).

Autohistoria-teoría, as described by Colchado, is a means of self-reflection that Chicanas can employ in their research to analyze their language, identity, and traumatic experiences rhetorically. Not only does autohistoria-teoría push for self-reflection, "Autohistoria-teoría requires the writer to push back and challenge high theory and hegemonic discourses by using decolonial practices" (Colchado 24). Autohistoria-teoría is the primary methodology that I use in my research because it provides a space for

Chicanas' narratives, thoughts, reflections, and perceptions. These elements are free from western conventions of research and autobiography. Because I am a Chicana, I weave my identity into my research, and analyze my language using decolonial practices.

Colchado draws from both Anzaldúa (2015) and Bhattacharya and Keating (2017) to identify significant components that make up autohistoria-teoría. In describing this methodological approach, Anzaldúa states that autohistoria-teoría is “a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one’s personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes” (“now let us shift” 578). In Chimine N. Arfuso’s “Whispers of the Soul; Autohistoria-Teoría as Decolonial Knowledge Production,” Arfuso describes six major components that define autohistoria-teoría. These six components inform the structure of my thesis, as I will be enacting these elements into my research process. These components of autohistoria-teoría ask the ethnographer to,

- Risk the personal (Keating, 2000).
- “Engage in extensive self-reflexivity (Anzaldúa, 2015) that includes magical thinking (Bhattacharya & Keating, 2017) and is held accountable by a connection to an Indigenous collective consciousness” (Arfuso 2).
- Immerse themselves in the connected nature with spirit and find ease in ambiguity (Anzaldúa, 2015)
- Write within oppressive structures instead of a colonial outsider perspective (Anzaldúa, 2015).

- Engage in the decolonization process of epistemological and ontological assumptions around valid knowledge production, operating outside colonial assumptions (Anzaldúa, 2015)
- Be used as social justice praxis to help suture colonial trauma (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Traditionally, qualitative research methods ask scholars to remove ourselves as an active participant in knowledge production completely. This can have many reasons, but the most important one is to keep the research unbiased. However, when describing autohistoria-teoría, Anzaldúa offers researchers a relational approach to research and knowledge production by invoking personal experiences and creating “new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual and collective transformation” (Anzaldúa, 2015). Anzaldúa describes ways of knowing, which she calls “*conocimiento*,” a form of spiritual inquiry that challenges hegemonic discourses by utilizing decolonial practices. PD Lopez states that *conocimiento* is “an iterative process of conscious deconstruction/re-construction of the self, others and the social world” (16). *Conocimiento* is characterized by seven interdependent interweaving stages, which expose the “individual to deeper, often new and complex, or contradictory, ways of knowing that transcend normativity, hierarchy, objectivity, and duality in thinking and being” (16).

The seven stages of *conocimiento* include *el arrebatado*, which is the shattering of experiences, expectations, and the way we believed we were meant to live; *Nepantla*, which is a borderland of the clashing of the old and confronting new, complex realities; *Coatlicue state*, which is the resistance of new knowledge, and the undoing and weaving out of the internalized oppressions that disempower individuals in order to decolonize

processes of knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2011); the call or *el compromiso*, which is undergoing reflexivity and the process of leaving the body in order to reinforce the mind/body dichotomy; “putting *Coyolxuahqui* together” is the process of reconstruction and putting the pieces of our identity back together; in the sixth stage, the individual is called to present their findings to others and realize a clash of realities from others; and lastly, shifting realities is the solution for the clash of realities by establishing a common ground and engaging in spiritual activism, which depends on integrating the knowledge acquired into our lifestyle. Using the seven stages of *conocimiento* to inform my methodological research process, I am integrating the stories that I underwent to deconstruct my colonial practices of writing and push toward a border pedagogy in my classroom. Anzaldúa describes the effect that *conocimiento* has on transformation. She states,

The bridge (boundary between the world you’ve just left and the one ahead) is both a barrier and point of transformation. By crossing, you invite a turning point, initiate a change. And change is never comfortable, easy, or neat. It’ll overturn all your relationships, leave behind lover, parent, friend, who, not wanting to disturb the status quo nor lose you, try to keep you from changing. (Anzaldúa 557)

Moreover, two essential elements of autohistoria-teoría and *conocimiento* are shadow work and magical thinking, which is precisely how this thesis idea came to fruition. As described by Colchado, shadow work “is the process of excavatory deep thinking to unearth painful and traumatic parts of our memories and identities” (Preface, VII).

Bhattacharya and Keating wrote a piece using autohistoria-teoría and cite magical

thinking as a key component of Anzaldúa's methodology. They define magical thinking as follows,

Finally, autohistoria-teoría employs magical thinking, which is neither understood nor honored in academia. Magical thinking evokes onto-epistemologies not bound by rationality, but uninhibited in imagination, creativity, and inspiration. Such thinking could invite one to imagine connecting with an ancestor, a creative muse, or a higher or inner being from where one develops knowledge, understanding, and a sense of radical interconnectivity by expanding on what is understood as reality. Thus, we enact a decolonial turn by evoking material- and spirit-based approaches to thought and imagination. (2)

When I pieced my autoethnography together, I enacted magical thinking as I looked at my past literacy experiences through the lens of a future version of myself that had already healed from the trauma. Some of these experiences were still painful, and I had to step back and reflect on how I could approach this analysis from a place of understanding and transformation, instead of anger and misunderstanding. Looking back at this traumatic event can cause the emotions associated with it to arise, so therefore, is important to enact magical thinking. By meditating and journaling, I tapped into the future version of myself that was healed and ready to analyze my experiences. Magical thinking was not the only spiritual aspects of *conocimiento* that I utilized in my research.

Autohistoria-teoría and its Spiritual Aspects

Colchado describes several decolonial processes of writing, and these include “ritual, chant, incantation, talking to plants, the burning of incense, the creation of an

alter ego as a reflection of Self, crystals as sources of energy, etc.” (Preface, VII). By enacting shadow work and magical thinking into my research process, it is vital to define and clarify my own spiritual practices and how these practices urged me to undergo these specific research questions and push toward a border pedagogy in my FYC classroom.

When I began graduate school, I felt this tremendous uncertainty and skepticism about whether I belonged in this program. The first few weeks of the program were brutal, as the confidence that I believed I once had crawled its way out of my soul the second I sat in the room with perspicacious peers who did not have to look up every advanced phrase that was used. My days were filled with dread and multiple anxiety attacks, as I saw myself less than everyone else. That first semester, I was diagnosed with anxiety, panic disorder, and depression; I thought about dropping out at least once a day. My writing was unsophisticated, plain, and, and my thoughts and ideas were not intelligent enough to spark up a discussion in the classroom. These thoughts plagued my head when I would think of school or the assignments I had to do. Every day, however, I would still get up, grab one of my crystal necklaces, manifest, and break through the constraints of my own mind and attend class.

Somewhere and sometime in between my constant wallowing and suffering, my spiritual journey began. Once the pandemic hit, I was forced to sit with my thoughts, and it was becoming quite apparent that something needed to change. Once I began reflecting on my work in graduate school, I realized that my thesis topic was something that I felt disconnected with, my discussion posts were filled with standardized academic jargon instead of my actual writing voice, and my writing was painted perfectly to be situated on an intellectual level. Not only was I not acting like myself, but my writing was not an

accurate representation of who I am, either. When I realized this, I realized that *la manera de cómo escribía necesitaba que cambiar*. Whenever an assignment was given to me, I began feeling like my mind was spinning out of control. However, instead of panicking, I would pull out a crystal, meditate near my plants, and call on my higher and inner being to give me the confidence to write to the best of my ability. Every day, whenever a due date was nearing, I would manifest that my writing ability would avoid getting clouded by insecurities and anxieties and that writing would pour out of me. Writing would work, as words began flowing out of my fingertips and onto the computer in magical ways, as my brain attempted to catch up with the swift mannerisms of my writing. It was electrifying, magical, and indescribable.

My writing processes went from avoiding the art of writing because of the fear of writing something unintelligent to a ritual of carrying crystals, meditating, calling upon my higher and inner self to be filled with the ultimate knowledge and confidence to fulfill my assignments. As informed by Latinx spiritual practices, my spirit work is the most important aspect of my writing because I am releasing anxieties and insecurities impairing my confidence.

When reflecting on the cause of my writing anxiety and why I felt less than my peers, various painful and traumatic writing memories that I experienced because of my language surfaced. Without realizing it, I was experiencing Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento* into my academic journey, starting from reflecting on my traumatic academic experiences. When I meditated and reminisced with these memories, I knew a releasing of these experiences was imperative and needed to occur. So, this research is my way of releasing.

III. NO VOY A CAMBIAR POR TI: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

“Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future” (Freire 84).

A Stab in My Heart: Story #1

“You obviously have some ESL markers in your paper, and you talk to the reader. Connecting the essay to your own readings and experiences is dumbing the material down. I have marked all of your mistakes and expect a redo by the end of the period. If you don’t do this, you will fail your paper,” my teacher blurted out to me in front of the entire sophomore class. It seemed pretty easy to make corrections and turn in my revised paper for a passing grade, but it wasn’t that simple. I had spent weeks before my initial due date reading, researching, and constructing several drafts to perfect my argument. The final exam essay prompt was,

Read “The Road” by Cormac McCarthy and construct an essay analyzing the author’s use of three literary devices and whether they were effective or not.

I felt extremely confident in my writing, as I incorporated various sources to support my claim and reflected on the novel using my own experiences and connections. My teacher, however, did not appreciate this. During our fifth-period English class, Mrs. Guevara loudly passed our essays back to us, exclaiming what we had done wrong and what we could do to fix it.

“All of you will never make it in college. This is honestly embarrassing. I gave you all clear, direct instructions to follow, but none of you followed them. How will you pass the EOC exam?”

This public humiliation was a repeated tactic of hers, because as she made repeatedly clear: “embarrassment will only lead to improvement.” We needed to improve so we wouldn’t struggle in a university classroom; at least, that’s how my teacher would excuse her abuse. However, I had avoided such belittlement because I would always follow her rubrics to the T, making sure I had every “preferred” element implemented in my essays. I had a perfect score in the class, but my writing felt ungenueine and manipulated, as I had to force my writing style to fit high standards and impossible perimeters. Not only that, but my grade was a result of obstructing my own language, as she would punish anyone who spoke Spanish in her classroom by taking five points away from any major project.

“Pero, ma’am, usted si nos puede entender. ¿Por que tenemos que hablar puro inglés? Éste es nuestro idioma y como nos comunicamos.” These were the type of questions we would ask almost every week, but our teacher did not care.

“I understand, but this is an English classroom,” she would say while waving her fingers around the classroom, “This is not the space for that type of language and communication. How will you all ever learn to avoid grammar and ESL mistakes if you are not immersing yourself in the English language?”

For my final paper, I stretched out of my comfort zone and attempted to apply different personal elements to my paper, such as my personal connections and experiences, while I talked to the reader, keeping my audience immediately present in my

content. I already had an A in the class, so there was nothing I could lose. As she exclaimed my “mistakes,” I embarrassingly looked around at my peers and felt ashamed of the way I was being called out in front of them. However, most of them had the same defeated look on their faces, as she professed their errors instead of focusing on what was working in their essays.

I lost most of my self-esteem and my love for personalized writing that day. Everyone stared at me as my teacher ejaculated her opinions of my paper onto the whole class in a disgusted and ridiculing tone. She *punished* me for not writing the way she wanted me to write. She *punished* me because I was taught Spanish for the first seven years of my life, which was apparent in my writing. She *punished* me for attempting to step out of my boundaries and form connections to my life and experiences. She *punished* me for creating a bond with the reader.

After that day, I stopped experimenting. The consequences of doing so were not worth the mortification I had experienced. It felt like a stab in my heart; I wasn’t good enough—my patterns of thinking and writing were not good enough. All of my hard work was not appreciated; instead, it was despised and neglected. Minutes after receiving my paper back, the appropriate revisions were made and handed back to the teacher. I took out all of my “you” and “Is,” making sure I did not talk to my audience, deleted most of my connections and stuck with hard facts and logic, and I changed my “ESL markers” to fit into American Standard English proximities. It felt as if I was cheating—cheating my writing and plagiarizing my teacher’s writing style. She smiled at me, checked all of my modifications, and then proceeded to give me a passing grade. It was a

minuscule and unimportant moment in my teacher's life, but it was one of the most impacting moments of my life.

Ever since that day, I learned never to use "I" and "you" again, I avoided using my perspectives to analyze and argue in my writing, and I double—or even triple check my writing in order to make sure it fits Edited American English (EAE). My voice was lost, and to save myself from further humiliation by any of my teachers, I stuck to what I thought was "correct" and "uncontroversial" writing.

"We need to ask ourselves whether our rejection of students who do not adopt the dialect most familiar to us is based on any real merit in our dialect or whether we are actually rejecting the students themselves, rejecting them because of their racial, social, and cultural origins" (CCCC 4). My teacher deemed my voice in my writing as a "mistake," or as an inconsistency that needed to be corrected in order to be accessed accurately. By calling mistakes in my grammar "ESL markers," she reduced my writing and its content to a simple formula: one that needs to be informed by Edited American English (EAE). Instead of building mine and other students' confidence, my teacher punished us for not changing our dialectic in our writing to represent "academic" writing. "Since the issue is not the capacity of the dialect itself, the teacher can concentrate on building up the students' confidence in their ability to write" (CCCC 11). My writing represents my ideology and identities, which includes prior experience with my language and influencing factors. This closely relates to Threshold Concept #3, which states that "Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies."

My first language is Spanish; that was all I knew to read and write for the first seven years of my life. My mother taught me how to read in English after that, and her first language was Spanish as well—she learned to read and write in English at eighteen years old. The odds were already against me without even knowing; so, if a minor ESL marker crept its way into my writing, it is just a demonstration of my identity formed by the constraints of mine and my family’s language. “The extent to which we align ourselves with a particular community, for example, can be gauged by the extent to which we are able and willing to use that community’s language, make its rhetorical moves, act with its privileged texts, and participate in its writing processes and practices” (Roozen 4). By writing academically and fitting into this particular community, I manipulated my writing to fit EAE constantly and get appraised for it, as I did in my previous essays, where I received a perfect score.

However, this community of standardized English was not my own, as I was forced to assimilate my writing voice into something deemed “academic” and “professional.” My actual community was not found until I reached higher education.

Mi idioma pertenece a mí. Nadie me lo puede robar.

Rebuilding my Agency: Story #2

“Unlearn everything you thought you knew about composition.”

It never really occurred to me how close the U.S./Mexico border was to the university. UTRGV is on the same street as *la frontera*, and every day, I would see families, students, and elderly people—all sorts of individuals in their cars waiting in line to cross the physical and metaphysical border of Brownsville, Texas. Cars honking, the siren of police cars, and the sound of tropical birds from afar were the noises that I would encounter daily. Some cars would pass through the border quickly, while others were stopped to be inspected for drugs or to see if anyone was hiding, and others were simply turned away and asked to go back to Mexico.

My reality was a contradiction, because of how the border was depicted in the media. On one hand, I was experiencing border culture first-hand and on the other side, the news was informing me how dangerous it is to live near the border. The headlines would always portray an emergency “immigrant” crisis, with thousands of immigrants crossing the border without citizenship. Whenever I would look at the border, memories of *elotes*, *tacos*, and *horchata* during a hot, summer day in between visiting *mis abuelos* and going to the *farmacia* would fill my mind. I would think of my friends in high school, who crossed the border every morning at 5am to get an education. I would pick them up sometimes, sweat dripping from their eyebrows because of the heavy south Texas sun. When I would think of the border, I would think of my family and how they crossed the border to give me a better, easier life. Living in a border city formed my identity and experiences.

I would pass by the border every day to get to my classes, and I never really asked myself how meaningful *la frontera* was to me until my sophomore year of college. My rhetoric and composition II teacher, Dr. Noe, was an intimidating, tall man who, by the

complexion of his skin, did not seem like the type to be pushing toward the unlearning of dominant approaches of composition and the learning of the types of oppression that plagued our everyday life living close to the border. When I first got to class, I noticed that the other students were disengaged and uninterested in the material of the class. For our first assignment, he told us to look back at our literacy experiences and analyze themes of oppression, translanguaging, and language identity. At first, I was confused; I believed that we were not allowed to write about our personal experiences in the academic classroom. Previous experiences with my high school teacher influenced how I approached this assignment, as I was confused about how much creativity we could input into this assignment. “Don’t worry, everyone. You’re allowed to use ‘I’ in this assignment, and you can include whatever language you want! Don’t worry if I do not know it. I have resources for that.” Right when he said this, my classmates and I looked at each other in disbelief.

Did I hear this correctly? We were really allowed to use whichever language we chose? Previous teachers wouldn’t even allow us to talk in Spanish in whispers and murmurs among our friends, so how was this college professor allowing us to write in Spanish?

It might seem like a minuscule, unimportant moment—to be able to write in the language I desired—but for me, it was a sincere, life-changing moment. Going from a setting where I had to give up a part of my identity to fit into the constraints of standardized English to an environment where I was allowed to channel my thoughts directly on the page—no matter what language I used—was the beginning of the threshold that led me to gain my confidence back into writing and commence my healing.

That night, I sat on my bed and let the words release from me slowly, and then all at once. I had never felt this excited to write about anything before; it was so easy to look back and write about my literacy experiences and reflect on how they impacted my attitude toward writing and the ability to form a conversation with my reader in Spanish. It was hard to comprehend how writing about my past experiences would help me understand writing and rhetoric, but it surprised me how engaged I was with this assignment. Writing in my own language felt so freeing—I felt like I was breaking the rules, and getting away with it, too.

Whenever I turned in my assignment the next day in class, my heart was beating out of my chest because this felt like the best writing I had produced in my entire life, but it was in my native language—my mother tongue. It felt freeing to be able to enact my own identity into an assignment, and not be judged or harassed in front of the class for including my language. A week later, my professor gave me my comments, and I was astonished. Not only did my professor focus on the content of my writing instead of the grammatical or mechanical errors present in my paper, but he made me feel confident in the writing that I was doing. Instead of shutting me down for my own writing choices, I was applauded for including a mixture of two languages together to get my point across.

As I look back at this experience, I realize that this was a pivotal turning point in my writing career. By writing an essay in my own words and language, I was growing confident and healing from the previous negative experiences with my English teachers. It was like this darkness that I have been carrying around was finally gone, and light and motivation had replaced it.

As an 18-year-old who had been constantly told that my language was not enough, my English was wrong, and my writing was not as “academic” as expected, my writing confidence had been shattered and destroyed for years. Anxiety, coupled with body sweats and shaking, would be the only way to describe my writing process all throughout my elementary, middle school, and high school years. My writing felt like it was never enough for my teachers, and with previous experiences, my writing confidence had been completely shattered. The writing was a mode of communication that felt like a mundane activity because of the disconnection I felt with it. I knew I could write creatively and argumentatively, but writing about characters, books, and topics that were formulated to resonate with White American children in the constraints of formal, standardized English was something that would stress me out and cause me to avoid writing altogether. However, once I was allowed to write in Spanish and have a conversation with the reader on my terms, I felt confident enough to step out of my comfort zone and exercise my craft.

El arte de la escritura es algo que debe ser guardado y cuidado.

La Frontera y sus Enseñanzas

Dr. Noe was the first person who introduced me to critical pedagogy and Paulo Freire. As a young teen who was always driven to help others and fight injustice outside of the classroom, I was surprised when Freire was introduced as a model for initiating discussion on border and race issues in the classroom. Freire’s ideas seemed insane to a

young, brown girl who was told that every aspect of her life needed to fit the constraints of a White American who spoke perfect English without constantly getting stuck and stuttering at the switch of the tongue. I was taught to stay quiet—to listen to the “white man” as they had all of the knowledge that I needed to survive in this world. Contributing to the knowledge produced through discussion seemed unattainable for me, as I never had the encouragement or agency to speak about my opinions in the classroom.

“The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (Freire 47)

When Dr. Noe introduced Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to the class as a reading requirement, he would push for a critical discussion in the class—one that felt like a conversation between two individuals learning from each other collaborating to tackle social justice issues. He would ask for our perspective and actually listen to our narratives, and push for solutions and analysis of our personal experiences.

One day in the middle of the semester, Dr. Noe wanted to spend class time learning about our perspectives concerning the border and how living in a border city had influenced our lives and our behaviors. We all stayed quiet, as we were unsure if our professor, who was white, would understand our experiences fully. *Were we being exploited, or did he actually care about our constant oppression and marginalization?* This resistance resulted from previous educators’ attitudes as we all approached the

discussion in cautious ways. Finally, after some silence, one of the students shared that they “would cross the border every morning to go to school because my parents are not citizens *y viven en Matamoros.*”

Some students nodded in agreement, and others began adding to the conversation by sharing similar experiences. After sharing, the professor would nod and would proceed to ask how these experiences made the student feel. We chuckled, because we thought he was joking or approaching the conversation comically. However, his face was ever-so-serious as he left his podium and approached the student to sit next to them.

“I want you to really reflect on this experience. How does waking up early every day and traveling from one land to another without your parents make you feel?”

This type of pedagogy was unusual, as teachers rarely asked how border or race issues influenced how we felt. “Honestly, I hadn’t really thought about it. It makes me sad, I guess. I wish my parents could drive me to school. And I wish we lived here so I wouldn’t have to wake up early every day. Also, every morning I’m fearful that there would be a problem with my passport or ID, and they would have to send me back.” Our professor would nod in agreement and ask the class,

“Do you guys think that this issue is a result of a larger systemic problem that is taking place in the U.S., or is this situation one that this student’s family wanted?”

Everyone looked around and answered, “Larger problem.”

Dr. Noe wanted us to question the societal influences that were the cause of why our border city operated the way it did, and he did it by carefully drawing us near the answer instead of him professing his knowledge unto us. Our professor would add to the conversation by asking questions and connecting it to the greater issues at play in our society, which kept us fully engaged. These were issues that influenced our everyday life and by being able to analyze the power systems that were at play, and the inequalities that we were facing, we were able to connect more with the material and analyze our own experiences, which pushed us to learn more about ourselves and literacy. Not only would we discuss in the classroom, but our professor would also make sure to assign various writing assignments that had to do with the discussions that were taking place.

With every discussion and writing assignment that took place in that classroom, I contributed to the knowledge that was being formed with my classmates and professor. I was learning things about myself, my family, the people who lived in the same city as me, and how oppression and marginalization ruled how we make decisions and interact with the world.

Our classroom began feeling like a family—a “facultad”— that fully understood each other because these experiences were a shared familiarity among all of us. All of my classmates would participate in the discussion, as it pertained to their own lives and knowledge that did not have to be studied or memorized—it was true, lived experiences that influenced our present life constantly. There were times when we would continue the conversation that we were having in class during lunch, after class, and in our group chat. Attempting to avoid border issues after being made aware of the inequalities was difficult. Border issues were all around us, from how the media portrayed our living

situation to the family members that had crossed the *Rio Bravo* for asylum. Our perspective had shifted from one that was oblivious to our hometown's issues, to one that pushed for activism and reform.

If it wasn't for that class, I don't believe that I would have been as engaged with social issues and writing as I am now. The pedagogy that my professor utilized in his classroom paved a way for my understanding of the community around me. By listening to my peers' stories of the border and relating it to my own experiences, I realized that advocating for social issues had to become my reality because it had become personal. These were people I saw every day and seeing how the inequalities had impacted their life, it affected me to want to research theories and solutions for these issues. Border pedagogy ultimately influenced my mentality and how I approached literacy.

Las Personas de la Frontera

When I first enrolled in my women's rhetoric and language class, I was excited to share what I already knew about powerful women rhetors with the class. However, my knowledge was limited to Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the only two feminist women introduced in our high school curriculum. *I won the history fair in high school for my presentation on Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Not only that, but I consider myself a feminist. This is going to be easy.*

Upon receiving my syllabus for the class, besides half of the syllabus being in Spanish which I had never seen before, I saw names like Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Terry Tempest. *Who are these people? Why have I never heard of them before?* Dr. Cavazos and Ms. Dibrell stood in front of us as we skimmed the syllabus,

and they asked us if we had ever read these scholars before. We all shook our heads and they both chuckled.

“Well, we’ll start off with Anzaldúa and progress from there. She’s from the Valley, like all of us. I feel like many of you will relate to her.”

Later that same semester, I realized just how impactful Anzaldúa was in my personal and academic life. *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of those readings that stays with you for the rest of your life; it’s one of those readings that you read once in your lifetime, and it changes your perspective of how you interact with the world around you. I remember the first time I read it. I was in my room, waiting to hear “¡*Ya esta lista la comida!*” from both of my parents. Our time-worn house was filled with the sound of my brothers yelling, as my parents were both in the kitchen making *sopita de pollo y tortillas*. Dr. Cavazos and Ms. Dibrell had assigned “How to Tame A Wild Tongue,” and I had waited until the last minute to read it. Once I had finally sat down to read it, the first few lines read,

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess-that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong. 'I want you to speak English. Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent,'" my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. (53)

Immediately, I was hooked. Not only had I undergone the same experiences as Anzaldúa, but she was bringing out memories of my childhood and adolescence that I had completely forgotten about. Constantly being punished because of my language was an experience that she had already written about in a book, and knowing this, I felt validated—as another Mexican American woman had experienced the same situation and was able to analyze it academically.

I started to know more about myself through Anzaldúa's writing, as I saw myself as her embodiment. The way she used her language and how it changed from English to Spanish to Spanglish, depending on the environment, was an accurate depiction of how I would constantly shift between languages. "A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni inglés, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages" (55). Anzaldúa explains that the combination of two languages were filled with contradictions and feelings of "not being enough." And, I related, because my whole life, I would be criticized for the way I spoke Spanish by my family members, and schoolteachers would constantly critique my English.

I realized, after some time, that my Spanish was too broken and illegitimate.

"Si vas a México, no te van a entender."

And my English was always too simplified and unintelligible.

"You sound better when you write."

Anzaldúa defended her language, and she made it a priority to overcome the tradition of silence and write in the variations of her languages. After reading Anzaldúa, I knew that I could never allow anyone to try to steal my tongue or my identity in my writing. I am a clash of different cultures, cultures intertwined to create ways to communicate to the world around me.

Reading Latinx scholars in the classroom pushed toward personal healing, as identifying my experiences with these scholars in the academic context is a necessary process in finding my academic identity and confidence. Reading narratives of other Chicanas who lived in the Rio Grande Valley, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, made me see myself as a scholar who could achieve what they have already accomplished. By being made aware of the power systems and inequality situated in the border city of Brownsville, Texas, I was driven to bring this information to graduate school and situate my experiences in an academic context, as Gloria Anzaldúa did. I was pushed out of the constraints of being a woman of color who had been ridiculed for her language, to a threshold where I could reflect on the ways literacy is taught for students with “ESL” markers and push toward implementation of border pedagogy in the FYC classroom. This will motivate students to participate in discussions of the inequality they face and advocate for change in how people think and what they can do to change the inequalities present in the border city.

Afterword: Writing as a Tool for Personal Healing

Narratives and stories have always been a mode of writing that I felt most connected to—it is also the type of writing that pushes me toward healing. I rarely get a chance to step back and reflect on my experiences, but I understand myself and the world around me better. The first instance of when I used writing as a mode of healing was in high school when my first boyfriend had broken up with me; I found that writing about my feelings, emotions, and experiences, and reflecting on them helped heal the wound that others had left me.

Many psychologists, sociologists, and literary critics agree that the “construction of self and life worlds draws on a particular genre of language usage: narration” (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 1). Whenever I produced my narratives, my stories, I demonstrated what Carl Rogers deems a “self in process [...] open to change and movement,” which has the ability to enter into “new identities” (Johnson 101) and constitutes an “evolving sense of self” (Adler and McAdams 180) in narrative. “Life writing provides the author an opportunity to reconcile with the past, to forgive and be forgiven, to renew his or her identity, and to set free the self [...] Past experiences can be rearranged and assigned new meanings so that healing and letting-go can take place.” (Gu 486).

When I wrote and reflected on the mistreatment of my language at a young age, I found that I needed to undergo this process in order to appreciate my language, my writing style, and my hometown. I experienced my process from an insecure student who would despise writing and participating in class, to a student who discovered their voice

and agency with the implementation of border pedagogy in the classroom. Looking back at these experiences led me to banish the oppressive stories that produce “negative self-images which create problems for human development” (Abels and Abels 29). By composing a new story about my literacy experiences, I break away from the dominant narrative that had previously defined and controlled me and discover new possibilities for my writing. Gu states that “By creating fresh, unique, and insightful narratives about their lives, a client sees him or herself from different perspectives, discovers skills, tools, and possibilities for healing, and finds meaning in the experiences of the past” (488). Writing is an act of authority and reclaiming the power that systems of oppression have tried to take away from me from stripping me of my culture and language in a classroom setting. Pennebaker notes that writing about trauma and specific painful memories/experiences allows writers to externalize this event, detaching themselves from experience (Gu 98). “In providing us with an opportunity to integrate disparate elements of our autobiographies, all depth therapies such as psychoanalysis allow us to conquer the past and move toward the future with a new sense of mastery” (Pennebaker 159). I reclaimed my power by becoming an agent of action and creation in my narrative instead of continuously avoiding literacy as a coping mechanism.

Additionally, the therapeutic potential of writing includes a “reconnection” with a larger community (Herman 155). Batzer Benjamin states the following,

Though trauma is almost always a social activity, the lasting pain of trauma frequently isolates the victim, who has suffered by the violence and/or silent witness of others. Additionally, the victim's feelings of pain, betrayal, or injustice can isolate her. Reversing this isolation, as Herman argues, is necessary to

therapeutic coping. Pennebaker says that writing, as a social activity, automatically pulls one back to a larger community (Secret Life 125), echoing the claim of Jean Trounstein and Robert Waxler that writing reverses the tendency to focus on the "internal monologues and raw emotions that draw us away from compassion for and understanding of others. (227)

Writing encourages community-building, as I have shown how my classmates and I participated in problem-posing discussions. This will be expanded in my next chapter, where I explain border pedagogical practices that push toward community-building.

Moreover, during the construction of these stories, I continued to connect it to my research methodology: autohistoria-teoría. Keating situated autohistoria-teoría as a platform for social justice as it exposes the “limitations in the existing paradigms and create[s] new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation” (319). Conducting shadow work during this process was difficult, as I had tried to hide how I was ridiculed in class and dismissed for my language. These painful memories were something that I did not want to explore, but I knew that I had to heal from these wounds and grow as a writer and as a teacher. During this process, I had to continuously step back and meditate, water my plants to ground myself, and carry around crystals for self-healing. These tools helped me write about some painful experiences while protecting myself from emotionally exhausting myself.

This process was necessary for further analyzing how writing about specific traumatic literacy experiences concerning language and border issues push for critical engagement in the FYC classroom and enact personal healing within the student collective.

IV. LINKING BORDER EXPERIENCES TO PEDAGOGY: AN ANALYSIS

“Autohistoria-teoría as a methodological lens for Chicanas writing traumatic narratives will “rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, [a] [theory] that will cross borders, blur boundaries” (Anzaldúa 136).

This project was guided by a specific set of questions, ones which have been implicit in my autoethnography and ones that need further investigation. First, I wanted to know: how can reflecting and writing about certain traumatic literacy experiences concerning language and border issues push for critical engagement in the FYC classroom and enact personal healing? Second, because justice often depends upon the realization of community, how can border pedagogy be utilized to build a writing community in my FYC classroom? Lastly, what specific pedagogical practices can be employed to enact liberatory border thinking, rhetorical healing, and build a writing community in my FYC classroom? In what follows, I will analyze the border pedagogical practices exhibited by my professors. In my conclusion, I will analyze how I can implement them in my own syllabus and pedagogy.

Border Pedagogical Practices as Informed by My Professors

Dr. Noe, Dr. Cavazos, and Ms. Dibrell all exhibited different border pedagogical practices that can be mirrored in my own FYC classroom to push toward critical engagement and personal healing.

Professor #1: Dr. Noe

Dr. Noe incorporated a border pedagogy approach in his FYC classroom that helped students understand and reexamine their histories, language, identity, culture, and political barriers present in our border community. Our professor engaged us in a pedagogy where students understand the boundaries of their knowledge concerning the “epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history, power, and difference” (Kazanjian 373). In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks considers the ways the classroom can become a space to “reinvent” the self (3), as well as a site for “confrontation and conflict” (178). The possibility for growth and change in the classroom arises from hooks’ paradigm of an “engaged pedagogy,” which is developed and refined based on the teacher’s deep interest in the personal experiences and lives of students (13).

Border pedagogy acts as an engaged pedagogy, as students and educators alike are pushed to consider how the U.S./Mexico border disrupts power systems and the language identity of a region. Giroux describes the general concept of border pedagogy, which is to develop a “democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life” (20). Practicing border pedagogy in the classroom allows students and educators to move across cultural borders and analyze how these borders have served apparatuses of the continuous perpetuation of power and power systems. Kazanjian states that “Once one acknowledges these

constructed boundaries, one is able to step outside them. From the margins, students and educators are able to critically deconstruct the narratives, knowledges, and languages that have shaped their histories and experiences” (373). Moreover, in our FYC classroom, we were not only encouraged to understand and redefine border pedagogy, but we were pushed to consider a new lens for “reexamining historical and social apparatuses of the border to understand their limitations and qualifications” (Kazanjian 373). When our professor would ask us questions about why our lives operated the way they did in a border city, we were pushed to examine the language and institutions of power and how they ultimately affected social relations. When Dr. Noe would engage the classroom in the personal and the political, he made sure to reiterate his position of white privilege, and he encouraged our discussion by asking questions and pushing us toward considering how inequality is perpetuated. The classroom became a setting of meaning-making and community building because we would engage in discussion, we related our stories with one another, and we identified ourselves with others.

Moreover, Dr. Noe engaged in a specific border pedagogical practice to engage border thinking: straddling. Crucial components of border pedagogy include navigating power differences, social and cultural discourses, and analyzing various forms of marginalization. In doing so, border pedagogy should focus on “scaffolding power, naming inequities, and, through critical dialogue, involving students in their growth and critical consciousness. This process requires humility, critical reflexivity, and humanization. Teachers need to learn about their communities and engage students in their own cultivation of critical hope” (Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo 288). Dr. Noe engaged us in the analysis and scaffolding of power, causing us to become more aware of

the world around us. He would consistently push us to practice critical reflexivity in the classroom whenever he would involve us in critical dialogue and engagement.

The use of “border pedagogy” in relation to engagement, as described by Hayes and Cuban, “prompts students to understand their own culture in new ways, appreciate cultural differences, become more critically aware of social inequities and power relations, and envision a more democratic society” (1). Moreover, Loebick and Torrez define border pedagogy as a community-engaged pedagogy that engages students to analyze how their own culture differs from others and how to become more aware of the social inequities and power relations to envision a more united society. When we were prompted to reflect how the border had impacted our lives and our family’s lives, we became more aware of power differences and our experiences. My classmates and I would discuss border culture and our literacy history, and we would learn from each other, as would the professor. We were all facilitating knowledge from our discussion and community. Whenever our first narrative was assigned, we were able to encourage each other and offer suggestions of stories that had already been articulated in the classroom. Border pedagogy allows students the opportunity to interrogate and define their own experiences, as well as heal from the linguistic abuse that many students of color had previously faced. bell hooks, in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, states that, “As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (32).

Additionally, the response of a professor is imperative in encouraging the student to engage in writing and border thinking. Educators should uncritically accept the stories,

experiences, and language of their students to engage them in the discourse of border pedagogy. As Giroux explains,

To take student voices at face value is to run the risk of idealizing and romanticizing them. It is equally important for teachers to help students find a language for critically examining the historically and socially constructed forms by which they live. Such a process involves more than allowing students to speak from their own histories and social formations. It also raises questions about how teachers use power to cross borders that are culturally strange to them. (113)

Our professor never critiqued our content in essays or grammar errors; instead, he focused on our stories and how they could be placed in the U.S./Mexico border atmosphere.

Lastly, Dr. Noe incorporates the border pedagogical practice of translanguaging, which is defined as practices that are “identity markers and represent the complex ways in which bilinguals use their linguistic applications to communicate across contexts and to negotiate social identities” (Cavazos 45). Translanguaging practices have the potential to be powerful tools for understanding and learning what has been insufficiently researched and documented in higher education contexts (García et al. 72). Dr. Noe allowed us to write in Spanish and English because it is impossible to communicate, interact, and participate in a bilingual community and discussion without appealing to translanguaging (Cavazos 45). Translanguaging creates learning opportunities where students can draw on their various languages in writing as resources instead of barriers. This is important for students who speak more than one language, as “A translanguaging approach to teaching zooms in on students' language experiences, acknowledges their

languages as resources for learning, and raises questions about how educators should create opportunities and design learning environments that integrate and extend students' linguistic repertoire” (Cavazos et al. 12).

Previously, as shown in my autoteoria-historia, monolingual assimilation of the English language caused my classmates and me to hinder engaging in the discourse with our home language and cultural identities. Additionally, the lack of Spanish in our discourse and writing caused us to forget a majority of words in our language because English was the only language we were allowed to speak, write, and read. This is because traditional conceptualizations of FYC classrooms and bilingualism are based on ideas of language purism and the hegemony of standardized English. “Thus, bilinguals whose Spanish language practices do not conform to the so-called correct expressions and practices of those in power are stigmatized as languageless and their voices silenced in classroom discourse” (Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo 290). Not being able to use my language to profess ideas or engage in analysis disrupts my identity, but Dr. Noe helped us build agency in our language. Henry Giroux states that “border pedagogy” begins with an awareness of one’s position in and between linguistic identities (28). Moreover, Giroux argues that border pedagogy “speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power” (28). Border pedagogy, in the context of the English subject at a college level, encompasses theories, practices, and politics, situated within a “language-based learning environment” (Brady 1).

Additionally, Dr. Noe enacted the Conference on College Composition and Communications' "Students' Right to their Own Language." "Students' Right to Their Own Language" tackles the dominant ideology of American "standard" English and proposes alternatives in order to include the various language differences based on social, economic, and cultural influences. Furthermore, it focuses on dismantling the "English of educated speakers," since this is an inherent power/social dominance toward those of different dialectics. The main argument of this article is summarized explicitly as, "The diversity of our cultural heritage, however, has created a corresponding language diversity and, in the 20th century, most linguists agree that there is no single, homogeneous American "standard" language (7). Because of this, educators should not focus on the mechanics of writing; instead, they should be focused on the "sense" and content of the writing, as opposed to the form.

Dr. Noe successfully incorporated elements of border pedagogy in his practice and in doing so, pushed for an increase in critical engagement from the students.

Professors #2: Dr. Cavazos and Ms. Dibrell

Dr. Noe wasn't the only professor at UTRGV who pushed toward the integration of various elements of border pedagogy in the writing classroom. Dr. Cavazos and Ms. Dibrell both made it a priority to include women of color in their curriculum, and this included scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga. In their syllabus, they state,

"Course readings [...] are designed to provide you with opportunities to explore, through ethnographic methodologies, how language and rhetoric are used by and

about women and how these choices are negotiated for diverse purposes. The readings written by and about women we engage with this semester, whether academic articles, documentaries, videos, or images, are political. Some will be outwardly political where they address race, riots, systemic oppression. [...] As we read and analyze these texts and as we conduct primary research, we must listen to understand and suspend judgements to create more inclusive, diverse, and equitable spaces”

Dr. Cavazos and Ms. Dibrell interweaved language and rhetoric with Chicana literature. There, they explicitly state that integrations of race issues, systemic oppression, and other political matters will be addressed through course readings. These professors enact border thinking and pedagogy, because, as Giroux states, “In this case, border pedagogy must take up the dual task of not only creating new objects of knowledge but also addressing how inequalities, power, and human suffering are rooted in basic institutional structures” (52). In border pedagogy, it is important that students are given opportunities to read works from authors that incorporate similar histories. Giroux states that students need to be “be offered opportunities not only to read texts that both affirm and interrogate the complexity of their own histories, but also the opportunity to develop a counter discourse to the established boundaries of knowledge” (53). Incorporating Chicana texts in the composition classroom offers students the opportunity to engage in different cultural codes, experiences, and languages that pertain to their own life situated in a border city. “This means educating students both to read these codes historically and critically while simultaneously learning the limits of such codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories” (Giroux 53). By using critical text

from women of color, such as Anzaldúa and Moraga, students recognize the limits built into the discourse and the societal regimens of truth that deny gaps, limits, specificity, and counter-narratives (Giroux 53). When students were introduced to readings like these, they are crossing over into the realms of “meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations, and values” (Giroux 53).

Moreover, educators, such as my professors, need to train students to understand their voice amidst the complexities of societal constructs. Kazanjian states, “For example, teachers can allow students to examine the multitude of texts that confirm or confound their own histories and narratives” (373). By examining different texts from other Chicana scholars, students can identify themselves within the realm of academic discourse.

Kenneth Burke, in “A Rhetoric of Motives,” states, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.” (55). Burke uses the theory “identification” to distinguish from the traditional definition of persuasion in classical rhetoric. Identification serves as an extension of persuasion since identification can place two distinct individuals in a conjoined group if their interests are similar. These individuals may be identified together because of their similar interests, but their distinct characteristics will not be denied. Both Cavazos and Dibrell included works of Latinx and Black women rhetoricians to relate to them and understand their writing more and be motivated in the ways we see ourselves as scholars. In border pedagogy, Chicana feminist thought is grounded in Theory in the Flesh and embodies border thinking. Both Anzaldúa and Moraga introduce Theory in the Flesh as a feminist project that helps

women of color generate knowledge and processes from systematic forms of oppression and border thinking. In defining theory in the flesh, they state, “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity... We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our own words. (23). By introducing theory from women of color in the composition classroom, borders are being challenged and crossed, as new knowledge is being formed. Giroux states that “not only are borders being challenged, crossed and refigured, but borderlands are being created in which the very production and acquisition of knowledge is being used by students to rewrite their own histories, identified, and learning possibilities” (54). Knowledge and an analysis of power are important pedagogical issues that must come together to reaffirm and interrogate difference, in order to open up engage a “vision of community in which student voices define themselves in terms of their distinct social formations and their broader collective hopes” (Giroux 64).

These stories of what it is like to live in the borderlands by a Chicana resonated with me and my classmates because we identified with her experiences. We saw ourselves in her writing. Acknowledging cross-cultural and multilingual communications in the classroom causes students to learn new ways of expressing themselves and engaging with others. Trisha Brady, in “Negotiating Linguistic Borderlands, Valuing Linguistic Diversity, and Incorporating Border Pedagogy in a College Composition Classroom,” states that “When students realized that everyone in the class, including their professor, had to negotiate Anzaldúa’s linguistic borderland and additional linguistic differences that emerged in our classroom as their peers started sharing their personal

knowledge and experiences, they found their voices. It is in this sense that border pedagogy restores what monolingual instruction often prohibits: the ability to construct one's sense of self within signification and representation when allowed to reference linguistic repertoires as resources." (1). When students feel comfortable in a setting that affirms and demonstrates representation of POC writers, they will exponentially begin to participate in class.

Conclusion

Border pedagogy is a tool that can be used in composition classrooms to promote ethical relations with one another, tie in the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity of a student into a student's writing and discussion, increase critical engagement, and push toward personal understanding and healing of experiences with language. By promoting discussion in the classroom that interweaves personal histories and how they are associated with politics and power systems in our society, students are constructing their own knowledge but forming it in an academic context. Moreover, as Brady states, "carefully selected multilingual or bilingual texts can be assigned to create a linguistic borderland or borderlands that must be negotiated in the classroom" (1). Integrating text in the classroom by Chicana writers pushes toward identification between students and writers.

V. BORDER PEDAGOGY IN MY FYC CLASSROOM: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

I now conclude my research with the last step of my healing process: to bring what I have learned into fruition in my own FYC classroom. As a novice first-year composition teacher who is also queer and Latina, I strive to incorporate an inclusive pedagogy that integrates the intersectionality of border thinking, border pedagogy, and language to build a writing community in my FYC classroom. I want to implement the border pedagogical practices that I have learned by analyzing my previous experiences into my FYC course syllabus, assignments, and pedagogical style to build a strengthened writing community in my classroom and to increase participation and critical engagement from my students.

When I began my research, I was a few months into my first semester as a FYC teacher, and I wish I had instilled the several pedagogical practices expressed in this research. However, with this thesis, I can justify my pedagogical choices and instill these practices when I begin teaching my next first-year composition course. This thesis served as a mode for me to explore my previous experiences and analyze how border pedagogy worked to alleviate any anxieties or trauma that I had previously experienced, and how it can work to build a writing community in a border city.

Limitations

Before I begin to explain how I will integrate border pedagogical practices in my classroom, it is important to first note the limitations of this implementation. Autoteoria-

historia as a method made it possible for me to explore and bring to light previous experiences with my language that I had buried deep in my subconscious. It was also important to analyze and discover the motivator behind my increase in critical engagement in class, which was the integration of elements of border pedagogy. For this specific study, I wanted to deal with the personal and use my experiences to inform the practices in my classroom, but it is imperative that the border pedagogical practices analyzed throughout this thesis be situated in the rhetoric and composition field. I continuously reference scholars from the composition field who have analyzed the theory of border pedagogy and who have enacted border pedagogical practices in their classrooms. This study would not be as effective if it was informed only by my experiences; I needed to incorporate information from other scholars to situate my work in a scholarly manner.

Additionally, when studying how border pedagogy can be used in a FYC classroom to increase critical engagement, I realized that my study is limited to border cities where border culture is present. However, I do not believe that border pedagogy should only be implemented in institutions that are located in border cities or with similar demographics. As Giroux points out, border pedagogy posits students to generate an encounter with linguistic difference, such as course readings and pedagogical practice. Students, then, become linguistic border crossers as they glimpse the monolingual and bilingual culture from a new perspective that has the potential to disrupt “existing configurations of power” within America’s socio-linguistic hierarchy” (Giroux 28). By selecting course readings with multilingual or bilingual texts, the classroom itself

becomes a linguistic borderland in which students can traverse these texts by utilizing their own translingual skills to make meaning (Brady 1).

In what follows, I will demonstrate how the pedagogical practices that I adopted from my previous instructors will work in my borderland classroom.

Syllabus and Assignment Implications

For my syllabus, I will stress the importance of community-building in terms of discussion, collaboration, and community engagement. I am gathering information from Dr. Cavazos and Dr. Dibrell's syllabus for this, as they specifically integrate border pedagogical themes throughout the syllabus. For my syllabus, I am including a section titled "Classroom Atmosphere" and incorporate the following statement,

"We envision our classroom as a place where all of us can share our ideas, thoughts, and questions without fear of being made fun of or embarrassed or attacked. We all have different beliefs, lived experiences, and perspectives, and we do not need to agree with each other on everything we discuss in class; we do, however, have to respect each other at all times, provide constructive feedback, and believe we can all learn from one another. We envision peaceful and learning enriching discussions for all. Our classroom interactions will be based on respect for all of the writers and readers we encounter this semester. Because our writing classroom will be a community of writers, researchers, and readers, you are expected to help your peers succeed in all course writing projects and in the process you will also succeed" (Cavazos & Dibrell 2016).

Border pedagogy is rooted in critical pedagogy, and both of these practices push for discussion and meaning making in the classroom. By acknowledging that students will all have different perspectives and experiences that will bring to the class, I am encouraging a respectful environment of community-building and collaboration from my students.

Moreover, I want to follow both Dr. Noe, Dr. Cavazos and Ms. Dibrell by giving students the ability to communicate and write in languages other than English. The following is what I would incorporate in my syllabus,

“Our ability to speak, read, and write in more than one language and/or dialect is a strength both in our personal and professional lives. *Los invitamos a escribir, leer y desarrollar investigaciones en cualquier lenguaje o dialecto que este alineado a sus metas y expectativas.* We encourage you to engage in conversation, conduct research, and write in any language and/or dialect that fit your goals and expectations” (Cavazos & Dibrell 2016).

As I have previously stated, it is important for students to be able to engage in literacy in whatever language they feel comfortable in, as this encourages critical engagement with the materiality of FYC instead of focusing on the mechanics of English vernacular.

Additionally, language is a part of a writers’ identity, and it is important not to separate language and identity when it comes to literacy development. I will also be reading CCCC’s “Students' Right to Their Own Language” in class, which states,

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable

amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (1)

Because I am referencing the CCCC's SRTTOL, as an educator, I will not focus on the mechanics of writing; instead, I will be focused on the "sense" and content of the writing, as opposed to the form. This is because if educators primarily focus on the mechanics of writing, they might not take into consideration that a student may be an ESL writer. I want my students to be engaged in the art of writing, and not to be dismayed by their grammar.

For my pedagogical approach, I will be enacting what Reynaldo Reyes states in the article "In a World of Disposable Students: The Humanizing Elements of Border Pedagogy in Teacher Education." Border educators are those who integrate border pedagogy into their curriculum, which is the identity that I will take in the classroom. He defines border educators as

Individuals who see complexities of identity; are personally invested in the success of their students by understanding the importance of student voice; are willing to challenge their own beliefs through self-reflection; show care and trust; adapt curriculum to students; and bring nonstandard resources to teaching and learning and apply life experiences to learning. (34)

I will consistently remind students that I have come to realize my identity and my place in this politicized world through writing and reading of my own literacy experiences and how border culture influenced my agency. Additionally, every class session will be filled with student voice and self-reflection, as I push for discussion from my students rather than myself.

Lastly, as for assignments, I will have several readings that will help facilitate discussion and identification with Chicana scholars.

They include,

- *This Bridge Called my Back* “Theory of the Flesh” readings edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa
- “La Conciencia de la Mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness”
- “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory: Stock Story vs. Counterstory Dialogues Concerning Alejandra’s ‘Fit’ in the Academy” by Aja Martinez
- *Building a Translengua in Latina Lesbian Organizing* by Lourdes Torres
- *Movimiento De Rebeldía Y Las Cultras Que Tracionan* by Gloria Anzaldúa
- “NFWA march and rally” (transcript and video) by Dolores Huerta
- *La Respuesta* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Conclusion

Este proceso se tardó mucho tiempo, pero era necesario para aprender cómo ser una maestra que yo necesitaba cuando era niña chica. By analyzing different border pedagogical practices in relation to my own autoethnography, I was able to decipher the ways in which border pedagogy could be used in U.S./Border cities to build writing

communities in higher education. The goal of this proposed research was to guide myself and other FYC teachers to understand ways in implementing border pedagogy in their pedagogical practices to increase the engagement of students in writing classes.

By reflecting on my previous experiences and healing from them, I was able to build my own writing voice and construct my agency, as well as understand my identity as a scholar and writer.

“Sometimes a breakdown can be the beginning of a kind of breakthrough, a way of living in advance through a trauma that prepares you for a future of radical transformation.”
(Moraga 20).

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