

STORIES OF SCHOOL AND THE STORIED LIVES OF LATINA/O  
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

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## **DEDICATION**

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the storied lives of three Latina/o elementary Principals. The research partners included two individuals and the author of this dissertation. The study employed a narrative inquiry approach and is rooted in an epistemological notion of narrative inquiry and Chicana/o Ways of Knowing. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to understand not only stories of schools, but the social, cultural, and familial stories that shape and inform Latina/o school principals' leadership, as well. A further purpose was to understand how their social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories conflicted with the research partners' story of school and how they negotiated conflicts. Through a narrative inquiry approach, field texts of their narratives were collected using a variety of strategies. Field texts were composed from extensive conversations between the researcher and the two partners. The research partners were invited to tell and retell stories of their own experience of schools both as students and as elementary school principals. Field texts were then analyzed by applying a framework of analysis that included: (a) the notions of three dimensional space (e.g. time, space, and sociality); (b) chronology, epiphanies, and pivotal moments; and (c) tenets of Chicana/o Ways of Knowing. From the analysis, poetic transcriptions were created to represent the stories related by the research partners. Their shared stories highlight a politic of *pasión* that informed their leadership. Implications for further research are presented within in the framework of the ecologies of knowing.

## **I. PRINCIPAL'S STORY AS INTRODUCTION**

I know a principal who not only tells great stories but about whom great stories are told, stories about his leadership skills and his compassion for students and staff. These stories have not only caught my attention. I have constantly reflected on them during my teaching career. As a teacher, I looked at this principal as a model of an educational leader, so I considered myself fortunate when I obtained an instructional administrator position with this principal. Unfortunately, the privilege of working with this principal was short-lived. A month into the school year a personal illness forced him to take a leave of absence. On the day he told the staff that he was leaving and the school district had decided to name me as interim principal, I sat with him in his office. We both anxiously awaited the after school meeting. While we waited, he told me stories about his personal and professional journeys through life, stories about his upbringing, his tenure as the principal of the campus, and about the school's faculty and staff. On the surface, his stories were informative but they also carried a personal connection, as if he was inviting me to share in this storied landscape he had created and in which he lived.

He also practiced his speech. "I want to explain the announcement just right to the staff," he told me. The speech began with stories about the school, transitioned to his reason for leaving, and finished with my transition to interim principal. "What do you think?" he asked, looking for feedback about his speech. I told him how beautifully it was prepared and how masterfully he embedded stories that were meaningful and appropriate. "So, what do you plan to say to the staff?" he asked me. I told him that I did not have stories to share the way he did. I will forever hold the words of his response in my heart.

“Sure you do,” he said. “You have stories, and you will have your own principal stories. In fact, you are part of our school’s story now.”

These words from this storymaker and storyteller comforted me and invited me to reflect deep down into my soul, my *alma*,<sup>1</sup> about my own story. His words gave me the courage to share my story with staff, students, parents, and community members. His words also allowed me to see how we could be connected in a new story as we engaged together. Through the dimension of story, engagement is both dialogical and familiar. As we each make meaning together of the present engagement, we recall our own past experiences or stories and contemplate future stories or possibilities within the context of a narrative engagement. Understanding the interconnected possibilities of story allowed me to be conscious of the stories I was creating and experiencing as a principal. This consciousness also informs my research, which is guided by the following questions.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the stories of schools that shape and inform Latina/o school principals’ leadership?
- What are the social, cultural, and familial stories that shape and inform Latina/o school principals’ leadership?

### **Purposeful Disruption: The Flow of this Narrative**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to delve into the lived experiences of Latina/o elementary principals through their storied lives, the *cuentos*<sup>2</sup> that shaped their leadership. While this narrative inquiry addresses the technical standards of a

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<sup>1</sup> Spanish word for soul.

<sup>2</sup> Spanish word for stories and personal narratives.

dissertation, the rhythm, flow, and unconventional presentation of scholarly work are purposeful to the framework.

The framework and roadmap of this dissertation are informed by my own experiences as a former elementary school principal and reflections about my own leadership and ontology. They are informed by the topic of storied lives and the diversity of Latina/o elementary school principals' leadership and experiences. They are also informed by the nature of stories and the story making process. In addition, the roadmap for this dissertation is informed by a pedagogy of home: my mother's lessons on quilt making, knowledge shared by my mother, and the familial story of a mother and daughter relationship.

I made the decision to honor the experiences and stories that have informed this work through the narrative presentation of this inquiry. As a result, I acknowledge disrupting the traditional dissertation format comprised of five chapters. The disruption, and therefore this methodology, are informed by the research stories, the experiences, the literature, and my ontological position rooted in my upbringing. However, I strategically use headings, stories, and scholarly literature to assist the reader with the flow of this narrative. I am also transparent with the process of creating this narrative and with my position as researcher and author throughout this text.

In essence, this dissertation is an auto-biographical narrative of the continued story of me as a school principal and educational leader. Similarly, it is a narrative of the stories of school that have shaped Latina/o elementary school principals; a narrative of the social, cultural, and familial stories encompassing tension and negotiation. As the storyteller and storymaker, I share my own personal narratives or *cuentos* throughout the



text. I share *cuentos* from my lived experiences as a school principal, student, and as a Latina. I share the story of developing this narrative, and I share the stories of this narrative research. As storymaker and storyteller, I step in and out of some stories, telling them as vignettes of my lived experiences. I weave these stories throughout the narrative text. Some of the stories are about my own sense making. Others helped frame this narrative text within the context of academia. Ultimately, the rationale for my storytelling is to engage you and invite you to engage with this narrative text. Recalling the words from my former principal, I start our journey through this narrative text with one of my principal's stories. I encourage you to also engage with this narrative text, as you are now part of this story.

### **My Principal Story as Context**

*I am a competent and experienced administrator. My authority is derived from God who has called me to this profession and has blessed me with the gifts and capacity to carry the cross of this calling on a daily basis. I am made strong by humility in serving others and my faith in God who is always with me. He guides me no matter how difficult the burdens of my profession may be (L. Agapito/P.Rocha meeting notes 2010).*

I sat in silence at the smooth round table in the middle of my office where I had many *pláticas*<sup>3</sup> that school year with assistant principals, teachers, students, and parents. My friend, one of the assistant principals, sat in silence. He had pushed me to think about this prayer and patiently waited for my response. Through the course of our time working together, this individual, a second assistant principal, and I worked on establishing authentic honest relationships based on trust and respect for one another. Through these relationships we learned how to address the technical and human demands of our positions as administrators. We often pushed each other to reflect and make meaning of issues we otherwise would have avoided.

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<sup>3</sup> Spanish word for conversation. The word also describes a method of engagement.

I read the prayer the assistant principal wrote on the back of that afternoon's instructional leadership meeting agenda (see Figure 1). It was already past regular school working hours. The darkness coming from outside the office window indicated it was early evening. I knew this meeting, like many others before, had gone longer than planned.

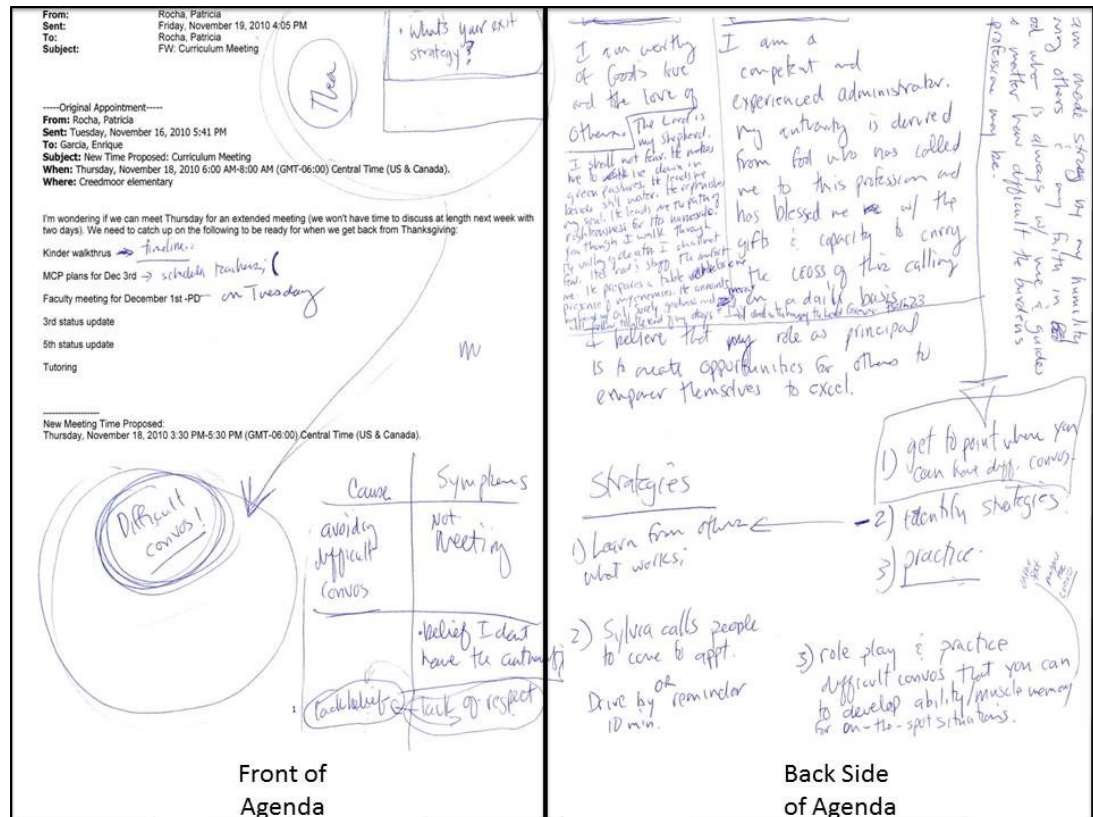


Figure 1. Agenda from the instructional meeting referenced in the author's story.

The front side of the agenda noted the intended meeting plan: kindergarten walkthroughs, Model Classroom Project professional development, faculty meeting professional development, third grade status update, fifth grade status update, and tutoring. These were critical topics to discuss in November with the holiday breakfast approaching. However, the planned instructional discussion shifted to a conversation about the stress associated with change and the critical conversations I needed to have

with others. As the campus principal, I sometimes questioned my role and obligation as school administrator to have these conversations. I was trying to create a community of learners and leaders at the school and at times I wondered if I should relinquish direct authority about school leadership decisions. It was difficult to balance the conflicting ideologies between top down and collaborative leadership. My eyes were focused on the writing jotted on the back page of the agenda. I reread the prayer silently. The words “no matter how difficult the burdens of my profession may be” assaulted my tired body. My eyes began to tear up.

Guilt. A year had gone by since my former principal left. I was no longer interim principal. I was *the* principal, and the burdens of the position weighed heavily on me. The most pressing of those burdens were: (a) responding to teachers unsettled by instructional changes implemented that school year, (b) helping teachers through the stress connected with our transition to work as a learning community, and (c) diffusing an escalating situation with a group of parents upset over misinformation they received from a staff member. And to make matters worse a school board member had complained to my superintendent, questioning my ability to lead based on the color of my skin. I felt uneasy and guilty, doubting my ability to lead the campus.

I had succumbed to the darkness of doubt resulting these burdens. I questioned the wisdom of my choices: why did I push forward with community learning framework? Why did I implement the focus on literacy instruction and college readiness? I doubted my leadership and my authority as principal. I told myself the easier road would have been to settle for the status quo. Yet, deep down I knew the status quo was not enough. I knew that as a school leader there were opportunities to make a difference by challenging

the status quo. My biggest dream for this community was to create an environment in which teachers, students, and families saw the potential within themselves, an environment where students and families dreamed of college as an option if they desired, and teachers continued to grow personally and professionally. These had been my goals as far back as when I started in education as a bilingual teacher and they continued to be goals that motivated me as a Latina school principal. My personal experiences in schools, and the experiences I witnessed through the lives of many students reminded me of my goals as an educator. Yes, deep down, I knew that the easy road was not enough.

I spent the previous year as interim principal, managing the collective emotional impact of our principal's departure. The strong and beloved principal was out on sick leave and my job was to maintain the instructional focus that already had been outlined for the year. The difficulty of the situation and the principal's illness took a heavy emotional toll on the staff and school community. As a result, an additional role I took on as interim principal was to validate this heavy emotional toll and support the staff, students, and parents through the transition. At the end of my year as interim principal, we celebrated the fruits of our labor and celebrated our designation of "recognized status" according to the state's accountability system<sup>4</sup>. However, I knew that this accomplishment was not sufficient. I spent my year as interim principal in conversations with teachers, students, and parents. I visited classrooms, poured over our data and facilitated conferences with the parents and teachers of struggling students. Still, I knew that there was more we had to do as a community to help more of our students pass the state's assessments. The campus is a predominantly Latino campus and while many of

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<sup>4</sup> The state accountability system in Texas is a system that assigns a label according to passing rates of the state's assessments.

the 80% who met testing standards were Latino and White, the majority of the 20% who had not passed the state's assessments were Latino students. Additionally, even though we had an 80% success rate, the standards for the assessments were changing. The state was ready to implement more rigorous standards and a new assessment. And, having been recently named principal, I was ready to lead the school community to challenge our work to better account for all students.

Yet, the burdens of leadership, change, and pushing other campus staff members to question our practices were overwhelming me. I had started to doubt my decisions and my leadership.

Reflecting on these difficulties overwhelmed me as I sat in my office with the assistant principal. The prayer written on the back of the agenda had served as the impetus for my internal reflection. Overwhelmed, tears slowly ran down my face.

While we were still sitting at the table my assistant principal broke the silence and asked, "What do you believe your role is [as] a principal?"

I took a deep breath. I understood I only had the luxury of being in touch with my emotions for a brief moment. I was ready to continue the conversation. "I believe that my role as a principal is to create opportunities for others to empower themselves to excel."

I took another deep breath as I let my words linger out loud. I reread the prayer. This time I focused on the words, "... blessed me with the gifts and capacity to carry the cross of this calling on a daily basis."

I was ready to move forward with the conversation and move toward planning the strategies to support my belief. The prayer and the conversation with the assistant

principal had provided me with an opportunity to reflect and to think of one critical question, “What do you believe your role is as principal?”

### **Cuento: Personal Narrative as Introduction of Self**

This was not the first time I reflected on my purpose as an educator, and I am certain it will not be the last time. However, this *cuento*, this personal narrative, that I share about a difficult moment during my role as a campus elementary principal is the story I choose as the genesis of our engagement, between you as a reader and me as storyteller, for this dissertation. I believe we all create stories and are in a state of constant re-storying based on our own experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Clandinin, 2013). For the purpose of framing this dissertation, I identify myself as the storyteller and storymaker. However, you are also the storyteller as you engage with me.

As a reference point for our engagement, I define my conceptualization of story. I engage primarily from my own experience with story. I refer to my personal stories that I share with you as *cuentos*. *Cuentos*, a representation of a personal narrative, have been and continue to be an integral part of my life. Smith (2013) writes,

We learn about and begin to make sense of the world through the tales that we tell-stories that we tell ourselves about the world, about ourselves; stories that others tell us; stories that we perform, create, and imagine... We create stories in order to understand who we are, and what we are, and how we are in the world.

(p. 5)

I remember hearing *cuentos* from my parents as they shared historical lessons about our small town. I remember hearing second hand *cuentos*, once shared by my *pagrande*<sup>5</sup> with my dad about the struggles of immigrant life. While very much entertaining, these

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<sup>5</sup> Spanish word for grandfather.

*cuentos* also took the form of a moral lesson or a lesson of persistence. I also remember the *cuentos* I would often tell myself to explain the injustices I perceived were aimed at me. As a young adult in college, I relied on the written presentation of story to journal and create short stories about my experiences. As I transitioned into a professional career, I relied on *cuentos* to help build community as a teacher and as a campus principal. Later, stories became especially critical in my formation and in my journey as a doctoral student.

### **Storied Lives: Cuentos de Tensión**

The *cuento* I shared about the doubt I had is only a part of a greater narrative of me as a Latina educator. It is a story that reveals and attempts to make sense of the reflective questions that came after a disruption of my story of principal, my personal story of Latina, my familial story, my spiritual story, stories of teachers, stories about school policy, and the stories I had told myself about schools. This disruption revealed incongruence between my beliefs of what a principal should do and real-life experiences. I felt guilty for doubting my leadership decisions even though I knew my decisions were based on extensive thought, collaboration, and deeply rooted values. My story of principal was one that did what was right for students and did not accept the status quo. It was one of a leader who did what she believed was the right thing to do, only to have these decisions questioned by others. At the time, these moments created guilt and doubt, disrupting my view of myself as a confident and competent school leader. Now, however, these moments of doubt serve as an opportunity for me to scrutinize the multiple stories I was unknowingly piecing together.

The *cuento* I shared about doubt is also a story I frequently revisited through my doctoral studies in a school improvement program. This experience provided me the opportunity to explore the ontological and epistemological underpinnings that have shaped me as a person and an educator. In my second year of doctoral studies, I decided to leave the principalship so that I could dedicate more time for my studies. However, as I progressed through the doctoral program and began to understand the politics of education, school reform, and philosophical theories, I often reflected back on my experiences and this particular *cuento* as principal. I struggled to make meaning of this *cuento* and I struggled to make meaning of how I frequently went back to my own experiences with schools. School and schooling had been the institutional landscape that I most frequently struggled to make meaning of.

### **Quilting as Sense Making**

“*Comó te fue?*”<sup>6</sup> What did your professor tell you?” my mom asked me as she worked at my kitchen table. She was sitting in front of her sewing machine stitching small, multicolored square pieces of fabric. The quilt she was sewing was slowly starting to take shape. I walked into the kitchen and sat in the chair across from my mom while I placed my heavy backpack to the side. Even though the kitchen table sat six people, my mom’s sewing machine and supplies had overtaken it.

My mother and father had moved into my house just as I started my doctoral studies. They moved in with me to be closer to my sister, and help her with her new baby and my nine-year-old niece. Since then, we jokingly call each other roomies to describe our living situation, and my mom started a routine of asking me about school: “Do you have school tonight,” “Do you have homework,” and “What did you talk about at

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<sup>6</sup> Spanish phrase meaning “how did it go?”



school?” Eventually, when I chose my dissertation chair and explained the process of working with a dissertation chair to complete a dissertation, her questions became more focused. “What did he say,” she would probe until she was satisfied and then she ended her inquiry about my meetings with my dissertation chair, Dr. Esperanza, with a final piece of advice saying, “Listen to your teacher.”

“He told me that I need to keep writing.” I gave my mom the short answer even though I knew that it was not enough to satisfy her question.

“What else did he say?”

This day I was not in the mood to discuss the conversation with my dissertation chair at length since I was struggling with pinpointing my ideas for my research. I left the meeting with my chair with more questions than answers. So, I started asking my mom questions.

“Who is that quilt for?”

“I’m just making it to keep busy.”

“Where did you get the fabric?”

“I picked it up at the small fabric store in town.”

My mother has been sewing quilts for a long time mostly since her retirement. She was a seamstress for a large retail company for many years. She knows the intricacies of the sewing machine, types of stitches, the knowledge of fabrics, and the type of cuts required of delicate strands of threads better than anyone I know. Like a trained professional, she reads sewing quilt magazines and books looking for ideas, creative inspiration, and tips that will improve her craft.

One of my defense mechanisms is to ask others questions to avoid thinking about the questions that I have to think about for myself. I continued with more questions.

“Why do you like making quilts?”

“I like the challenge of figuring things out, it keeps my brain active.”

“Have you always liked making quilts?”

“Yes, it helps me relax and helps keep my mind off things.”

My mom seemed satisfied despite the fact that I was obviously avoiding her question about my meeting. For now, it seemed she was humoring me by being an active participant in my impromptu study about why she quilts. And why not? She was used to my questioning her about what she was up to, something I had done frequently since I started the doctoral program, as I struggled to make sense of my own ontology. One time, when I was trying to understand the inequities faced by Latinos in my hometown and her experiences in school, I bombarded mom with questions. She became so nervous about being questioned about experiences of racism that she yelled back at me saying she felt like she was on trial. Over time, however, my inquiry skills and my relationship with my mom have improved, and we have been able to have authentic dialogue about her past and my past.

“But you didn’t always make quilts?” I asked.

“No, I was busy sewing clothes for you all.”

My mother not only sewed for a living but it was a means for her to contribute to our family’s economic survival. She would sew all our clothes. Creating dresses for each of her four daughters, and shorts for my brother.

“Your grandma made quilts. I made my first quilt when my father passed away. It helped me keep my mind off of things.”

I remembered when my grandfather passed away. Even though I was only four years old I remember being in the front yard playing as my uncle walked up to tell my mom the news. I remembered she stopped washing the clothes on the *tallador de ropa*<sup>7</sup> and she started crying in my uncle’s arms. Realizing that she made a quilt to help her through the grieving process made sense to me now.

“Where is the quilt now?”

“Your dad threw it away when we cleaned up the house after you all left for college. You remember the quilt. It was the *colcha*<sup>8</sup> with all the fabrics from our scraps of clothes.”

I remembered the *colcha* well. It was slightly bigger than a full size quilt that contained rectangle pieces of left over fabrics of dresses and blouses she had made for us and herself through the years. My memory of the *colcha* was that when I snuggled under the quilt my eye would always recognize the polyester remnants of the fabric for the suits my mother would make for herself.

“I didn’t use a pattern for the quilt. Instead I cut rectangle pieces from different scraps of fabric from around the house. I tried to find the pieces of fabric that reminded me of some memory or event.”

“If you didn’t have a pattern, how did you design it?”

“The design was simple. I cut the fabrics into squares and stitched a hem around each square. I set out the blocks at first by color and by fabric. There were pieces of

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<sup>7</sup> Spanish word for washboard.

<sup>8</sup> Spanish word for quilt.

cotton from your dresses and polyester that I used for my own clothes. I laid the pieces out and moved around to create the design I wanted. Then I realized that it didn't matter how I laid out the design because each square had its own meaning. I used the sewing machine to sew the squares into blocks. Then I sewed the blocks. I used a long piece of fleece fabric for the backing because I wanted the quilt to be cozy and warm. I then stitched the backing with block panels together by hand."

As my mom told the story behind her first quilt, she also gave me a rich description of the meticulous and precise sewing process, the pattern design, and the fabrics. While she reflected and told the story of her first quilting experience, she did so with more than twenty years of professional sewing trade experience. Embedded in the *cuento* was not only a personal reflection but also a technical reflection based on her knowledge of her craft and years of experience. She spoke not only as a mother but as a professional seamstress. I could see both of these experiences were part of the multiple storied life of my mom.

As I sat there taking in and reflecting on my mom's explanation of quilting, I was reminded of the readings I had just completed for my feminism class. I was reminded of Chicana/Latinas' everyday experiences and practices of teaching, learning, and communal "knowing" as education (Bernal 1998; Bernal et al., 2006; Elenes, 2010). I thought about how my mom had taught me many things. However, I really never had learned to sew. She had tried to teach me once for a math assignment I had in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in which I had to create an art project that incorporated math elements. She helped me sew a quilted pillow. Even though my quilted pillow won two ribbons, I really never learned to sew. However, sitting there at the kitchen table, my mom in her storying and in her own

knowledge was helping me stitch some of the concepts of my own research study together. I was starting to think about experience from the perspective of storied lives and how a storied life contained multiple stories.

### **Interweaving/Sense Making: Storied Lives and the Landscape of School**

My mom's *cuento* of her first quilt helped me develop and stitch together several concepts to help me frame the purpose of my study. First, as I listened to her during the conversation, I began to see my mom's storied life was shaped by multiple stories. Her lived experiences included her story as mother, her story as quilter, her story as professional seamstress, and her story as a member of a family. Each one of those stories contributed to my mother's current story as she lived it at the moment of our conversation. Second, as my mom talked about the personal meaning of the quilt she revealed another lens and knowledge set that also framed the *cuento*; the lens from her professional story as a seamstress was interwoven with her personal story. My mom's professional language, knowledge, and skill, as well as her years of experience were evident as she described her first quilt. Third, when my mom described the pieces of fabric that contributed to her first quilt, I could see those pieces of fabric were more than randomly selected pieces of throwaway material. They represented multiple stories of lived experiences. Furthermore, her process of putting the pieces of multi-symbolic squares of fabric together served as a vehicle for memory, reflection, learning, and healing. Lastly, I remembered the comfort and coziness of the blanket and that the pieces of the fabric from my mom's quilt reminded me of her suits. I was reminded that both the process of making the quilt and the final product itself had multiple and varied meanings and purposes.

Recalling my mother's story, I again thought about my own *cuento* about the struggle I experienced when I was a principal. I thought of the many questions about which I found myself constantly reflecting as an educator. I realized those moments of guilt and doubt occurred when I had been faced with a story that differed, collided, or conflicted with the stories that had shaped me and the stories I was living. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) state we live storied lives. I have found this to be true with my own experiences and reflections. However, as an educator, my storied lives center on the landscape of school. As a student, through the landscape of schools, I learned and lived stories that I knew of teachers and the stories I knew of school. These stories of schools contributed to my knowledge, my values, and my actions as a school leader and were also part of my own lived experiences as a student. As I became knowledgeable about schools through my training and experiences as an educator my personal stories of school were also interwoven with my new knowledge and language of education leadership.

As I began to understand my life as storied, I expanded my knowledge of storied lives based on the works of Clandinin and Connelly (1990; 2006). Clandinin and Connelly (1990) view human experience in which humans, individually, and socially, lead storied lives:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Therefore, experience is a storied phenomenon. (p. 33)

Clandinin (2013) explains that in order to understand each individual's experience one must understand the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that shape, and are shaped by, the individual. For Clandinin (2013), institutional stories include the stories of schools. Clandinin asserts, "The institutional stories of school profoundly shape us all. The stories we live by, and the stories we live in, over time are indelibly marked for all of us by stories of school" (p. 22).

I found myself pondering the stories of schools that I have been told as a student and the stories of schools that helped form my role as an educator. I think of the *cuento* I shared earlier in which I had to answer the question "What do you believe your role is as principal?" Through my own experiences as a student, as a teacher, and through principal preparation, I told myself the story about principal and lived the story of principal. This story of principal falls within the landscape of the story of school. In addition to learning the role of the principal through story, I also have come to know different stories of school through my own academic studies and experiences.

### **Stitching Sense Making: Story of School**

One of the stories of schools I learned through my training and studies of education is the story of the Latino educational pipeline (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sanchez & Solórzano, 2006; Pérez Huber, Malagón, Ramirez, Camargo Gonzalez, Jimenez, & Vélez, 2015; Valencia, 2011; Yosso, 2005, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). For Latinos, the educational pipeline represents a failure of the educational system to provide meaningful opportunities for educational success (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Huber et al., 2006; Valencia, 2011; Yosso, 2005, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). This story of school for Latinos is

one that was also voiced to me as a school principal through our campus data and the initiatives from the state and local school district aimed at improving Latino school achievement.

I also lived and learned the story of schools for Latino students in my own experiences as a student growing up in Sebastian, Texas and attending school in the Lyford Consolidated School District. I recall a number of my classmates who struggled through school, and many of my friends who were successful in graduating from high school did not make it to college. I also learned a powerful lesson in the story of schools for Latino students on my first day of college at my state's top tier university. Sitting in an auditorium classroom filled with 500 students, I looked around to see the majority of students there did not look like me. It was at this exact moment I realized schools did not work for all students, in particular students of color. My first day as a college student began to frame a new story of schools for Latino students and a new story for me about schooling.

### **Purpose**

The lessons from Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2006) of experience as storied lives, lessons from my mom, and the reflection of my own stories of school helped me to form the questions that shape this study. The purpose of this qualitative study is to delve into the lived experiences of Latina/o elementary principals through their storied lives, the *cuentos* that shaped their leadership. In particular, I explore their institutional stories, their stories of school that shaped the leadership of these Latina/o elementary principals. By exploring these stories, I seek to contribute to our understanding the story of school, the story of principal, and in particular those of Latinas/os. While I recognize learning is



not confined to the hallways and classrooms of a school building, learning happens in the spaces of home and community (Bernal et al., 2006; Elenes, 2010), I focus on the story of school because it is this institutional space that has led to reform efforts to improve the space of learning for Latino students (Murakami, Valle, & Mendez-Morse, 2013; Murillo, Villenas, Galván, Muñoz, Martinez, Machado-Casas, 2010; Valencia, 2012). It is the institutional space that teachers, school leaders, and principals, by nature of their roles, can impact.

It is in understanding the stories and interweaving their meaning, like my mom's pieces of fabric which formed her first quilt, that we begin to form an understanding of the narrative of the story of school as experienced by Latino students and lived by Latina/o elementary school principals. Like the process of my mom's first quilt experience, the process of storying our experiences can create new possibilities.

The unique positionality of Latina/o elementary school principals provides an opportunity to examine the issue through an informed lens as school leaders and as Latinos. As school administrators, principals have experienced specialized training in educational history, law, policies, and instructional pedagogy (Anderson, 1991; Anderson, 2009; Fowler, 2000; Kafka, 2009). School administrators also have an understanding of school improvement efforts and macro elements from the community, state, and federal levels that impact public education (Fowler, 2000; Hope & Pigford, 2001). Through their formal principal training, they have been taught the need to address minority student academic achievement from a data analysis of state and federal accountability student assessments (Anderson, 2009; Fenimore, 2011; Shipps & White, 2009). Latina/o elementary school principals have been privileged to witness student

stories with school as they have worked as teachers and school administrators. In addition, Latina/o elementary school principals have their own personal stories as students in the school system.

### **Stitching the Pieces of Storied Lives: Personal Justifications**

When I was a school principal, I remember sharing personal *cuentos* of my own school experience and listening to *cuentos* of school from teachers, students, and parents. With the daily demands of technical administrative responsibilities and instructional leadership, I relied heavily on my own stories to make connections with teachers, students, and parents. However, I never had the opportunity to fully reflect on and understand the stories that shaped me as a leader. This study matters to me because it offers the opportunity to voice my story of school, assists me in reflecting on the events and memories that shaped me as an educational leader, and, just like my mom's experience with her first quilt, helps me learn, heal, and reimagine possibilities for my own growth as an educational leader.

### **My First Day of School**

My own experiences of school are a rich source about my knowledge formation regarding the story of school. My first day of kindergarten was my first experience with school and the educational landscape. My first day of school occurred on a fall day in 1976 at Lincoln Lee Elementary. Lincoln Lee Elementary is a small primary school in the Lyford Consolidated School District in Lyford, Texas.



*Figure2.* Picture of Lincoln Lee Elementary in Lyford, Texas.

I remember the day clearly because my sister and I wore new dresses that my mother sewed for us. I did not know I was going to school. I knew the distance we traveled was far from home because we drove past the cotton gin at the edge of our little town of Sebastian. We ended up in front of a large, brown brick building. I knew this building was important since it was made of brick—most of the homes in my town were wood frame structures. As we walked up the steps of the building and entered through the front doors, I started to realize we were there to stay. I clung to my mom’s legs and held her body tight. I didn’t want to lose her in this strange space.

### **First Day of School as Elementary School Principal**

The image of me clinging to mom was still vivid in my memory. I would be reminded of the memory when I was a school principal and I had to work with kindergarten teachers’ requests to mandate that parents drop off their children in the gym and not allow them to walk students to their classrooms. The teachers’ argument and concern was that they needed to quickly establish routines and start the day with the students. They would note the difficulty of this task with added adults in the room. I had to negotiate my own personal viewpoint and experience, the needs of parents and

students and the teachers' requests. I would negotiate with the teachers to support parents coming in the room as we set a time limit for parents to stay in the room. After the designated time, I would announce on the intercom it was time for parents to join me for café<sup>9</sup> in the library as means to provide them with a sense of still being at the school and to start building community with the new parent group. As I greeted anxious parents of kindergartners walking into the building on the first day of school, and even more anxious little kindergarten students holding on to their moms or dads, I was reminded of my own memory of holding on to my own mother and the memory of that day.

### **My Story of School: An On-going Cuento**

My first day of school was my initial experience with formal schooling and the beginning of my story of schools. My first day of kindergarten is only a small part of my story of school that informed my role as a school leader. My school experiences have also been part of my ongoing journey as a professional person as well as a person seeking to understand her greater purpose in life. As a student and educator, this journey has been one of frustration, celebration, and inspiration. There have been moments of tension when my story of school collided with other stories of my lived experience. Clandinin (2013) notes that through the inquiry process of narrative stories we unpack the lived and told stories of our lives. It is through this process of storying and restorying that Clandinin (2013) asserts "we can perhaps begin to shift the institutional, social, and cultural stories narratives in which we are embedded" (p. 34). It is this landscape of the educational system stories of school that I seek to revisit in order to move forward.

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<sup>9</sup> Spanish word for coffee.

## **Practical Rationale and Social Need**

It is not only for my own needs that I seek to explore the storied lives of Latina/o elementary school principals. I believe that understanding the storied lives of Latina/o elementary school principals will also help inform the story of school for Latino students. As an institution, public education has failed to respond to the educational needs of the Latino population (Murillo, et al., 2010). Contreras (2011) asserts that data consistently reveal large numbers of Latina/o students are academically underperforming, and only meager efforts are being made to educate, retain, and engage them in the educational pipeline. This story of school, from the educational pipeline perspective, highlights Latina/o students' lowest education attainment as compared to other racial or ethnic groups in the United States (Gandara & Contreras, 2010; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

The story of school for Latina/os is a story that will impact all our stories and the narrative of this country. Contreras (2011) calls the issues of low educational attainment an American problem and termed the Latino demographic issue as the Brown Paradox. Latino population growth has made an important impact on the economy, culture, politics, and the media. However, Contreras (2011) asserts that little or no additional investment has resulted, thereby fostering little or no change in the educational success of Latina/os. Education has been the gateway for economic sustainability. Thus, Contreras (2011) asserts, the system is creating a growing population that will not only fail to contribute to our economy, but will in fact, become an economic dilemma for the entire nation.

Researchers, scholars, and practitioners have addressed and continue to address the crisis in Latina/o education attainment and achievement (Gandara & Contreras, 2009;

Murakami, et al., 2013; Murillo, et al., 2010). While research and policy have also attempted to address the issue of Latinos' struggle through the educational pipeline, there has been limited research in the role and impact of the campus principal in addressing this issue (Murakami, et al., 2013). It is worthy to study the lived experiences of principals and their story of school given the role of the principal in implementing change, educational policy, and reform (Anderson, 2009; Fowler, 2000; Hope & Pigford, 2001; Kafka, 2009).

While Latina/o educational achievement and attainment has been examined, research on Latino principals and in particular, research on Latina/o elementary school principals is lacking in the educational leadership literature and literature on principal leadership (Murakami, et al., 2013). Understanding the context and competence of elementary leaders is necessary if Latina/o children are to get a good start with their schooling. Current literature on educational leadership is based on dominant discourses of principal leadership and issues of power (Murakami, et al., 2013). The current literature then is a storied narrative of school that still does not voice the story of school from a Latina/o lens or through an epistemology that allows stories of Latina/os to be told in their authentic voice.

In addition to the lack of storied lives of Latina/os in current educational leadership research Bernal (1998) asserts that, "Historically, traditional mainstream educational scholarship has not addressed the influence of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality on education policy and practice" (p. 557). From this perspective, there is a general lack of research that focuses on Latina/os' experiences as principals that also considers the multiple storied lives that have shaped and impacted the lives of these

educational leaders. By focusing on the social, cultural, and familial stories in addition to the institutional stories that have shaped the Latina/o principals, this study will highlight how issues of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality may have also contributed to the Latina/o principals' practices. In addition, a particular focus of this study is to capture the narratives of how the social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories conflict or collide in practice. The study also seeks out the story of how the Latina/o elementary school principals negotiate their multiple stories in practice.

Therefore, this narrative inquiry is situated with the guidance of the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo, Guajardo, Oliver, Valadez, Deawe, Henderson, & Rocha, 2013). I situate this work within the self, organization, and community. As noted, this work has implications for my research participants and myself as ongoing personal reflection and development. The implication for this work is not only for personal development. It will also inform the organization by apprising schools about Latina/o school leadership. Through the exploration of narrative inquiry, the use of story, and Chicana/o Ways of Knowing, this dissertation also has implications for academia within the community of educational leadership.

### **Layout of a Storied Quilt: Story Map**

The whir of the sewing machine sounded off in the kitchen. I stood there in the new addition to our house made by the hands of my dad and my *tíos*.<sup>10</sup> The new dining area was meant to provide more space for a family of seven to eat dinner. However, my mom managed to set up shop to finish sewing a dress while the *frijoles*<sup>11</sup> and *fideo*<sup>12</sup> cooked on the stove. My eighth grade pre-algebra teacher had assigned a homework

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<sup>10</sup> Spanish word for uncles.

<sup>11</sup> Spanish word for beans.

<sup>12</sup> Spanish word for a dish made from vermicelli noodles.

assignment in which we needed to create pieces of art or craft that incorporated math. I wanted to make a quilt. My mom convinced me to create a pillow quilt as the assignment was due within the week.

“Patricia, you need to fold the triangle pieces that you cut out yesterday and iron a small hem all-round the edges of each square. The *plancha*<sup>13</sup> is set up and ready for you to go.” This was my mom’s first lesson for the day.

“When can I sew?” I eagerly wanted to skip the task of ironing and get to sewing.

“Your pieces are not ready. You can’t skip the step of ironing. Besides, I haven’t showed you how to use the machine.”

I felt annoyed as I wanted to be done with the project. I had enjoyed coming up with the idea and I had enjoyed our trip to the fabric store to pick the right shade of pink gingham fabric for the quilt pillow. However, as soon as the work of measuring, cutting, and ironing came along, I had lost my interest and I just wanted to put all the pieces together.

“You want to get a good grade, don’t you?”

This was not a question. It was an expectation. My mom had high expectations when it came to my grades. I worked hard to make A’s but I was so interested in having friends and listening to music that I did not always apply myself 100%. And even though I always had A’s, my mother always compared my grades to my older sister’s grades. So, yes, I wanted to make a good grade, but I also knew I had to continue the game of trying to keep up with my sister in order to get my mom’s approval. I did not want a

*regañada*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Spanish word for iron.

<sup>14</sup> Spanish word for reprimand.



I picked up the iron, already hot, and slowly started ironing the little pieces of squared fabric. When I was ready to start sewing the pieces, my mom hovered over me as I tried to figure out how to thread the needle. Later, my mom tried to show me how to work the sewing machine, but I couldn't figure it out. Yet, she would not do the work for me. She stood there by my side telling me how to move the lever of the machine and how to twist the square pieces. When I would not stop the machine and the stitching continued past the piece of fabric, con *una regañada*, she would make me start over. It was a back and forth teacher-student moment, and all I wanted to do was just finish. I didn't want to learn. I wanted to rush through and be done.

Our pillow won first place and fifth place ribbons at the annual Lyford Art Show.



Figure3. First place and fifth place ribbons for quilt pillow created for an assignment.

I remembered visiting the exhibit with my mom and also with my class. I beamed with pride as I noticed the ribbons but most importantly I had succeeded in gaining the approval of my mom for the moment.

I thought back on this *cuento* as I sat with my mom, this time at my own kitchen table. The sewing machine was still whirring as she worked on her quilt, and I was trying to avoid talking about my dissertation study. I thought of the tension between mom and me as I was growing up. I had mistaken her demands and high expectations of schooling as a need to win her approval. I think about the familial story between us, as mother and daughter. I can't help but also think of my story of school and how it wove with my familial story. My mom had defined the story of school as an important one. She was the one who walked me up the steps to Lincoln Lee Elementary for my first day of kindergarten as I wore the dress that she had sewn for me. My story of school is one that my mom helped tell as I lived it out. She had expectations about my grades and behavior. "Listen to your teacher" was not advice but a mandate that she gave me. She communicated the importance of school when she attended my programs and events in the evenings. She attended parent conferences and always told my teachers, even my high school algebra teacher, "You have my permission to spank her if you need to."

I sat back thinking about lives as stories as I talked to my mom about her first quilt experience. Although I did not learn to sew to any level of expertise beyond sewing a pillow for an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math assignment, I realize that through my mom a part of my story of school was formed. I also realize that in her own ways my mom possessed an "immense capacity to dream and prepare us for lives she could not imagine." (Villenas, 2006, p.157)

I sit back and think of the work I have ahead with designing and writing a dissertation. I avoided the conversation with my mom about my meeting with my dissertation chair because I had felt that I did not know how to proceed. I did not know

how to put the pieces of my learning, the pieces of my questions, the pieces of my experiences, and the pieces of the research together. I reflect on my mom's current quilt and how it was taking shape. I reflect on what I have learned from my mom. I reflect on the story of school. Slowly, I start to interweave the pieces of my research and begin to create.

I share this *cuento* because I think it is important for you as a reader to understand the story map for this narrative. As you have read so far, it is not only about the storied lives of educators. This narrative is also embedded with personal family *cuentos*, *cuentos* of my childhood and schooling.

Narrative representation of *cuentos* is critical to bring *alma* to the storied lives that will be shared. The embedding of *cuentos* continues as the narrative unfolds. I weave in theory, relevant literature, and methodology that contribute to the meaning making. I create and share a conceptual map to aid in meaning making. I seek out partners to help me tell the story of school for Latina/os as the participants tell their own stories of school. We tell how the story of school was disrupted by other stories and how as educational school leaders we negotiated this disruption. As the narrative unfolds, I invite you, the reader, to also reflect, story, and re-story your own experiences.

Before, we move forward with this narrative, I want to make a note on representation. Four Arrows (Jacobs, 2008) discusses representation as part of the dissertation process, in particular about dissertations that do not fall into the traditional academic format. His book, the *Authentic Dissertation Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research, and Representation*, highlights dissertations which have demonstrated that representation is as much part of research as exploring data (p.4). Garman and Piantanida

(2007) and Tuhiwai Smith (2012) also speak about representation in the dissertation process as a means to be in harmony with the author's history and achievement of research goals.

As such, I reflect on representation. I think of the metaphor of quilt as part of this narrative text and reflect on the historical work of quilting in the lives of Mexican American women in Texas, where I grew up. The art of quilting has served different purposes for women in Texas inspired and rooted in their own historical, political, ethnic, and social story. Yabsley (1984) documents the emergence of the many nationalities (White colonists, Black slaves, and native Spanish Texans) in Texas, and points out they were quick to adopt the use of quilts. Quilts quickly became common in virtually all Texas households, regardless of ethnic or economic differences. In addition to providing warmth and being used for bedding, the quilt also had an important social function in the form of quilting bees that brings a community of women together to create a quilt.

My own familial story documents part of this history, however, quilting in my family was not used as a social function. It served as an economic means of providing bedding and warmth during cold winters. Following a long day's work in the fields, my maternal grandmother would sit and sew, patching together fabric remnants to create simple, unpretentious patchwork quilts. The endless demands of rural life necessitated forgoing elaborate quilting embroidery that would have produced works of art more commonly associated with modern day quilting. As she created her quilts, my grandmother taught my mother to sew, nurturing my mother's formation as a contributor to the needs of the family and her future as a home maker. However, social and economic conditions had changed by the time my mother became a home maker. She did

not have the need to quilt bedding but rather focused on sewing clothes for her growing family. As noted earlier in my mom's story, her first patchwork quilt served a different function and purpose.

In deciding on moving forward with this narrative, I stopped to think about this historical contribution to my story. I stopped to think of representation because so much of what I have shared so far falls outside of the traditional dissertation boundaries, yet it influenced my research focus. I think of my mom's story and the many things I have learned from her and her impact on my story of school. I think of the process of quilt making and my mother's experiences as a quilter. I think about how, moving forward, I can best honor my own experiences, lessons learned, and the stories of my research partners. I chose my mom's quilt lessons as the representation of piecing together stories for this narrative because in my mom's lessons I have learned much about ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Her lessons have been part of the pedagogy of home that I acknowledge and honor. As such, moving forward, parts of this dissertation read as a lesson from my mom as she teaches me how to quilt this narrative. My intent is to honor the research process and respond to the technical standards of the dissertation, as well as honor my ontological position by highlighting the voice, experience, creativity, and authority of my upbringing (see Figure 4). In essence this part of theorizing my mom's lessons falls within the Castillo-Montayo and Torres-Guzman (2012) notion of exploring one's funds of knowledge. As I interwove different bits and pieces, my cultural ways of knowing developed in my own life and in my relationship with my mother to pursue and represent my scholarly passion.



*Figure 4.* Author's mother sewing a quilt on author's grandmother's sewing machine, and grandmother's patchwork quilt in the background.

## II. METHOD FOR QUILT MAKING

### The First Lesson: Personal Ontology

I returned home tired from an exhausting conversation with my dissertation chair. We met to discuss my initial thoughts on the research outline for this dissertation. I shared my preliminary writing and discussed the feedback provided by Dr. Esperanza. We spent the next two hours *platicando*<sup>15</sup> about my ideas and plan for the research questions. Dr. Esperanza pushed with questions but most importantly listened to my connections. His focus was more on describing the lessons I learned from my mother and how it connected to what I had experienced in the doctoral program. Explaining the rationale for my focus on storied lives of Latina/o elementary school principals made sense, especially using my mom's own experiences and the memory of the conversation about her first quilt as a lens. However, I knew that in order for the narrative *colcha* I was creating about the storied lives of Latina/o principals to take form, I had to address issues of ontology, epistemology, and methods.

Additionally, my conversation earlier in the day with my dissertation chair left me mentally exhausted and more puzzled about epistemological and methodological design. I walked around my house picking up misplaced items of clothing as I thought about the questions posed to me during the conversation.

"How was your meeting?" my mom shouted from her tiny bedroom in my house. I could hear she was watching television in her bedroom. This was her space in my home since she had moved in a couple of years ago. She loved watching TV in her room but

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<sup>15</sup> Spanish word for conversing.

would always ask me for help to find the *Create Channel* where she would watch shows on cooking, quilting and sewing.

“It was alright,” I replied. I was still putting things away in another room. I asked my mom about some of the items in the room and returned to my task of cleaning up. By the time I finished, I was sure my mother’s interest in my meeting would have dissipated but to my surprise 30 minutes later when I sat in my home office next to my mom’s room, she was still interested in talking about my meeting.

“What did your professor say about your ideas?” she asked from her room. I could hear she had changed the channel and was now watching an old movie. Instead of shouting back from my office, I walked over to her room with my laptop in my hand. I plopped myself on her bed. She lowered the volume on the TV and asked me again. “Well?”

I told her the initial feedback was supportive but I was now at the stage where I had to think about research design. I opened my laptop and shared my initial ideas outlined in a PowerPoint presentation. I discussed the draft of some of my ideas of the conceptual map for my work (See Figure 5), and I talked about ideas for analysis, which were based on my initial ideas on methodology.





*Figure 5.* Initial ideas on methodology shared with author's mother during a discussion.

My mom recognized the picture of my grandmother's quilt and sewing machine in the figure. My mom proceeded to ask me questions about the design. Specifically, she inquired about why I was approaching the research from a narrative inquiry perspective. Although, my mother did not phrase her questions and comments using the technical terms of research and academia, she nonetheless asked keen questions about why I was interested in the experiences of Latina/o elementary principals. She was interested in how connecting the ideas of quilting worked with my research interest. She asked me specifically, "How does that work for what you plan to do?" The conversation was as intense as my conversation with Dr. Esperanza earlier that day.

As I sat there conversing with my mom, I recalled the epiphany I had while listening to the power of my mom's storied landscape. As a quilter and former seamstress, she possesses the innate ability to think of design and patterns in a way that honors both creativity and practicality. She understands how different elements contribute to a final product, regardless of whether that product is a quilt, a finished dress, or a suit. She understands that any one decision about the design impacts the creative

process and the final product. At that moment, I remembered a lesson she once shared about selecting a pattern that was purposeful, creative, and flexible.

### **A Triggered Memory: Fabric Store Lesson**

*“Patricia, sit down.”*

*I was running around with my brother in the large fabric store. My mom was shopping on her day off at the large fabric store where she had taken a part time job. I knew she loved working there because she was able to talk about fabrics, threads, patterns, and all the things she loved with others who also loved sewing as she did. Personally, I found the countless rows of multi-print fabrics themselves of no interest. However, for me, the countless rows of fabrics served as the perfect hide and go seek playground for me and my brother. For some reason, I remember my regañada and not my brother’s reprimand since he was not called over to sit down. I sat down at the table with my mom. She only had to call me once when she called me by my full name. I copied my mom’s research skills and started flipping through the catalog patterns.*

*“Why are we here? Why don’t you just pick the fabric? I saw some pretty colors over there,” I inquired and pleaded with my mom as I pointed to where my brother was hiding.*

*With a disapproving look, my mom shook her head disapprovingly. “You don’t start with the fabric. You must think about other things before starting. Picking fabric comes later.”*

*“Oh,” I replied in frustration. Had I convinced her to look at the fabric then I would be allowed to get up from the table and look for my brother and perhaps even show my mom that my brother was also guilty of running around in the store.*

*“I’m not sure what type of dress to sew so I’m looking for pattern ideas,” my mom added.*

*I sat next to my mom as she flipped through pages of the thick pattern catalog. She studied each page containing a photo of the finished product, a summary of the sewing process, and a summary of materials and fabric needed. I noticed her pondering all the information and then I noticed her flip the page and start the process all over again. It felt like hours passed before she finally decided on the pattern for the perfect dress.*

*“Do you want to get up?”*

*I nodded hoping that I could run to the back of the store to find my brother. However, that was not part of my mom’s plan for me.*

*“Go over to the file cabinet and find this pattern number.”*

*It was not what I had planned, but I jumped at the freedom of getting up from the chair. I looked over to the far end of the store, but could not see my brother hiding. I quickly looked for the pattern in the large tan colored filing cabinet. “The sooner I find the pattern,” I told myself, “the sooner I can go off on my own when my mom starts to look for fabric.”*

*As I walked to my mom with the pattern packet in hand, I noticed the picture of the dress pattern my mom had finally chosen. It was a detailed ruffled summer dress.*

*“Is this for me?” I asked.*

*“It is for both you and your sister. See how I can make different styles just by changing the top,” my mom turned the pattern over.*

*I noticed how this one pattern had a variety of styles to choose from. The illustration on the back of the pattern envelope showed different designs such as a strappy tie top, a button strap, and a dress with sleeves.*

*“I know your sister and you have different tastes so I picked the best pattern that had different options. I will use the basic design for both of you but I can play around with the different styles as needed for what we want.”*

### **More Questions: The Plática Continues**

My mom continued with more questions about my meeting with Dr. Esperanza. I grabbed her iPad and started to play with a new quilt design application I had purchased for her. I played around with the different options as I continued to talk to her about my plans for the research work. I thought the diversion might give me ideas on visual representation. I explained that I was trying to fit an idea but was not sure it would fit with the research process. I told my mom that one of my challenges would be to find ways to visually represent my ideas. I told her I had to “show not just tell” and admitted I was rather challenged in creating artistic visuals. She nodded in agreement.

“How do you approach quilt block design?” I asked my mother as I moved the different pieces of shapes on the iPad screen to create different quilt patterns.

“That’s an impressive app for quilt design, but it seems too difficult to work with for me. Sometimes, you just need to move the pieces around to see what works and sometimes you might have to do it over and over again. In the end, you know what feels right as long as you don’t forget the reason of why you are making something,” my mom replied.

I stopped and stared back at her and wondered if she was talking about designing a quilt block or if she was talking about my research work. I didn't seek, nor did she offer, clarification. With that our two-hour conversation ended.

I was even more exhausted than when I first got home from my meeting with Dr. Esperanza and was ready to go to sleep. I was too tired to think about the next steps for my research design but I felt confident my mom's lessons about pattern design would guide me.

Recalling this conversation with my mom, I realized that understanding the story of school for Latina/o elementary school principals and ultimately, the story of school for Latina/o students, was a lot like my mom's process for sewing. In the same way that she looked at patterns for dresses and found different options based on my taste and that of my sister, I must seek a design and pattern for this narrative that not only speaks to *corazon*<sup>16</sup> and *alma* but that also allows me flexibility as the quilter, storyteller, and storymaker to look at the multiple stories that contribute to the story of school. Similarly, like my mother moving the pieces of a quilt around until she knew what felt right. I too had to move theoretical and methodological concepts around until the design felt right to honor the narratives and lived experiences of Latina/o elementary school principals.

I flip through the catalogs of research design and educational literature. I explore different ways of knowing to weave the foundation to this narrative quilt of story, of school. I also reflect on my own ontology, which is critical to my role as quilter and researcher. I reflect on philosophical underpinnings of how I see the world and philosophical theories that may be relevant to address this research narrative. I reflect on epistemological questions as I think about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is

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<sup>16</sup> Spanish word for heart.

constructed. I heed my mom's advice and think about how *pieces* of ontology, philosophy, and epistemology can be moved around to form the methodological design for this narrative quilt. I think about my reflections and select the research design that *feels right*.

My focus of this narrative is to understand the social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories that have shaped the leadership of Latina/o elementary school principals. I also seek to understand the *how* of the multiple storied lives of Latina/o principals that intersect with the story of school. I seek to understand how the experiences and stories can inform the story of school for Latina/o students. As such, this narrative will employ a qualitative design with a narrative inquiry approach. The theoretical underpinnings that support this design include an epistemological notion of narrative inquiry and Chicana/o ways of knowing.

### **Who Am I and How This Contributes to My Research**

I am a border crosser (Anzaldúa, 1999). As a border crosser, I learned to live between multiple realities. Although, I did not have the name, ontologically, to describe myself as a border crosser until the first year of my doctoral program, I have been a border crosser my whole life. After a course on philosophy, I was challenged as part of a class assignment to explore my own ontology and to identify a philosophy that describes my ways of seeing the world. The critical readings in the course exposed me to different philosophical thoughts. However, it was Anzaldúa's (1999) theory of border crossing that I felt best described my experiences that had shaped my life and also how I learned to view the world.

As part of the class assignment, I created a poem that gave voice to my ontology. I share this poem with you now in order to be transparent with you regarding the lens I bring to this research narrative. The poem describes the different phases of my life. It describes how I struggled, managed to negotiate the multiple storied spaces of my landscape, and how I have learned to view multiple landscapes.

### **An Ode to a Chicano that Corrected My Spanish**

“A *chongo*<sup>17</sup> is a bun NOT a ponytail” he said

I’m from Sebastian not Sebastián, *Tejas*<sup>18</sup>

I’m from the valley

A borderland

an in-between

a not really from here

and not really from there space.

I’m from the land of endless spaces and different faces

My county doesn’t border the border

and with this

created my 3<sup>rd</sup> space.

Where my grandparents spoke Spanish

Where one came from *Méjico*<sup>19</sup>-a *bracero* building railroads in New York

Where we had piñatas, tamales for Christmas, and menudo after a *baile*<sup>20</sup>

(not every day as the restaurants in Austin sell)

I’m from Sebastian

A place where we had two stores

yet when we ran out of things my mom would send me across the street

“Ask your *magrande*<sup>21</sup> for sugar”

---

<sup>17</sup> Spanish word that refers to a type of hairstyle for a woman, however, the translation of the word to the specific type of hairstyle is the point of tension between the author of the poem and the character referenced in the poem. The character of Chicano translates the word to mean a bun hairstyle. The author of the poem translates the word to mean a ponytail hairstyle.

<sup>18</sup> Spanish word for Texas.

<sup>19</sup> Spanish for Mexico.

<sup>20</sup> Spanish word for dance.

<sup>21</sup> Spanish word for grandmother.

“How do you say that in Spanish?”  
“*Tienes*<sup>22</sup> sugar” my mom would say  
That was my Spanish...*tienes* sugar, *tienes* bread, *tienes* kool aid

I’m from Sebastian  
Where mass was bilingual  
My Spanish was from Fr. Mac  
a priest from Boston  
“*o-re-mos*<sup>23</sup>” he would say

I’m from Sebastian  
where we didn’t know *La Virgen*<sup>24</sup>  
but we would pray  
Alabaremos Mi Senor.<sup>25</sup>

Where after mass we would go to Las Flores, *Méjico*  
Crossing the bridge  
The smell would make me sick  
I would cover my nose  
and my mom would pinch me.  
“Don’t be a snob,” she would tell me.

The faces reminded me of my *Pagrande*  
but there were kids walking around without shoes,  
blind folks asking for money,  
men whistling for us to go to their stores.

I’m from Sebastian  
Where we went to México,  
to eat tacos, get perms in our hair,  
buy *jabon para lavar*<sup>26</sup>, *chupis* (iced pops), Clearsil, cassettes, tortillas from a  
factory  
my dad would try on boots and he’d buy bottles of *Presidente*  
that he would hide under the car seat  
to not pay taxes.

I’m from Sebastian  
Where playing outside I could see across the street

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<sup>22</sup> Spanish word for the verb ‘do you have’.

<sup>23</sup> Spanish word for the verb to pray.

<sup>24</sup> Spanish phrase to reference Our Lady of Guadalupe.

<sup>25</sup> Spanish phrase meaning praise God.

<sup>26</sup> Spanish word for laundry soap.



Men

*amigos*<sup>27</sup> of my *pagrande*

they came to stay in a little house in the back of his home

they come to work the fields

“They’re from *Méjico*” my mom would say.

I’m from Sebastian

Where playing in the fields

you could see men that looked like my *Pagrande* walking the highway

with colorful plastic straw bags stuffed with clothes and blankets

They looked hungry, tired, and their eyes filled with dreams

and

my

heart

felt for them.

“Wetbacks!” my uncle would say.

“Are you a wetback?” he asked me.

Yes! I thought

I have dreams too.

I’m from Sebastian

Where in 4<sup>th</sup> grade a whole family from *Méjico*

All of them, even the high school brother with a moustache,

were placed in my class until they learned English.

I’m from Sebastian

Where in high school I would listen to Menudo, Luis Miguel, and Timbiriche-

Spanish pop

To not be like my friends listening to MJ and Madonna

I’m from the space

Where in high school

when we played a border town in basketball

the boys will chant to the opposing team ‘*Ya viene la migracion*’.<sup>28</sup>

THEY were from borderland

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<sup>27</sup> Spanish word for friends.

<sup>28</sup> Spanish phrase meaning ‘the border patrol is coming’.

Yet, Sebastian was its own space in the borderland.  
It was the in between of the in between  
The oppressor within the oppressed  
I didn't belong...  
I went away

I'm from Sebastian  
Where when I went away to the University  
There were students that didn't look like me  
They didn't look like my *amigos* from home.  
I became the Hispanic,  
the Mexican,  
the outsider,  
The brown skinned.

I tried to find a home.  
I tried to find a space like Sebastian.  
I found that home in the tún-tún of the accordion.  
Going to dances in Austin  
East Riverside  
Where I heard Selena, La Sombra  
Tejano music  
Music of my parents but now of me

I became the Chicana Queen at the University  
Reading Cisneros, Américo Paredes  
yes, someone like me  
From the valley, who wrote *George Washington Gomez* and a book called  
*Between Two Worlds*

I'm from Sebastian  
that created in me a passion to help immigrants  
people that looked like my *Pagrande*  
A degree in Spanish  
From *tiernes* Kool Aid to a bilingual teacher in San Antonio and Austin  
where I created a bridge  
connecting students from one world to another  
Where I taught students about *Diez y Seis*,<sup>29</sup> cómo sumar/add,  
where we read *Eating Too Many Tamales* during Christmas

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<sup>29</sup> Spanish word meaning September 16<sup>th</sup>, which is a holiday celebrating Mexican Independence Day.

and I showed them how to dance *folklórico*<sup>30</sup> ...La Bamba!

I'm from Sebastian that created in me a language advocate.  
In parent conferences, parents saying you speak Spanish well.  
Who at a March for Immigrants Rally ran into me and said  
"Maestra, gracias por apoyarnos"  
Thank you for supporting us.

US  
as in YOU are not US.

I'm from Sebastian, Chicano.  
Not from *Sebastián*.  
*Chongo* is a bun. *Ay por favor*<sup>31</sup>!  
I'm tired  
And to quote the movie *Selena*, yes *I'm quoting the movie Selena*

"We gotta prove to the Mexicans how Mexican we are, and we gotta prove to the Americans how American we are. We gotta be MORE Mexican than the Mexicans, and MORE American than the Americans; both at the same time! It's exhausting! Man, nobody knows how tough it is to be Mexican American."  
(Moctezuma & Nava, 1997)

I'm exhausted Chicano.

So let me tell you,  
I've gone back in forth between *Méjico* and the US,  
gringo/wetback,  
citizen/immigrant,  
Chicano/Pocho,  
brown/white,  
I'm tired of the binary.

I'm from Sebastian,  
the Valley,  
a borderland,  
the home of *mestizaje*,<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Traditional Spanish folk dance.

<sup>31</sup> Spanish words meaning, 'oh brother.'

<sup>32</sup> Spanish word meaning of mixed race. Used here it refers to a theoretical concept of tensions, contradictions, spiritual and aesthetic dimensions, and hybrid cultural experiences (Anzaldúa, 1999).

a 3<sup>rd</sup> Space,  
the space of the in between.

And Chicano,  
In Sebastian,  
the Valley,  
a borderland,  
the home of mestizaje,  
a 3<sup>rd</sup> Space,  
the space of the in between  
*CHONGO IS*  
ponytail.

### **Relevancy of My Ontology**

The relevancy of my lens as a border crosser is important to this narrative because as storyteller and, at this moment story designer, I must be aware and locate my own ontology within the design. My views on lived experience and knowledge creation are based on my own lived experiences. As a border crosser, I am aware of the different binaries that exist from different storied lives. However, my own experiences also inform me there is possibility within the borderlands of this landscape (Anzaldúa, 1999).

### **Disposition of the Researcher**

My underlying assumptions, values, beliefs, knowledge, and skills as a border crosser inform my disposition as a narrative inquirer. Savin-Baden and Van Nieker (2007) assert that the narrative inquiry researcher should:

- Listen to participants' stories,
- Acknowledge the mutual construction of the research relationship (both researcher and participants have a voice with which to tell their stories), and

- Acknowledge that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect on life and explain themselves to others.

I employ these understandings, skills, and assumptions as I engage throughout the process of this study. The skills that helped me engage within the borderland as a Mexican American female living in deep south Texas, as referenced in my poem, help me as I listen to the stories participants share. Just as I learned through my different encounters with people throughout my upbringing, I recognize the participant and I are living our own storied lives. However, by the nature of the research engagement, I also understand that our experiences are constructed within a research landscape that brings us both together to create a new story. As a border crosser, I also understand how reflection is on-going as one continues to negotiate the borderland within our own landscapes.

### **Qualitative Design**

My own ontology and skills I bring as a border crossing researcher contribute to my decision to use a qualitative methodology to understand the storied lives of Latina/o elementary school principals. As a Latina who grew up in a borderland space, I understand there is diversity within this borderland space of lived experience. As a doctoral student, I understand I need to employ a research design that allows for the diversity of different voices. Consequently, in order to gain insight into and understand the lived experiences and storied lives of Latina/o elementary school principals, this study will employ a qualitative methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry and understanding that employs a holistic approach to explore human and social problems or human conditions (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). Qualitative methodology allows for insights from participants in their natural setting and their comprehension about their own experiences with the institutional story of school both as students themselves and as elementary school principals. Furthermore, a qualitative design also accounts for diverse experiences and diverse storied lives by allowing for flexibility with the research methods. Creswell (2012) notes the emergent design of a qualitative methodology allows for the shifting of questions as the data are collected. For my purpose, I focus on the shifting of questions as I engage in dialogue with the research participants to capture their storied lived experiences. The flexibility to shift questions will allow me the opportunity to seek clarity and understanding during the dialogical and relational engagement.

### **Theoretical Frame**

I employ epistemological tenets of narrative inquiry and Chicana/o ways of knowing as the theoretical frames for this narrative inquiry. The tenets of both of these theoretical frames provide the lens to explain how knowledge is valued and what counts as knowledge for this narrative. This is important to establish as I seek to understand the storied lives that have shaped Latina/o elementary school principals and their leadership because of the diversity in multi storied lives and because the notion of story brings complexities to the idea of what is viewed as truth.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is based on the view that human experience, in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006; Creswell, 2012; Litchman, 2006; Reissman, 2006). Clandinin (2013) asserts,

“The focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals’ experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (p. 18). It is the focus on experience as phenomenon that makes narrative inquiry an appropriate approach for this study. Furthermore, the belief that our experiences are storied based on the three dimensional space which includes notions of temporality, sociality, and place, allows for an analysis of the experience that accounts for context and cultural impacts (Clandinin, 2013).

Another tenet of narrative inquiry approach that contributes to this study is that narrative stories often contain specific tensions or interruptions (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2006; Reissman, 2006). Identifying and understanding the tensions and/or interruptions would provide an additional perspective of the impact of social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories that have shaped Latina/o elementary principals’ experiences.

Narrative inquiry will allow for each of the diverse stories to be shared and analyzed (Creswell, 2012). Clandinin (2013) and Creswell (2012) assert that narrative inquiry is an appropriate approach to utilize when the research problem calls on individuals to tell stories of their personal experiences. The research problem for this narrative reflects a need to tell stories of individual experiences. The research problem is partly informed by research on Latina/o students’ experiences with the educational pipeline and the research on Latina/o principals. The following arguments highlight the lack of focus on the social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories that shape leadership and Latina/o principals’ experiences.

- Research indicates that Latinas/o students have had varied experiences through the educational pipeline, however, the data demonstrate that as a whole Latina/o students have limited educational attainment and success through the pipeline (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006; Covarrubias, 2011; Rodríguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2015). Thus, individual stories of Latina/os who have negotiated success through the pipeline should be told. By privileging the institutional story of school as one of the frameworks for focus of inquiry, individual Latina/o principal stories will highlight individual's insight into the educational pipeline from the lens of a storied life of someone who has negotiated success and is informed about the educational policies and practices within the educational pipeline.
- Research also indicates that the experiences of the Latina/o principals have not been told in the traditional narrative about educational leadership (Hernandez, Murakami, & Quijada-Cerecer, 2014; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015; Murakami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse, & Byrne-Jimenez, 2015; Murakami, Valle, & Méndez-Morse, 2013). Murakami et al. (2013) indicate that the number of Latina/o principals is limited compared to other race groups. Thus, the individual stories of Latina/o elementary school principals are warranted to expand our understanding of the experience from this group of educators and to contribute to the narrative about educational leadership.



## **Epistemological Implications of Narrative Inquiry**

Applying a narrative inquiry approach has epistemological implications for this narrative study as well. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) locate narrative inquiry within the cartography of narrative methodologies in an attempt to clarify the underlying philosophy of narrative inquiry as a research methodology. In doing so, Clandinin and Rosiek locate narrative inquiry based on a Deweyan theory of experience. Clandinin and Rosiek explain that Dewey's notion of experience is one that is transactional, thus asserting an epistemological implication. Clandinin and Rosiek describe it as a pragmatic view of knowledge which allows narrative inquirers to begin with the study of an individual's experience of the world and through the study seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others.

By locating narrative inquiry's roots on the methodological landscape and centering it within a Deweyan experience, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) also assert the possibilities and tension of the borderlands and borders between narrative inquiry and other frameworks of inquiry. In doing so, they help narrative inquirers locate themselves when considering other paradigms and frameworks of inquiry. Clandinin and Rosiek caution about the borderland's edges when exploring other frameworks while trying to apply a narrative inquiry approach because other frameworks place different purposes and focus for inquiry.

Particularly relevant to this research on Latina/o educators' experiences and multi-storied lives, I focus on the borders described between narrative inquiry and post-structural social and cultural theorist. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) assert the difference between a narrative inquiry and post-structural social and cultural theorist is the view of

the social and cultural narratives. While these frameworks acknowledge the social and cultural influences on experience, narrative inquiry locates these experiences as embodiments of lived stories. Clandinin and Rosiek assert that in a narrative inquiry, these social and cultural influences are “not treated only as the occasion for critical exposure” (p. 55). However, Clandinin and Rosiek acknowledge a poststructuralist assertion of the macro social influences on experience stating that, “Such macro social influences exist and must be considered” (p. 57). Clandinin and Rosiek claim that the differences lie within the matter of emphasis of these macro social influences on experience and claim that each form of emphasis comes with its attendant risks.

### **Chicana/o Way of Knowing**

While Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) caution about the borders with other ideologies, I find it necessary for this narrative to also employ a Chicana/o *Way of Knowing* as a theoretical frame that is woven in with narrative inquiry. My situating a Chicana/o Way of Knowing as an additional epistemological and theoretical perspective as part of the research design is influenced by my own experiences with the cultural, social, and political narratives with my own storied life and additional views of narrative as paradigm. In describing a new paradigm for narrative research and practice, Striano (2012) calls for understanding narrative as product and process. By focusing on process, Striano argues there is a need to situate the cultural and social context asserting that,

In so far as narrative is a complex process, situated within a determinate cultural, political, and social context, and imbedded within a specific frame of events and forces, it requires to be explored through an interdisciplinary approach, from multiple perspectives and with multiple tools. (p. 148)

Thus, applying a Chicana/o Way of Knowing provides the multiple perspectives in this inquiry.

A Chicana/o Way of Knowing is relevant for this narrative based on my own ontology as I situate myself as research and storyteller; looking to understand the multi-storied lives that have shaped Latino/a elementary school principals, based on the role of cultural, political, and social contexts in which narratives are situated. I employ elements of borderland theories and Chicana feminist epistemologies to create a version of a Chicano/a Way of Knowing that will aim to explore the complexities of this narrative quilt.

Borrowing from both borderland theories (Anzaldúa, 1999; Elenes, 2006; Pendleton Jiménez, 2006) and Chicana feminist epistemologies to form a Chicana/o Way of Knowing allows for the understanding of social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories from the narratives of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and organizational structures (Anzaldúa, 1997; Bernal, 1998; Calderón, Bernal, Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012). Similar to the assertion from narrative inquiry about multi storied lives, borderland theories and Chicana feminist theories recognize the multiple subject positions Chicanas/os negotiate as they position themselves in society. In addition, borderland theories and Chicana feminist epistemology take into account how individuals command their agency in response to institutional biases and how they negotiate the different forces that conflict with their own narratives (Bernal et al., 2006). By applying a Chicana/o Way of Knowing to a narrative inquiry, the stories of action and transformation can also be highlighted in the narrative stories. Employing borderland theories helps move beyond dualistic modes of inquiry and captures the complex ways

Chicanas negotiate their multiple and contradictory positions (Elenes, 2010). In addition, applying a Chicana/o Way of Knowing privileges pedagogy of home as I integrate lessons from my mother to this narrative process, representation, and sense making (Bernal, 2001; Godinez, 2006; González, 2006; Villenas, 2006a; Villenas, 2006b). I also apply a Chicana/o Way of Knowing as a Latina researcher through my own cultural intuition. Cultural intuition is a complex process that acknowledges the unique viewpoints many Chicana scholars bring to the research process (Bernal, 1998). The application of these tenets to this study is critical to the exploration of how Latina/o principals' storied lives inform their practices.

### **Self-Reflection on Methodological Awareness**

It was the Christmas holidays and I used my vacation time to spend time reading more about philosophy, ontology, epistemology, and methodology to apply to the narrative that I was forming. I had put in seven hours reading and note-taking and reflecting on my storied life in terms of how I see the world. I stopped working. I closed the laptop where I was taking notes and stared at the bulletin board on which I had displayed pieces of my writing. I was overcome with emotion and began to cry. My reflections had taken me back to a year before. The previous year had been a struggle as I was balancing the demands of full time work in public education and the demands of course work in the doctoral program.

The previous holiday season I had spent time in self-reflection as part of an assignment for an evaluation course. Through this reflection I was more aware of the changes in my life since I had started the doctoral program. It was this self-reflection and a couple of issues with certain relationships in my life that spurred a year of inner

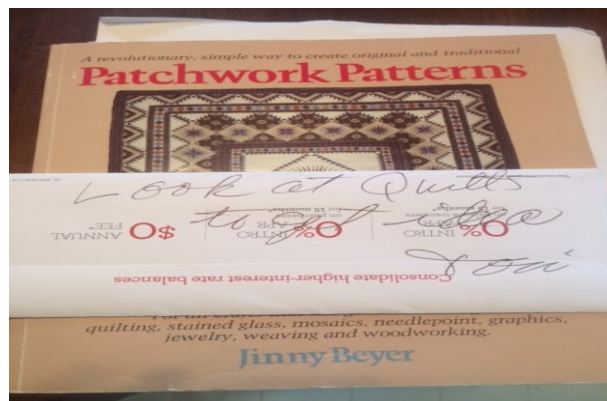
exploration into what I valued and what I know to be true in my life. One of the challenges I encountered with this inner exploration was becoming aware that what I thought was once true about certain relationships and experiences had changed. I struggled anxiously with the notion of change as it applied to my perspectives of these experiences and relationships. I questioned myself about what counted as truth. Anxious in my thoughts, I refused to accept things as I was seeing them in fear that it would invalidate the notion of what I once believed to be true. It was a struggle because I also knew that my new perspective and new understandings were also true. I had observables that could explain my current realities and I understood logically that my life experiences and relationships were different. Yet, I was anxious about accepting this new reality because I feared letting go of what I had believed to be true. Through God's grace, much inner reflection, conversations with friends and colleagues, and my own spiritual growth, I realized I could accept these multiple realities. I learned that it did not have to be an either or situation. I learned accepting one truth did not mean rejecting another. So, I sat there crying. I was overcome with joy that I learned to live my life in the borderland once again, understanding the present and the past were not necessarily different truths but interconnected truths and multiple versions that were all acceptable.

This is what it means to me to be a narrative inquirer. I laughed at how thinking about methodology had made me so emotional. However, exploring my own ontology and being attuned to my position as a researcher and storyteller was what I needed not only for the purpose of this narrative but for my own growth. Compared to the previous holiday season, I was at peace and I knew the value of understanding our storied lives. I knew that if this understanding could have such an impact personally, then I also knew

that understanding storied lives could also contribute to understanding at a social context level.

### **A Mother's Continued Guidance**

Even though I was at peace, I began to wonder how I could communicate narrative inquiry and Chicano/a Way of Knowing in a way that would visually represent my ideas. I looked at the stack of books sitting near my desk and I noticed the book on top of the stack. It was a book and a note given to me from my mom (Figure 6).

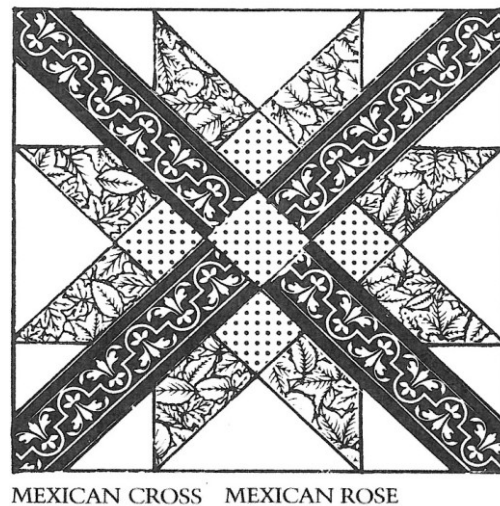


*Figure 6. Picture of book author's mother left for author.*

I found the book and the note on my kitchen table the morning my parents had left for the holidays. When I found it, I chuckled at the typical nature of my mom's handwritten notes. She writes notes on whatever paper is available, scribbling the message in any blank space on the paper. She left me a book about quilt patterns for ideas. I picked up the book from the stack of books.

I began to skim through the book and found it helpful in so many ways. It was a book on how to create different original and traditional pattern blocks for quilting (Beyer, 1979). In the book, I found similarities to what I was reading about research design: think about the overall goals of a project, select the appropriate methods and make sure to set aside enough time to create it. However, it was the different images of square block

patterns in the book that helped me start visualizing different ways to represent the ideas taking form for this narrative. In particular, I read about combining different design categories by imposing two categories on each other to create a new block design (Beyer, 1979). I found the image of the *Mexican Cross Mexican Rose* (Figure 7), a block design made from a combination of two pattern categories.



*Figure 7.* Image of a Mexican Cross Mexican Rose quilt block design.

I thought it was interesting that I was drawn to this image and the description. Unlike my own struggle growing up Mexican American and trying to balance the binaries associated with two different worlds, this design simply imposed the two categories to create a new design. Yet, the different elements of the two distinct designs that contributed to the image of the *Mexican Cross Mexican Rose* are clearly evident. I immediately tried sketching the design and then manipulating design software on my laptop. I could envision how the image of a quilt design of *Mexican Cross Mexican Rose* could represent my methodology (Figure 8).

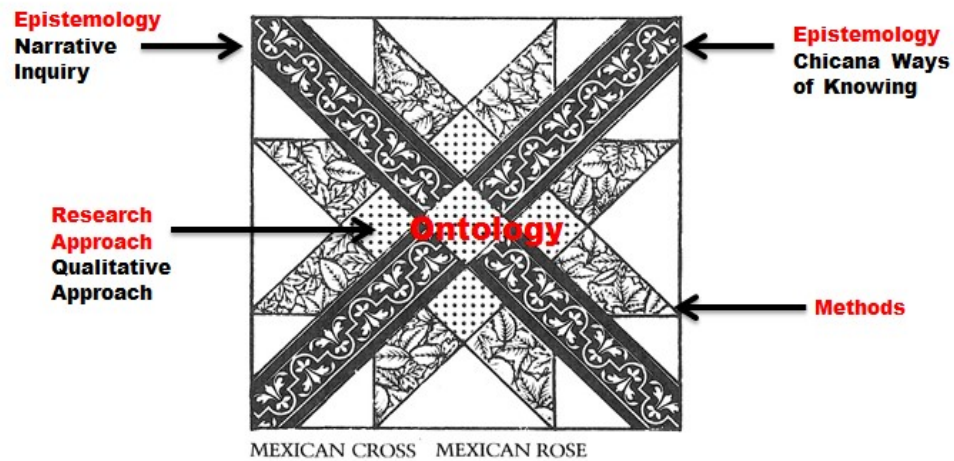


Figure 8. Image of Mexican Cross Mexican Rose quilt block design with the study's concepts for methodology.

I could even see how it could contribute to a visual representation of how I would analyze my data.

I continued reading the book and found some of the same advice my mother had given. Although her advice did not need validation from a book, the following words from the author reminded me of my mom's lessons. Beyer states, "Many times creation involves a long process of continual thought and work from the beginning idea to the finished product...Only by persisting can you create something which you are proud of and which is truly your own" (p. 177). The words left me thinking about my mom and being grateful for her creative wisdom as it guides me through this narrative. I thought about the impact of storied lives on one's learning, action, and growth. Here was an example of the familial story of a mother's guidance to her daughter and how it was imposing to the story I was currently living as a researcher. I realized that the understanding of the methodological underpinnings for this narrative was not only



needed to lay out the design of this work but for me to also start seeing how my storied life was interconnected with the work.

### III. CONDUCTING THE NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Understanding the methodological underpinnings of this narrative informed and clarified the steps to conduct this narrative inquiry. As the researcher, I recognized that employing a narrative inquiry and a Chicana/o Way of Knowing called for different approaches to understand the experiences of storied lives. This impacted how I conducted this inquiry. I break from the authentic narrative flow of this dissertation to describe how I conducted the narrative inquiry. I do so as a means to provide the reader with background to the methods applied as these are critical to understanding nuances of the research process.

Narrative inquiry and a Chicana/o Way of Knowing validated the role of the researcher in story construction and acknowledged that the researcher's experiences, values, ontology, and assumptions cannot be separated from story creation (Clandinin 2013; Bernal, et al., 2006). As such, I positioned myself with the field texts by including my own lived experiences and stories. As I worked within the three-dimensional spaces as a narrative inquirer, I met myself in the past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I noted remembered stories of myself as I engaged with my research partners. Clandinin and Connelly state, "It is not only the participants' stories that are retold by a narrative inquirer. It is also the inquirer's stories that are open for inquiry and retelling" (p. 60). As such, I kept a research journal noting my own stories and retellings throughout the research engagement.

For this research, my selection of research partners was purposeful. I sought two research partners to engage in this narrative journey with me. I wanted two research partners who identify as Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American, or Chicana/o. I needed

participants who had been elementary school principals. I used personal and professional contacts to help me find research partners whom I invited to join me on this journey.

Narrative inquiry places value on relationship as part of the inquiry process. By starting with personal and professional contacts to recommend research partners, I extended the established relationship that I had created with personal and professional contacts to the research partners. Figure 9 outlines the criteria for selection of research partners for this study.

Criteria	Identity	Principal Experience	School Experience as a Student
	1. Identifies as Latino/a, Hispanic, Chicano/a or Mexican American	1. Formerly an elementary school principal within the last 5 years	1. Attended public school in the United States for at least part of their schooling experience.  2. Experience with doctoral studies.  3. Completed a Master's program.

*Figure 9. Participant Selection Criteria.*

While the focus of this study is to understand the multiple stories that have shaped Latina/o elementary school principals including the social, cultural, familial, and institutional stories of when they were students and school leaders, I sought participants who have left the position of the principal within the last five years. I wanted to exclude

current principals because I thought they would find it difficult to share their leadership stories while still in the position.

The participants for this narrative inquiry include Cindi Marie and Tony. They were both elementary principals and met the other criteria laid out in Figure 9. Rather than including a description of the participants in this section, I use the re-storying section to introduce you to their stories.

### **Being in the Field: Walking into the Midst of Stories**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that as narrative inquirers we are always in the midst of storied lives. As a narrative inquirer, I walked in the midst of research participants' ongoing story as well as my own. The three dimensional narrative inquiry space (i.e. space of time, place, and the personal and social dimensions) continued while we engaged in this research narrative. The storied lives of the participants and my own storied life were in motion as we navigated this journey. Our lives will continue to be in motion after our engagement. Institutional stories and social narratives within our landscapes are also in process. As such, I considered this dynamic as I worked with research participants.

In order to be mindful of the dynamic of being in the midst of storied lives, I engaged in an ongoing conversation with the two research partners about their storied lives. The narrative inquiry began by telling stories, as I did not live within their storied landscapes. This research question did not originate from my living within my participants' lives; rather it started with my own experiences and my own questions. Therefore, I began by telling my stories and entered the field with the intent of hearing participants' stories.

Narrative inquiry's focus on relationship and dialogue opportunities to share stories required frequent and in-depth time with each participant. By selecting two participants, I was able to spend extensive time with each participant. The research design required a direct consent form agreement from all research partners which was solicited before the initial meeting (Appendix A). The consent form informed the research partners about the scope of the study, guidelines for participation, and information on withdrawing from the study. In addition, the consent form apprised the research partners of security and safety protocols for data and the research process. I employed the use of pseudonyms throughout the dissertation to protect the identities of my participants. I created and followed a guide that focused on activities required to conduct this narrative inquiry (Appendix B). In addition, I created and followed a dissertation timeline, to also guide me as I moved the work forward (Appendix C).

### **Field Text**

This study employed several different data sources. Although, narrative inquiry is focused on stories, data sources included more than a subjective account told to me as the researcher (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Therefore, this study included the following story telling data collection strategies that contributed to the field texts: field notes, journal notes, autobiographical accounts, *plática*, research interview, family stories, and documents. (See Figure 10).

Collection Strategy	Description of Strategy
Field Notes	Notes taken by the researcher of the field text engagement (Clandinin, 2012).
Journal Notes	Self-reflection of the researcher's or participants' experience during field text engagement (Clandinin, 2012).
Autobiography	Writing that is composed to illuminate the context of one's life and is a reconstruction of an individual narrative (Clandinin, 2012).
<i>Plática</i>	<i>Plática</i> is an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling and story making. It is based on a series of "informal" conversations and dialogues among researcher and research partners (Godinez, 2006; Guajardo, F. & Guajardo, M., 2013)
Interview	The use of structured or semi-structured set of questions by the researcher to obtain stories from participants (Clandinin, 2012).
Family Stories	Stories that are handed down across generations about family members and family events (Clandinin, 2012).
Documents	Handouts, memos, paperwork, policy documents and emails that contain relevant material (Clandinin, 2012)

*Figure 10.* Field Text Collection Strategies.

I used this guide to discuss different strategies with participants that could be used through the field text collection phase. Application of the field text collection strategy was dependent on the engagement with each research participant. At times, I employed a tactic to invite story telling or to gain a deeper understanding of the story shared. The strategies helped participants evoke memories or stories of critical moments during different periods of school experiences.

### **Field Text Engagement**

Due to the breadth of the study to capture the stories that have shaped Latina/o elementary school principals, I employed a series of engagements that focused on field text collection. Each individual meeting focused on a certain time period within the participant's story of school (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. School time periods used to focus engagement times.

As a researcher in this engagement, I was cognizant that my participation impacted the stories participants told. In an initial meeting, I discussed the research question with each participant and described different periods within the story of schools that would inform the narratives.

I also described the strategies contained in Figure 10 that I would employ to have the participants share their stories. I allowed each participant to select which time period they wanted to address from their story of school during each engagement. For each session, I provided some guiding questions to help frame our *plática* as needed (see Appendix D for the *plática* protocol). The questions were intended only to assist the research partner tell their story. For example, some questions included the following: “Please tell me about yourself during this school period?” “What are pivotal moments from this period?” “What are some memories or stories from this period?” This allowed the participant to frame their own story of school. Together we decided how many meetings were needed to effectively share stories from each period.

All engagement sessions were audio recorded. The recorded material was sent to a professional and reputable transcription service for transcribing. I ensured that the service company worked under a confidentiality agreement. I kept a receipt log to account for the recordings and transcriptions. Upon receiving the transcriptions, I verified the transcriptions for accuracy and addressed any discrepancies and corrections as needed. The transcriptions were analyzed as described in the data analysis section.

### **Considerations for Data Collection**

Applying narrative inquiry to the study brings with it methodological data collection dilemmas (Clandinin, 2013). As a narrative inquirer, I knew it was important to be mindful of these dilemmas to ensure the complexity of narrative inquiry did not overwhelm the study. One dilemma I considered is that experience is lived first, before it can be communicated. Clandinin (2013) asserts, “People both live out stories of experience and tell stories of those experiences” (p. 165). This dilemma could have shaped the inquiry because the researcher must consider how to live alongside the research partner. As the researcher, I was mindful about placing myself in the lived experience. With this dilemma, I was transparent on my positionality to the lived experience of this research engagement with my research partner. My journal includes my reflections on how my presence might have contributed to the lived experiences being described.

The second dilemma, I considered, was the need to slow down the moments of field texts and experiences, in order to analyze the complexity of the experiences (Clandinin, 2013). In order to analyze the complexity of experience by addressing the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, I must pause or address the experience in a



snapshot. The dilemma arises in the knowledge that experience is fluid and often does not pause, and is not a snapshot. In order to address this dilemma, I was transparent with the explanation of why a particular experience is being addressed at that particular time and I noted those explanations in my field notes.

The third methodological dilemma I considered is based on vulnerability as a researcher (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry with our research partners. As such, our narratives of experience intersect and interact with the narrative of experience of our research partner. I was mindful of these intersections and included these stories of intersections within the field text and research text. I noted these intersections in the field notes and in my journal reflections as appropriate.

The fourth methodological dilemma revolved around the need to find representational form or research text that addressed the relational aspects of narrative experience and the changing sense of narratives of experience (Clandinin, 2013). I addressed this dilemma by being mindful of the decision about the representational form of the research. I searched for different forms of representations to re-story the field texts. These included drama, creative non-fiction, narratives, and poetic representation. Of these, I selected poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) because I found it offered the best form to story the text while honoring the participants' voices and emotions. Additionally, I ground poetic form in my Chicana/o Ways of Knowing with the guidance of cultural writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Americo Paredes, and Corky Gonzalez.

Another factor I considered is how narrative inquirers conceptualize memory and imagination (Clandinin, 2013). It is important to acknowledge that as narrative inquirers engage in field text that there is an understanding that the recollections or memories of

experience are always reconstructed. Clandinin (2013) suggests the narrative inquirer must reframe understanding of memory as a retelling of what has been experienced by the research partner. Clandinin states, “The importance of understanding that our memories are recollections, not exact duplications of original experiences, is central to how narrative inquirers make sense of past events” (p. 194). While there is fluidity, then, in our retelling, Clandinin (2013) also points out that while the whole can change, the parts of the experiences do not change in and of themselves but rather in relation to the other parts of the whole they make up. The focus, then, in the analysis was to understand the points of change in relation to the three dimensional space concepts of narrative inquiry.

As the researcher, I was guided by cultural intuition to seek clarification and probe for accuracy (Bernal, 1998). Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) describe the tension of researcher’s role in story making as follows, “stories are created and re-created in the interview and then negotiated, so that both researcher and participant do not assume that the stories necessarily reflect a pre-existing reality” (p. 464). Although meaning making is co-constructed, ultimately, I created the stories from the field texts as poetic transcriptions.

### **Data Analysis**

Narrative inquiry focuses on exploring and understanding the life experiences of an individual using strategies including analyzing data for stories, developing themes, identifying pivotal moments or epiphanies, and chronology (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012; Reissman, 2008). This research narrative is focused on the institutional, social, cultural, and familial stories that have shaped the storied lives

of Latina/o elementary school principals and their leadership. The focus included exploring institutional stories of school experiences as students and as school leaders. The analysis occurred both during the engagement with the participant and after.

Initial data analysis occurred as stories were being shared through the engagement process. As a narrative inquirer, I was mindful of the three dimensional space of stories, the tension of multi-storied lives, the impact of epiphanies and events on stories, and social-cultural issues on stories. As such, I inquired during the engagement process about these dimensions as the stories were being told. I kept a journal to note my reflections on the rationale for asking certain questions and participants' responses to the initial data analysis questions.

I read the transcripts of each engagement session and analyzed the field text transcripts by noting elements of story, chronology, epiphanies, and events. I also analyzed the field text, by noting the concepts of the three dimensional-space: temporality, place, and sociality. I applied theoretical themes such as the epistemological tenets of narrative inquiry and a Chicana/o Way of Knowing to the analysis. The framework of analysis is demonstrated in Figure 12. The framework is based on the quilt design of the *Mexican Cross Mexican Rose* discussed earlier.

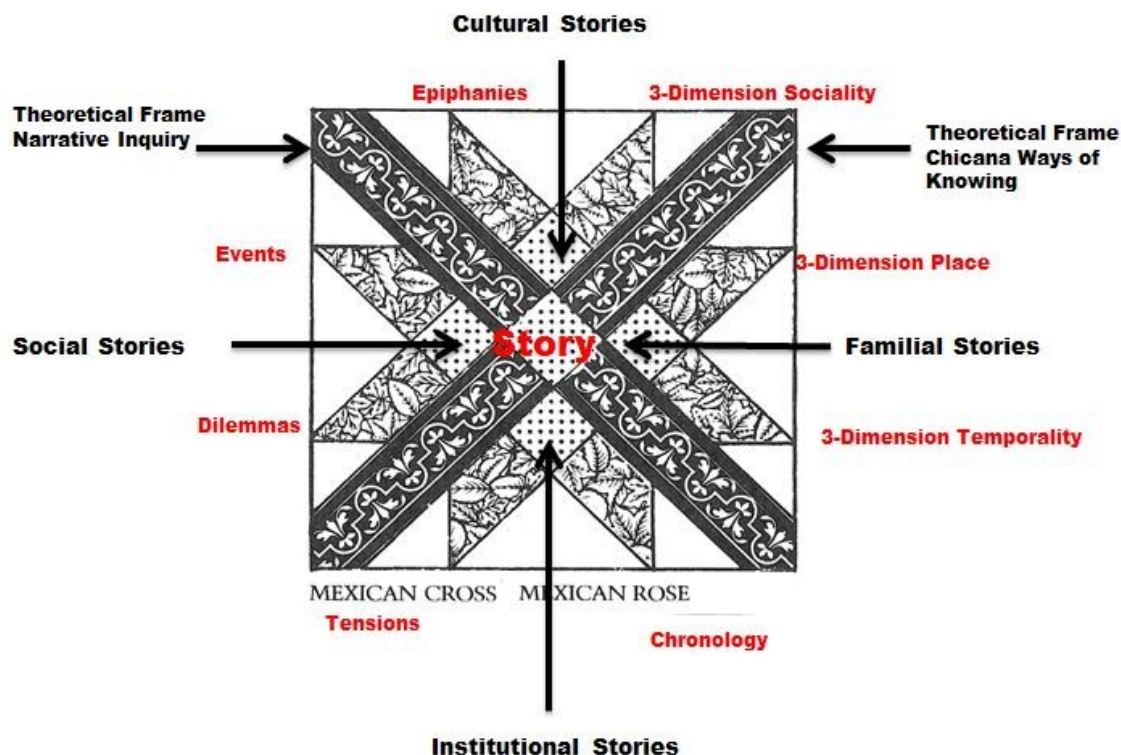


Figure 12. Framework for Analysis.

After the initial analysis, I created a re-storying of stories for each participant by creating poetic transcripts (Glesne, 1997). Then I continued to analyze the data and looked for common threads for sense making.

This section provided a summary of the steps applied to conduct this narrative inquiry. I described how I selected participants, the field text strategies used for engagement, the timelines that guided the process, and considerations for the inquiry. In addition, I described the framework for analysis and a briefly introduced the re-storying representation applied to characterize the field text. I return to the authentic flow of this narrative inquiry in the next sections.

#### **IV. KEEP IT SIMPLE, PATRICIA—LEARNING TO WORK WITH DATA**

During the first couple of months following my proposal defense, I pushed forward with this narrative work by engaging in storytelling sessions with my research partners and building my relationship with each one. I met with one partner face to face and I engaged with another via Skype. I followed their busy schedules and available times to pace the interactions I held with each one of them. I found the engagements with each partner rewarding; they honored me by entrusting me with their own personal stories. It is the part of the field work I found to be most humbling. After each engagement meeting, I was left to reflect on their stories, stories that described their development as persons and as educational leaders. I also left each engagement experience with reflections of my own experiences with schools and as a school leader. Finally, after each engagement meeting, I reflected on the implications of each story as it pertained to this narrative inquiry.

Although my time engaging in the fieldwork was emotionally and intellectually rigorous, the pace of the work was different from the time involved in developing the theoretical framework and research questions. During this time, my mom was more engaged with my work. She had attended my proposal defense and had a different perspective of this work. Daily, she would ask me if I had completed any writing or if I had talked with my research partners. I would deter the writing question by telling her that I was thinking and reflecting about each engagement and my own experiences. When I would get caught up in the stress of reflecting on large amounts of field text data and thinking about how I would ultimately honor the data through story representation, she would tell me, “Keep it simple, Patricia.”

I was perplexed with her advice to “keep it simple.” I had never heard my mom tell me these words. Growing up, my mom’s words were those of perseverance. When I wanted to give up on high school band or my summer job she said, “don’t quit something you started.” Or, when I brought home a low A on a report card I heard words of positive criticism like, “you did great but you can do better.” I also thought the advice was contradictory to what I was observing. During this field work time, I had observed my mother complete quilt after quilt each with its own elaborate design and pattern. I started spending more time working next to my mom as she worked on her quilts and I noticed that before she started on a project she carefully sorted through the different piles of fabrics she stored in various places around my home. I noticed, as she sat in the garage going through her different fabric piles, she took much care with each piece. It appeared as she was sorting the pieces but instead she was unfolding and flattening each piece as she stacked them (Figure 13).



*Figure 13. Selecting and stacking fabrics.*

We talked as she continued to work. Occasionally, she would interrupt our conversation to tell me where, when, and why she had purchased that particular piece of fabric. She took extra care with the pieces of fabric that she had received as a gift. I initially wondered why she had not used the pieces but as the stack of fabrics was increasing in size, I empathized with her knowing that I found myself in a similar situation with gifts

of stories I had received from my research partners. Each piece had a beauty of its own, yet it was up to the quilter, or in my case the storyteller, to give new life and meaning to each piece.

My mom talked to me of her plan for her pieces. She was going to follow a plan called scrap quilt method where she would cut the pieces of fabrics from her stack in small rectangle strips and then sew the small rectangle strips together to create the quilt. She had read about this method in one of her quilting magazines. As we talked, I noticed, she did not appear overwhelmed with all the pieces of fabric that clearly had special meanings to her. I continued to observe her as she worked diligently, going through the process, cutting the strips and sewing them together. I observed her quilt take form through this creative process. This particular quilt would make the fifth quilt she had made within the two months. I recognized her process was indeed simple. *Keep it simple, Patricia*. She recognized the beauty of each fabric piece and by applying a technique that helped her manage her large volume of fabrics, she kept the work simple and productive.

### **Story Representation**

Through this narrative inquiry, I too, have been gifted pieces of my participants' lived experiences through the stories of school they have shared. Stories were shared from our past and through the process of relational engagement, new stories were also created. Stories, in this case, were also shared to address the research puzzle. As such, field text stories, stories exchanged during the field work engagement, are only part of the process of the greater inquiry. In order to address the research questions, field text stories are analyzed and recreated as research text. Research texts are stories presented in the final report form. The large volume of field texts was initially overwhelming. But, I



learned from my mother that with a plan and process I could indeed work through the data.

### **Poetic Transcriptions**

I reviewed how to best re-present the stories emerging from the story telling engagements. I apply Glesne's (1997) poetic transcription to represent the stories of my research partners. Poetic transcription is a form of representation that utilizes the participants' transcripts to relay the story. As the storyteller, poetic transcription is interpretive text and relies on data reduction. I will embed transition paragraphs as needed to help streamline the stories. In addition to creating poetic transcriptions with the data, I bring the poetic transcriptions together as if I am sewing a quilt of the storied lives of each participant.

I present to you three narrative quilts consisting of poetic transcriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. In the first narrative quilt, I have pieced together the narratives of Cindi Marie. I provide a brief introduction to her story and the creative boundaries I set to create her poetic transcriptions. I follow with the poetic transcriptions, each individually titled, that make up her narrative quilt. I follow Cindi Marie's narrative quilt, with my own. I include a brief reintroduction to my story and explain how I created my poetic transcriptions. I then share my narrative quilt. I end the narrative quilts, with the narrative of my third participant, Tony. I introduce Tony's story and describe the process to create his poetic transcriptions and present his narrative story. I end this section with a final reflection of the process and the narratives shared.

### **Cindi Marie's Narrative Quilt—Stories of School**

I start the research narrative text with Cindi Marie's story of school. Cindi Marie was a campus elementary principal for four years. She currently works as a district administrator. She starts her storytelling of her lived experiences of school by sharing a pivotal moment about an encounter with her high school counselor. Through her stories, she shares her experiences growing up as a Mexican American in a small community in south Texas and her pathway into the field of education, and ultimately as a campus administrator. We met three different times for extended periods each time. I re-present her story through poetic transcription as a strategy to embed Cindi Marie's voice into the narrative. However, as noted earlier, poetic transcription is an interpretive text. For Cindi Marie's poetic transcripts, I applied the following boundaries: although I used Cindi Marie's words in the poetic transcription, I moved words and phrases around to juxtapose them and maintain a storytelling rhythm. In addition, I moved stories, as needed, to present them in chronological order even though they were told to me out of chronological order. Occasionally, Cindi Marie would repeat a thought and I kept the repetition if it was pertinent to how Cindi Marie presented the story. As Cindi Marie and I engaged in our storytelling meetings, I found myself being reminded of my own stories and I retold these stories to Cindi or I made note of these stories in my journal notes. At times, due to our connectedness through the world of education, we often talked about living in the midst of stories about education or our lives. I included living in the midst stories that contribute to our narratives together. For reader accessibility, I include a title emphasized by a bold heading as an introduction to each poetic transcription piece.

## **Cindi Marie's High School Story of Schools**

### **A High School Counselor's Guidance**

*"Oh, honey, you are not college material."*

And I remember  
Those words exactly.  
Very vividly,  
her just tapping my shoulder,  
making me feel like  
It's okay,  
there's going to be lots of other jobs  
you can do.  
That conversation with that Counselor,  
you cannot tell me I can't do that,  
her words were so piercing!  
How could she just take that from me?

A false belief,  
my dad had lost his job.  
A perception,  
I had the basics-  
she didn't see me  
as someone who took the higher level courses,  
the desire that one shows when they actively  
prepare for college

My Anglo friends  
were going to go to college.  
My Mexican friends  
weren't going to go to college.

I kind of lived  
in both worlds.  
Where I didn't  
want to be Mexican.  
Identity crisis,  
I didn't want to be Mexican, Mexican ways, Mexican music,  
*You know?*  
My junior year  
My high school principal told me

I shouldn't date this guy.  
He was Caucasian,  
He was the quarterback, the point guard, the star state runner.  
Had the best guy in our school.

I was living in both worlds.

As an athlete,  
my coaches calling me aside and telling me,  
You really deserve the MVP today,  
I have to give it to so and so  
because their mother is here.  
I don't want to have to hear it on Monday.

I was living in both worlds.

I did understand that very early on.  
I did associate them having,  
They were educated,  
They were teachers or librarians,  
That's what it took to have homes like theirs

I was going to go to college.  
I wanted a job.  
I wanted to break away  
from the way my family lived.  
I needed to have a better life,  
live better,  
didn't want  
paycheck to paycheck.

*"Oh, honey, you are not college material."*

In the back of my mind,  
I knew  
she didn't think I could.  
It did bring doubt.  
I remember looking at her straight in the eyes,  
I could see way beyond that.  
It's like my vision just went,

"No, I'm going to college."

### **Second Language Learner**

I loved school.

I loved learning.

But I was fearful of being called on,  
reading out loud,

I was a second language learner.

*I can call it now a second language learner.*

At the time, I couldn't.

My English wasn't very good.

There were certain words I couldn't say.

You know?

"World War II or I,"

I couldn't say that.

My tongue just didn't do that.

I was fearful.

I hated Round Robin reading.

*I didn't know it was called that.*

I hated that.

I knew that the next paragraph was going to be mine,

I was afraid,

didn't want to be made fun of,

it was because I was bilingual,

I was a Spanish speaker first.

I've associated

being a bilingual student

as a negative.

For years.

All those years in elementary, middle, and high school.

I associated that with being kind of second class.

I could hear other kids being made fun of.

Teachers telling us

we could not speak Spanish,

my cousins being hit in my classroom.

With yard sticks.

*I hate yard sticks.*

Teachers sitting at their desks with their feet on top of their desks, or on  
their chairs, reading the newspaper, and saying,

"Ah, I just heard you say that in Spanish. Please do not speak in Spanish in here.

It is very disrespectful."

The language that the teachers used was like, "Ew. You are second class. You need to speak English."

I very quickly realized,  
I was smart enough  
to know that I couldn't speak Spanish.  
Speaking Spanish made these white people not like you.  
Not necessarily to me,  
I was a rule follower.  
I'd sit and observe- never wanted to break the rules,  
I never spoke in Spanish. That was a negative.  
I saw my friends get in trouble.

My identity crisis in high school,  
I didn't like any kind of Mexican music,  
I couldn't understand why parents had to listen to that.  
Again, it was all Spanish.  
Spanish was bad,  
Spanish was not going to get me to college.  
Speaking Spanish and being associated with bilingual,  
it was kind of like, "Ew."

Now I did speak Spanish at home  
with my mom.  
I could not speak Spanish in front of my friends.  
They don't speak Spanish,  
I can't speak Spanish, it's a bad thing.  
My grandmother refers to me  
as 'Miss English'.

I did have a *Quinceañera*,<sup>33</sup>  
my freshman year.  
It was very shortly,  
by my sophomore, junior year,  
I totally broke away.

---

<sup>33</sup> Celebration of a girl's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.

My librarian, who was one of my best friends' mom,  
she'd say, Oh, honey, you can come over to our house any time.  
You don't even have to worry if Lindsey is not here.  
You just come over.  
You're just different.  
We love you.

This non-Hispanic group,  
I was accepted.  
I felt like I was different.  
Probably felt that I was better.  
I kind of rose a little bit higher,  
confidence.  
I was different.  
Powerful.  
In her telling me,  
she told me in the library.  
I would come over to their house,  
spend the night at their house any time.  
They would feed me.  
They were very nice to me.

My friend Caroline's family embraced me,  
Rachel's family embraced me.

My boyfriend was Caucasian.  
His mother just absolutely adored me.  
His dad was very nice to me.  
I was accepted into that family,  
that whole entire year.  
I dated another boy that was Caucasian  
his family was very prejudiced.  
That's who I dated.  
Didn't date other Hispanics.

It was kind of hush, hush.  
White kids got more attention,  
more assistance from the teachers,  
the principals,  
their tone was different in how they were spoken to.  
Issues around discipline.  
Hispanic kids would go to the alternative,

White kids weren't treated the same.

No one talked about it,  
but we saw it.  
We all felt it,  
we all knew.  
It's who you were.  
We all knew that  
if you were a brand name kid,  
if your dad was on the school board,  
if your mom's a librarian  
or a teacher,  
you're not going to get in trouble.

I learned the unwritten rules  
Of being friends  
with people  
that had a little bit more influence.

I was lucky.  
A little bit of privilege,  
I'm one of those people in the middle.  
I could go either way.

### **Teacher's Lounge**

I was an office aid  
at the elementary level.  
A moment,  
I walked into the work room  
to put up mail,  
I saw teachers.  
I saw them,  
they were talking.  
I heard them  
talking about  
their students.  
I heard  
who they were talking about,  
how they were talking about their families.  
Making fun of these kids,  
who were poor.



I knew who they were.  
I was disgusted at that moment.  
I cannot believe these women are sitting there talking about these children.  
I could so hear it,  
feel it,  
it isn't fair.

These children opened up to them,  
they're in the work room  
making fun of them  
I happen to know the kids.  
I knew them  
It broke my heart.  
I put up the mail,  
I remember leaving and going,  
"God, I hate them!"  
I remember,  
"God, I hate them!"  
That's very strong,  
"I hate them."  
I don't like how these teachers are.

### **Cindi Marie's College Story—Story of Schools**

#### **Abuelo, Yo Necesito Ir**

I got in.  
Found out right before graduation,  
I was going to State Tech.  
I was getting out of Rosewood.  
I was leaving.  
I was going to go off to college.  
  
My grandfather said  
"Absolutely not."  
*Right in line with Ms. Smith, my counselor.*  
"You shouldn't do this to your family.  
You should stay,  
you need to get a job.  
You need to work.  
You need to help out your family.  
I don't know why you're going off to college."

I'd say  
"Abuelo, yo necesito que ir.  
I need to go.  
It's going to be better for me."  
He'd say, "No.  
You need to stay.  
You need to help your family."

My dad and my mother  
begged me not to go to Rosewood College.  
They begged me not to go to Texas College.  
You need to stay here.  
We don't want you to leave."  
I was like, "No. I have to go." I said,  
"If I'm going to get out and have a better life, I have to go."  
I just knew I had to go.

I don't know how I knew that.  
I just knew I had to go.  
That's how I ended up leaving.

### **Walmart**

My mother hates to think about the moment that I left.  
She and my aunt dropped me off with \$800 dollars.  
How ignorant we all were.  
First generation,  
one suitcase with all my clothes.  
That's all!  
No sheets for the bed,  
no towels for my dorm.  
I had nothing.  
Nothing.  
No one said, "Here's a list of things that you need."

I remember going to Wal-Mart,  
my mom and my aunt  
buying the sheets for the bed.  
My mother said,  
"we'll get you a blanket when you come back."  
My aunt said, "No, we need to get her a blanket now."  
My mom and my aunt negotiating,

my mom's like, "We don't have any money."  
They didn't have the extra,  
probably \$70 dollars, it probably took.

### **My First Semester**

I had no money.  
My parents had to borrow \$800 dollars  
to get me started.  
No meal plan.  
I freaked out.  
I did poorly.  
I didn't know the rules.  
I was on my own.

My boyfriend  
was my greatest mentor.  
I could ask him questions.  
I didn't even know what to ask!  
He didn't have to ask for financial aid.  
I hadn't quite figured out my financial aid,  
I was on my own.

I remember going to my financial aid advisor.  
I'd go and sit for hours,  
I hated it.  
I waited and waited,  
finally got my financial aid at the end of September.  
Finally! My tuition's paid for.  
I had a meal plan.  
I couldn't afford anything else.

I reflected a lot about my high school.  
"Why didn't they help us?"

My first semester  
I was so depressed,  
slept a lot  
throughout the semester.  
I was very angry as I'd see my friends.

Every other week I would come home.  
I was home sick.  
I was depressed.  
I remember walking in  
excited about being home,  
going to the refrigerator.  
There was nothing.  
Nothing.

I would ride home with Tessa.  
I didn't have a car.  
I was very poor,  
I remember thinking,  
"God, I wish this"  
"I wish that."  
I was very angry  
at my parents.

Very angry,  
very resentful  
I had friends, they all had cars.  
They were in college,  
all those girls had fancy cars.  
They had money,  
they had cute clothes.  
They had everything!  
there I was,  
just super poor.  
Barely there.

You know?

My parents just worried  
how they were going to help support,  
provide for my two sisters.  
My dad was just rebuilding,  
unemployed.  
It wasn't his fault.  
He had worked at that refinery for 20 years.  
They closed it.  
He was displaced.  
He was starting his own business.

I couldn't get any more financial aid,  
they had invested in land and in homes.  
That was how there was enough,  
the rent that came in.  
That's how my parents  
sustained the home.  
Very little,  
at times.  
maybe... I remember distinctly,  
maybe a bag of potatoes,  
a container of beans  
in the refrigerator.

I didn't have more.  
Everybody around me had more,  
even financial aid.  
"Mom! Why couldn't you just put the homes under grandma and grandpa's  
name?"  
"Why can't you play the game?"  
Without even knowing what game I was referring.

My first semester,  
came home with a 1.333!  
Academic probation.  
My parents never asked me how I had done.  
Never asked me for my grades.  
Never asked me.  
They just said, "*Mija*, we're glad you're home."

That Christmas break,  
I remember saying to myself,  
I'm going to make it. I'm going to overcome this.  
I'm going to beat it.  
Now I know. I've been there one semester,  
I can do this.

### **That Voice That Fire—Going Back**

*Where is that coming from?*  
I don't know,  
I don't know,  
I still don't know.

My in-laws ask me,  
my husband has asked.  
I have no idea where that voice,  
that fire to prove people wrong,  
to prove that I am here,  
not a statistic.

I'm not supposed to do well.  
Everything about my life  
places me living  
in a different world.  
Not in this world.

I guess I needed to prove against,  
I'm always cheering for the underdog.  
I'm always cheering for those who don't have.  
I'm not always very vocal about it,  
but in my heart,  
I want the best for those who struggle.

I knew my private battles.  
I knew my struggles growing up.  
*You know?*  
Financially.

I thank God,  
privileged,  
with decent looks,  
not the most pretty, but not being made fun because of my looks.  
I know that privilege came.  
Now I can see  
I was just always in the middle.  
I could've fallen because no one paid attention to me,  
they didn't pay attention,  
didn't ignore me totally,  
I was still in the background somewhere,  
learning from everything around me,  
without them even knowing  
how much I was taking in.

But here again,  
I found myself

that Christmas going,  
"Oh, no. They don't think I'm going to make it."  
My former principal at a football game said,  
*"Are you coming back at the end of the semester?"*

Only I knew that I wasn't doing well.  
Only I knew that it was hard for me,  
taking biology, English, and history.  
Who does that as a freshman? *Weed out courses.*  
Who does that?  
I got like a D, or two D's, a C, and an A in PE class.  
1.33,  
proudly wearing the one State Tech t-shirt I owned,  
I deserve to wear this,  
won't be able to wear this if I come back home,  
devastate my entire family,  
look like a failure.  
I can't fail.  
I have to just go back.  
I'm going to have to do well.

Second semester I went back.  
I had financial aid.  
Wasn't worried about the money.  
I could eat every day.

Learned from that first semester.  
It wasn't that I couldn't do it,  
it was the obstacles.  
Family, financial, no vehicle.  
*You know?*  
Not knowing how to be at a university.  
Feeling like I was not worthy of being there.

I dealt with a lot.  
I may have seemed confident on the outside.  
Inside I was broken.  
Inside I was scared.  
I was fearful.  
I didn't feel like I belonged,  
hadn't been acclimated.  
I hung out with my roommates and my boyfriend.

That was probably my strength.  
Second semester I ended up with a 3.5.

Summer I went home,  
worked all summer.  
That fall semester  
another probably 3.5, or a 4.0.  
Every semester my GPA just went up, and up, and up.  
"I can do this."  
I moved out,  
I had my own apartment.  
I worked all summer.  
I worked at the cotton gin.  
Came back with like three thousand dollars.  
I thought I was just so rich.

That fall semester I worked at the student health center.  
I worked in medical records, my major,  
My junior year.  
Worked in the lab and in the pharmacy area,  
worked there for two years.  
Then that's what I did.  
Made my little extra  
working through work study,  
my grants,  
my loans.  
*I'm still paying off my loans.*

## **Church**

It actually starts with childhood.  
my grandmother and my mother,  
they both shared a story with me,  
I still hold very dear to my heart.  
When I used to play, probably  
somewhere between the ages  
of probably four and six,  
my outside imaginary play,  
I would go to church.

I was raised by a grandmother and a mother  
who went to church every Sunday.



That's how I learned to read in Spanish  
without even knowing.  
I would sing in Spanish, read the music.

My grandmother used to wear those scarves,  
like all the ladies in that little town.  
Every Sunday they'd put these things on.

I'd go into my grandmother's room,  
go and grab it, putting on the scarf.  
I'd go outside by the two big trees  
at the corner of the right hand side.  
I remember getting on my knees  
and praying.  
To the tree.

Coming back in and saying, "*Abuela! Yo fui a iglesia*"<sup>34</sup>

Of course, I'm outside.  
She knows I'm not at church.  
Then they said they would ask me questions,  
I'd probably make up something.  
So I would go outside and pray to this tree.  
I have no idea what I would say.

My spiritual upbringing  
was heavily influenced by my family.  
I went to church.  
I went through CCD, Religious Ed,  
all through elementary school and through high school.  
I attended retreats in high school.

I still have a cross.  
My cross says 'Search.'  
It was a wooden cross.  
I can tell you there's a song by Alabama. 'There's No Way.'  
But for me it was really more about  
"There's no way that I can live without God."  
That was the first song, besides 'Be Not Afraid,'  
that has been one of my favorite childhood songs.

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<sup>34</sup> Spanish phrase, "Grandma, I went to church."

I used to sing every church song.  
'This Little Light of Mine.'  
'Here I Am, Lord.'  
Those are songs that I remember as a child.  
When I hear 'Be Not Afraid' at church,  
I get goosebumps.  
"I shouldn't be afraid of facing life.  
God's with me.  
No matter where I'm at, God is with me always."

'Be Not Afraid,' plus that country western song  
engrained in my head  
I don't know, later, was going to just rely on,  
through whatever trials and tribulations I dealt with.

My Hispanic friends,  
we all went to Catholic church together.  
Went to classes on Wednesday nights.  
My other friends, they would not come with us.  
They had their church groups.  
We all had faith in God.  
The common thread amongst all of us,  
We all believed in God.

When I got Confirmed,  
I wore a white shirt with lace, and a red pencil skirt with heels.  
My grandmother  
made the skirt for me.  
They would sew a lot.  
We didn't have a lot of money.  
It was a skirt that they sewed.  
I remember getting confirmed.  
I remember going through, and thought,  
"I'm getting married at the Catholic Church."  
That's the only sacrament I had left.

Through college,  
would go to church at the Catholic student center,  
Pray,  
all by myself.  
Pray before and after tests,  
church on Sundays.

I needed that.  
Taking the Eucharist  
every Sunday.  
I knew that it was a relationship between me and the Lord.

*You know?*

### **Pageant Senior Year**

My senior year in college  
I was asked to be part of a pageant.  
A big fundraiser.  
The Greeks versus the Non Greeks,  
They had a pageant.  
A ball to raise money for cancer.  
I got asked by the  
Association of Latino Students.

I joined ALS two semesters before my senior year.  
I realized that that's who I was.  
I remember wanting to hear the music again.  
I was meeting friends at parties that were Hispanic.  
They liked the music my parents liked!  
I Reconnected.  
My family was now becoming important to me.  
I had already gone through everything,  
reconnecting  
with who I was

I remember  
the stage,  
walking out in my swimsuit and something else.  
I did it.  
*I don't know how the hell I did it.*  
I won.

I remember waving,  
the little tiara,  
the banner.  
Then, going out to the football field to get presented.

I remember going to a couple of meetings,  
they were all gung ho about Hispanic rights and stuff.  
I wasn't quite there yet.  
"I'm not going to get into that.  
I'm not going too radical on anything."

In the back of my mind  
I thought,  
"You can't really bite the hand that feeds you."  
One of those unwritten rules things again.  
I was like, "Okay, I'm not going to go radical here."

I met a lot more Hispanics.  
There was a LULAC pageant,  
Miss Cinco De Mayo.  
I was one of the top five.  
I was one of the finalists.  
I did not win.

"Oh well, it's just for fun."  
But it built me up.  
It gave me confidence that I probably needed.  
*You know?*

Reconnected with my roots,  
proud to be Mexican American.  
These are my people,  
this is my music.  
It was kind of nice.  
It was through that unveiling of, "Wow."  
Then I remembered telling myself,  
"What the heck was I thinking?  
Why did I think I was better?  
Who the heck was I to think that I didn't want to be Mexican?"  
I come back home with a different attitude.

I am proud to be who I am.  
I love my family.  
I think they're the greatest thing.  
*What was I thinking?*

I was getting ready to graduate.

I made it.  
I literally had made it.  
*What made me think that there was anything wrong with me?*

I met Felix,  
my husband in October,  
the semester I was graduating.  
I had never dated a Hispanic, or a Mexican.  
So this was the first Mexican boy I'd ever dated.  
He was a Spanish major.  
He listened to  
Emilio Navaira.  
I met somebody that resembles, and is like, my family.

This is family.  
"I was coming back home  
I felt comfortable.  
I felt at home,  
started to think, "It's okay."  
*You know?*  
"To be who you are."

Mexican-American

### **Cindi Marie's Teaching Story—Story of School**

#### **Graduate School and Teaching**

June, I started graduate school.  
That's how I ended up in education.  
I had to apply.  
My in-laws were heavy on education,  
they felt like I needed to become a teacher.  
School of Education.  
I thought, "Okay, well if I'm going to go into the school of education, I  
need to know why kids struggle with learning."  
So I went into Special Ed.

I always said I hated teachers,  
I would never be a teacher. *I met my husband, met my husband's family  
and they said, 'You need to have your certification.'*  
I started substituting.

Jargon.

I don't know anything about educational terms.

Second semester,

applied to the alternative program.

Alternative concept was brand new.

I went into special education.

*I was really into the whole brain research about learning.*

End up substituting, going to graduate school and starting an alternative program

### **Interview—I Speak Spanish**

In May I get a call from BISD, Kennedy Elementary.

I hadn't even applied.

They interviewed me

for a bilingual special education class.

They wanted to know if I spoke Spanish.

I said, "Yes! I speak Spanish."

I went, "Wow! I get to speak Spanish."

*You know?*

Because I hadn't spoken Spanish.

I had lost a lot of my Spanish.

Speaking Spanish was a bad thing.

They ask me the question about teaching in Spanish.

I said to them,

*"Well, I think it's important for you to support their Spanish, but I really think they need to learn English. And you really need to start teaching them English right away. But I think as a teacher I could help them. If they don't understand something, I can help them with the Spanish. But I think it's important that they learn English as fast as they can."*

Where was that coming from?

The complete immersion.

I walk out of the interview.

The assistant principal takes me aside, "I just want to tell you, you did a great job."

It was my first interview, ever.

I hadn't even applied!

She says to me, "Let me just tell you about bilingual ed."

She said, "Don't ever say that."

*She told me that.*

"Don't ever say that."

And I'm like, "Okay."

She said,

*"It's important that we teach in the language, in their first language. That you teach them in the language that they know. If you have to interview again, remember to say that it's important that you teach them in their first language. And then they will transfer to that second language."*

I remember distinctly, her telling me and correcting me.

*Correcting me!*

"What a sweet lady. She corrected me."

To help me.

I obviously didn't know much about bilingual education.

And I remember going, "Okay."

And I remember going, "Wow!"

I left the interview.

I got in my car

Thinking "This is all good."

It was my first interview.

I got a call back the next day.

I was offered the job.

*I guess they thought they could grow me.*

I taught all students

learning to read in Spanish

It was all resource,

first through fifth graders,

and that was it.

My introduction back to my Spanish.

### **Teaching**

After three years I left BISD,

went to Travis.

I taught a kinder/first class,

didn't want to do special ed any more.

I wanted my own classroom.

I wanted first grade, regular ed.

I didn't want to have anything to do with bilingual.

Let me tell you why.  
As a bilingual SpEd teacher,  
you didn't have the same resources as the gen ed teachers  
I didn't know if it was because you were bilingual,  
or because you were SpEd,  
but it was a double negative.  
You didn't have any resources.  
We didn't have any resources.

I was made to feel  
the prejudice,  
the bias,  
that I felt growing up.  
It all came back with the way I was treated as a bilingual special ed  
teacher.  
Political indifferences,  
politically bilingual teachers were treated like second class teachers.  
After my fourth year of teaching  
I left.  
I became an educational diagnostician

### **Thinking Back**

I think back,  
"Gosh, this was kind of like  
there was no one to motivate me,  
no one to really help me understand  
that if I had taken certain classes in high school,  
they probably would have helped me in college."  
But I didn't ever hear that.

I could've become a gap kid.  
I could've just fallen through the gaps.  
Nobody ever polished me.  
No one ever took interest  
in saying  
"God, this girl has potential"  
I never knew.

knew I was going to college.  
I had the motivation to go to college.



I just didn't know what could've helped me.  
I've never forgotten.  
I still challenge, now, my daughter's counselors.  
"What are we telling kids?  
Why are we in the same situation?  
Counselors are still not telling kids what kind of opportunities they have."  
The AP kids, very clearly some kids take all these courses.  
I didn't have that advocacy.  
It is still prevalent in schools today.  
Is it because of where they come from?  
Where they live?  
Who they are?  
Who their families are?  
What their last names are?  
Why?  
Why does it still happen today?

### **Cindi Marie's Principal Story—Story of School**

#### **Greater Impact**

I left it because I was itinerant,  
I knew I wanted more.  
Observing other principals – all the principals I worked with,  
I was like I can do that job.  
Have a greater impact.  
I just had this sense  
that's really what I should do.  
That's what I thought I wanted to do.  
*I still think I do.*  
That's what inspired me.

The people I admired,  
like one of my principals,  
I remember her being so resourceful,  
I thought I want to be like that.  
I want to be like that,  
help teachers,  
help students.  
Probably an internal,  
or innate, ambition to manage and lead.  
I've always been a leader,

but I was a very shy leader,  
still very reserved,  
not real confident,  
not real sure I could do it,  
fear of could I really do it.

I'm always second-guessing,  
probably  
because I was a second language learner myself.  
I always compared myself to my counterparts,  
always thought how could this little girl from Rosewood, Texas  
even think that I could do this?  
I don't have the capital.  
I challenge myself.  
I love being the underdog, improving myself.  
If I can achieve, so can anyone else.  
And we shouldn't set limits on people nor children.  
It's been my grit.  
I'm not going to take no for an answer.

### **Caged in Observing Discrimination**

I was so upset.  
What I observed,  
to me it was like,  
I felt like  
I was caged in,  
couldn't advocate because of my position.  
I didn't have the clout to really tell the principal what I had seen.  
I went into the middle school,  
this little girl I was about to test was going through the lunch line,  
cafeteria lady heard her speak Spanish.  
*See, this is where the speaking in Spanish, it surfaced again.*  
She tells the little girl you are an American.  
You need to be speaking English.  
Little girl responded, 'I can speak whatever language I want, it's lunch.'  
The lady felt it was disrespectful  
The girl got three days of ISS.  
She comes in crying.  
I'm ready to give her the IQ test,  
Had everything ready,

she's crying.  
She's says I have ISS  
'cause that lady said I couldn't speak Spanish,  
but I told her I could speak Spanish  
whenever I wanted.  
Now she says it's disrespectful.

I go to the principal.  
The principal says well we don't speak Spanish.  
I said, "sir, that was during her lunch.  
She is allowed to speak whatever language she pleases."  
He replied, "Well, yeah, but when you're in school you need to speak English."  
He, too, was close-minded.  
I remember calling my supervisor.  
I said this is wrong.  
These kids are being discriminated.  
I felt like I was caged in and couldn't do anything.  
I was so angry,  
I was just, I mean, beside myself.  
Struck a chord for me.  
This is very personal.  
I don't even feel like I can continue with the testing,  
can't test her under these conditions.  
You don't test kids under any kind of duress.  
She got ISS for speaking Spanish in the lunch line.  
I get treated the same every time I go to Sullivan City,  
like a second class educator.  
'cause I'm brown.  
Blatant discrimination.  
Who can I tell?  
I didn't have anybody.  
And so that lived in me for years.

### **We Fault Them**

I can so empathize.  
Felt that as a student  
I always thought I was lesser than who I was because of being bilingual.  
That's how we were made to feel,  
you can't speak Spanish in school.  
At some point

I didn't want to be associated with that.

I've seen the injustice.  
I've seen it as an educator,  
like the little girl,  
I can think of just so vividly,  
was discriminated against, was so wrong.  
Our ELL's now,  
I am proud of the work we're doing  
But,  
I think we're still so far behind.

Yet if you structure the curriculum  
you teach the curriculum,  
try to level the playing field.  
They will excel.  
They will,  
I mean I'm seeing it now.  
A lot of our students that came through Del Monte Elementary,  
they have outperformed their counterparts.

But you have to know that –  
I'm always trying  
to prove that these kids are smart.  
It doesn't matter if you're a child of poverty,  
you can still be successful.  
It doesn't determine your test scores.  
But if we are not teaching the curriculum  
they don't have the experiences,  
then that's what we do,  
we fault them,  
thinking it's their fault,  
or we make those excuses.  
We use their demographic data  
as excuses for why they're not.  
So that gap continues to be there.  
But,  
it doesn't have to be there.

I'm always finding,  
I fight a system  
that is not meant to educate  
all children.

I know that.

### **Closer to God**

I think God will place us in positions to draw us closer.  
I think that's probably when I was the closest was when I was on a  
campus,  
personal conversations with God  
more than any other time in my life,  
as a principal.  
It was about facing my fears.  
It was the courage,  
I don't know where I got that,  
because you know people are cruel.  
Being criticized.  
I'll ask some of my former teachers,  
what was it?  
Did I really inspire you?  
Did I motivate you?  
I never thought I did.  
I was never good enough.  
I'm constantly trying to find ways to get better.  
I'm not good enough.  
Not good enough.  
I've always had to improve myself because I wasn't good enough.  
Deep down inside  
I'm always looking ways to be better.  
I felt God's presence more as a leader, as a principal.

### **Doubt**

I had to prove to all those people who doubted me.  
Lots of people  
doubted me.  
The district?  
That's how they made me feel.  
Like they doubted me.  
Yeah, how could a brown person do it?  
They thought I couldn't do it.  
I was determined.  
I said Lord we're going to get through this.  
We're going to get through this

These kids deserve the very best.  
It was a new school,  
new principal,  
the poorest children all in one school  
without the support I felt like I needed or could've had.

My priority  
was for kids to be successful  
in spite of anything and everything.  
I was going to do everything right.  
I was going to read.  
I was going to listen to the research.  
I was going to keep learning  
so I could make sure I was on the right track for kids.  
The professional development,  
cluster meetings,  
it was the hardest year.  
I had student achievement at the top of my list.  
It was about kids.  
Kids first no matter what.  
Kids, kids, kids.  
Everything we do is around what's best for kids.

### **College Dreaming T-shirts**

College ready.  
Summer before  
I opened the school  
I sent out letters to every university and college  
in the state of Texas;  
Harvard, Stanford, Notre Dame  
and all the big colleges.  
We sent out probably over 500 letters.  
I requested a t-shirt from every one of those universities.  
I wanted to hand out a college t-shirt to every child on my campus.  
Personally important.  
*That was my way of – so we did –*

We ended up with about probably 200 t-shirts.  
Used them as door prizes.  
Every time I could, I'd give out the t-shirts.  
They all had a college t-shirt for College Day.

Counselor didn't really connect with my vision.  
It wasn't her vision.  
I knew that and that bothered me.  
I wanted her – I said why don't you do a video?  
Go to the universities, talk to people.  
Bring those videos back  
so our kids can see what it's like to be on a college campus.  
I would've done that.  
I couldn't though.  
I couldn't do everything.  
I will never forget that.  
That was a huge push.  
These kids are going to go to college.  
My vision took them to entering college.  
Beyond that, once they got to college,  
they could become whatever they wanted.

### **Leading**

There are things I had to do at times,  
had to humble myself.  
Of course I know I got criticized.  
There are mistakes I've made and so it's part of the failures.  
Always tell teachers,  
I want you to take risks.  
Learn from those failures.  
Be confident you're not going to be evaluated  
or judged based on you trying.  
I'd rather you try and fail  
than not ever try at all.  
You know when we implemented the math program,  
I always tried to say I'm not evaluating.  
I'm going to come in,  
but I'm going to learn from what you're doing.  
Give them feedback right away.  
I value you trying something.  
In reflection is that teachers said you know,  
thank you for growing me,  
thank you for nudging me,  
for pushing me  
always expecting more of us.

They actually helped me  
become the leader I am today.  
What they did that shaped me as a leader.  
I truly believe that.  
I truly believe that the non-negotiables,  
the setting of expectations,  
hearing my teachers  
also have that same passion and fire,  
saying oh no,  
these kids deserve the very best.  
These kids do.  
I surrounded myself with people  
who had the same passion for our children.  
And that is what made us strong.  
At the end of the day, I can't do it alone.  
Our scores were not because of what I was doing in the classroom.  
It's what they were doing in the classroom.

I wanted them to ask me questions.  
I was also going to come back at them,  
say let me explain why we're doing this.  
Now if you don't have a better idea,  
then don't just complain,  
come in with a solution.  
We have problems all day long,  
but I don't need us to just talk about the problems.  
I need to talk about how we're going to solve them.  
I can fix it,  
but then as soon as I fix it  
you're going to turn around and go  
you see, there she is fixing it.  
She didn't even give us voice in that.  
We didn't even have an opinion.  
She just took care of it.  
I said you're going to criticize me.  
Turn around, and you're going to criticize me.  
I said so this has to be a joint effort.  
They heard that enough that they started to believe it,  
sometimes they were still kind of cautious  
because that's just how it is,  
the role between the teacher and the principal.



I think now in retrospect,  
I think that they would come back,  
say that they were appreciated.  
Sometimes people have said,  
Well, you know Cindi, sometimes  
it's just your presence.  
You demand high expectations.  
I don't know that.  
I knew that the work that was coming down on them was heavy.  
They would ask me,  
well how much is a district initiative?  
How much is campus initiative?  
I would have to tease it out.  
This is what the district expects,  
and these are the things we need on the campus.  
We took the knowledge we had on our campus.  
I'm going to have to go back and reteach it.  
I remember walking up the stairs,  
hearing that and going, I love them.  
They're doing what's right for kids.  
It's not about me, it's not about them.  
They want kids to learn.

Don't let any teacher  
ever make you feel  
less than you are  
because you work at Del Monte Elementary.  
Be proud to wear that shirt,  
be proud to represent.  
Why?  
Because I was fighting the stigma  
of working on the east side,  
serving children  
that didn't look like the kids  
on the west side.  
Fighting what I used to read  
in the newspaper  
about the children  
on the east side  
not performing.

A comment in the paper,  
the children on the east side  
were hurting the district,  
and those Mexicans –  
should go back to Mexico where they belong.  
They're hurting the district.  
They're taking all of our money.  
I am now a principal on the east side.  
Don't you dare say my kids are not going to perform.  
We're going to outperform you.  
That was my prayer every day.  
We're going to outperform.  
This is my expectation.  
We're going to look at data  
to inform our instruction,  
make decisions based on the data.  
We're all going to look at this together,  
everybody's input.  
They would do it in front of me,  
then they'd walk out and do their own thing.  
But when I was there and we were doing this together,  
you could cut the tension in half.  
*You've had those experiences I'm sure.*  
At the end of the day, they knew where I stood

### **Living in the Midst—Scores**

I'm so competitive.  
I love it.  
We beat West Elementary  
on all tests  
except 5th grade science.  
They only outscored us by a couple points.  
Yes, outscored them.  
But you know  
what breaks my heart?  
They would've been higher.  
They didn't even look at data  
Until, like, January

## Adoration

*Patricia - I don't know if you remember this but, about two years ago, we had major budget cuts at the schools. You were in the Adoration Chapel and I walked in. It was my scheduled time and I see you there and I recognized you. I've hired one person from your campus but at that point we had not hired – you hadn't lost those teachers that I ended up hiring. But you turned back and you say to me, "How many are you losing?" We had never really talked before but right there we were both at Adoration and there was this common bond right there and then. I said we're realigning our district and that we were not losing any teachers. And you told me, "that's good." And I asked you how many were you losing. You were losing quite a few. Then we returned to focus on our Adoration time.*

I remember going to adoration.  
We were right in the thick of stuff.  
I was so stressed,  
I started going consistently.  
One day, I had this peace that is indescribable.  
I was in the same situation, same school, same kids, same teachers, you know, some changes with turnover.  
I had teachers who told me, you expect too much.  
There's too many meetings here.  
I'm like, isn't this what you're supposed to do?  
So those things used to weigh heavy, like what am I doing that's different?  
My teachers say well you just know everything.  
Well, no I don't.  
Y'all get away with things you think I don't know, eventually find out, but I know you do things to cut corners.  
We're human.  
We're going to do it, but don't cut.  
It's going to hurt kids.  
Cut everything else but don't hurt kids.  
That's it, it's all I ask, don't hurt kids.

Then I had this sense of peace.  
I don't know why.  
The only thing I've been doing consistently is going to Adoration.  
I've been doing a lot of thinking.  
*You know?*  
I was closer,

I think God uses us,  
I don't know how to explain this,  
Don't have the theological background to explain that  
God uses us to make a difference  
in whatever position we serve.  
I strongly believe that.

### **Redemption**

So Community Inc., redeemed me.  
Second superintendent during my leadership  
came in and heard nothing but negative.  
I was a principal that was getting decent results,  
but she's not any good—must be her AP.  
She's white. I'm brown.  
So many stories. I couldn't do it. I hired well.  
Those administrators at central office,  
She's just got a strong AP.  
That's who is holding her up.  
They still questioned.  
I knew doubting –  
*again there's that doubt.*  
Doubting, and doubting.  
Take everything away.  
In spite of the turnover we kept going.  
We kept advancing.  
Here's another judgment,  
God always in due time,  
it's one thing I've learned,  
God will make the things I thought were wrong, right.

Community Inc., came in,  
shared my story,  
in a meeting in front of all these other people,  
all the leadership,  
all executive cabinet with one principal present,  
the presenter says, I just want to highlight Del Monte Elementary.  
They're doing some great work.  
They're adding value.  
The kids are growing.  
They have the greatest growth among their students.

They're not at 90% passing but their kids are growing every single year,  
every content area. Have you had a conversation with the principal?  
I didn't have to share my story.  
I couldn't convince anyone at central office.  
I couldn't convince them.

What was it that girl was doing?  
She can't be successful over there?  
What is she doing?  
Community Inc., came in and intervened for me.  
They came in and shared the work that we were doing.  
It took someone from the outside to say they're doing some great work  
over at Del Monte.

Dr. Williams comes out to see me.  
I just want to tell you thank you,  
want to tell you I appreciate your leadership.  
What can we do for you?  
What do you need?

I said, Dr. Williams, honestly,  
I want you to believe in our children.  
I want the people in this community to stop asking for transfers out.  
I say the White people,  
I need you to stop transfers out.  
I said my White children keep leaving because there's too many Brown  
children.  
I have no control over the attendance zones.  
I went there,  
I said, and I don't want to lose my White children.  
I have very few of them and I don't want to lose them.  
I said, and I don't want my White children to think Brown children are not  
smart because that's what they're hearing.

White children are repeating that.  
It's very painful.  
I know we are adding more value to our students' education,  
more so than any other school in the district.  
But because of our transfer policy,  
we've allowed parents to think that they're going to a better school.  
We're working hard,

teachers are working extremely hard.  
It hurts that my children are leaving  
because there are too many brown children.  
I'll leave you with that.  
I said that's how you could help our school.

### **Not My Time**

So you see what I'm saying?  
I just feel like there was so many things I experienced,  
then of course going back to the Adoration,  
the peace I felt,  
the closeness I felt to God,  
leading me,  
using me.  
I was just being used in the flesh,  
I know that.  
In spite of the naysayers,  
in spite of the negativity,  
*'cause you know how it is as a principal,*  
you're going to have that.  
God always found a way,  
not in my time,  
but in His time.

### **My Narrative Quilt—Stories of School**

My own story contributes to the research puzzle so I reflect some and embed stories in addition to those already embedded in the dissertation. I pulled my stories from archival transcripts, when I had shared my stories with others for different purposes, my journal notes, research notes, and prior written assignments. Even though, I am using different data sources, I decide to also follow the same poetic form I applied to Cindi's and Tony's narratives. I use the rhythm and structure from Cindi's poetic transcriptions to help create my poetic representations. I created my poetic representation stories after my engagements with each of my participants as I was noting trigger memories in my

research journal. For reader accessibility, I include a title emphasized by a bold heading as an introduction to each poetic representation piece.

Like Cindi Marie, I was a campus elementary principal for four years. I currently work for a large urban school district as a child study school facilitator. I provide specialist support to 10 different campuses. While I have embedded some of my stories throughout the dissertation text, for reader accessibility, I also start by sharing a pivotal experience of my elementary story of schools and proceed to present my narrative story chronologically. Through my stories, much like Cindi Marie, I share about my experiences growing up in a small community in south Texas and describe my pathway into the field of education.

### **Elementary Chillona**

Lincoln Lee Elementary.  
It is in Lyford, not my hometown of Sebastian.  
I think it is far from my home.  
Far from my mom.  
My first day of school  
my mom leaves me  
with the crowd.  
I can't find her.  
I cry, and I cry.  
During recess, I stand next to the massive oak tree.  
I look out at the older kids' playground.  
I want to find my sister.  
I am so alone.  
My cousins are at the new kinder classrooms.  
I get to see them on the school bus.  
I learn that Mr. Munch makes the M sound  
I have trouble taking naps,  
But I manage to finish kinder.  
  
I cry in first grade.  
My cousins' names are called,  
we are in the same class.

But, they are not here.  
They are up North.  
I don't know what that means.  
All I know is that they are not here.  
I spend my days crying.  
When my mom comes to eat lunch with me  
I cry and want to go home.  
She takes me home.

My cousins come back.  
It is cold now.  
One of my cousins has a nice new furry coat.  
Up North is colder, she tells me.  
I feel left out.  
My cousins get called out.  
They get free books.  
I cannot get free books.  
I am not a migrant.

### **Bilingüe**

In second grade  
I do not have many friends.  
But now, I'm in a class with students named  
Juan Antonio, and Maria  
They speak Spanish.  
I speak English.  
I get picked for school plays  
and assemblies.  
I speak English.  
They do not.

I am taken to a small closet.  
I look at the test.  
They want me to say the names of pictures  
in Spanish.  
I do not know what a plane is in Spanish.  
'Plane-o' I say.  
I learn in college  
it is a language proficiency exam.  
Why was I in a bilingual class?



*No se.*<sup>35</sup>

But I noticed  
a difference  
in this class  
from other classrooms.

I notice  
I get picked.  
I speak English.  
The others do not.

## **GT**

I am a chubby kid,  
a quiet student.  
I have friends  
but I feel out of place.  
I am on free lunch,  
my mom makes my clothes,  
I wear homemade sundresses every day.  
I'm in fifth grade when I get my first pair of pants.  
They are green pants.  
I wear the pants when it is very cold.  
A teacher tells me I am smart.  
I will be tested for GT.  
I do not know what that means.  
Soon I get to leave the class  
with the GT group.  
We walk to the middle school.  
We work on computers,  
we work on puzzles.  
We write a code for the computer.  
In class I work harder.  
Ms. Sanders thinks I am smart.  
She teaches us how to do presentations,  
how to work on projects,  
how to beat the other classes in flag football.  
  
I get called in to the office.  
When we have a sub

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<sup>35</sup> Spanish for I don't know.

they said, Patricia did it.  
There's another Patricia in class.  
It was not me.  
I am scared. I have never been to the principal's office.  
I start crying.  
The class thinks I was paddled.  
I was not.  
It was not me.  
But I remember crying.

### **High School**

High school is awkward.  
I feel I do not belong.  
I am heavier than others.  
I do not like having to buy plus size clothes.  
I start working out.  
I do not eat.  
My lunch is a Diet Coke.  
I lose a lot of weight,  
I wear fashionable clothes,  
I run and play tennis.  
I feel better, but I feel I do not belong.  
I have been with the same group since kindergarten.  
I find other friends in high school,  
Smart students.  
We are nerds that go to academic competitions.

One of my friends is from Mexico.  
I wish I could be like her.  
I do not want to be like the others.  
I listen to Mexican pop music,  
I watch Mexican music shows like *Siempre en Domingo*.  
I go to Mexico for my braces,  
I beg my dad to take us to Monterrey for vacation.  
The mall in Monterrey is trendy.  
I buy clothes there,  
we see a fashion show.  
I want to be more Mexican.

My peers do not get it.  
They think they are better.

We play border towns in sports.  
They chant to them from the stands,  
*"A viene la migracion"*  
They wave a U.S. flag.  
I think this is not right,  
I do not want to be like them.

The only way is to leave.

### **Expecting Better**

I want to go to college.  
My family does not talk to me about college.  
My mom is strict.  
I must do well in school,  
study, and do my homework  
or else.  
Or else I will get in trouble.  
My mom will spank me if she needs too.  
My older sister is smart and likes to study.  
I like to be on the phone with my friends and go to games.  
"Your 94 is good but your sister got a 97 in this class."  
My mom is tough; she expects better.

There are things I want that we cannot have.  
Money is still very tight.  
I wear hand-me-downs from my aunts.  
My mom sews some of my clothes.  
I save to buy some trendy clothes from Walmart.  
Some peers notice; they think I am wearing Esprit and Santa Cruz labels.

I do not like playing basketball.  
I want to see the boys play their games.  
I talk to the new coach.  
I want to help.  
A basketball manager.  
There has never been a female manager  
for the boys' team.  
He gives me and my two friends a chance.  
We are allowed to travel  
with the team  
but we cannot go into the locker room.

We are the first female boys' basketball team managers  
at our school.

I earn a letterman jacket,  
plus now, the other sports allow female sports managers.  
I like when girls have a chance to do things.

### **Remembered Stories of Self—My High School Counselor's Story**

I open the perforated edges  
of the postcard size letter,  
my ACT.  
I am eager and nervous.  
My dream was to score high,  
To apply to out of state schools  
like Cornell University,  
or even Princeton University.  
I quickly glance to the composite score.  
I scored higher than average,  
high enough to be accepted to Cornell.  
Not that many students from my hometown  
made it to an out of state university.

The next day  
I walk in to the high school counselor's office.  
I rarely walk through his door.  
Mr. Villarreal always seemed busy helping only certain students.  
This time though, I knew exactly what I needed.  
I also knew that I had out-scored my peers.  
“Mr. Villarreal, I received my ACT scores yesterday.  
I did really well.  
Can you please write me a letter of recommendation for Cornell  
University and a couple of other out of state schools? I know I have the  
scores and grade point average to be accepted and I am interested in the  
business program at Cornell.  
I will also need my transcripts sent there, ”  
I asked when I walked in.

Mr. Villarreal looks back at me.  
He was shorter than me,  
Even with his two-inch heel cowboy boots.  
His demeanor towered over me.  
He reached over,

patted my shoulder.  
“*Mija*, you aren’t going there.  
I already figured that you will go to St. Edward’s University  
with a migrant scholarship,  
like your sister.  
That’s already figured out.”  
He pats my shoulder,  
nudges me out of his office.  
I am upset.  
Devastated.  
He denied my request.  
He predetermined my college destiny  
without asking me.  
My senior year goes by.  
I notice Mr. Villarreal’s time  
helping the only two boys in the top ten group  
He sends them college information,  
sets them up on college visiting trips,  
provides them information on college scholarships.  
I am upset.  
I am already bothered  
by the unjust gender treatment at home.  
Now, I experience this at school.  
Mr. Villarreal determines my destiny, as a female student.  
The two male students are given options.  
I think this is unfair.  
I clearly outscored the two male students

The last month of school  
I receive a letter from St. Edward’s University.  
Did not receive the migrant scholarship.  
My mom had not worked the sufficient number of days.  
We are not considered seasonal workers.  
I am devastated.  
Universities had already accepted their incoming classes  
and awarded scholarships.  
The counselor helps me get admitted to a state university.  
I am late with paperwork,  
I receive a minimal scholarship,  
I am late for registration,  
wait listed for housing,

do not receive a financial aid award  
until I enroll in the fall.  
I start my university experience  
playing catch up  
with the organizational process.

*“Mija.”*

I will never forget  
the condescending tone.  
My dream derailed  
by a male school authority.

### **College**

A large state university,  
not an Ivy League school.  
But, I am away from the Valley.  
I felt out of place in the Valley,  
always trying to belong.  
I am away from home.  
I have a tough course load  
but I can do the work.  
Chemistry class is in a huge auditorium.  
There are more students in my class  
than the number of students from my graduating class.  
I'm overwhelmed.  
Only a few students look like me.  
I'm frustrated.  
I know friends from my hometown can do this work,  
I tutored them,  
they know this.  
Why aren't they here?  
Why was college not an option?  
I start to believe that school does not work for all students.  
I feel lost in this place.  
This is the first time I feel  
*othered*,  
as a Mexican American.  
Why did my friends not make it to college?  
I'm learning schools do not work for all students.

### **Ms. Brooke's Bilingual Class**

I made the move,  
transferred out to St. Edward's University.  
I got lucky with a work study job,  
a community mentor job.  
I work at a local elementary school.  
I am assigned five students to mentor,  
Tutor in the classroom.  
Sitting in Ms. Brooke's second grade bilingual class,  
working with students that speak Spanish,  
learning my students live  
in public housing.  
Why does Gina cry so much?  
I wondered about one of the students assigned to me.  
She's been assaulted by a family member.  
It's hard for me to understand.  
But I help.  
I listen, play with students, and tutor them.  
Learning a second language is difficult.  
I start my journey to learn Spanish.  
I want to be a bilingual teacher.  
I learned so much in Ms. Brooke's second grade bilingual class.

I struggled in Spanish college classes.  
Others in the class looked like me,  
many from the Valley.  
They speak Spanish,  
But I didn't speak Spanish.  
I mastered grammar rules,  
learned the to write a term paper in Spanish,  
and how sounds in Español are produced with your mouth.  
But I didn't speak Spanish.

A professor threatened to not recommend me as a bilingual teacher.  
I start watching Univision.  
I listen to Tejano music and go to Tejano dances.  
I start to feel a connection.  
I start to feel like I belong.  
Ahora hablo español.

### **Fideo and Colored Money**

I thank God for my work study job.  
I get to work in schools and work with kids.  
But I need more money.  
St. Edward's is really expensive.  
I work part time at Sears  
yet I still struggle.  
Being cashless brings me to tears at times.  
I didn't eat ramen  
But ate *fideo*,  
20 cents a box.  
When my used car breaks down  
I still do not have enough.  
My friend suggests I ask for help.  
I'm reminded when my family had to ask for help.  
I'm embarrassed, but had no choice.  
I did not want to go home.  
I take the bus.  
I find my way to the Department of Human Services.  
I wait in the dark dirty waiting space.  
I answer the questions.  
No, I do not have a bank account,  
no, I do not have savings,  
my car is broken,  
I do not make enough.  
I get a small award.  
Soon enough, I am paying for groceries  
With the colored paper money my mom used  
When we needed help.  
I'm still embarrassed, but I am glad I found help.

### **Seeking Peace**

Queen of Peace Chapel.  
Every Sunday  
I joined a prayer group.  
I meet a guy there,  
I start going to church every day.  
On Sunday mornings I go to mass with my sister.  
No matter how late I stayed out on Saturday at the Tejano dance,



I go to the student mass in the evening.  
I decide to make my confirmation.  
My roommate is my madrina.  
I receive the oil anointment from the bishop.  
I find some peace.

I almost failed out of a Mexican American Studies class.  
I was still searching for my identity.  
I was offended by the professor telling my about my roots,  
very generalized.  
Sorry Proff, what you are talking about was not my experience in the  
Valley.  
I drop the class.

I take it again two semesters later.  
My friend from the prayer group,  
He introduced me to Americo Paredes.  
I read George Washington Gomez.  
I start to understand,  
I find some peace.  
I am Mexican American.  
My experiences are valid if you learn about my story.  
The next time I take the class  
I ace the quizzes.  
The professor likes that I know.  
I become her unofficial assistant.  
My family calls me the Chicana queen.  
I find some peace.

## **BESO**

We are a small group of us, in bilingual education.  
One professor teaches all the courses.  
He is one of my biggest mentors.  
I learn about second language acquisition,  
I learn about Total Physical Response.  
We start a club.  
I'm a founding member of BESO at SEU.  
We travel to conferences,  
I become an area rep.  
You will find a job  
I am told.

I student teach.  
I do not want to teach.  
Student teaching was teaching  
another teacher's ideas.  
Activities like baking cookies and cooking octopus,  
this is not teaching.  
Thematic learning.  
I do not want to teach.  
I graduate.  
I work for a call center.  
My new friends there help me realize  
that I am privileged with a college degree.  
I start my search to become a bilingual teacher.

### **Teaching**

Yes, we provide a bilingual stipend.  
South San Antonio ISD.  
As soon as I call they ask me to go in.  
I speak to the HR coordinator.  
Yes, I speak Spanish,  
I am bilingual.  
I meet the principal,  
we talk.  
He doesn't ask me questions.  
We talk about family and my parents working in the fields.  
A brand new school,  
I am interested.  
We drive to visit the campus,  
a caliche road and older frame houses in San Antonio.  
The construction crew is working.  
I am excited, brand new hallways and brand new classrooms.  
We cross the street for lunch,  
a Mexican restaurant, the type that sells *tortas*.  
There's a jukebox in the corner playing *norteño* music.  
I look around.  
Mr. Olvera tells me "welcome home this is your new family."  
I accept the job.

## **Bilingual Materials and Miss I See My Name**

Brand new school.  
First thing we do is meet  
in a circle.  
The principal  
leads us.  
We are family.  
Everything we do is what is best for kids.  
He leads a prayer.  
We are teary eyed.  
The first of many faculty meetings,  
centered on family, students, and prayer.  
I am at home.  
Mentor teachers guide me.  
First year, no materials.  
New school, and we do not have teaching editions,  
just books.  
I create and build my reading library.  
I learn so much.  
I learn that bilingual materials are missing.  
I create, and create materials.  
I work long hours, but it is what is best for kids.  
I see something is not right.  
New materials, purchased for English classes.  
I am young, but I walk into the principal's office.  
I advocate for my students.  
We need materials too.  
He grins. He is glad that I am advocating.  
He approves a budget for bilingual materials.

I have a student that likes to shout out answers.  
He is always moving.  
"Hydraulics, miss" he shouts during science.  
He is right, but he shouts.  
I work with him,  
teach him strategies.  
I will not send him to the office.  
Discipline is spanking with a paddle,  
so I teach him strategies.  
One day, Daniel walks in to class.

His face is red and purple.  
I can still see the belt welts on his face.  
I hug him.  
I'm shocked and want to cry.  
I call for help and advocate for him.  
I start to learn about my students' struggles at home,  
and I help my students even more.

I help the students with learning a new language,  
teaching them in their first language.  
The state will still test them in English.  
I do not agree but do my best.  
We give assessments in English.  
Students all try their best.  
They are not reading English yet.  
Jose raises his hand during the testing,  
he comes up to me, excited,  
"Miss, aqui dice mi nombre."  
He doesn't read English but finds his name in a problem.  
My heart breaks.  
I must advocate.  
I sign up to write Spanish assessments during the summer.

### **My Biggest Lesson**

Miss Rocha, you will have a new student.  
He cannot be in the other bilingual class,  
the teacher had him last year in first grade,  
he cannot be with her in second grade.  
His behavior is bad, I am told.

He acts like a gang member, I am told.  
He cannot read, I am told.  
A seven-year-old,  
with blonde hair and blue eyes.  
He is Mexican American.  
Students are excited he is in my class.  
They all know him from the barrio,  
a leader, I notice.

He does act tough,  
But I teach him.

I connect with him.  
We have rules in class,  
I connect with him.  
I give him leadership roles.  
He talks tough and talks about gangs.  
I tell him that he can lead.  
He is seven years old.

‘Miss,’  
He tells me,  
‘You do not have to meet with my mom anymore.  
My dad is getting out of prison on Thursday.’  
I tell him that is good.  
He is excited.  
I am excited too.  
He loves his dad, and I know it will help him.

Monday morning,  
Cesar is not there.  
My colleague comes in.  
My colleague lives in the barrio.  
Cesar’s dad was shot down  
in the street during a dance.  
He was killed.  
Drug violence.  
Cesar is not there.  
“Miss you do not have to meet with my mom anymore.”

My principal says we need to get him back to class,  
he should not stay home.  
My assistant principal goes with me.  
A rosary.  
my first rosary in my life.  
I had never been in a funeral home.  
I see his father’s casket.  
I walk in with my assistant principal.  
She teaches me what to do.

Teachers collected money.  
We hand the envelope to his mom.  
I hug Cesar and his sister.  
The assistant principal tells his mom

we need him back in school,  
it is what best for him.

His mom turns to me.  
Her eyes are red from crying.  
She tells me my biggest lesson yet,  
“Te encargo mi hijo.”

“Te encargo mi hijo.”  
My biggest lesson.  
I learn that students are entrusted to us.  
I learn how to love my students.  
I never understood that kind of love until now.

I continue teaching Cesar.  
I am lucky,  
I loop with my class.  
I spend one more year with him and the group.  
We are a family,  
we help him.  
We continue to learn.  
He is a leader and teachers no longer  
Talk about his bad behavior.

### **Principals Lead**

Our community changes,  
our principal leaves.  
He will be a district administrator.  
Our new principal,  
she does not lead in the same way.  
No longer do we hear what is best for kids,  
we hear all the things we must do.  
We are told what to do.  
We are written up if we do not follow the new ways.  
This school is my home,  
but no longer can I be around  
a leader that harasses, does not talk about kids.  
I leave.

I move to a new city,  
a new principal.

This time, the school leaders do not speak Spanish.  
I become a teacher leader.  
We still do not have bilingual materials.  
I learn how to be a better reading teacher.  
Administrators cannot speak Spanish.  
We send notes home to parents in English.  
I am frustrated.  
All the bilingual teachers are frustrated.  
The principal is never on campus,  
she does not enter our bilingual classrooms,  
she tries to motivate us at a faculty meeting.  
I speak up.  
Bilingual teachers cheer and follow,  
we need to be supported.  
The principal comes to talk to me about a principal leadership program.  
I am a step ahead,  
I am back in school to earn an administrative certification.

I continue to be a teacher leader.  
I have a great year,  
I am voted Teacher of the Year,  
I am a semifinalist for the district out of 112 other teachers.  
I start attending district meetings, and I advocate for bilingual students.

### **Principal**

I am the new interim principal.  
My principal takes a leave of absence,  
He is very sick.  
I am saddened.  
I always wanted to work with him,  
learn from him.  
The front office feels sorry for me.  
They think I had no idea what I am getting into.  
I tell them we will be OK.  
I have led as an assistant principal,  
I have been trained,  
I reassure them I know what to do.

I spend the first year observing,  
building relationships.  
But we need to talk about students,

we need to look at our data.  
How do we know students are learning?

We start having meetings.  
Teachers are not use to the meetings,  
but they are glad that we are helping students.  
We talk about helping our students,  
we talk about being family.

I am named principal.  
Our former principal is too sick to return.  
The assistant principals and I meet.  
I want to help build community,  
I do not want to dictate things,  
I tell them I believe in the power of WE.  
We start the year talking about professional learning communities.

Teachers are nervous,  
they are used to being told what to do.  
We start talking about students, data, and teaching.  
It is personal and they are nervous,  
but it is what is best for kids.  
We push on.  
Some teachers complain,  
we have a half day training dedicated to hearing concerns.  
Feedback was harsh, but honest.  
I have to reflect on my leadership.  
We push on with finding solutions together.

I have an issue with a staff member.  
Human resources intervenes,  
parents do not agree,  
they blame me,  
they start a petition.  
I have to meet with 10 parents  
and one of the assistant principals  
Who they also blame,  
And the superintendent.  
We do not like her they say.  
There are too many new things,  
Changes.  
They say they have a petition.



My superintendent  
tells them the work we are doing is fantastic,  
it is based on research,  
it is what is good for kids.  
He tells them he trusts me,  
he will not fire me.  
He tells them the staff and students are doing better  
than ever before.

I know I have relationships to mend.  
It is difficult.  
Feelings of not being accepted arise,  
but I must learn to deal with this cross.  
I seek my spiritual direction.  
I go to adoration  
to find peace within the burden of the job.

I rebuild relationships with parents.  
I tell them stories of my home.  
I tell them how I know school does not work for all students  
but we will work together.  
I tell them we change ways so our kids can have opportunities.  
College is not only a dream,  
it is the core of what we want for our students.  
They tell me they really did not know me,  
did not give me a chance before.

They are excited to have a voice.  
They are part of our professional learning community.  
We continue to excel with the state standards,  
but for me it is not enough.  
We still have students that struggle.

We focus on new teaching strategies.  
We all build our background on reading.  
Our students will be reading and thinking.  
We want the best for them.

The superintendent's team visits.  
We present our story.  
We have come a long way.  
Every year we meet the state's recognized standards.

The associate superintendent tells us  
she has seen the school transformed.

### **College Dreaming—Little Ways**

We have major changes in place.  
I wish we could spend more time  
on college dreaming for our students.  
It will be something else to take on.  
Slowly, and in little ways  
I try to spread the message  
of college dreaming possibilities.

It started with a t-shirt.  
What is the design you want on this year's t-shirt I am asked.  
My assistant principals and I think.  
We create a collegiate design  
on the back of the t-shirt.  
We add the state of Texas.  
We add the names of the universities in the state,  
connecting them to our school.  
It started with a t-shirt.

Soon teachers caught on.  
We had a committee that worked on college going culture.  
We change our standard state assessment pep rally  
to a college going pep rally,  
dressing up with your favorite college wear,  
decorate our doors in college themes,  
give away college t-shirts and pencils.  
Students write to universities  
we know, have banners on the wall.  
We spend book fair money  
on a mural depicting students graduating  
a university, and different careers.  
We visit universities as class trips.  
I tell students and parents at kinder and 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation,  
this is their first of many more graduations.  
We are preparing students for college if they want to go.  
It started with a t-shirt.  
Now we talk about high expectations,  
Making opportunity possible

by what and how we teach.  
We look out for our students.

### **Tony's Narrative Quilt—Stories of School**

Tony was a campus elementary principal for four years. He currently works as a national professional development specialist for a large bilingual research center. Tony starts his storytelling of his lived experiences of school by sharing a pivotal moment when he enrolled in kindergarten. Through his stories, he imparts his experiences growing up as a Mexican American in a large city, and coming to terms with his sexuality. He tells how these stories contributed to his pathway into the field of education and ultimately as a campus administrator.

Due to his traveling schedule as a national professional development trainer, we engaged five different times face-to-face via Skype. I re-present Tony's story through poetic transcription. I applied the following boundaries: I used Tony's words in the poetic transcription, moving words and phrases to juxtapose them and maintain a storytelling rhythm. Tony shared his stories in a chronological order and kept his focus on the different periods of schools during the engagement. I keep this order in the retellings of the poetic transcriptions. Tony was reflective in his journey. I embedded some of his reflective thoughts within the poetic transcriptions and notate the reflections by using italics. I had previously worked with Tony on a small scale research project before our relationship developed through this engagement process. At times, we also shared experiences of living in the midst stories about education, or our lives, and occasionally found that we knew common people in the field of education. For reader accessibility, I include a title emphasized by a bold heading as an introduction to each poetic transcription piece.

## Elementary Stories

### Kinder Kicking and Screaming

Five years old,  
enrolled me in kindergarten.  
I didn't speak any English.  
Very nervous child,  
I actually was kicking the teacher,  
screaming,  
urinating on myself,  
running home.  
*Pretty traumatic experience, actually.*

Went on for a couple of weeks.  
The principal  
told my very young parents  
that they needed to keep me from school,  
that I wasn't ready for kinder.  
My parents –  
not very familiarized  
with the educational system,  
trusted that the principal knew what was best.  
I ended up skipping kindergarten.

First grade came around.  
Now, I'm six.  
My parents take me back to school,  
exact same thing,  
kicking.  
Principal told my parents  
they weren't equipped to  
help a student like me.  
Told my mom that if I didn't want to stay in school,  
they wouldn't be able to have me be a first grader there.

Mom and my dad,  
new to the country,  
not knowing the language,  
not knowing the system, said,  
“Okay, we're so sorry. We're so sorry that our son is doing this,”  
and actually took me home.

My Godmother,  
had been in the United States a little bit longer,  
gave my young parents the advice of taking me to Saint John's Cathedral  
Elementary School.  
Heard of that school,  
very strict there.  
St. John's was expensive,  
didn't have that kind of money.  
Parents worked in factories sewing clothing.  
*Somehow, you know, they made it happen.*  
Enrolled me in first grade there.  
*It was a very traumatic experience.*

I remember  
being in the principal's office with my mom,  
kicking and screaming,  
the principal, a nun,  
she had them bring a small gurney,  
proceeded to strap me,  
rolled me to first grade class.  
My mom,  
sight of the gurney,  
crying,  
her child tied down,  
being rolled into  
first grade class.

Got into the class,  
tied to the gurney,  
the teacher telling class,  
"say hello to our new student."  
They said "Hi, Tony."  
Not only was I rolled into a classroom,  
but my name was changed  
to *Tony* instead of *Antonio*.

Complete submersion program.

Students, middle-income white students.  
Latino students there  
were not the type of Latino  
I was around.

Very traumatic.  
I remember  
thinking,  
“you have to stop because this is bad.”  
Stayed in school,  
tried my best.  
Remember kids  
calling me  
“wetback,”  
“wiener,”  
“Mexican, go back to Mexico” – *those kind of negative comments.*  
I remember,  
even then, thinking,  
“one day they’ll regret saying that.”

My parents, young and vulnerable,  
didn’t have the means to actually take me to school and pick me up,  
factory jobs, pretty early.  
Take me to six o’clock morning mass,  
leave me in the front pew.  
The priest got to know me,  
six o’clock AM mass by myself.  
The priest would let me go out the side door  
into the playground  
and into the cafeteria  
afterschool,  
on the public bus at six and seven years old.

*All of this it really drives everything that I did as a principal,  
from English language learner me,  
all the way to parental involvement,  
making parents feel comfortable*

### **Nervous Child**

Very nervous child,  
didn’t want to go to school.  
Embarrassed,  
didn’t speak English,  
felt wasn’t worthy  
because I didn’t know the language.  
To top it all off,

very traumatized child,  
from the age of three and a half, or four,  
sexually abused by our childcare person,  
one of my cousins.  
She was 15,  
taking care of us  
here, in the country illegally.  
*I think that now, in retrospect, I feel like that was one of the reasons why I  
was the way that I was.*  
She was pretty violent.  
She was molesting my little brother too,  
the two of us.  
Would place my brother in her arms,  
above a bucket of hot, scolding water,  
tell me that if I told,  
she would burn my little brother.  
All of that happened,  
right before I started school.  
All of that definitely  
gave me the drive that I had ever since.  
I'm sure it was innately a part of my person,  
my being,  
I can definitely tell you  
that at a very early age,  
in that first year at Saint John's Elementary School,  
I knew that I was going to be a success  
because I would make it happen.  
From the outside looking in,  
I knew I was the butt of jokes,  
didn't speak English,  
knew the only way to stop that laughter  
and ridicule  
was by learning,  
by proving that I was worthy.

### **Lo Que Se Dice Se Hace**

My mom and my dad  
don't have a formal education,  
don't speak the English language,  
two of the most generous,

selfless,  
really educated people that I know.  
Not be book smart,  
they are kind and humble,  
hard working and loving,  
always promoted education.  
With very little  
they did so much.  
The simple fact,  
they were paying for me to go to this school.  
Really, I had no reason for being there  
other than I wouldn't stay in a public school.  
Huge sacrifices, *throughout my whole educational career*.  
So supportive of anything,  
everything that the three of us have done – their three children.

The other person,  
My *abuelita*<sup>36</sup> Juanita,  
would come and take care of us  
after my cousin left.  
Extremely ferocious,  
phenomenal.  
A feminist without even knowing what that means,  
zero education,  
from Mexico,  
can write her name,  
do simple arithmetic.  
Focusing on me,  
specifically, for some reason,  
seeing something in me.  
Just really targeted my academic excellence  
my academic achievement.

She was the one that would tell us,  
“Lo que se dice se hace”  
“*that which you say, you do.*”  
I remember that from very early on,  
her chasing me.  
When I misbehaved,

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<sup>36</sup> Spanish word for grandmother.



her telling me,  
“Lo que se dice se hace,”  
clicking in my head  
that if I said that I was going to do something,  
then I couldn’t let them down,  
them being my mom,  
my dad,  
my *abuelita* Juanita.

### **Drive**

I was ten years old  
when I told my mom about the abuse.  
My mom and I talked about it.  
I remember my dad being brought into the conversation.  
They asked me specifically what had happened.  
I know that they confronted tia Fela’s mom.  
Fela knows that I know and remember what happened.  
Her actions  
definitely, in summary,  
drive everything that I’ve done.

My mom and my grandmother  
stressed education –  
my mom taught me how to read and write in academic Spanish.  
I ate it up,  
part of that drive that I had.

Also, I kind of was  
the third parent in my family.  
Pretty assertive from a young age,  
because English came so quickly to me – *again, the exception, not the norm.*

I actually was the one  
dealing with adults from the youngest age  
I mean, seven, eight, nine years old,  
having conversations in English with phone companies  
when we purchased our small little home.  
I was nine years old,  
filling that paperwork  
all of our HUD paperwork.  
Helped my mom

with the checking accounts,  
with the bills,  
with layaways.

One instance,  
about eight or nine years old,  
green truck stopped.  
Immediately the officers got out,  
started asking my mom, in English,  
for her passport, for her documents.  
My mom, nervous,  
started to cry.  
I remember grabbing her hand,  
saying to the immigration officer,  
“what is it that you need?”  
And he said, “I need to see your mom’s passport.”  
I remember turning to my mom,  
saying, “mama, necesitan tu pasaporte.”  
My mom calmed down,  
reached into her purse,  
got her passport,  
gave it to the gentleman,  
then the gentleman said, “okay, you can leave.”

*That sticks in my mind forever because to this day I feel like my parents  
and I grew up together.*

### **Two Teachers and the Tales They Told**

My parents used a program  
to purchase a house  
with very little down payment,  
really low payments.  
For fourth grade,  
moved away from central El Tunal  
to the lower valley.  
Miss Garret,  
my fourth grade teacher,  
knew that I was gay  
before I ever had a concept of that.  
I remember

she stressed to me  
to love myself,  
I was different – I was artistic,  
I was very creative,  
that one day I would be  
very successful,  
that I had to believe  
that it was okay  
to not be like the other boys.  
I remember her being  
very, very supportive.  
I remember  
her very fondly.

Miss McDaniel,  
my first grade teacher,  
she started within me  
a battle that I've had my whole entire life,  
with who I am,  
and where I fit in.  
From the moment  
I was rolled into that classroom,  
she introduced me as Tony,  
not as Antonio.  
Telling me that in her class, and in school,  
we didn't speak Spanish.  
My parents told me that I needed to do  
what was I was told in school.  
I became Tony,  
until I was 16, 17 years' old,  
coming to terms with who I was,  
my sexuality,  
my ethnicity,  
that I started to even  
consider becoming Jose again.  
Actually been an ongoing battle  
most of my early adulthood.  
It's only been in the last 15 years  
that I truly know who I am,  
and know that I was never Tony.  
That was Miss McDaniel's label for me.

## High School Stories

### Horrors and Fitting In

Trinidad high school.  
Very sports driven,  
very male,  
alpha male driven,  
gangs.  
Either you were a jock  
or a gang member,  
or a *cholo*.

My experience,  
very difficult,  
because obviously  
I was a little bit of feminine.  
Finding my way as a gay male.  
My cousin Lizzy  
was a chola.  
Tormented by my cousin  
and her friends.  
It was very—it was tough.

Mostly at the high school,  
so afraid,  
I actually didn't leave home.  
Like, I was inside, I stayed inside.  
It was really tough.  
When you hear and see movies  
about kids pushed in urinals,  
I lived that,  
more than once.  
On top of that,  
I was being called a fagot  
by the Jocks.  
Gay boy was often used.  
It was pretty horrifying.  
In honors classes  
I was very nerdy,  
my salvation,  
being in an honors class,

just focused on academics.  
And surviving.

My sophomore year,  
that first week and a half,  
was so horrendous,  
the bullying,  
the name calling,  
then on top of that the issues with my cousin.  
There was a situation  
in the bathroom,  
so horrified,  
two guys that my cousin sent in  
were going to beat me up.  
Pushed me against the wall,  
very dramatic.

I remember thinking  
you don't have to put up with this.  
I do know—I mean,  
I was fifteen,  
I went home,  
told my mom we need to go to the school district.  
“You, as my parent, are going to say that I am being bullied and  
harassed.”  
Don't know where  
that assertiveness came.  
I mean, it's inherent in me,  
everything that I've gone through,  
had my mom go to the district,  
tell them  
I was being harassed, and hit, and pushed.  
I don't know how we did it,  
but my mom and I got a transfer,  
to Belmont high school.

My daddy would drop me off in the mornings before work,  
very early.  
In the evenings I would take a bus.  
Once I got to Belmont high school,  
things didn't really get much better.

It was pretty sad.  
Actually get out of my class,  
either go to the library, not eat,  
or would take a sandwich,  
eat it really quickly.

Many days  
I actually spent in a stall,  
in the bathroom.  
I did my best to fit in,  
but I didn't fit in there either.

Honor's classes.  
My salvation again.  
When the library was closed,  
most horrifying experience.  
I had panic attacks.  
Get very nervous,  
knew I was going to have  
to be in the stall,  
and what if people came.

Decide that I was going to be straight.  
One of the nerdy girls in my honor's English class,  
we started dating.  
I mean,  
it was so ridiculous.  
I remember thinking  
this feels so awkward,  
would walk her to her locker,  
she had no idea  
that I would go to the stalls, or the library,  
or anything like that.  
Very short relationship.  
Remember thinking,  
definitely did not enjoy that.

### **Realization and Salvation**

I realized  
the people at Trinidad high school  
did not deserve

the right to take me away  
from the school,  
that was supposed to be  
my experience there.  
End of my sophomore year,  
told my mother, *my poor mother*,  
went with me to the district,  
told them that I was returning,  
that things were going to change.  
Returned to Trinidad high school  
my junior year.

An elective,  
my counselor said PE or Drama.  
No way in hell I'm doing PE,  
done that my freshman year.  
Put me in Drama.  
My life changed.

All of a sudden,  
found a group of students,  
embraced who I was,  
even though I didn't know it,  
fully, what that was yet.  
In drama,  
started competing in speech and debate.  
Did really well.  
My coach, Mrs. Tanini,  
my life completely changed,  
my first out of town trip.  
Had group of friends  
when I was sixteen.  
I can actually even tell you the month,  
something was happening in me,  
becoming comfortable with who I was.  
Had kind of an idea  
that I was gay.  
Was assertive.  
Once I had friends  
something happened.  
I was at tournaments.

Coming out in the announcements,  
in the fall and the spring show.  
Everyone talking, what  
a great actor Tony is.

I called Eli,  
I said, “where we can get fake IDs?  
He was like, why do you want a fake ID?  
I said,  
I think that I'm gay.  
I think that you're gay too.  
We need to find out  
where the clubs are,  
where we can get a fake ID.  
Got our fake IDs.  
Went to the Old La Rouge.  
By now, I'm much more popular,  
I haven't said I'm gay,  
embracing it a little bit.  
So, we went to the Old La Rouge.

You know that nobody's there at the gay bars.  
Eli couldn't get in.  
I looked at Eli and said,  
“Eli, I have to stay. Your grandma lives close by.”  
He was like,  
you have to tell me everything that happens.  
And I said, okay.  
I actually gave him a hug,  
and he said, “you go, you go.”  
Went into the Old La Rouge  
by myself  
when I was 16 years old.

I didn't know what to do,  
the change came,  
the anger that I was on this campus  
that I shouldn't have never been at  
because nobody  
should have run me out of the school  
that belonged to me.



That high school experience  
should have belonged to me.  
And so, my junior year was just very different.  
This was kind of a culmination of that.

Officially came out  
to my theatre group.  
They were so supportive.  
I just remember feeling so empowered.  
There was no stopping me.  
Honestly, that was a turning point

### **Layaway, Rotations, and Las Financieras<sup>37</sup>**

We had a home.  
We struggled a lot.  
I remember having to go with my parents  
to the lay away places,  
lay away jewelry or the extra TV.  
One of the things that  
was very difficult for me  
in middle school  
and in high school,  
knowing  
that I had to wear the same clothing,  
three or four times,  
sometimes during the week.  
I had two pairs of jeans.  
I remember my eighth grade year  
I had two pairs of jeans and three shirts.  
So, I rotated.  
Everything really went to pay the mortgage.  
They were still working in factories.  
Somehow though,  
my parents  
would make it happen.  
Put things on lay away for us.  
In the spring semester  
we would have school clothes,  
some school clothes,

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<sup>37</sup> Spanish term for finance companies.

not a lot, but some.  
I got to go to homecoming and prom  
both my junior and my senior years.  
I wanted to buy the big mums  
and all of those things.  
My mom  
would find somebody at Levis or Lee,  
where she worked,  
that would make it more cheaply.

For speech and debate tournaments,  
I would have to  
bring like 30 dollars  
additional for food.  
My mom and my dad,  
they're so awesome.  
We would go to  
Las *Financieras*,  
the finance companies.  
I actually grew up thinking  
that going to a *financiera*  
was normal.  
*We've come a long way, my parents and I.*

### **Where Are You Going**

Senior year was a blast.  
Qualified for nationals.  
Miss Tanini, my coach,  
she's the one that said,  
'hey Tony where are you going to college?'  
Nobody had had that conversation with me.  
My parents wanted me to study.  
Looked at my report card,  
but they didn't know what it took,  
what steps needed to happen.

My counselor  
never brought me in.  
You were expected to graduate,  
get a job,  
only if your parents

had access to that information.  
Miss Tanini told me to apply  
to El Tunal community college and UTET.  
Told me to apply  
for financial aid. .  
I filled it out for my parents,  
submitted it.

One of my friends had applied to NYU,  
told me about the theatre schools.  
I applied,  
miraculously got accepted.  
But of course,  
I couldn't go.  
Didn't have the money.

I got into UTET.  
I went to UTET.

### **Living in the Midst—Juanita**

I'm doing okay.  
It's been a rough week,  
probably the toughest week  
I've had in a long, long time.  
But if anything it just,  
I mean first of all it reminds me  
I'm human and things are going to happen in life.  
Graduation,  
my parents working on funeral arrangements,  
like last minute things.  
Family missed the viewing,  
the burial on Monday,  
talked to my parents,  
whether I should cancel Cleveland.  
My mom said  
your grandma would kill you  
if you let down that school.  
*Lo que se dice se hace.*  
I did Cleveland,  
60 staff members  
in this dual language campus K through 8.

No clue about the program.  
A lot of negativity,  
they were forced  
to come to this PD.  
I went in  
like a warrior.  
I was like you have to do this  
for yourself.  
You have to do this  
for Juanita.  
And I have to tell you.

Within the first 15 minutes,  
I had all but three.  
It went really well.  
The evaluations were fantastic.  
They requested eight additional days  
for '15-'16 school year.

Everything happened last week.  
Celebrated my dad's retirement,  
my grandmother's passing,  
Saturday graduation.

### **Intentions and Path**

I ended up going to UTET  
That's what I could afford.  
It was close to home.  
Even though I had applied to NYU  
there was no way I could make it happen in a short time.  
So UTET it was.  
I entered immediately knowing  
what I wanted to do.  
I wanted to be a  
speech and debate theater arts coach  
at high school level.  
In 1989 I started in the fall semester.  
I entered as a theater arts major  
with a minor in secondary education.  
My pathway  
was going to be that door,

which had created  
such great opportunities for me.  
That was my intent  
from the moment that I started.

### **Freshman Year**

My freshman year  
focused on basics and theater.  
I decided not to do speech and debate  
because I was kind of exhausted.  
Didn't have a lot of support.  
Knew if I was traveling  
all the time for speech and debate  
at the collegiate level,  
it might be tough.  
Embraced  
by the theater department,  
all ages, sexual orientations, very artsy people.

Did a couple of shows my freshman year,  
the *Miser of Mexico*,  
*Romeo & Juliet*,  
*Westside Story*.  
We talked about theater and film.  
I didn't have that schema.  
While everyone was watching those movies  
or going to musicals,  
I was watching  
*El Chavo del Ocho*  
*Chespirito*  
it was awesome to hear about *Star Wars*, *Pygmalion*, *My Fair Lady*,  
kind of like my renaissance.  
A safe haven.  
They were straight, gay, black.  
It was very, very cool.  
I was the only first generation student.  
We would hang  
out after rehearsals,  
started working  
as a student recruiter,

the work study program through financial aid.  
Peto Lopez,  
the director of recruitment,  
a life changer, *so that's why I'm bringing it up as a freshman.*  
Because in my junior year,  
that totally changes the path of my life.  
Rocking it out academically.  
Living my gay lifestyle.  
Dancing, going to concerts and movies.  
I kind of got revenge for my miserable childhood.

### **Sophomore Year and Los Vendidos**

Joined the speech and debate team.  
I'm taking classes, a full load,  
plus, I'm doing theater,  
plus, I'm doing speech and debate.  
You have tournaments,  
like two or three times a month.  
Dr. Elena Trejo,  
the coach,  
made a huge impact in my life

I selected a piece,  
dramatic interpretation,  
*Los Vendidos*, by Luis Valdez.  
That's a very important play in my life—*You'll see it comes up quite often.*  
*Los Vendidos* is hysterical.  
I discovered the Chicano Movement.  
My first tournament out,  
I made it to finals with *Los Vendidos*,  
which is in English and in Spanish.  
My coach was like, I don't know how this is going to work,  
Jose, but you do it.  
I have faith in you.

I came into the speech world you know,  
Punching, and in English, and Spanish, and Spanglish,  
making commentary  
about the stereotypes people have of Latinos.  
Found at the library,

random,  
completely random.  
Went to the play section,  
I was pulling things,  
I remember reading it,  
laughing hysterically.

It's about selling Mexicans.  
It's Honest Sancho,  
he's a used Mexican sales shop person.  
He sells Mexicans for a living.  
Miss Jimenez, who works for Gov. Ronald Reagan's office, comes in.  
He's showing her the models,  
you have the Pachuco, the Farmworker, the Revolucionario,  
the Anglicized Mexican-American.  
I took a one act play  
to less than 10 minutes, the parameters of the event.  
It went really, really well.  
Random, random.  
*I just used Los Vendidos yesterday*  
*at the end of my presentation in Cleveland.*  
*Los Vendidos comes in to a lot of the work*  
*I do in that culture proficiency piece.*  
I started traveling all over the country.  
At that tournament I won second place overall.  
I won Outstanding Newcomer,  
I qualified for nationals.  
Went to nationals.  
It was phenomenal.  
It was the best experience.  
I qualified in multiple events,  
but *Los Vendidos*, of course, was my baby.

### **Opening Mail**

Going to out of town trips,  
having trouble being a recruiter.  
I asked Mr. Peto Lopez  
if he would consider  
just letting me be in the office.  
My junior year I stopped being a recruiter.

I worked in the front office.  
I opened mail.  
Towards the end of my junior year  
I was opening mail,  
there was a letter,  
the Rockefeller Foundation.  
A fellowship.  
UTET had an opportunity to submit the names  
of two, three, students, nominations.

It caught my eye.  
If you were selected from your university,  
the next stage,  
you would be flown to NYC  
to interview with the Rockefeller Fellowship people.  
You would get to be in  
New York for two days.  
Immediately *'cause I'm not assertive at all,*  
I went to Peto Lopez.  
Get a plan because I need to apply.  
He was laughing.  
He was used to me, you know.  
He was laughing.  
They set up the process and the protocols and all that.

*I'm telling you  
when your path is kind of,  
you create your own opportunities,  
I definitely believe that.  
But I believe that some things happen also  
just because they're supposed to  
like me finding that book in the library.*

Anyway, I submitted my application,  
made it to top three UTET representatives.  
Rockefeller Foundation selected two people from UTET  
to the next level of interviews.  
I was one of them.  
Headed to NYC to interview.

Got a little chance to sightsee.  
I begged my parents



to hook me up with some money  
so I could see my first Broadway show.  
I saw my first Broadway show.  
It was *Grand Hotel*.  
That was amazing.

I had my interview with the Rockefeller people.  
It was pretty intimidating  
in that I remember that it was in this building,  
then they asked you questions. *Kind of like we do when we interview  
teachers.*

So they were asking me questions,  
I was answering them.  
I was myself.  
I got it.  
I was one of 25 in the country  
that received a Rockefeller Fellowship.  
That opened a lot of doors.

### **Getting to NYU—Senior Year**

I had to do a service project  
as part of this fellowship program.  
The summer before my senior year,  
Dr. Elena Trejo, who I had to nominate,  
was my official mentor.  
For the first time I had an official mentor.  
Did a summer coaching program  
for low socioeconomic students at the high schools.  
I was the coach.

My senior year was crazy.  
I had to finish.  
One semester I had 21 credits.  
I had to get it done in order to get this fellowship.  
In the midst of all this,  
still competing for speech and debate.  
Then in the theater department,  
I was selected to produce a play.  
The spring semester of my senior year

I directed, it's the first play I directed.

The play is called *Safe Sex*.  
The second one act is called *Untidy Ending*  
I combined the two.  
*I still have the poster.*  
The poster was the Statue of David,  
with a big lock pad in his private area.  
This was in 1993.  
The AIDS epidemic was still happening.  
The program had a condom.  
At all of the performances,  
there were free condoms.  
The social aspect of it was as important as the theater.  
I graduated in May of 1993.

### **Teaching**

I've asked myself this question.  
For a brief moment,  
I really thought that I wanted to be an actor.  
I guess I went to NYU thinking that my options were open.  
I knew I had my teaching certificate.  
I knew I could always fall back on,  
but I really felt like my time in New York  
would let me know whether or not that's what I needed to do.  
I went to NYU.

I lived in the dorms my first year at NYU.  
I walked in and I burst into tears,  
I was horrified.  
I moved the furniture in tears and I went into bed.  
Didn't unpack a thing and cried myself to sleep.  
Woke up at like 7 pm,  
thinking you have got to get your shit together.  
Went walking because I was scared.  
I was like this is what you wanted,  
now do it.  
The next morning, I was a new person.

The program is called Educational Theater.  
It's a very unique program,  
it's a master's degree  
where theater is used as a means to create social justice and equity.

Appealed to me.  
The whole program was about  
using theater  
as a vehicle to create change.  
Without even knowing the depths of it,  
it caught my eye.  
That's where I learned about  
Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.  
Augusto Boal *Theater of the Oppressed*.  
It changed my life.

### **Doors and Living**

When I do pass away  
I have to say I've lived a lot.  
I've experienced a lot.  
I've been very blessed.  
I was in the right place at the right time  
that the doors magically opened for me  
really, in many instances.  
Like, I feel like God really has a plan for me.  
Every door He's opened I walked through it.  
And when a door wasn't open  
I said watch out,  
here I come and I opened it myself.  
One of my required courses  
was student teaching.  
Did it at a magnet high school  
for low SES students.  
I also explored my theater world.  
I did three shows,  
off-Broadway.

I graduated December of 1994.  
Finished in a year and a half.  
Thought about teaching.  
Thought about being an actor.  
The rational in me came out.  
Remember thinking Jose,  
you're short, Latino, gay, chubby,  
your parents have worked too hard

for you to be waiting tables.  
My two options were,  
you were either going to teach in NYC,  
have a stable job with two roommates, or more.  
Or,  
you can return to Texas,  
serve the community that helped you,  
have a stable job,  
be close to your family,  
serve in that way.  
At the end of the day,  
the common sense,  
the logical in me won out. *I didn't want to have roommates.*  
I wanted to buy a house.  
I wanted to show my parents  
that their work meant something.

## Teaching Stories

### Teaching

I return to El Tunal.  
There were no theater or speech and debate openings.  
Beto Camarillo,  
one of my high school teachers,  
kind of an official mentor,  
he said "There's a position at the middle school  
by the second year I will have  
created a position for you in Lafluer High.  
It actually worked out.

He got me hired, I didn't even interview...

My first job was Reagan Middle School,  
theater teacher.  
A year round school district,  
fine arts teacher, as actually  
worked year round, that year.  
Didn't have any mentors,  
didn't have any guidance,  
didn't have a textbook,  
treated my middle school students

as if they were high school students,  
like, I was on my own.

I focused on interpretation,  
dramatic interpretation,  
humorous interpretation,  
poetry,  
pros impromptu,  
extemporaneous speaking.  
I decided  
my kids were good enough to compete  
at the high school level.  
That's what I did.

We rocked it out.  
My middle school kids  
would be in finals rounds  
with high school kids.  
I directed two plays,  
one play in the fall,  
we were district champions  
in one act play,  
so it went really, really well.  
That campus though,  
it was more middle income students.  
I think the one thing  
that I kept missing, what  
I wanted to be somewhere where  
I could be really helpful.  
There, I thought,  
it came pretty easily even  
with the middle school kids.  
A very successful year,  
found my voice as a teacher.

### **Saving Others**

My sister was about to go into eighth grade  
She had had a rough seventh grade year  
because of her weight.  
Extremely heavy.  
Had gone through some depression,

very heavy bullying.  
She went through a lot  
of the same stuff that  
I went through, but because I was gay.  
I decided that she would transfer school districts  
she would go to middle school with me as an eighth grader.

I knew that speech and debate  
would save her life,  
*just like it had done for me.*  
She became one of the members of team,  
competing and rocking it out.  
I wanted her to be saved,  
knew that she needed to be with me,  
and that if she competed  
she would be okay.

That was a rough year, *a personal anecdote...*  
My boyfriend that I've had on and off,  
he was... I found out very quickly,  
very different than  
what I thought he was,  
using a lot of drugs,  
got very physically violent,  
tried to get him in to rehab,  
and stuff like that.  
It got really, really violent.  
Police actually removed him,  
arrested him for domestic violence.  
I wanted to save him too,  
but I couldn't put him in speech and debate.

Work was my salvation.  
Had a tournament to get ready for.  
I had to get my kids ready.  
Speech and debate and theater  
saved me once again,  
that's the story of my life.

## Success

Moved to Lafluer High School  
the following year.  
Expectation was to grow the team,  
to be the powerhouse,  
within two or three years,  
at the state and national level.  
We got state qualifications that first tournament.  
Kept working it and working it.  
After that,  
there was just no stopping us.  
Didn't take two or three years,  
ended up ranking second in the state.

The kids were so talented,  
came with all of the things  
*we wish kids come to school with.*  
I wonder if you could do it in a low income school  
that always kept bugging me.

Things did get strange professionally.  
Teachers were being a little bit jealous  
that this new kid was doing well.

My mentor,  
See, that he's attracted to me.  
We shared a room at state.  
I woke up and he...  
in between the two queen beds,  
he was actually masturbating.

*This is not one of those "Should I tell her?"  
It was a huge part of my professional career  
because what followed was a mess.*

I stopped him and I was like,  
"What are you doing?"  
He was like, "What are you talking about I wasn't doing anything."  
At that point I didn't know enough  
to know that I could grieve.  
I went to my principal,

told him that this had happened.  
He said “You don’t need to tell anybody, I’m going to take care of this.”  
Mentor was a good friend of his,  
nothing happened.  
I inquired what happened,  
“He’s been reprimanded, I’ve taken care of it Antonio.”  
Things are very awkward.  
My mentor tells me that next year  
he’s going to be doing fully speech and debate,  
I’m going to be floating,  
and take the speech and debate team away from me.  
  
I was just...

I was so devastated

### **Making a Presence**

Went to one of the most impoverished  
high schools in the city,  
the South High School.  
One of my parents, actually  
of my top students, Trinity,  
her mom transferred her to be with me and Elaine.  
It was my job to build the team.  
It was tough.

Most of the kids were English learners,  
some of them,  
literally, recently arrived to the country.  
Couldn’t ask for not even \$20 for food.  
We had to provide food for them  
at the speech tournaments.  
We were ranked third in the city my first year,  
the second year it got a little bit better.

At year three we’re a powerhouse.  
The El Tunal Times wrote  
multiple stories on us.  
We were on the news,  
had PEP rallies for the team.



We were so on top of the world,  
it was crazy, crazy.

If you place high expectations on students,  
you get their parents involved,  
their parents became our cheerleaders,  
we had a booster club.  
They didn't speak English, most of them,  
but they were there every Friday and Saturday  
with dinner and lunch.  
South High School.  
A block and a half away from the Rio Grande,  
some of the things that pushed me  
while I was there, was  
the fact that our students,  
who are English learners,  
were sometimes put to the side.

The border patrol in those times  
would drive in front of the school,  
occasionally even go into the cafeteria,  
not to get anyone,  
just to make their presence known.  
*I know that that's illegal now  
probably wouldn't happen now,*  
but I can tell you  
I saw it happen at least three times.  
The green trucks were like, on the street,  
not inside the parking of the school,  
but like on the street.

Just to make their presence known.

### **Ownership**

Always felt that people  
immediately made assumptions about me.  
Not only because I was Latino,  
but because I was gay.  
I knew that I have to be very, very good  
and very, very strong as a teacher,  
as a speech and debate coach,

as a theater director,  
because if I wasn't,  
I wouldn't be successful with my kids,  
I wouldn't be taken seriously.

Parents needed to trust me,  
to give me the permission  
to take these kids,  
only the weekend until very late.  
I just knew that being gay,  
and being Latino,  
both things,  
I needed to show  
that they were not impediments,  
that they were assets,  
that I was so good  
that none of that was going to matter.  
I was just going to be the coach  
that made your child  
have success and academic opportunities.

I'm not everyone's cup of tea.  
I was the same kind teacher  
*that I was as a principal.*  
If there was a teacher  
doing harm to students,  
not teaching them,  
if there are kids with their heads on their desks  
not doing something,  
I was the one that would be like,  
"I saw you ... how do you get away with it?"  
Because I needed to make them aware  
that it was just not cool.

I'm always honest,  
always professional,  
not going to shy away,  
especially if you were  
not doing what's best for kids.

You have to be honest,  
You have to be who you are,

You have to be transparent,  
You have to set parameters,  
You have to establish relationship,  
You have to be humble,  
You have to share all of your heart,  
You have to share all of your story.

Everything I've done since my first day as a teacher,  
as a novice teacher, actually as a college student,  
actually as a child,  
has been like kind of grounded in  
that, like, you have to own who you are,  
and when you do that  
everything else falls in place.  
*Of course I didn't know it when I was a child  
but this process has actually helped me see that.*  
Like that kid making phone calls for my mom,  
or that kid dealing with the border patrol agent that stopped us,  
do you know what I mean?

Like, now I see it,  
Like, it's been there.  
I was forced into that position  
I think, by me, and I kind of just owned it.

### **Follow Your Heart**

Our new principal  
made my life very, very difficult.  
Got a job at Westwood,  
five of my top competitors transferred with me.  
I met Larry,  
when I moved to Westwood.  
By the second year he was going to be stationed at Fort Albert,  
he asked me to move in with him.  
I had a parent meeting with my kids there,  
I told them  
I had met the love of my life,  
that I'm so sorry,  
that I have to leave Westwood,  
especially those five kids that had transferred with me.  
The overwhelming response was,

follow your heart Mr. Reyes,  
you go  
we love you,  
you have prepared these kids.  
These kids will do fantastic  
That's how I ended in Fort Albert.  
Twelve,  
I had 12 years of teaching experience.

### **Principal Aspirations—A Job to Do**

It actually wasn't me.  
I would've been so happy  
teaching the rest of my life  
because I loved it, and I felt very fulfilled.  
I felt like I was a leader.

It was actually Larry.  
He started that conversation.  
He said, you really should think  
about this  
because I see this in you,  
I don't understand  
why you don't see it for yourself.  
I was like, no I get it,  
but it's just that I need to be in the classroom.  
That's why I'm making a difference,  
But He told me  
I can make a difference  
at a campus level,  
really make a bigger difference.

I was like,  
I know,  
but what about my being gay?  
I don't look like  
the other administrators.  
I don't act like  
the other administrators.  
He's the one that said,  
but that's worked for you.  
Just go get the certification.

Give yourself options.  
I was like, okay that's fine.

Once I got into the program  
that's really all I needed.  
Once I started hearing  
the things  
that were coming out  
of the students' mouths  
in my classes...

I cannot believe the things  
that are being said.  
This is absolutely  
what I'm supposed to do.  
They're treating students  
in this fashion,  
so it happened very, very quickly.  
Once I was in,  
I was in,  
and I was in quickly,  
and needed a job.  
Because there was a job to do,  
I was the one  
that had been self-charged to do it.

### **Serving**

I accepted AP job,  
Roosevelt High School,  
TEA was trying to close it down  
for low scores.

My experience there really prepared me,  
established a foundation  
for me as an instructional leader.  
Within the first week,  
I was visiting classrooms with TEA officials,  
people from the district-level,  
every single thing that a teacher did  
in a lesson, analyzed,  
micro-managed,

dissected.  
I got a chance to see  
what that does to a community of teachers.

The community was on the news,  
where parents would come in,  
there were banners, and chanting.  
Don't close our schools,  
Johnston is our heart,  
and our neighborhood.

Ironically, very quickly, the teachers,  
for some reason connected with me.  
I remember Norma Marie,  
within the first two months  
she was in my office,  
She said to me,  
you know, Antonio,  
you're our salvation.  
I remember that conversation with Norma stuck with me.  
I said to her,  
I'm the new AP.  
She said, no,  
you're the one we look to.  
It was like my second month,  
but... I came in doing what I do.  
Which is to serve.

### **Advocating Challenges**

I end up at Davistown.  
I have to tell you I hated it.  
I was the 10th grade principal.  
A very traditional high school.  
The teachers,  
about half of them,  
were very loving,  
but when I started talking about Sheltered Instruction,  
and how they had to make  
the content accessible to students...

I was the administrator  
in charge of English language learners.  
I was the TELPAS person.  
I was the LPAC administrator.  
I hated it  
because there's such a traditional campus  
where students are successful  
because a lot of them  
came from middle income homes,  
but it's not that great teaching  
is happening in every classroom.

I felt like I was hitting walls  
like I had never hit before.

I felt like a large percentage of the teachers  
saw me as someone who was trying  
to make their work different  
than what they felt was the way,  
and had always been the way,  
and should always be the way.  
It was a very stressful time.

The principal,  
He didn't back me up.  
I became the administrator  
that puts teachers on growth plans.

I have a problem with a coach,  
who has been there for 21 years,  
and sits at his desk,  
doesn't differentiate for anyone,  
including English language learners.  
They're all failing,  
nobody's saying anything  
about his instruction.  
I have a problem with that.  
You need to meet your student's  
academic needs first

## **Elementary Leadership**

Had zero experience in elementary school,  
but Nelson called me.  
You would like to learn elementary.  
I think the time is now.  
I was like, what do you mean?  
You need to be in a dual language campus.  
I'm sending you to an elementary campus  
for a year, or two.  
You learn it well,  
I will give you your own campus.

My charge was to really make  
that dual language program  
be successful.  
Learn elementary curriculum and instruction,  
but more than anything,  
needed to unite that community.  
A survey  
about the dual two-way program,  
the comments  
from parents in community,  
were all about Mexicans go home.  
Those Mexicans should not be here.

Sent me on my way to Grove Park.

I was scared.  
I was scared for many reasons.  
I was scared because I had –  
my whole educational background  
was middle school and high school.  
I was scared that  
I didn't know elementary school.  
I was scared that  
I wouldn't fit in.  
I was scared that  
the teachers wouldn't value my input.  
I was nervous  
that the community  
would not appreciate a Latino AP.



It's one of the times  
that I've been most frightened,  
but I don't work in the realm of fear.  
When I'm afraid  
I tend to get stronger.

I stood up to Grove Park,  
I was like, hi I'm here.  
It's so funny because my reputation,  
from Davistown High School,  
had already gone to Grove Park  
before I got there.

The teachers  
had heard  
that I was somebody  
that had really high expectations.  
That you needed  
to be doing your work.  
That I was in classrooms  
all the time.  
That I would co-teach with you,  
but that if you weren't doing your job  
that I would definitely intervene,  
and provide you support.  
Of course, in their eyes  
they would just call it a growth plan.

I was in classrooms.  
I told the teachers that first week,  
I'm so excited  
that you all are going to teach me  
how to be a fabulous administrator  
at the elementary school level.  
My duty, really, is just to support  
everything that you do in the classroom.

They invited me,  
and I would co-teach lessons.  
I was doing guided reading groups in English.  
I was doing them in Spanish.  
I was doing math lessons.

I would book myself for three, or four, times a week,  
to be in classes.  
Very quickly,  
teachers  
were asking for me  
to be in their classroom,  
but the biggest surprise  
was that everything  
that I did in middle school and high school  
that I thought made me an effective teacher  
completely transferred to the elementary level.

Because the truth is  
that those kids,  
they know if you're fake or not.  
They know if you care, or not.  
Now it's weird because people will ask me,  
what did you enjoy most?  
I enjoyed them all.

As a brand new AP to elementary,  
I was in the front hall,  
just building relationships.

I always knew that you had to...  
*I know what you're looking for.*  
I was always the outsider.  
I was always the one  
that shouldn't have,  
shouldn't be.  
For me, with those speech teams –  
I've talked to you a little bit about it,  
but even though the speech teams –  
It was us against the world.

### **Principal**

I'm the new principal.  
The culture of that community  
had really been turned around.  
The community surveys  
were out of this world.

Everyone wanted  
dual language programming.  
Everyone valued bilingualism,  
and bi-literacy.  
The community could not be happier  
We were recognized  
for the third year in a row.  
The dual language kid's scores  
were through the roof.  
It was just such an amazing time,  
those two years as a principal there.

### **Cedar Elementary**

They wanted a Davistown principal  
to take the leadership.  
Nobody would step up.  
They flat out told us  
it was going to be one  
of the most challenging campuses.  
That it was five-feeder schools.  
That you would get five-feeder students,  
and teachers.  
Was going to qualify for title one  
before the doors opened.  
Which is pretty rare, in year one.

No one wanted it.  
Nelson, actually in the hallway...  
right in front of the board room, one day.  
He was like,  
why are you not volunteering?  
Consider it.  
I was like, okay I'll consider it,  
ask questions about the population,  
heard the kids might be fighting all the time.  
the parents may not show up.  
It would be  
the toughest challenge of my life,  
and it was.

I showed up to the interview.  
I had a plan for recruiting.  
I had the top ten reasons  
why you should work at Cedar Elementary.  
It was all about academics,  
creating culture,  
assessment,  
professional learning communities.

They didn't give me teachers.  
I was able to recruit,  
went to teach one of the five campuses,  
I did a speech.  
I had a conversation,  
then a question and answer period.  
I used the top ten reasons  
why you should work at Cedar Elementary.  
It was like a mini-performance.  
I shared with them my life motto.  
*"Lo Que Se Dice Se Hace."*  
I shared that from the beginning.

I talked about Juanita.  
I talked about my parents.  
I told them  
that I was not everybody's cup of tea,  
but that if you were somebody  
who was wanting to not only grow, as a teacher,  
but as an advocate,  
and if you truly wanted  
to have that experience  
then I needed to be the person  
working alongside you.

### **Building a School Community**

Came in full force.  
We made it happen.  
Created a plan for TEA on curriculum and instruction.  
The biggest obstacles were the building,  
the location of the building.

The building was not ready.  
Week before school started,  
still not ready.  
Larry, myself, the teachers  
that I had hired at that point,  
and the custodians,  
we all  
moved the furniture ourselves.  
We did everything  
that needed to be done  
so that when the teachers  
walked into the building  
there were desks in every room.  
That word got around.

Plus, during the summer,  
I was already sending them emails,  
and updates,  
and inviting them to come,  
and work on the campus improvement plan.  
Creating our vertical teams,  
and recruiting teachers  
that really believed in our mission,  
and our vision  
“*Lo Que Se Dice Se Hace*,” to the end.  
It was an amazing thing,

### **Us Against the World**

Honestly, from the first six weeks,  
when the parents showed up,  
the first day for meet the teacher,  
I had them meet in the cafeteria.  
I shared with them our three campus goals  
in English, and in Spanish.  
*Obviously, the fact that I spoke Spanish helped.*  
I also told them,  
your children are expected to fail.  
They told me  
that you would not show up.  
They told me that you

would not care enough  
to come to everything that I ask,  
but you've already proven them wrong.  
*we had done neighborhood walks before that.*

The cafeteria was jam packed,  
but I told them  
everything that they needed to hear,  
I created that us  
against the world sense  
that is so needed,  
and that is so real.  
Those parents would've fought in battlefields for us.

One thing that Nelson  
did mention,  
he goes, you may have to tone down the gay.  
Because some of those male parents,  
they're Latino,  
and they're [*machistas*].  
I said, Nelson,  
whatever, I don't have tone down anything.  
I said, you watch.  
Those parents,  
they're going to be right there with me.  
Sure enough, those Latino male parents  
would have kicked your butt  
if you said anything bad about me.

### **Jumping Fences**

The difficult thing  
is that the school  
was built right next to a trailer park,  
to serve those kids,  
but a fence existed  
between the trailer park, and the school.  
There was supposed to be an opening,  
and the district was going to go ahead,  
and make pathways.  
It was going to be lit,  
and beautiful.

The community owners  
decided that they didn't  
want to do that.  
Our biggest challenge  
was that our students,  
which were two thirds of our students,  
those that couldn't be driven all the way to Hopkins Road,  
and then all the way back around.  
Which was around .98 miles.

Families would jump the fence,  
the families would have to go ahead,  
and take their hammers,  
and pry the wood off  
so that the kids, and the grandmas,  
and everybody, were  
going in through the holes  
in the wooden fence  
for probably about three months.

That began my long and arduous fight  
with the school district  
to get lawyers,  
and ultimately it's a battle that I lost.  
That's the one time  
that I felt that Nelson  
became the politician  
instead of the person  
that I'd come to really depend on  
to do the right thing.  
He actually met with me and told me,  
Jose you need to stop your teachers  
because my teachers had believed in our vision and mission  
so much that they wanted to go and speak  
at the board meetings.  
Really engage in those difficult conversations.  
Because one of my mom's actually told me,  
you wake up  
Because when it would rain  
there would be puddles.  
It's actually a ditch.

Nelson didn't back me up  
on that one.  
I had to be the one  
that told the staff,  
we've been told  
that we need to stop.  
The biggest battle lost  
is that not only did we not create an opening  
for that two thirds of the community,  
but the community owner  
later got tired of the wooden boards  
being pulled apart  
so they actually  
created a cinder wall.  
A cinder-block wall.

Six feet tall,  
behind Cedar Elementary,  
to this day,  
continues to be completely  
isolated from two thirds of its student population.  
Our district would not pay for the buses.

What we started to do  
is just focusing on curriculum, and instruction,  
and building community  
so that those parents,  
they would pile ten kids in a truck, or a van,  
and help each other  
so that the kids could come.  
Very quickly,  
they wanted to be at Cedar,  
Cedar became the source of pride in that community.

### **Changes**

The second year at Cedar  
is when Bonillas came in.  
That's why I left Cedar.  
Because year two,  
dual language was no longer important.  
It was actually transitional.



Dr. Bonillas, he and I had conversations  
about dual language,  
and he said Antonio,  
you and I made it,  
and we were submerged.  
I kept telling him,  
but Bonillas, we're the exception.  
That's not best practice.  
It just became a little bit difficult,  
the second year at Cedar,  
as far as dual language,  
and English language learners.

Year two  
was really tough.  
Obviously, I made the decision  
that I could not work  
for somebody  
who I didn't believe in.  
More than anything,  
the support with Nelson  
was completely gone.  
Because whereas  
I had been given access,  
had been a leader at the district level,  
even from the early days,  
Bonillas saw me as a threat,  
rather than an ally.

He didn't make my life difficult  
as far as he was mean to me,  
or anything like that.  
I knew that my type of advocacy  
was not what he wanted.  
He wanted leaders  
that were going to be  
quiet,  
submissive.

He wanted me to tone down.  
Not just the gay part.

He wanted me to tone  
everything about me down.

Despite the fact  
that in the two years  
that our scores started out in the 20th percentile  
during the first assessment;  
the low 70s by the time  
they were at state assessment.

Which was huge.

We had also won the English,  
and the Spanish, academic meet.

The commissioner of education  
was looking to us to give us an award  
the following year.

A lot of things happened that first year  
that were out of this world.

We had an equity, and social justice, vertical team.

We were truly engaging  
in the professional learning community.

Everything that we put the foundation  
for in year one  
just bloomed in year two.

We were getting recognitions up the wazoo.

We were on the right path.

### **Leaving**

The sad part has been  
that when I left,  
that was the toughest thing.  
I had told the teachers,  
I told the kids, and the community.  
It was horrible.

It's probably the lowest point  
in my professional career.

I felt like I was depressed.

Not in front of them,  
but at home.

Larry really had to walk me through that,  
and say you're doing this for your career.

You're doing this  
because there you were going to be stifled.  
It wasn't going to be healthy  
for you to be there  
it was a very, very difficult place.

### **Narrative Quilts Reflection**

While all of the narrative quilts presented in this section followed the same strategy for story representation, each narrative story of each participant is distinctive and unique. Together these narrative quilts represent the research text for the three participants of this inquiry. As I worked with each piece, I was reminded of the humility and grace of each participant to entrust their story pieces to me. By applying poetic transcriptions, I strived to maintain each participants' voice and storytelling rhythm. I realized that by keeping this process I maintained the integrity of each story rather than be over consumed with data.

I also recognize that there were some stories that were shared with each other that were more about building relationships and trust than they were part of the research process. Like the delicate pieces of fabrics that my mother carefully safeguards, I too found some stories that were beautiful, personal, and powerful that I needed to safeguard. We shared stories of personal trauma such as sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and difficult relationships. We shared stories about fears and doubts that we may have not shared with others in our professional or personal lives. We shared stories about others in our professional lives stories that still have authority in our careers. We each acknowledge that there were stories that we were not ready to share or make public. Ultimately, the stories presented through poetic transcription are pieces that have shaped our story of school and create our narrative as educators.

The narrative quilts begin to take shape with these pieces; however, the next phase of the process will embed the theoretical foundations of this inquiry to stitch together each participant's stories.

## V. SENSE MAKING

Although, the poetic transcriptions represent the research text of field stories that allow a reader to understand the storied lives of the participants in this inquiry, as narrative inquirer, I must make sense of these stories as they apply to the research question or puzzle. Ely (2006) states, “Narrative researchers must communicate important, binding ideas and insights about what it all meant to them, what they learned, and what this might mean to others” (p. 595). Telling stories is not enough (Clandinin, 2006; Kim, 2015). It is our scholarly responsibility to continue the inquiry not only for ourselves and our participants but for the academic community. I would also argue that as an educator it is my responsibility to continue the inquiry in terms of sense making and developing recommendations because ultimately the stories inform part of the Latina/o student school experience. With public schools collectively failing to support Latina/o’s school success, (Covarrubias, 2011; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010), it is my responsibility to continue the work of this narrative inquiry in order to inform Latino school experience, and hopefully spur action. Stories are not enough. I must reread the stories, continue to engage in sense making, and return to the research puzzle that guided the research question: What are the stories of schools that shape and inform Latina/o school principals’ leadership? What are the social, cultural, and familial stories that shape and inform the Latina/o principals’ political stance, or way of being?

### **Preguntas<sup>38</sup> y Posibilidades<sup>39</sup>**

My mother’s creative wisdom has guided me through the research process as I have moved this dissertation forward. It was her creative wisdom in the quilt making

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<sup>38</sup> Spanish for questions.

<sup>39</sup> Spanish for possibilities.

process, and her professional and personal knowledge landscapes that initially helped me work through my research question, theoretical framework, and methods for this inquiry. Once again, I look to lessons I have learned from my mother to help me make sense of the narratives that I developed through poetic transcription. This time, however, I fall back to a lesson my mom has modeled throughout my upbringing. I often perceived this pedagogy of home (Bernal, 2001; Elenes, 2006; Villenas, 2006a, 2006b) as criticism and a lack of trust. My mom has this innate motherly ability to always follow a compliment with a question. For example, when I asked her how I looked after spending an hour fixing my hair, she would reply “it looks good, but did you think of wearing it another way?” Or, when I shared with her I made a decision about leaving my principal position, she replied, “That may work but did you consider doing something different?” In my own insecure need for her approval, I thought my mother’s questioning skills were a critique for not being good enough. I perceived this unyielding stance as cold and harsh. It was however, a distinct pedagogy of home. It was my mother teaching me to question; teaching me how to evaluate more than one way of thinking, and pushing me to explore different possibilities and solutions. This encouragement to question is not one of critique or mistrust; rather it was my mother’s way of encouraging creativity and possibility. It is this lesson and this skill, learned from my mom, that I bring forth to the sense making of this narrative. As I reread the transcripts and address the research questions, I push myself to think of other possibilities.

### **Continued Sense Making**

In this section, I describe the sense making thoughts of this narrative quilt. I move from the role of storyteller to that of meaning maker. I struggle with this new role, and

acknowledge my ontological and epistemological background recognizes and accepts multiple realities. I concede to my sense making and my role as the meaning maker by acknowledging that this meaning making is one of many ways of interpreting the narrative stories shared. For my first attempt at sense making, I apply my theoretical framework to unpack the stories. The theoretical framework guides me to identify narrative threads that resonate through stories of school, cultural stories, familial stories, institutional stories, and social stories. Identifying the narrative threads communicates insights from our collective stories (Clandinin, 2013). In doing so, I identify themes that were apparent in our collective stories, and provide sense making insight on how these themes resonated among us.

### **Otro Punto De Vista<sup>40</sup>**

However, I push myself and follow the questioning skills of my mother and think about other possibilities. This helps me think about the insights (Clandinin, 2013). These possibilities are brought forth with the same intentions my mother modeled for me. Albeit I mistakenly misunderstood those intentions growing up, I understand now that the intentions were grounded in *amor*<sup>41</sup> and encouragement. It is with the same intentions my mother modeled for me that I search for another *punto de vista*, which is neither critical nor resolute. Following the behavior my mother modeled, I apply the framework for analysis in addition to ongoing questioning skills and analysis tips acquired from scholars in the field (Emerson et.al, 2011; Saldaña, 2015), as noted in Appendix E.

As I push myself to engage in sense making of the narrative quilts of our storied lived experiences, I also begin to understand how the stories inform a particular type of

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<sup>40</sup> Spanish phrase meaning point of view.

<sup>41</sup> Spanish word meaning love.

action and advocacy. I see how the stories describe a politic of *pasión*<sup>42</sup> that manifests in not only how we led as principals but how we lived out our roles, what we prioritized, and how it created a sense of urgency in our actions.

### **Politic of Pasión**

#### **Privileged Learning**

Undoubtedly, the lens which helps me envision a politic of *pasión* in the lived experiences of our stories is rooted in the development of my own political self. It is rooted in the privilege and opportunities afforded me through my doctoral studies, my ongoing conversations with colleagues, my own reflections, and a critical consciousness about my understanding of my political self. Lopez asserts that story re-presentation is only one presentation that tells more about our framework or *ventana*<sup>43</sup> that encompasses our perspectives (Lopez, Guajardo & Scheurich, 1998). The following “I am” poetic representation describes my emerging awareness, or rather my *ventana* from three years ago.

#### **I Am—A Political Self**

I am the eyes that see  
from a new set of lenses;  
I am the past of my experiences.  
Framing the knowledge of politics  
from where I have been,  
what I lived, smelled, and breathed.  
I frame this politic;  
My own knowledge of politics of where I am now,  
seeking the space of new possibility.  
I am the new knowing of what troubled me before  
as I cast the net  
that secures my new way of thinking.

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<sup>42</sup> Spanish word meaning passion.

<sup>43</sup> Spanish word for window.



It is this emerging knowing of my politic self that helps me frame the lived experiences from a politic of *pasión*. My politic self represents my development in understanding politics. I identify in our individual and our collective stories this notion of politic of *pasión* as a politic of being (Guajardo et al., 2015). The politic of *pasión* is a borderland (Anzaldua, 1999) space. It is a space where our lived experiences intersect and merge into a fluid movement of action. The politic of *pasión* derives from our stories of schools, our social stories, our cultural, and our familial stories, and merges into a flow of movement and action. This movement and action manifest in how we led as principals, how we lived out our roles, what we prioritized, and how it created a sense of urgency in our actions. The politic of *pasión* encompasses borderland living skills, *resistencia*<sup>44</sup> and resilience, *reflexión*<sup>45</sup> and critical awareness, and *corazón* and *coraje*<sup>46</sup>. These components are fluid and in constant motion and *emoción*<sup>47</sup> fueled by the energy of our experiences and the stories we live and tell (see Figure 14).

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<sup>44</sup> Spanish for resistance.

<sup>45</sup> Spanish word meaning reflection.

<sup>46</sup> Spanish word for anger.

<sup>47</sup> Spanish word for emotion.



*Figure 14. Politic of Pasión*

### **Borderland Living Skills**

Borderland living skills encompass the skills we have developed from negotiating the different borderlands we crossed during our lives. Anzaldúa (1999) describes borderland “as a vague and underdetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (p. 25). As such our borderland spaces encompass both literal physical spaces and the spaces of our familial, institutional, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Our struggles and victories derived from living multiple subject positions trained us with skills that contributed to our professional knowledge landscapes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). These skills include the following: the ability to understand authority, the ability to leverage power, the ability to see beyond the surface, and the ability to understand the consequences of actions. Our borderland living skills resonate through stories we told about schools, family, social and cultural climates, and institutions. For example, in a familial story Tony shared as he discussed his story, he understood from an early age that the man in the green uniform had authority and he

needed to help his mother provide this man what he needed to be able to move forward with their day. It is the same skill Tony used when he acknowledged the authority of the superintendent asking him to not push the neighborhood sidewalk issue.

These skills manifested from our internal struggles negotiating spaces. Prevalent in our lived experience is the notion that we were *los atravesados*,<sup>48</sup> struggling to fit into what is defined in our context of normal (Anzaldúa, 1987). Our cultural, social, and school stories merge to create the setting of the internal struggles. For all of us, understanding our identity as Mexican Americans played out differently. However, we struggled with being associated with Mexican culture, or as Cindi said, “Mexican ways.” We were all impacted by how schools represented and denied the music, traditions, and language of home. We all received the message from school that speaking Spanish was a deficit and in order to succeed in school, to fit in, learning and speaking English was a priority. We lived different worlds; we understood school devalued our Mexican American identity by how we were treated, how others like us were treated, and the opportunities that others not like us received or did not receive. Antonio became Tony, and Cindi Marie was denied acknowledgements and accolades for her athletic performances. My struggle was different in that I saw others treated unjustly, such as students not having the opportunities to represent the class, and others being ridiculed for being Mexican. From this experience, we learned to develop another language from our interactions with our families, and relied on other institutions such as church to develop our language. We also learned to be aware of how we presented ourselves to others. We became masters of living different roles and became accustomed to quickly filtering information from our environments. We learned that there were advantages to living the

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<sup>48</sup> Spanish word for misfits.

story that was not ours. It provided protection as Tony so clearly relayed. He played along with his experience as “Tony” at school, staying within the grace of his teachers, and played along so that students would not associate him as Mexican. He lived his role outwardly, but struggled inwardly, “I became Tony instead of Antonio. I was embarrassed that I didn’t speak English, I felt I wasn’t worthy because I didn’t know the language.”

Our multi identity struggles also extended past our Mexican American cultural stories, into social stories. For me, this struggle unfolded in issues of gender where I negotiated the emotions I experienced when my brother and other males were given opportunities denied to me. It also manifested in times with my struggles about the way I looked and dressed. Being overweight and not having fashionable clothes due to my family’s financial story, was difficult emotionally, however, it brought forth skills of humor and creativity. Beauty based on how one looks and what one wears was prevalent as the gender story that I associated with my experience. Cindi Marie knew this story as well. However, she recognized that her looks provided privilege and opportunities. Cindi states, “I was lucky, I knew I had my looks.” This awareness did not foster confidence in Cindi but rather it gave her power to know that she could leverage the expectations of gender norms to her advantage. She states, “I learned the unwritten rules of being friends with people that had a little bit more influence.”

Tony also struggled with gender norms, however, his struggle differed because it intersected with his coming to terms with his sexuality as a gay male. As a child, he felt different and attributed a fourth grade teacher for encouraging him to be okay with his mannerisms and what he felt was different. His family and school stories crossed paths

within the borders of his development of sexuality awareness as his cousin became the one that bullied him and instigated others to bully him in high school. Tony attempted to live the narrative of straight Latino male by having a girlfriend in high school. He acknowledges that this was a social role he was trying to fulfill in order to fit in. However, he was able to find a space where he could live out the part of his sexuality story by taking on another identity, literally with a fake ID card. Tony found that by exploring and living his story at a gay bar, and by sharing this with his theater peers, that he could not only negotiate border spaces but thrive in them. He carried this skill to complete ownership of being a gay Latino into his career. The struggle during his time as a youth equipped him with the skills to negotiate when pushed by school administrative supervisors who cautioned him to play down being gay. By living in both worlds as a youth, Tony had the courage and the skills to stay true to himself even when supervisors asked him to tone down his personality or being gay.

Another borderland space we negotiated, and from which we harnessed practical living skills, was living in a space between haves and have-nots. We all described ourselves as growing up in families with modest incomes. In the stories we told, this space resonates vividly in the words we use to tell our experiences. We use words like “we were poor,” “we had nothing in our refrigerator,” “my mom sewed my clothes,” and “I only had two pairs of jeans.” It is a space where we learned about survival, or alternate ways of problem solving, such as using *financieras*, layaways, sacrificing spending on one need to pay for another, and learning the system of financial aid in college. However, more prevalent in our stories is the skill of dealing with emotional stress due to lack of money and the unknown. For example, Tony did not know how he was going to pay for

some trips as part of his academic competitions, and Cindi and myself were not sure how we were going to pay for college. These experiences all contributed to our skill of learning to make ends meet and learning how to keep going despite the struggles. Much like Tony's feelings of not belonging by not speaking English, Cindi's emotional stress was due to not knowing how things were going to be paid, and by understanding how to live a lifestyle like those with financial means lived. She adds to her story, "it wasn't that I couldn't do it, it was the obstacles of my family's financial situation and no vehicle. It was not knowing how to be at a university feeling like I was not worthy of being there." This situation created an emotional struggle for Cindi. Consequently, she developed skills to live a life where she "may have seemed confident on the outside but inside I was broken and scared, fearful. I didn't feel like I belonged."

Despite enduring these challenging experiences of living by modest means, these experiences taught us lessons about having faith in our families. Tony describes this faith in his family for support, "No matter the situation, my parents found ways to pay for things." Familial stories intersected with the social stories of financial hardships. Cindi, recognized her aunt advocated on her behalf, encouraging Cindi's mother to spend the money to make sure Cindi was financially able to make the transition to college. My own familial stories echoed with my faith and assurance that my mother would find a way to sew my new outfits, or that my hand me downs were a blessing. Our families modeled survival skills but also unconditional support despite our demands for more to appease our own needs to fit into a different world. Our families also communicated an understanding of our needs to border cross in how they engaged with us, in their own way recognizing and validating the borders around us. Cindi, fondly describes her

Spanish-speaking-only grandmother calling her “Miss English.” She recalls this story as if it was said in jest when she was a child, but admits she understood the message her grandmother communicated. Cindi knew that her social and cultural stories, attempting to belong, intersected with her familial story of speaking Spanish. However, Cindi also knew that by joking about it, her grandmother demonstrated a level of understanding of the landscapes her granddaughter faced. Tony’s mother also demonstrated a level of understanding by advocating for him to change schools even though she did not know the level of bullying that Tony encountered. Our familial stories demonstrated faith and understanding of our border crossing landscapes.

### **Resistencia and Resilience**

*Resistencia* and resilience are additional components that contribute to the politic of *pasión*. They are the energies that flow from experiences where we struggled due to the imposition of others’ comments, violent acts or assumptions, and moments when we were degraded. In my field notes I described these moments of *resistencia* and resilience as Selena movie moments, referencing a particular scene from the 1997 biographical musical drama film based on the life and career of the late Tejano music star, Selena Quintanilla (Moctezuma & Nava, 1997). In the scene, Selena is shopping at a high end dress store in the mall with a friend. The store associate, a white female, disrespects Selena and her friend because she assumes they cannot afford to shop there. Selena asserts herself and demands that her friend be able to try on the dress. As the friend tries on the dress, Selena helps her squeeze into the dress and tells her the dress better fit her because she is determined to prove a point.

These types of Selena movie moments occurred during our story of schools but also transpired in our familial, institutional, cultural, and social stories. At times, the energy from these Selena type moments created a drive to take a stand, to act and oppose a force we perceived as insulting to our dignity. For example, when Tony was 15 and realized he did not have to put up with the bully at school, he had his mom go to the school district to demand a transfer. The *resistencia* was also evident in the examples of how Cindi Marie and I were determined to succeed in college and leave our hometowns, to resist the forces that reminded us that we did not belong.

However, most times, the energy from our Selena movie moments was suppressed and turned into fuel for later *resistencia* and resilience. For example, even though I witnessed the indignity of a family from Mexico all placed in the same 4<sup>th</sup> grade class with me until they learned English, the energy this moment fueled later *resistencia* as a first year bilingual teacher walking into the principal's office demanding and advocating for new materials. Tony also echoed how his experience fueled later *resistencia*, "All of that (referring to his kindergarten experience) gave the drive that I had ever since."

The experiences that fueled our *resistencia* and resilience re-created us as advocates in education and advocates against what were perceived as mainstream norms. This was evident in stories where we took a stand and created new possibilities. For example, determined to breakdown gender norms because I felt I could help the boys' basketball team, I advocated for myself to be selected as the boys' team manager. This advocacy against the traditional practice of girls only being part of the girls' team created opportunities for girls to engage in sports that they liked but had previously been barred



from because of their gender. Tony, also, has a similar story in which he pushed the norms of academic speech competition by presenting a piece that integrated Spanish speaking material. This helped him create opportunities later on for others who only spoke Spanish to be able to compete in the academic speech contest.

### **Reflexión and Critical Awareness**

*Reflexión* and critical awareness highlight the thought processes of a politic of *pasión*. Both of these run continuously through our lived experiences. *Reflexión* represents the times we have thought of an experience and stopped to make meaning of it. It could happen in conversations with others, in our quiet minds, or in a meditative relationship with our creator. *Reflexión* also encompasses our new knowledge and learning as it helps us name experiences. It represents the knowledge base we received from our training as educators to be able to name what we experienced in schools. This type of awareness is similar to Freire's concept of critical awareness. Valadez (2012) states, "we understand critical consciousness as a level of self-awareness that elucidates a person's lived realities, highlighting how historical, cultural, and political factors influence systems and structures within self, institutions, and societies" (pp. 2-3). This critical consciousness then takes Clandinin and Connelly's (1999 ) concept of professional knowledge landscape to a deeper intuitive state. Clandinin and Connelly (1999) describe the professional knowledge landscape as the stories from within the field of education that inform our stories. For example, my story of bilingual education is formed by my story of school and my professional knowledge developed through my bilingual education teaching formation. However, in the case of *reflexión* as it pertains to the thought process of a politic of *pasión*, I have also developed an understanding of

bilingual education based on my awareness of how historical, cultural and political factors influence systems. This form of consciousness then allows me to recognize oppressive systems and mobilize in order to change and create more equitable systems and structures (Valadez, 2012).

This type of *reflexión* and critical awareness is also evident in the stories shared by Cindi Marie and Tony. Their stories incorporate oral side notes that bring in their professional knowledge landscapes to name experiences but also bring a type of critical consciousness enabling them to recognize their experience with an oppressive system. It is this thought process that then informs the thought process within their politic of *pasión* which in turn informs their passion to create change as a school leader. For example, in Cindi's story telling she acknowledges her professional knowledge landscape when she names certain experiences in her stories. Cindi states, "I was a second language learner. I can call it now a second language learner. At the time my English wasn't very good. I was fearful. I hated round robin reading. I did not know it was called that."

In our stories, we also highlighted critical consciousness of the behavioral constraints imposed by social stories embedded in our lived experiences. This type of consciousness of the "unwritten rules" as Cindi Marie names it, helped us understand how to maneuver our landscapes and how to use the knowledge to our advantage as leverage. For example, Cindi states, "I learned the unwritten rules of being friends with people that had a little bit more influence." Another example, is when she was upset because her mother was not aware on "how to play the game" to access college financial assistance.

We are still in ongoing reflection about our experiences which is evident in the stories shared. We are filled with unanswered questions about our social, familial, cultural, and school stories. Cindi questions, “Why didn’t they help us,” as she reflected on why her high school had not prepared students for the college going process. I also have ongoing questions, “Why did my friends not make it to college? And, why was college not an option?”

Ultimately, however, it is the critical awareness about the education system that informs the heart of the thought process of the politic of *pasión*. Cindi Marie, said “I’m always finding I fight a system that is not meant to educate all children. I know that.” I also acknowledge the same critical awareness about our education system, “I learned that schools do not work for all students.” Tony states, “I know that my story is the exception not all students put in immersion programs succeed.”

### **Corazón and Coraje**

The *corazón* and *coraje* are the components of a politic of *pasión* that derive from an emotional space within our lived experience. *Corazón* and *coraje* give fruit to the emotion that moves our *alma*. It also bears our tears, *alegrias*,<sup>49</sup> confusion, and our worries. *Coraje*, a deeply rooted emotion, is the anger from our experience witnessing and undergoing injustice. It is the pain we feel when we are hurt. *Corazón* is rooted in the love we have experienced and received. It is what comforts us and inspires us. It is the gifts that we received from our parents and *familia*,<sup>50</sup> teachers, lovers, friends, and our creator. *Corazón* and *coraje* are not binaries of each other. They are components that rest within the borderland spaces of our experiences.

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<sup>49</sup> Spanish word meaning happiness.

<sup>50</sup> Spanish word for family.

For Cindi, *corazón* is found in her stories of family. She attributes her grandmother and her mother helping her have a strong foundation that was faith based and church going. She centered *corazón* in her relationship with God. She adds in her story, "There's no way that I can live without God. I have to take the Eucharist every Sunday." This closeness and relationship were key during her principalship. Cindi says about this, "I had those personal conversations with God more than any other time in my life as principal because it was about facing my fears." Tony's story of *corazón* is centered in the sacrifices and acts of love from his parents and his *abuelita*. He also attributes *corazón* to the opportunities in theatre and speech and debate, and the relationships gained from those opportunities. He states, "Speech and debate saved my life." My own stories attribute *corazón* to family, but I also attribute *corazón* to teachers who looked out for me and provided opportunities to succeed. Another source of *corazón*, for me, is learning about the love for students as an educator.

It was Cindi Marie's school stories that served as a source for her *coraje*. From the first story that Cindi Marie shared about a high school counselor telling her that she was not college material, to her coaches telling her that despite earning an MVP recognition the award would go to someone else, to hearing teachers make fun of poor Hispanic students in the teacher's lounge, her stories are examples of *coraje* due to injustices on the part of adults in the school setting. I relate to this because of my own high school story of a school counselor who failed to provide the resource help I needed to gain access to a college education. However, it was witnessing that the same adult help boys that triggered my anger. For me, it is issues of gender rights that stir a force of *coraje*. Tony's *coraje* is rooted in experiences as a child being bullied in school and the

way his school community failed to support him as an English language learner, and failed to support him with his behavior outbursts, during his first school years.

### **Politic of *Pasión* in Principal Leadership**

The politic of *pasión* continuously derives from our ontology and manifests in our lived experiences. However, for the purpose of this narrative inquiry, I honor and highlight the politic of *pasión* centered in our principal leadership. It is evident in our stories of how we lived out our roles as principals, what we prioritized, and how it created a sense of urgency in our actions.

### **Principal Role**

Although we each have distinct leadership styles and personalities, our own politic of *pasión* contributed to how each of us led our campuses. We believed our role as principals gave us the platform to have a greater impact for students, a greater ability to do more. We believed honesty, transparency, humility, and investing in our whole heart in the work were central to our performance in the job. Our role as principals was one where we saw ourselves as instructional leaders but most importantly, we saw the opportunity to facilitate and nurture relationships for the good of children, families, and staff. We saw our role as one that is supportive, yet firm, calling out the need for improvement. Cindi states, “As principals we need to do things about injustices.” We deal with criticism and acknowledge learning from failures. Our lived experiences inform the need for our role as instructional leaders to help level the playing field and provide guidance to teachers, and build capacity.

### **Priority in Action**

Our politic of *pasión* that is informed by the components described earlier also informs what we prioritized in our unspoken agenda. Cindi Marie shares, “I’m always trying to prove that these kids are smart, it doesn’t matter if you’re a child of poverty.” Her priority was assuring that teachers were well informed with strategies and understood the curriculum. She adds, “My priority was for kids to be successful in spite of anything and everything.” Cindi Marie’s vision was to have set up her students for college success. I also had the same unspoken priorities as a principal. This manifested itself as I focused on working as a professional learning community and quality instructional strategies as the mechanisms to support my top priority. I also fostered opportunities to establish a college going culture on campus. Tony prioritized a supportive English Language Learner agenda that valued native language and culture. He prioritized academics and family involvement.

### **Sense of Urgency**

Our own politic of *pasión* created in us a sense of urgency in our principal leadership. Cindi echoes this when she reflects on how counselors do not help certain populations with college access information. She states, “Is it because of where they come from? Where they live? Who they are? Who their families are? What their last names are? Why? Why does it still happen today?” Cindi understands the struggle on a personal level and this empathy creates a sense of urgency to change a system that from her view does not support all students. I felt the same urgency as a principal that was informed by my politic of *pasión* and reviewing data. I knew we had students who were not meeting standards and struggling to pass. This created a sense of urgency for me to

lead change and to speak up against practices that continued to perpetuate the problem. Tony took his sense of urgency to his families. It was “us vs. them” moments that he shared with parents about proving others who did not believe in them wrong.

### **Conclusion**

I learned from my mother how to question and reflect different points of view. Her pedagogy of asking questions rather than providing simple responses to questions is what leads me to think and reflect on *otros puntos de vista* for this sense making section. I often perceived this skill as critical but I have come to learn that this skill opens the imagination for new possibilities. It is with this skill that I made sense of my participants’ stories as I addressed the research questions that guided this narrative inquiry. The stories of schools, and the social, cultural, and familial stories that shape and inform the Latina/o principals’ politic or way of being and school leadership are informed by a politic of *pasión*. This politic of *pasión* is derived from our lived experiences and encompasses borderland living skills, *resistencia* and resilience, *reflexión* and critical awareness, and *corazón* and *coraje*. The politic of *pasión* manifested itself in how we lived out our roles as principals, what we prioritized, and how it created a sense of urgency in our actions.

## VI. WHAT DO I KNOW?

Nervously I walk in to a school district's board room to interview for a position as a new elementary principal. I am nervous because it has been three and a half years since I left my elementary principal position to fully embrace my doctoral studies journey. I am nervous because I have spent more time in the world of academia, presenting various research projects, and completing this narrative inquiry. What do I know about elementary schools? I am not up to par with state standards. As an emerging scholar, I know more about theory, yet I doubt I will be asked about my epistemology or how I applied Chicana ways of knowing to my dissertation. I am an emerging scholar. What do I know about being a practitioner? Have I been gone from the field too long? Will my answers to questions be too critical? I can talk about the Chicano pipeline. I know that for every Latina/o kindergarten student only .5% receive a doctoral degree (Covarrubias, 2011; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). I wonder if the committee will think, 'great, but what does that mean when you're the principal for this new campus?'

I know that my lived experiences and my research partners are rich and valuable. I know that when I reflected on our transcriptions that a new story emerged about a politic of being, a politic of *pasión*, that describes how our lived experiences informed our leadership. How does this help me as an elementary principal? I feel that I learned so much about leadership, Latina/o leadership, yet, what do I really know when it comes to leading a new elementary school? I walk up the steps and enter the room where a committee of ten people awaits to ask me questions. They want to know what I know. I wonder the same thing. I approach the large conference table where the committee sits. I



keep wondering what do I know. I approach the first person at the table and shake his hand as I introduce myself. Before I sit, I walk around the table greeting each person with my name and handshake. I notice this was not the expected protocol. What do I know? I tell the committee, I know this protocol is different, but my mom taught me better.

*Saludar*,<sup>51</sup> this I know.

### **Educational Lessons and Pedagogy of Home**

Indeed, I have learned many things from my mom. As I honor her pedagogy of home, her creative wisdom has guided how I pieced together this narrative quilt. I have also learned, through observing and interacting with her, how she creates a gracious space for others. She taught me to make sure, I knew how to *saludar* and how to present myself with others. I learned how to be hospitable observing her host Tupperware parties as her part time job to help our family make ends meet. I learned how to be respectful and invite people into your home. I also learned, in the ways she served and did things for others, the power of giving. Even now, she models this lesson for me. As a quilter, my mom's quilts become gifts for others. At times, she sews a quilt to give to a family member for their birthday, or to celebrate the birth of a new family member. She most recently, sewed a quilt for a former colleague of mine who was diagnosed with cancer. Even for those she has never met, she models giving. For a couple of years, I watched her piece together brightly colored red, white, and blue fabrics to create quilts for soldiers she would never meet. She donated these quilts to a group that would deliver them to wounded soldiers returning from overseas duties. Although, I think the process of creating is ultimately a self-centered act that nurtures my mother's imagination, it is the unselfish act of giving quilts to others that fuels her *alma*.

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<sup>51</sup> Spanish meaning "to greet."

It is this same giving spirit, which I have learned from my mom, that I use to close this narrative story. It is this same giving spirit that I use to offer possibilities of how this narrative inquiry informs not only academia, but school practice as well. I center this section in the ecologies of knowing that guided how I situated this dissertation (see page 26). The ecologies of knowing (Guajardo, Guajardo, Oliver, Valadez, Keawe, Henderson, & Rocha, 2013), aid in imagining a theory of action rooted in the self, organization, and community. In doing so, I situate the power of this work within the spectrum of both practice and theory, and call for further implications as it pertains to educational leadership.

### **Ecologies of Knowing**

#### **Self**

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) assert experience is a storied phenomenon that people share their daily life by stories. Additionally, Clandinin (2013) asserts we are profoundly shaped by the story of school. For my research partners and myself, this journey of telling our stories of school has been a powerful experience in our own personal development. We were able to name how our stories of school and how our social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional stories intersected to impact our school leadership. The process of telling the stories of school impacted us. Both participants described how the process of reflecting and telling their story of schools was powerful. Tony stated in one of the story telling sessions with me, “I enjoy our time together. It helps think me reflect on where I am as a leader. As I tell you stories, there are some things that I never realized contributed to how I lead and why I do things.” Cindi Marie, stated, “Telling you about my story of school and my principalship, helps

me understand better my purpose as an educational leader and my next steps.” By participating in a process that invites storytelling about our school experiences, we were able to understand our leadership purpose and understand the foundational roots that contribute to how we lead. This process and the insights that came from telling our stories of school was healing and revealing in that we were surprised to have shared similar stories. We shared that as campus elementary principals, the job was isolating and demanded our focus on the micro-political and macro-political issues of schools. When we engaged in this narrative inquiry, the participants and I had recently left the principalship. We discussed how being away from the job that demanded so much of our time and energy created a breathing space to reflect and gain critical insight.

### **Implications for Self**

Given the value of principals reflecting on their practices and their stories of schools, future research is needed that explores how principals can find the gracious space and time for a reflective process of their own stories of schools. Is it possible for school districts to provide sabbatical time for self-exploration and an understanding of self? What would this time for self-understanding look like? Is K-12 education ready to grant sabbatical time for principal personal development?

In addition to principals, this narrative inquiry informs principal preparation programs. For example, future school leaders can learn about leading different programs by also being able to name how they experienced their particular program as part of their school experience. Burciaga (2014) discussed how she asked principal preparation students to reflect on their own schooling experience by comparing demographic data from their schooling to the demographic data from their current school of employment.

By incorporating stories and storytelling into this type of assignment, principal preparation students could identify pivotal moments in their story of school that impacted them, and thus have the potential to impact their leadership. Experiencing this type of assignment as story sharing with others, can model the power of storytelling and build relationships as well as self-understanding.

Further research to investigate how the process of reflecting on one's story of school can be integrated with principal preparation program is worth exploring. Such research should include the following: How can principal preparation programs integrate a narrative inquiry assignment so that students can explore their story of school? And, how can this type of reflection be integrated not only in one class and one assignment but throughout the whole principal preparation program?

### **Organization**

This narrative inquiry provided for our own professional growth and understanding, it also informs school organizations as our cumulative stories highlight school organization experiences from an informed lens. We were Latina/o elementary principals with specialized training in educational history, educational law, and instructional pedagogy. From our informed lens, we were able to describe our experiences as students and as school leaders. These experiences bring additional insight about issues of expectations for Latina/o students, issues of access to information for college opportunities, issues of expectations of Latina/o school leaders, and issues of how social cultural stories intersect with a Latina/o student's story of school. Collectively, our stories provide rich voice to current research that highlights how public education has failed to respond to the educational needs of the Latina/o population (Covarrubias, 2011;

Murillo et al., 2010; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Our stories, chronicling the educational pipeline, provide a thick description that includes our insights as educators in the same system. These stories also serve as a counter-story to the Latina/o experience in school since the three of us have successfully navigated the pipeline, as Tony stated when he described how he mastered English in an immersion program. Our stories “are not the norm.” However, as a counter-story, our stories highlight the familial, linguistic, cultural, and other institutional stories that impacted our lived experience through the educational pipeline much like Yosso’s (2005, 2006) notion of community cultural wealth. Thus, our stories support an asset based approach to understanding the Latina/o student experience.

### **Implications for Organization**

From an organization level, however, so that we can learn more about the Latina/o student’s school experience from an informed lens, future research may explore the following: Who are Latina/o school leaders whose stories of school need to be told and shared? What are specific school policies, school laws, and instructional pedagogies that could benefit from an informed storied voice? How can organizations of the P-20 pipeline begin to embed lived experience stories from students, teachers, and faculty to inform the organization’s focus, culture, and process?

### **Community**

By virtue of the expectations of a dissertation, specifically, one conducted in a school improvement program, this narrative inquiry informs the community of academia in educational leadership. It contributes to the literature on educational leadership. Specifically, our narrative stories contribute to the discourse on educational leadership that has excluded the lived experiences of Latina/os (Bernal, 1998; Murakami et al.,

2013, 2015). Additionally, by applying narrative inquiry as an epistemology and methodology in which stories and storytelling are privileged, this narrative inquiry adds an authentic voice to the educational leadership scholarship.

Furthermore, while Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) caution about applying other frameworks to a narrative inquiry approach, this narrative inquiry informs how Chicana/o Ways of Knowing can complement a narrative inquiry framework. This study benefits from a Chicana/o Ways of Knowing lens in that it specifically privileges social, linguistic, and cultural intersections within our narratives. Finally, through the form of representation, this narrative inquiry also honors pedagogy of home. It is my mom's creative wisdom that guided my thoughts through the dissertation process. Paying homage to my mom's creative wisdom is not simply a metaphor; this dissertation demonstrates that a student of color, and an emerging scholar of color, possesses skills and assets acquired from home that can be applied in academia. Additionally, this narrative inquiry contributes to alternative ways of representing a dissertation. By continuing the story of my tension about writing a dissertation that does not follow the traditional academic format, this narrative inquiry identifies the possibility of writing in a way that is harmonious with a researcher's way of knowing (Garman & Piatanida, 2006; Jacobs, 2008; Smith, 2012).

### **Implications for Community**

From an academy community level further research is needed to understand (a) the implications of epistemology, and (b) how to apply alternative ways of knowing and representation to the field of educational leadership. Future research may seek to find the following: How can academia support alternative ways of knowing in the dissertation

process? How does educational leadership foster scholarship by welcoming non-traditional academic formats of representation? What kind of preparation is needed in our educational leadership doctoral studies to encourage alternative ways of knowing representations in dissertations? What support structures would need to be in place to provide doctoral students' assistance with writing alternative dissertations? How can the research enterprise, through the call for conference presentations, fellowships, grants, and journal publications, encourage and support the work of alternative dissertations?

### **Signing the Narrative Quilt**

This narrative inquiry dissertation describes the lived experiences of three Latina/o elementary school principals and our story of school. By applying narrative inquiry and Chicana/o Ways of Knowing to the methodology, a new story emerged through analysis. A politic of *pasión* is taken from our collective stories to describe how the stories of school and the intersections of our social, cultural, and familial stories shaped and informed our principal leadership. This politic of *pasión* incorporates our stories into the following components: borderland living skills, *resistencia* and resilience, *reflexión* and critical awareness, and *corazón* and *coraje*. These components are not static but rather flow within our being and manifest themselves in the action of how we led as principals, what we prioritized, and how it created a sense of urgency. Through the application of the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo, et al, 2013), this dissertation positions its contributions and implications within the self (principals), the organization (schools) and the community (academia).

As I move to close this narrative inquiry story, I reflect on the power of story itself. Story is ever evolving and incorporates social, linguistic, familial, cultural, and

institutional narratives. Story incorporates the past, the present, and the future. Story does not end. It is, in its very nature, unfinished. Like the quilts my mother sews for others this story will continue to provide comfort, healing, and new possibilities for me, the participants, and hopefully you the reader. It is with an eternal gratitude that I thank you for following this narrative to its closing (not completion) and for embedding your story with the words and lived experiences shared.

Next to making the quilt, signing the quilt is the most important step in the quilt making process. It is a documentation of the quilt which includes the quilter's name, and special thoughts or feelings about the quilt. I have seen my mother sign her quilts many times. Often times, it is signed at the bottom, on the back side of a quilt. I know, for her, it gives special meaning to the work and the process, and symbolizes her connection to the receiver. In closing, I would like to specially sign this narrative quilt as well. I leave this signing with a poetic representation of one of my mom's own stories of school. This signing represents the power of story and the interconnectedness of our stories. It represents how my story of school, my politic of *pasión*, is rooted in my mom's own story of school and how the story of school profoundly shapes our lives (Clandinin, 2013).

### **Antonia's Story of School**

A Counselor's Visit,  
1964,  
I walk into the office.  
My first time there.  
It's the last day of school.  
Graduation is at night.  
I hope it does not rain.  
I walk in and ask about college.  
I heard a friend say she's going to college,



I want to know how I can do the same.  
I didn't know,  
no one ever told me what I needed to do.  
It's too late he tells me.

It's too late he tells me.  
I leave.  
I graduate.  
Start my own family.  
My children,  
they will go to college.  
They will learn.

I sew my daughters' outfits for their first day at school,  
I prep my son to behave when he goes.  
I see in them possibilities that I never had.  
I am strict,  
ask about their homework,  
I visit with their teachers,  
I expect the best from them,  
I review their report cards.

They think I am harsh with my discipline,  
but  
I want the best for them.  
One by one, they go,  
college and more college,  
lawyers, educators, and an accountant.

One of them dreams.  
She dreams of schools that work for all students.  
It's not too late I tell her.  
Our stories continue.  
Our story of school continues.  
It's not too late.

## VII. EPILOGUE

The story of this dissertation work continued even after the written document was submitted for committee approval. An oral defense of the dissertation was required by my doctoral program and academia. In preparation for this oral defense, the issues of tension between traditional academic work and authentic ways of representing knowledge were once again at the forefront. Traditionally, the oral defense is an opportunity to present the body of research that comprises the dissertation. The oral defense should incorporate the components required by academia for scholarly research. I struggled with preparing for my oral defense because I was unsure how I could honor the flow of weaving in stories as I did in the written text. Ultimately, I was guided and encouraged by my dissertation chair to honor my ontological and epistemological roots, and my notion of viewing the world as storied.

In essence, the oral defense is the story of my dissertation. With this in mind, I applied a broader notion of the poetic transcription form I used in my narrative quilt. I created a poetic transcription of my dissertation's story and my journey through this process. To address the standards required for a defense, I prepared visual supports in form of a PowerPoint presentation that provided material that satisfied scholarly requirements. However, I decided I would not disrupt the flow of the poetic transcription of my dissertation's story by stopping to speak on each individual slide. Instead, the visuals presented in the PowerPoint were shown in juxtaposition to the spoken words of my dissertation story. I share this epilogue with you, the reader, because it is both a continuation of this narrative quilt and because it serves as an additional source to inform this work.

## SLIDE 1

### *SILENCE*

STORIES OF SCHOOL AND THE STORIED LIVES OF  
LATINA/O  
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Patricia Rocha  
Texas State University

## SLIDE 2

The purpose of this qualitative study is to delve into the lived experiences of Latina/o elementary principals through their storied lives, the *cuentos* that shaped their leadership. While this narrative inquiry addresses the technical standards of a dissertation, the rhythm, flow, and unconventional presentation of this scholarly work are purposeful to the framework.

### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

*Hola*

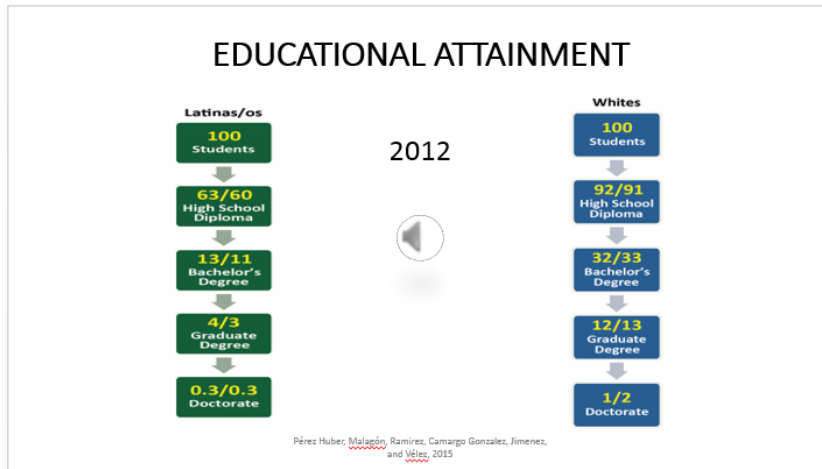
*Soy Patricia*

This is me with my Chicana hair  
Standing in a privileged space,  
In an ivory tower  
I longed to climb.  
With me, the spirit of  
Paredes and Anzaldua  
Story makers  
Storytellers  
Border crossers

Telling *cuentos* in poetic rhythm  
Capturing  
*Alma,*  
*Coraje,*  
*Amor,*  
*Piensamiento;*  
Breaking boundaries of traditional knowledge representation.  
This is me with my Chicana hair  
Standing in this privileged space.  
Dare I not do the same?  
My work;  
It's not my own,  
It's a legacy of those  
Who came before me  
Rooted  
In those who challenged traditional formats  
Like  
Four Arrows (2008)  
who  
Speaks of harmony,  
Of one's history, with  
Research goals

It is in this spirit  
I do the same  
This is me with my Chicana hair  
Standing in this privilege space  
Inviting you, as I share  
The story of this dissertation,  
To dream of possibilities  
Within the context of this  
Narrative engagement

### SLIDE 3



#### *Play Audio of Antonia's Story of School*

A Counselor's Visit,  
1964,  
I walk into the office.  
My first time there.  
It's the last day of school.  
Graduation is at night.  
I hope it does not rain.  
I walk in and ask about college.  
I heard a friend say she's going to college,  
I want to know how I can do the same.  
I didn't know,  
No one ever told me what I needed to do.  
It's too late, he tells me.

It's too late, he tells me.  
I leave.  
I graduate.  
Start my own family.  
My children,  
They will go to college.  
They will learn.

I sew my daughters' outfits for their first day at school,  
I prep my son to behave when he goes.  
I see in them possibilities that I never had.  
I am strict,

Ask about their homework,  
I visit with their teachers,  
I expect the best from them,  
I review their report cards.

They think I am harsh with my discipline,  
But  
I want the best for them.  
One by one, they go,  
College, and more college,  
Lawyers, educators, and an accountant.

One of them dreams.  
She dreams of schools that work for all students.  
It's not too late, I tell her.  
Our stories continue.  
Our story of school continues.  
It's not too late.

#### SLIDE 4

##### Latina/o Principals

- While research and policy have also attempted to address the issue of Latinos' struggle through the educational pipeline, there has been limited research in the role and impact of the campus principal in addressing this issue (Murakami, et al., 2015).
- It is worthy to study the lived experiences of principals and their story of school given the role of the principal in implementing change, educational policy, and reform (Anderson, 2009; Fowler, 2000; Hope & Pigford, 2001; Kafka, 2009).
- Bernal (1998) asserts that, "Historically, traditional mainstream educational scholarship has not addressed the influence of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality on education policy and practice" (p. 557).

##### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

It's not too late.  
*Soy Patricia.*  
This is me with my Chicana hair  
A principal,  
*Una directora,*  
Living a storied life  
Of gender,  
Race/ethnicity,  
Class,

Sexuality.  
*A directora*  
Who dreams of schools that work for all students  
Implementing change,  
Educational policy, and reform.  
But the research,  
*No habla de mí,*  
Not my Chicana hair,  
Not my storied upbringing.  
*¿Qué onda?*

## SLIDE 5

### Call For Research

- From this perspective, there is a general lack of research that focuses on Latina/os' experiences as principals that also considers the multiple storied lives that have shaped and impacted the lives of these educational leaders.

Rodríguez, C., Martínez, M. A., & Valle, F. (2015)

### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

I have journeyed through the pipeline,  
The same pipeline  
We all work to change  
*Como directora.*  
I see things  
Some things  
*Me llena*  
*Con coraje*  
But I don't understand why.  
Could my storied life  
Help me understand?  
Could it help  
Others understand?

*¿Cómo te fue?*  
I don't answer.  
Instead, I asked her,  
Mom why do you quilt?  
She tells me a story;  
I began to see.

Professional stories,  
Personal stories,  
Stitched together  
Just like her *colcha*.  
I began to see my own stories,  
As a student,  
As a *directora*.  
I wonder.  
I think.  
I question.  
*Muchas preguntas.*

## SLIDE 6

### Research Questions

What are the stories of schools that shape and inform Latina/o school principals' leadership?

What are the social, cultural, and familial stories that shape and inform Latina/o school principals' leadership?

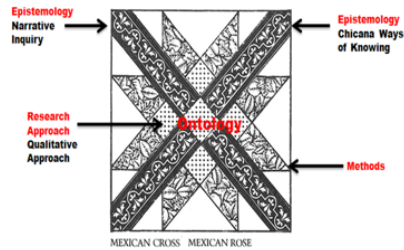
### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

Putting together stories,  
Like my mom's pieces  
Of fabric that formed  
Her first quilt,  
We can begin  
To understand,  
Make meaning,  
Create new knowledge.  
I know,  
Now,  
*Las preguntas,*  
That guided me  
Through  
This journey.



## SLIDE 7

### Narrative Inquiry and Chicana/o Ways of Knowing



### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

This is me  
With my Chicana hair,  
Standing here,  
In this privileged space,  
I found a design for  
This narrative  
That speaks to *Corazón*,  
*Alma*,  
And helped me explore  
Multiple stories of school,  
*Mis teorías*,  
And methodological concepts  
Honored my ontology  
And how I see the world;  
Honors my border crossing  
Between multiple realities,  
*Y como Azaaldua*  
This experience also informs  
How I see possibility within the borderlands,  
*Esta teoría*,  
Based on the view  
That we all  
Live storied lives  
That value experience  
That explore  
The social,  
The cultural,  
The familial,  
The linguistic,

And  
 The institutional narratives  
 That shape us.  
 Narrative Inquiry,  
*Muy apropiado*,  
 But the cultural,  
 The political,  
 And social contexts are embedded in our lives,  
 So like the quilt block  
 Design,  
 The Mexican Cross,  
 From my mother's books.  
 I imposed one design with another.  
 I added my Chicana ways of knowing  
 To narrative inquiry.  
 This way of knowing  
 Recognizes the multiple subjects,  
 Positions Chicana/os negotiate  
 In society  
 I cannot separate this from the research process.

## SLIDE 8



### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

This is me  
 With my Chicana hair  
 Standing here,  
 In this privileged space.  
 Yet, I did not journey here alone.  
 With me, two courageous partners,  
 Partners who Identify as  
 Mexican American,

*Directores también,*  
Cindi Marie  
And Antonio.  
Together, we walked in the  
Midst of stories.  
I met with each one  
Separately,  
And they shared their  
Stories of school.  
Cindi started with high school.  
*Play Cindi's story*  
Antonio,  
He started with his first day of school.  
*Play Antonio's story*  
And my story,  
Well, my story started in college

I'm humbled.  
The stories are entrusted to me.  
I find poetic transcriptions  
As a means to voice their stories  
However, I remain the storyteller.  
I work to reduce and analyze data  
As called for by the research  
And my framework.  
Analysis is ongoing.  
I am aware of my how I am re-storying.  
It's a tension, but I am reminded  
That as a researcher  
I am a storymaker.  
But these poetic forms  
Comfort me,  
Allow me to capture the flow  
And rhythm of  
Cindi and Antonio's stories.  
*Play Cindi stories and Antonio's stories*  
This rhythm allows  
Me to voice my stories as well.  
*Play my story.*

# Framework for Analysis

The diagram is titled "Framework for Analysis". It features a central grid of research questions, a surrounding context of cultural and social factors, and a set of guiding principles on the right.

**Central Grid of Research Questions:**

- What are people doing? What did I learn?
- What do the stories reveal? What stories are relevant to the inquiry?
- What are new ideas here? What am I trying to figure out as I do this?
- What is the idea that I'm studying? What does it tell me?
- What surprised me? What intrigued me? What disturbed me?
- What are the elements of narrative inquiry?
- What does my Chicana Ways of knowing and my cultural intuition reveal?

**Surrounding Context (Left Side):**

- Cultural Stories:**
  - Traditional Place Narrative Inquiry
  - Event
  - Social Stories
  - Timeline
  - Researcher's Relationship
  - Timeline
  - Institutional Stories
- Chicana Ways of knowing:**
  - Resilience
  - Chicana Ways of knowing
  - Chicana Place
  - Familial Stories
  - Chicana Temporality

**Surrounding Context (Right Side):**

- Traditional Place Narrative Inquiry:**
  - Event
  - Social Stories
  - Timeline
  - Researcher's Relationship
  - Timeline
  - Institutional Stories
- Chicana Ways of knowing:**
  - Resilience
  - Chicana Ways of knowing
  - Chicana Place
  - Familial Stories
  - Chicana Temporality

**Guiding Principles (Right Side):**

- Resistencia and Resilience
- Border land living Skills
- Reflexion and Critical Awareness
- Corazon Coraje

**Emerson et al, 2011; Saldana, 2013**

This is me with my Chicana hair  
Standing in this privileged space.  
Yes, I'm still standing,  
Even after the sense making.  
Stories,  
Sense making,  
*Qué curioso,*  
Because it felt like  
*Puro locura,*  
Craziness.  
As a researcher,  
Telling stories  
Was not enough.  
I had to make meaning.  
Scholarship calls for this.  
I reread and reread poetic transcriptions;  
I go back to the research questions  
Just like I learned in my qual 2 class,  
"Don't lose sight of your research question!"  
I take my framework  
And look at stories,  
Sense-making  
Makes sense.  
With questions that I gather  
From experts,  
I create a bookmark with these questions  
And I go back, over, and over, and over, again.

I don't simply want to pull out themes  
 I want to make meaning.  
 I'm reminded of how my mom always pushed for different possibilities.  
 I do the same.  
*¿Que más es posible?*  
 Telling stories is not enough.  
 Themes are not enough.  
 I need to address the research question.  
 I go back, over, and over, and over, again.  
*Si puro locura.*  
 But then, I can see  
 In our stories,  
 Another point of view  
 That manifest in our stories.  
 I see  
 A type of  
 Action,  
 An advocacy.

#### SLIDE 10



#### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

A politic of *pasión*.  
 See, in my privileged space,  
 My own experiences  
 Help me understand my own political self,  
 My politic of being.  
 This consciousness,  
 This awareness,  
 It is a *ventana* on how I view the world.  
 Politic of *pasión*.  
 It is what I see in our stories.

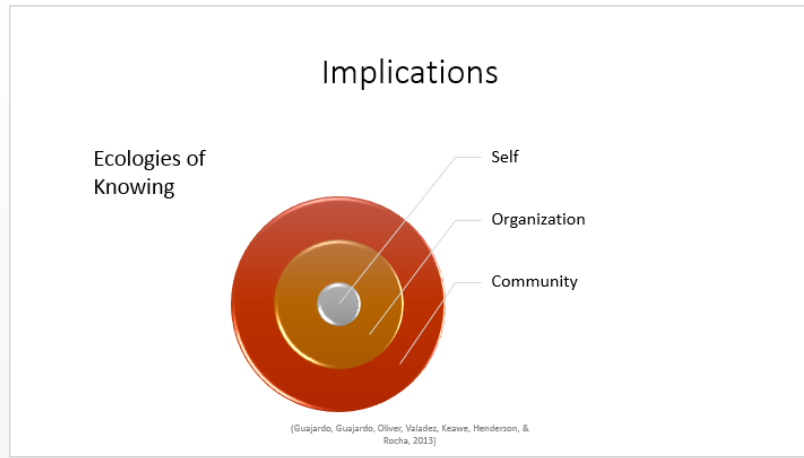
It is where our lives intersect,  
Merge into a fluid movement of action,  
*Resistencia*,  
Resilience,  
Borderland living skills,  
*Reflexión*,  
Critical awareness,  
*Corazón*,  
*Coraje*,  
Are in constant motion in our stories, and our lives,  
And our leadership as principals.

It sets in motion  
How we led our campuses,  
How we saw our roles,  
How we called out injustices,  
How we tried to bring equity.

Politic of *pasión*  
Informed our spoken  
And unspoken  
Agenda as principals.

Politic of *pasión*  
Created in us  
A sense of urgency  
To create change,  
To challenge the status quo,  
To speak up.

## SLIDE 11



### *Poetic Narrative of Presentation*

This is me with my Chicana hair  
Standing in this privileged space.  
As a scholar I know this research.  
I understand the issues of educational attainment  
For Latino students,  
And through this narrative journey I have learned  
About Latino Elementary principals,  
Their stories of schools,  
Their storied lives,  
And how it manifests in their work.  
I wonder of implications  
And what still needs to be done,  
So I situate the power of this work  
Within an ecology of knowing,  
The self.  
The process of stories impacted my partners and myself.  
We found the process reflective and powerful.  
I wonder how others can do the same.  
Is it possible for this type of self-exploration and understanding,  
At a campus level?  
Or, how can this process be integrated in principal prep programs?  
The organization?  
The stories highlight, from an informed school leader lens,  
The issues of access and experiences of Latino students,  
Voicing a thick description as educators.  
The same system we strive to change.  
I wonder, from an organization level,  
Who are Latina/o leaders whose stories of school need to be told and share?

What are the practices, policies, and instructional pedagogies that need to be told from an informed storied voice?

The community.

This work informs educational leadership and academia.

It informs concepts of methodology, epistemology, and other ways of knowing.

I wonder about the community of scholars and the academy.

How can academia support alternative ways of knowing within the dissertation process?

How does educational leadership foster scholarship by welcoming

Non-traditional academic formats of representation?

Implications to take this work forward.

I'll end this engagement

With a departing thought or two.

Soy Patricia.

This is me with Chicana hair

Standing in this privileged space,

In an ivory tower

I longed to climb.

I'm honored that you have been here.

Stories of schools

Profoundly shape our lives.

We can create schools that work for all students.

It's not too late.



## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A

#### Consent Form for Dissertation Study

Title of Project: Stories of School and the Storied Lives of Latina/o Elementary Principals: A Narrative Inquiry

Principal Investigator: Patricia Rocha  
Student  
Miguel A. Guajardo, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Texas State University  
College of Education  
601 University Drive, ASB South 322  
San Marcos, TX 78666  
Add email  
Office phone: (512) 245-4587  
Cellular phone: (512) 796-2049

Texas State University - San Marcos IRB approval #EXP2015A3293321

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to understand your school, social, cultural and familial stories. You are specifically being asked to participate in this study after another participant, colleague of the investigator, or the investigator herself identified you as a potential participant who might meet the criteria of the study. The intent of this research is to understand your views and experiences as a Latino/a principal who has worked within a public school setting. Specifically, this study will examine how the story of school has shaped or informed your leadership.

If you volunteer to participate in this research, you will participate in a series of engagement meetings lasting for approximate 1 hour to 2 hours. In the engagement meetings, you will be asked to discuss your experiences and stories of school from five different focus periods. These focus periods include your time as a student in elementary school, high school and college. In addition, the focus periods include your time as a teacher and a school principal. You will be asked to share your stories of pivotal moments or memories from each time period. For instance, you will be asked questions like the ones that follow: What are your memories or stories from this school period? What were pivotal events during this time? Did any of these stories from school conflict with familial stories or stories of your cultural experiences? If so, how did you negotiate the multiple stories during this school period? How have your lived experiences informed your daily practices? The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. Your

participation is voluntary and as such, you may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or jeopardy to your standing with Texas State University, San Marcos.

In addition, you will be asked to share any photos, documents, or other artifacts that have special meaning to your experiences that you have shared. These items will be photographed or scanned, and stored electronically. These items will be used by the researcher as part of data analysis. You will be asked for permission on the use of these items for the final report. Your participation and permission to use these items is voluntary and as such, you may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or jeopardy to your standing with Texas State University, San Marcos.

**RISKS:** In reflecting and talking about your experiences of school and as a school principal, you may become uncomfortable with unhappy experiences or memories recalled. However, you may elect to not answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy, and still remain a participant in the research. There are no known psychological or physiological risks associated with participating in this research. However, some of the questions may be considered sensitive. Participants are not required to respond to any question that they do not feel comfortable answering. All answers will remain confidential.

**BENEFITS:** You may not benefit from your participation in this research. Research on school principals' stories and reflection of their own experiences of school may be beneficial to other professionals in understanding how story of school landscape. In addition, the research may provide further insight into understanding the types of programs and policies to support principal preparation and growth.

**COMPENSATION:** You will not be paid for participation in this research.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. No identity will be made in the data analysis. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the investigator's office and the principal investigator, Dr. Miguel A. Guajardo, will have sole access. Your response(s) will appear only in statistical data summaries when the data are presented in written or oral form at scientific research meetings. Your name will never appear in any publication of these data. All materials will be kept for three years.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free

to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this project, I may call the investigator who is asking me to participate, Dr. Miguel A. Guajardo, at (512) ###-####. If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact the Director of the Office of Research Compliance at Texas State University - San Marcos, Becky Northcut at (512) 245-7975. (check name and number)

---

**Participant's Signature**

---

**Date**

---

**Investigator's Signature**

---

**Date**

## APPENDIX B

### Conducting the Narrative Inquiry Activities

Activity	Date	Observables	Guiding Questions
Researcher's story	February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research journal</li> <li>• Autobiography field text</li> <li>• Documents</li> <li>• Memory box</li> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is my story of school?</li> <li>• What are the pivotal moments from my own school experiences that I revisited as a principal?</li> </ul>
Recruitment and confirmation of research partner's participation	February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent form (Appendix B)</li> <li>• Handout with summary of research with Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5 explaining process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you interested in participating in a study that focuses on your story of school experiences and principal leadership?</li> </ul>
Schedule engagement times	February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calendar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which date works for our first engagement meeting?</li> </ul>
Decide on a time period focus within the story of school frame for the initial engagement meeting	February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handout with summary of research with Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5 explaining process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you think of the different periods of schooling, which period is one that you remember?</li> <li>• Please think of any</li> </ul>

Activity	Date	Observables	Guiding Questions
			photos, mementos from this period that may help tell your story of school. Please bring these to our initial engagement meeting.
Engagement Meetings	March-July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher Field Notes</li> <li>• Journal Notes</li> <li>• <i>Plática</i></li> <li>• Interview</li> <li>• Family Stories</li> <li>• Documents</li> <li>• Memory box</li> <li>• Audio recording device</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the items documents/photos/memory box that you want to share?</li> <li>• What are the pivotal moments or memories from this period of school?</li> <li>• What meanings do these moments have to your story of school?</li> <li>• Please tell me your story.</li> </ul>
Send recorded sessions to transcription services.	March-July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation and agreement with transcription services</li> <li>• Receipt log</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the turn-around time for transcription?</li> <li>• What are the measures in place to ensure safe keeping of audio recordings?</li> </ul>
Copies of photos, memory box, and documents	March-July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documents</li> <li>• Photos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which are the personal items that can be copied?</li> </ul>

Activity	Date	Observables	Guiding Questions
contents and store electronically		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory box items</li> <li>• Scanner</li> <li>• Electronic file service (Dropbox)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which items can be used in the dissertation representation and which items can be used only as field text reference?</li> </ul>
Analysis field text	July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field text</li> <li>• Transcriptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the framework for analysis (Figure 2.6), what are the elements of story, chronology, epiphanies, events, and 3- dimensional space from the field texts?</li> </ul>
Decide on re-story representation	August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes from analysis</li> <li>• Examples of re-storying possibilities (poems, narratives, photos)</li> <li>• Researcher journal</li> <li>• Discussion with dissertation chair and writing group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which representation will best re-story your field text?</li> </ul>
Create re-storied research text	September-November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes from analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this re-storied research text honor stories shared?</li> </ul>

Activity	Date	Observables	Guiding Questions
Share re-storied research text with participants for feedback	November- November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-storied research text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please provide feedback on re-storied research text.</li> </ul>
Finalize narratives	December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the feedback change the research text narrative?</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C

### Dissertation Timeline

Activity	Expected Start Date	Expected Completion Date
<i>What is the research task that needs to be done?</i>	<i>When does the research task need to start?</i>	<i>When does the research task need to be complete?</i>
Submit proposal to committee	January	January
Defend proposal	February	February
Submit forms to Grad College	February	February
Submit IRB	February	February
Solicit Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send letter looking for participants for professional network</li> </ul>	February	March
Make contact with potential participants and arrange for signing of informed consent	February	March
Schedule narrative engagement visits	February	March
Conduct narrative engagement (Focus-elementary years, high school years, college years, teaching years, principalship years) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School focus period 1</li> <li>School focus period 2</li> <li>School focus period 3</li> </ul>	March	July



<b>Activity</b>	<b>Expected Start Date</b>	<b>Expected Completion Date</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School focus period 4</li> <li>School focus period 5</li> </ul>		
Send data to transcription services	March	July
Organize field text collected (journals, photos, memory box items) for analysis	March	July
Analyze Data	July	September
Decide on re-storying representation	August	August
Discuss story themes with participants	August	August
Re-story field text to narratives	September	November
Send narrative to participants for feedback	November	November
Finalize narratives	December	December
Write discussion of themes	December	January
Write conclusion/recommendations	January	January
Submit to Chair	February	February
Submit to editor	February	February
Submit to committee	February	February
Prepare presentation of	February	February

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Expected Start Date</b>	<b>Expected Completion Date</b>
findings/defense		
Dissertation defense	March	March
Share final copy of narrative with participants	April	April
Complete paperwork for graduation	March	March
Graduation	May 2016	May 2016

## APPENDIX D

### *Plática Protocol*

Date and Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Describe the project:

#### *Getting Started Reminders for Researcher*

1. Provide Preliminary Information:
  - *Why am I here and purpose*
  - *What will I do with the information*
  - *How will I treat the information*
  - *How long will the interview take*
2. If not collected already, obtain permission to conduct Interview. Review IRB requirements.
3. If not granted already, obtain permission to use a recording device.

#### *Segue to the Interview*

#### Guiding Questions for *Plática*:

1. We decided to focus on the following school period. Please tell me about yourself during this period. What are pivotal moments or memories from this period?
2. Please tell me about your school. What experiences or opportunities did your school provide? What were the systems set up to support you form this period?
3. Please tell me about familial or community support during this period.
4. What was the climate in the school?

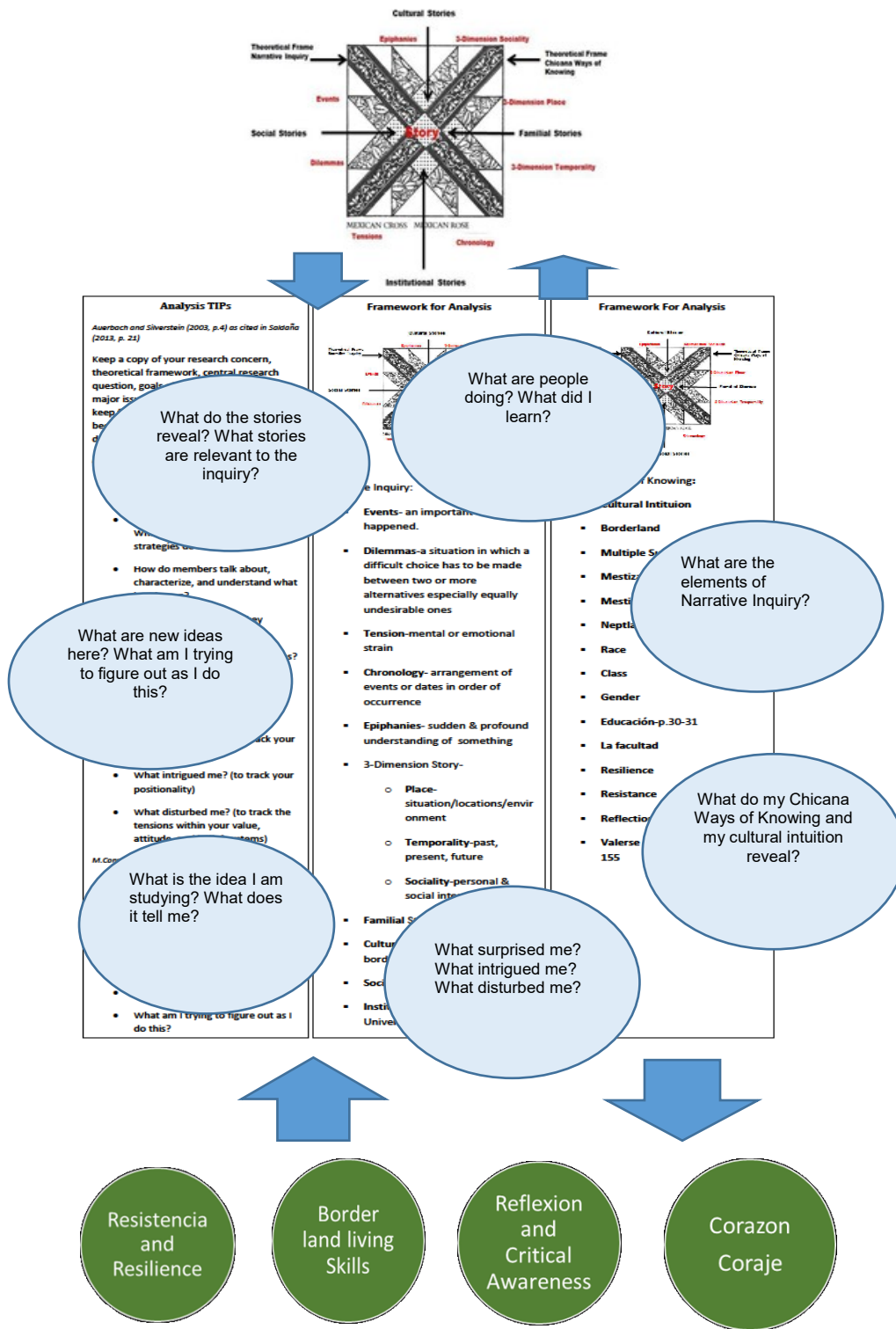
5. What are your memories or stories from this school period?
6. What were pivotal events during this time?
7. Did any of these stories from school conflict with familial stories or stories of your cultural experiences? If so, how did you negotiate the multiple stories during this school period?
8. How have your lived experiences informed your daily practices?

*End of Interview*

- Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about?
- Thank research partner for their participation.

## APPENDIX E

## Application of Framework for Analysis



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