

ESTA ES NUESTRA HISTORIA: AN INTERGENERATIONAL STUDY WITH  
THREE LATIN@ EDUCATORS

by

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## DEDICATION

*Para mis padres que han sacrificado su vida por sus hijos. ¡Gracias por todo su apoyo y amor!*



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*Para mis padres, que fueron mis primeros maestros, gracias por enseñarme el valor de la educación y por siempre creer en mi. Mami gracias por apoyarme y enseñarme que la educación es la única cosa que nadie te puede quitar. Desde niña me decías que era muy importante que yo como mujer me valiera por si misma, tus consejos han sido tan importantes en la formación de mi identidad feminista. Papi gracias por pasar tu vida trabajando para que tuviéramos un hogar y todas las cosas que necesitábamos. Dios me bendicio con los mejores padres del mundo. Aaron gracias por ser el mejor hermano y por todo tu apoyo. Los quiero mucho y esto ha sido posible por todo lo que han sacrificada por mi. ¡Este doctorado es para ustedes!*

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept of critical ontology and how it informs the being, work, and advocacy of three Latin@ educators in the San Marcos community who span three generations. Two Latin@ educators and myself, are the primary unit of analysis although, secondary and tertiary units of analysis which include citizens' stories of schooling and community are presented. This qualitative inquiry employs critical microethnography and autoethnography. Social cartography is the genre used to present our findings, which culminate in a museum titled *San Marcos Desde Adentro*; it presents a map of our lives at the micro and macro context. The findings reveal the development of critical ontology as a fluid process that has been marked by the awakening of our critical consciousness. The development of our critical ontology has an impact on our identity, our work in schools, and our role as activists in the community; it serves as a moral compass guiding our work ethic, agenda, and advocacy.

This study informs us that understanding the role of critical ontology for Latin@ educators working in traditional white stream institutions becomes a tool for resistance contributing to the participants' identity formation and critical awareness. Implications of this study inform us on the importance of Latin@s educators' understanding of the self and the impact education has on community change. Additional implications for education and community development include the historical stories of the district and community which can be utilized to inform future Latin@ educators and school leaders.

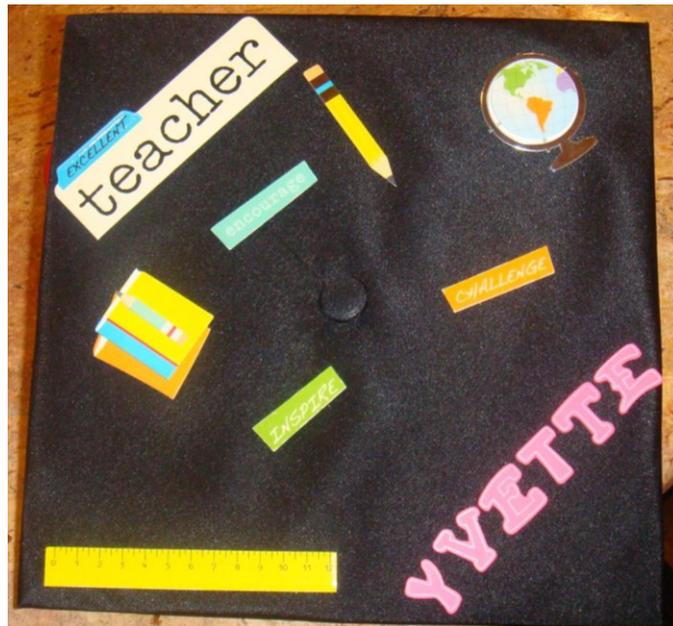
Key Words: critical ontology, Latin@ educators, LatCrit, microethnography, autoethnography, pláticas, social cartography, activism

## **OPENING**

“We resist colonial models of writing by talking about ourselves first and then relating pieces of our stories and ideas to the research topic” (Absolon & Willie, 2005, p. 98).

## I. EDUCATION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

My phone rang one afternoon in late July of 2009. As I looked at the phone number, my anxiety kicked in. It was Mrs. Sanchez, the principal of a brand new elementary campus, which had interviewed me for a teaching position earlier in the week. I answered the phone nervously with a “Hello,” anxiously awaiting the reason for her phone call. “Hi, Yvette this is Mrs. Sanchez. Do you have a minute?” “Of course,” I replied. “I was calling to let you know you were the top candidate for the teaching position and I want to know if you are interested in joining our team?” With relief and excitement I replied, “Of course I am interested, I am so grateful and excited for this opportunity. Thank you so much!”



*Figure 1.* Author’s Graduation Cap. “Photograph by the author”

My graduation cap is pictured above, I remember spending one afternoon decorating my cap for graduation day (see Figure 1). I wanted my cap to portray my vision of a teacher’s role. I chose the following three words for my cap as a visual

expression of my concept, encourage, inspire, and challenge. These words encompassed my purpose as a teacher. They represent values my parents had inculcated in me, and that I wanted to pass on to my students. As a teacher I wanted to encourage students to be the best they could be, to try their best at all times and never give up. I dreamed of inspiring students to value their education and pursue their dreams. Furthermore, I vowed to challenge students and provide them with the best education possible.

Ecstatic about my first job as a teacher, I could not wait to start school so that I could encourage, inspire, and challenge my students. That year I was assigned to teach first grade, six and seven year olds, at a brand new elementary school. The school was the result of district rezoning San Marcos had conducted in the spring. Students assigned to our school would come from two other elementary schools in the district. I remember feeling confident, prepared, and ready to be the best teacher for my students.

### **My Story**

For me, teaching was so much more than just a job. My entire life, I had grown up listening to the importance of school and education. My parents had moved as teenagers from *la tierra materna*, Mexico to the U.S., *la tierra de oportunidades* a place many immigrants like my parents idealized because they believed anything could be accomplished through hard work in the United States.

Growing up, I remember listening to countless stories of my parents' lives in Mexico, as immigrants, and as migrant farm workers up north. I was fascinated by their courage, perseverance, and dreams of a better future.

I dreamed of being as courageous and as persistent as they had been, and vowed to make all their sacrifices worthwhile. I knew I had to take advantage of all the

opportunities available to me so I could make my family proud. It was the stories of my parents' lives that served as catalysts for my love of learning and value for education. Since I was a little girl, my parents stressed the importance of an education, and I knew I had to take advantage of school.

I grew up in the small town of Santa Maria, in the Rio Grande Valley. The town has about 800 residents of which 99.76% are Latin@s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). The school I attended was, and still is, part of a small school district with no more than 70 students in each grade level. Most of the teachers were Latin@s who lived in the community and taught at Santa Maria ISD for most of their careers. My classmates were the same people from Kindergarten through twelfth grade and all of them looked just like me. Nearly all of us were first generation Latin@s whose parents had immigrated from Mexico.

I had the privilege of excelling in school and recall it being a fun and joyous place. I was blessed to navigate the educational system with ease and because of my success in school, I became the first person in my family to graduate from high school, a milestone that made my parents very proud. My passion for education led me to pursue a college degree in teaching. I wanted to become a teacher so I could inspire other students and instill the value of an education, just like my parents had done for me.

After all, I believed that I was proof that the American Dream existed. Through hard work and education, I had managed to be successful in school and had become the first person in my family to graduate from high school and college.

## **Tension**

Unfortunately, my dream and expectations of teaching were quickly shattered. Teaching was not what I had thought it would be. It was not the humble profession I expected. I was shocked and saddened to realize it was far from what I had experienced as a student.

As a teacher, I was one of the few Latin@s employed at the school despite the fact that most of the students were Latin@s. During my first year, I often heard comments about students and their families that made me feel uncomfortable and went against what I had experienced as a Latina student. For example, students' families and home environments were often used as excuses to explain low school performance.

During my second year of teaching, I was finishing a graduate program in elementary education and was enrolled in a class called *understanding self*. In this course I was exposed to readings that mirrored what I was experiencing as a teacher. I had witnessed contemporary deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997; 2010) in regard to race, culture, and poverty at my school through the comments I heard to explain students' low academic performance. Deficit thinking as defined by Valencia (2010) "is a pseudoscience founded on racial and class bias" (p. xiv). Valencia also explains, it is the belief that students fail in school because of their racial or cultural inferiority, as well as their language, low social economic status, or parents' low levels of education. These were the criteria utilized to flag students and identify them as at-risk. Students were labeled and tracked by identifying and focusing on their so-called deficiencies, such as their economic backgrounds and language. As I became aware, I began to notice the blame game was a popular way of explaining problems. I often heard things such as

“their parents just don’t care about school” to explain why students were not being successful. Valencia and Solórzano (1997) state,

One aspect of deficit thinking that fails to die is the major myth that low-income parents of color typically do not value the importance of education, fail to inculcate such value in their children, and seldom participate through parental involvement activities in the education of their offspring. (p. 190)

Furthermore, I was shocked to encounter the same beliefs and misconceptions about students of color in the literature. In his 1981 book, titled *Ethnic America: A History*, Sowell wrote a chapter called “The Mexicans.” In this chapter he asserted, “the goals and values of Mexican Americans have never centered on education” (p. 266). Much of the literature during this time period blames Latin@s for their failure in school. Valencia and Black (2002) provide a review of the literature that has perpetuated deficit thinking about Latin@ students. A variety of explanations such as genetics (Valencia, 1997), culture (Foley, 1997), family (Pearl, 1997), and genetic–cultural–familial explanations (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997) have been documented in the literature for the failure of Latin@ students in schools. Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi (2004) found that deficit thinking was a persistent problem in American schools. Unfortunately, students and families that are culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse continue to be viewed as deficient by teachers and school personnel (García & Guerra, 2004; Quiócho & Daoud, 2006; Zarate, 2007).

Bowles and Gintis (1976) discuss how schools are not set up for the success of all students. They examined the functions of school through an economic lens that takes into account the capitalist society in America. Through this examination they found

education “is best understood as an institution which serves to perpetuate the social relationships of economic life through which these patterns are set, by facilitating a smooth integration of youth into the labor force” (Bowles & Gintis, 2011, p. 118). In addition, they described how schools work in ways to promote and demote students, in preparation for the hierarchical systems in the workplace. Rosenberg’s (2004) review of Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) seminal work states, “the major claim of this text is that our educational system’s primary role is to mirror, support, stabilize, and reproduce the fundamentally hierarchical and undemocratic social relationships that exist in the majority of American workplaces” (p. 23).

I began to understand how school was set up to maintain the status quo. Bourdieu (1977a) writes about how the status quo is maintained through cultural capital, which he defines as “linguistic and cultural competence and the relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced with family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture” (p. 494). Because schools operate under the assumption that everyone possesses dominant cultural capital, students who are familiar with the dominant culture have an advantage in school. Further, students who do not have dominant cultural capital have a difficult time being successful in school. In this way Latin@s who are culturally and linguistically diverse, are robbed of a chance to be successful in school. Thus, maintaining the status quo.

In the fall of 2010 as a second year teacher I felt defeated. I had chosen to become a teacher because I believed in the transformational power of education, but my experience did not reflect this. I experienced school as a place filled with deficit thinking. Instead of caring and educating all of our students, test scores were the priority.

This led to students being viewed through only one lens, the score they produced. When they could not perform well, they were blamed for their failure. I knew and felt in my heart that something was wrong with this system of education.

As previously mentioned, I was attending graduate school and was enrolled in a course titled “understanding the self.” The goal of the course was to prepare participants for leadership by encouraging self-reflection. This course pushed me to reflect upon my experiences and the tensions I felt as a teacher. To help me reflect, I spent some time looking through many photographs.



*Figure 2. Mis Padres.*

As a Latina, I knew the deficit thinking about Latin@ students was not true. The picture above was taken on the day I graduated from college (see Figure 2). I love this picture because it shows my parents standing and looking at me. Their presence captures the support I received from them my entire life. They always supported my education and encouraged me to do well in school. I remember coming home every day from school and sitting down at the kitchen table to do my homework. *Mami* would be cooking dinner and glancing at me to ensure I completed all my work. Even though both

she and *Papi* only spoke Spanish, they made sure I got my work done. Anytime I needed help, I would use our landline to call my aunt who was in her early twenties, and she would help me with my work over the phone. My parents always supported my education and wanted me to be successful in school. Being Latin@s, native Spanish speakers, and poor did not mean that school was not important to my family, in fact it was the complete opposite, school was the most important thing.

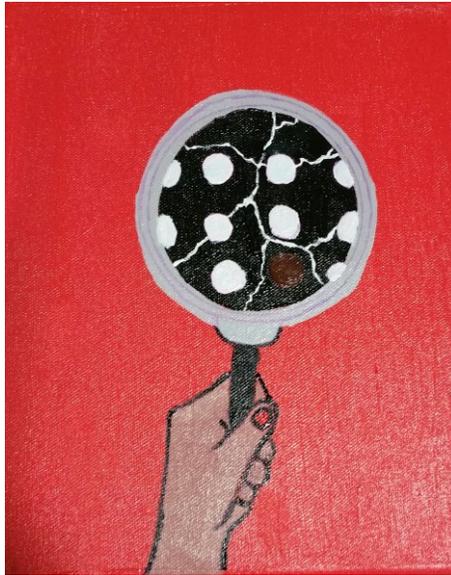
I kept a journal throughout the class, and wrote the following on October 23, 2010 as a reflection on deficit thinking.

Now that I am a teacher at a Title 1 school, I hear people say that parents of color just don't care about the parents of the children we work with. It makes me very upset because I grew up in the very same situation and environment that most of my current students come from, with parents of color who were uneducated, were immigrants of Mexico, and who spoke only Spanish. This in no way hindered my parents from instilling the value of an education or caring about our schooling. As a matter of fact, they were so involved and adamant about my brother and I taking advantage of our education. If it were not for their motivation and persistence, I would not be here today.

Through the course I continued to question and problematize my experiences using various contexts. During this time, I remember reading about the educational gap of Latin@ students and being exposed to the systems that create disadvantages for Latin@s. I remember feeling angry when I realized I had a micro understanding about my life and education. All my life I had thought about education as a tool for bettering my life, it was something my parents had told me since I was a child. I was certain that if you worked

hard enough in school, you could accomplish anything you wanted. What I didn't realize was that education was also used to oppress people, specifically Latin@ students. This completely shattered my view about schooling. All my life I believed that education was the great equalizer, but I had failed to see that the education system was set up to maintain the status quo (Bourdieu, 1974, 1977a, 1977b; Doob, 2016; Moll & Ruiz, 2002; Rouse & Barrow, 2006). Moll and Ruiz (2002) highlight how historically Latin@s have faced segregation in school which limits their access to equal education compared to Anglo children. Furthermore, subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) practices such as English only programs that force children to lose their Spanish language have been used to assimilate Latin@s and strip them of their culture and identity.

By the end of the course, my eyes were opened to the inequities of the education system, marking the emergence of my critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; 1974). Throughout the class, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery and now realize I had such a small understanding of myself. This experience completely redefined who I am and gave me a bigger perspective about my life (Guajardo, Oliver, Rodríguez, Valadez, Cantú, & Guajardo, 2011). This was a turning point for me. It transformed my life and role as an educator. I vowed to be an agent of change in school, by becoming more than just a witness or passive bystander of the social injustices in school. I also knew then that my personal education journey was not complete, I made a decision to apply for a doctoral program in December of that year so that I could continue learning how to be an agent of change and school improvement for Latin@s in school.



*Figure 3. The Truth. "Painting by the author"*

I painted the picture above to capture my personal development as I reflected on my emotions and experiences as a teacher (see Figure 3). My brown hand is painted in the image to represent myself and my identity as a Latina. The magnifying glass represents my awareness and the deep examination of the school system in which I worked. The dots represent students in school; they are painted white to signify the assimilation that occurs in school. The brown dot represents a Latin@ student who is being educated in a system of reproduction. The cracks in the glass represent my anger with this system of education and serve to signify the broken system of education for Latin@ students. The red background and nail polish represents both the anger and pain Latin@s have faced in the educational system and its aggressions. For instance, the segregation of Latin@ students and the stripping of cultural identity. This painting portrays my shift in thinking about the school system and the emergence of my critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; 1974), an awareness of inequities, power and privilege that schools possess.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the critical ontology (Kincheloe, 2003) of three intergenerational Latin@ educators. Critical ontology is “a way of being that is aware of the ways power shapes us, the ways we see the world, and the ways we perceive our role as teachers” (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 53). I, as a Latina educator, immersed myself in this journey along with my two research partners, thus turning this project into a collective fabric of our stories and life experiences. Even though each one of us grew up in different generations and in different locations, our lives intersect through our work within the San Marcos school district. This study explored our lived experiences as Latin@s and educators. Therefore the research questions guiding this study are as follow:

1. What is the critical ontology of three San Marcos CISD Latin@ educators?
2. How does the critical ontology of these Latin@ educators inform their being, their work, and their advocacy?

## **Relevant Terms**

Throughout history many different labels have been used to refer to people of color. The following terms appear in the literature and in government documents to describe people of Mexican or Latin American descent. Although sometimes used interchangeably, the terms have specific definitions.

The term Chicana, or Chicano, became popular during the Chicano movement of the 1960s by people of Mexican descent. Sometimes it is written as Xicana/o, as a way to acknowledge indigenous heritage (Castillo, 1994). Both terms are used interchangeably with the term Mexican (Bernal, 2002). The term Hispanic was created

by the U.S. government in the 1960's and defined as "all persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race" (Wallerstein, 2005, p. 23-24). Latina or Latino is gender inclusive, Latina referring to females and Latino referring to males. The term is used to refer to people originating from or having a heritage related to Latin America (Comas-Díaz, 2001). Mexican is "the term used appropriately for Mexican citizens who visit or work in the United States" (Comas-Díaz, 2001, p. 117). Mexican American is used for Americans who trace their ancestry to Mexico (McLemore & Romo, 1998). Spanish refers to people from or originating from Spain.

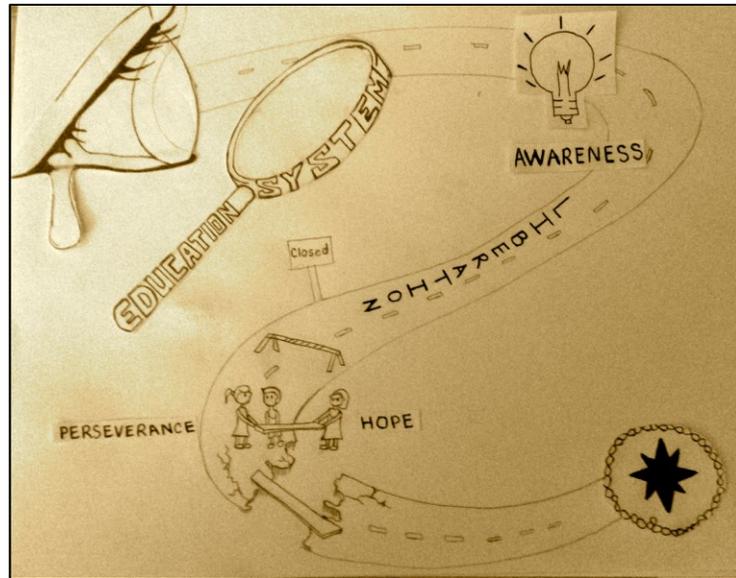
These terms appear throughout this dissertation when cited directly from the literature, government documents, or from people's stories. When not referencing any of those situations I purposely choose to use the word Latin@. The addition of the "@" is "a widespread political gesture against the gender power of the noun's masculine form to signify all Latinos, irrespective of gender, and to acknowledge Latinas as an essential component of the panethnic designation" (Allatson, 2007, p. 141). Additionally, Latin@ "respects the diverse national origins and the waves of population movement from Latin America for over four centuries" (Haynes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987, p. 65). And, "unlike "Hispanic," it [Latin@] is not an identity label imposed by the politicized statistics of the Census Bureau and the market who seek to target particular constituencies for political and economic manipulation" (Flores & Yudice, 1990, p. 80).

### **Road Map**

These tensions and curiosities serve as the inspiration and driving force for this study. In the following chapter, I discuss the problem statement, which explains why this

study is important. Chapter three provides the context of the study, including a historical overview of the development of place, context, and history of the San Marcos community and school district. Additionally, chapter three includes a collection of stories and experiences from the voices of the San Marcos community and school district. They provide a glimpse into the organization of schools and community. These stories will take us into the schools, the minds, and souls of the San Marcos school district and community. I also include their stories as a way to privilege their voices and experiences as witnesses to lived experiences and part of the triangulation of this work. Chapter four is dedicated to the methods and data collection procedures for this study. Chapter five provides the findings in the form of a museum titled *San Marcos Desde Adentro*. The museum is a mode of social cartography (Paulston, 1996), a form of mapping that helped us convey our story through various artifacts. In addition a life map is included in the museum, which presents our lives as intergenerational Latin@ educators and citizens over the past century. Furthermore, a discussion based on the tenets of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) and the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo, Guajardo, Oliver, Valadez, Henderson, & Keawee, 2012; Guajardo, Guajardo, Jansen & Militello, 2016) are provided. The final chapter, six, includes a discussion of the research questions and presents the recommendations, a call to action, and future research based on this study.

## II. ANGER, TENSION, AND AWARENESS



*Figure 4. My Journey. “Photography by the author”*

The map above represents my journey thus far (see Figure 4). I drew this in the Spring of 2015, working on my dissertation. It highlights my transformational journey over the past five years. The eye and magnifying lens represent the pivotal moment of anger, awareness, and tension, which began five years ago when I critically examined the education system and gained a critical awareness and understanding of the world. This awareness, or critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; 1974; Valadez, 1992), came about through my exposure to critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; 1974), which pushed me to think about my life through a biological, historical, cultural, and political lens. This experience was liberating and gave me an opportunity to find my identity as a Latina educator and scholar which catapulted me on a new educational trajectory from a critical pedagogy to a dynamic-critical pedagogy. This transformed my role as an educator from a storyteller to

a storyteller (Guajardo et al., 2016). This position raises my role as a researcher and creator of knowledge, albeit, latent knowledge.

Although the road has not been easy and often times, seems like is closed, I have found strength in community. The power of being with others has been the source of perseverance and hope throughout my work as an educator and life as a graduate student. It is that interdependence that sustains my journey. The power of community and collectivity has influenced my ontology and shaped my life as an educator.

The compass at the end of the map represents the journey that lies ahead. Although I do not know where it will take me, I do know that wherever I go, the compass will guide me to my destination and as a storyteller, I am an active participant in this journey.

### **Educational Gap for Latin@s**

The goal of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is “to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (NCLB, 2001). This law promised to fix the education gap and offer a more promising future to all students, especially students of color and low socio-economic status. Unfortunately, the law has not remedied the large educational gap that exists for Latin@s.

Latin@s have the lowest educational attainment rates in the United States (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). According to Burciaga, Pérez Huber, & Solórzano (2010) only 56% of all Latin@s who begin elementary school graduate from high school. Research on the Latin@ education pipeline demonstrates that out of one-hundred Latin@ students only

five will earn an associate's degree, ten will earn a bachelor's degree, two will complete graduate school or a professional degree, and 0.2 will earn a doctorate degree (Covarrubias, 2011). Swail, Cabrera, and Lee (2004) found that Latin@ students who do complete high school are often underprepared to meet the demands of higher education. Cumulatively less than 13% of Latin@s complete college (Lopez, 2009).

The data reveal how our current education system is failing an immense number of Latin@ students who are not being adequately served in schools. The education of Latin@ students should be a priority for schools, especially as the demographics of schools have changed in the United States.

### **Latin@s in the United States**

The United States has experienced a huge demographic shift as the Latin@ population has increased over the last 30 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010a), the Latin@ population accounted for over 50.5 million residents, which is approximately, 16.5% of the United States population (Fry & Lopez, 2012). More recent estimates reveal about 55 million Latin@s in 2014 and projections anticipate that by 2060 there will be 119 million Latinos, an increase of 115% (Colby & Ortman, 2015). If these projections prove accurate, the Latin@ segment will comprise 29% of the United States' population, more than one-quarter of the total (Colby & Ortman, 2015).

This increase in the Latin@ population has huge implications for schools. As the Latin@ population increases, the number of Latin@ students in schools also increases. Nearly one in every four children currently attending school is Latin@ (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). According to Fry & Lopez (2012) it is projected that by 2036 Latin@s will compromise one-third of the nation's children.

### **Latin@s in Texas**

The state of Texas has also experienced an increase in the Latin@ population, one which surpasses that of the United States. In 1980, the Hispanic population in Texas was under three million (Texas State Data Center, 2010a). In 2010, there were more than nine million Hispanics, giving Texas the second largest population of Latin@s in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). Hispanics account for 37.6% of the Texas population, which makes Texas one of five states where Latin@s make up more than one-in-four residents (Passel, D’Vera, & Lopez, 2011). By 2040, it is projected that there will be 18.8 million Hispanics in Texas, a growth of 530% from 1980 to 2040 (Texas State Data Center, 2010b). The rapid increase of the Hispanic population means that the demographics of communities and schools in Texas are rapidly changing. This has huge implications for the Texas education system.

### **Latin@s in San Marcos**

Population changes in San Marcos mirror those of Texas and the nation as a whole. According to the U.S. Census (2010a), people of Hispanic ethnicity comprise 37.8% of the San Marcos population (see Table 1) making Latin@s the largest minority group in the community. This has huge implications for the San Marcos CISD school district.

Table 1  
*San Marcos Population Demographics*

<b>Population</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Native American</b>	<b>Asian</b>
44,894	78.5%	37.8%	5.5%	0.9%	1.6%

U. S. Census, 2010

**San Marcos CISD School District**

The San Marcos school district was first established in 1877. At the time the district served about 53 students. “In the fall of 1889, the City Council’s judiciary committee reported favorably on building public schools for both white and colored children” (Milecam, 2001a, p. #18B). This marked the beginning of school segregation in the San Marcos school district. For the next 60 years, students would be educated in different facilities based on the color of their skin.

As the community continued to grow so did the school district and the necessity to build more schools. Comprised of one consolidated school district, which serves the students who live in town as well as those who live in the surrounding communities. Currently the district is composed of one high school, one alternative high school, two middle schools, six elementary schools, and one pre-kindergarten school. The district serves over 7,500 students from pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The demographics of the students are listed in the Table 2, below.

Table 2  
*San Marcos CISD Student Demographics*

<b>Population</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Native American</b>	<b>Asian</b>
7,501	20.9%	72.5%	4.7%	0.1%	0.7%

TEA, 2014

The majority of the students (72.5%), are listed as Hispanic on the Texas academic performance report (TEA, 2014).

The TEA (2014) report also includes information about the faculty and staff that work in the San Marcos CISD district. Table 3 (below) presents data about the teachers who serve the students.

Table 3  
*San Marcos CISD Teacher Demographics*

<b>Population</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Native American</b>	<b>Asian</b>
542.8	60%	33.5%	2.8%	0.6%	0.7%

TEA, 2014

Sixty percent of the teachers employed are White, while Hispanic teachers comprise 33.5% of the teaching staff. As one of the few Latin@ educators employed in the district, I noticed the difference between the demographic of students and teachers (see Table 4). The majority of students who attend the district are Latin@ minorities and yet the majority of educators employed are White.

Table 4  
*San Marcos CISD Teacher vs. Student Demographics*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>% Teachers</b>	<b>% Students</b>
White	60%	20.9%
Hispanic	33.5%	72.5%

TEA, 2014

### **Teacher Population**

Like the rest of the nation, the population of professional staff working in schools has not changed much despite the change in student population. Demographics of teachers have remained constant (Flores, 2011; Ochoa, 2007). The majority of teachers are White (83%), while Latin@s comprise about 7% of the teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Even in states that have large numbers of minorities, teacher demographics are similar. In Texas during the 2011-2012 school year, 72% of the teachers were White, while 28% were Latin@ (Ramsay, 2013). These percentages are similar to the student and teacher demographics of San Marcos CISD. Though my research focuses on a micro-community level, the issue being researched is relevant to the state and nation as a whole.

### **Cost and Concerns**

Latin@s employed in education represent a small percentage of people who are working in traditional White stream institutions (Bourdieu, 1977a). A White stream institution in this case refers specifically to schools. U. S. schools are known as White stream schools because of “the official and unofficial texts, ideologies, and discourses used in U.S. schools that are founded on the practices, principles, morals, and values of

White supremacy and that center on un-critical and exceptionalist history of White Anglo-American domination” (Urrieta, 2009, p. 181). Thus they “do not nurture racial/ethnic minority identities” (Urrieta, 2009, p. 155). Latin@s’ experiences within these institutions can highlight information about their work, the students, the school, and the dynamics of White stream institutions within a shifting context and student population.

This is important because of the demographic shift that is occurring in the United States; a shift that the small, central Texas town of San Marcos is experiencing. As the community has diversified and changed, incongruence between the staff and students has increased. Learning more about the experiences of Latin@s who have worked for the San Marcos school district can inform ways that Latin@ educators work in White stream institutions (Bourdieu, 1977a). Additionally, this work can also inform teacher and leadership preparation programs as we recruit more Latin@s into the profession. Furthermore, it can inform alternative teacher programs and teacher induction programs for districts which are recruiting Latin@ prospective teachers in response to their organizational diversification and because of the shifting demographics of our communities and schools.

### **Teacher Ontology**

Teacher preparation programs often focus on teachers’ epistemology and leave ontology unexplored (Brownlee, 2004; Olafson, Schraw, & Veldt, 2010). Ontology is the study of beliefs about the nature of reality (Merricks, 2007; Schraw & Olafson, 2008). As human beings, we all hold assumptions and beliefs about our world, which make up our ontology. For teachers the exploration and development of ontology is crucial.

The challenge of teaching is to decide who you want to be as a teacher, what you care about and what you value, and how you will conduct yourself in classrooms with students. It is to name yourself as a teacher, knowing that institutional realities will only enable that goal in part and that the rest is up to you. (Ayers, 2001, p. 22)

Unfortunately for teachers this is an area that often remains unexplored in teacher preparation and professional development programs. Teacher preparation programs often have teachers reflect on their epistemology but rarely ask teachers to examine their ontology “especially in relation to the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical world around them” (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 47). For Kincheloe, critical ontology is “a way of being that is aware of the ways power shapes us, the ways we see the world, and the ways we perceive our role as teachers” (p. 53). This ontological understanding is necessary for teachers to develop their own teacher persona (Kincheloe, 2005). The current lack of critical exploration of teachers’ own belief systems and understanding of teacher identity plays a role in the teaching, learning, and leading of educators.

As an undergraduate student in a teacher preparation program at Texas State University, we rarely explored our ontology. Instead we focused on developing a philosophy of teaching that was rooted in what we believed was best for students. We never had conversations or explored literature about the students we would teach or the educational gap for minority students. We were never pushed to explore our own lives, educational paths, or our own history. The lack of ontological exploration hindered my role and effectiveness as a teacher. Furthermore, without this exploration and understanding I was naïve about the realities of school.

## **Teaching, Learning, and Leading**

Ontology plays a role in the public identity and construction of teachers, thus, impacting the role of teachers in schools. Kincheloe (2005) found that ontology has an impact on the teaching practices that teachers utilize and the way teachers view themselves is directly connected to pedagogy and the ways one teaches. However, there is a distinction between private ontology and public presentation of ontology. First there is the development of private ontology, an awareness of reality that occurs at the individual level. Then there is the public presentation of ontology, the decision by the individual to publically act based on their ontology, which creates the public identity and construction of teachers. It is this awareness of both the private and public ontological self, which becomes dynamic and thus is reflected in the public identity of teachers.

Further, I believe the same applies for leadership; ontology is connected to the way one leads. Decisions about leadership, power, and agency are impacted by people's ontology. Pedagogies and the type of teaching and leading that students receive can vary based on educators' ontological beliefs. For students of color, this is crucial as educators' pedagogies are extremely important and can have a huge impact on their success or failure in schools.

For Latin@ educators, who comprise a minority of the teaching population, an understanding of their ontological beliefs might help to inform the reasons why Latin@s pursue a career in education and the ways in which their ontology informs their teaching, learning, and leading. This can provide a greater understanding about Latin@ educators, who they are, ways in which they are working in our educational system, and things they are doing to improve the educational success of minority students.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Critical theory is a philosophy that closely examines beliefs that favor privileged people over other people. It examines historical, political, and economic issues of power (Freire, 1970; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). At its root, critical theory posits that systems have caused an unfair and unbalanced system, which privileges some and marginalizes others. This social theory aims to challenge the status quo and promote change in society as a whole (Crotty, 1998).

Critical race theory (CRT) (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2013) was developed in the late 1960s as a result of the sluggish implementation of the civil rights legislation. Scholars began to address and critique the absence of race from critical legal scholarship resulting in the development of CRT, which provides a critical examination of society and culture and the intersection of race, law, and power. CRT acknowledges that race, racism, and power have an influence in the world in which we live. Because of this, minorities are treated differently than White people in this country. According to Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas (1995) CRT's two foundation principles are,

To understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America, and in particular, to examine the relationship between the social structure and professed ideals such as the "rule of the law" and "equal protection." The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it. (p. xiv)

Thus calling for an aggressive approach to social transformation and the use of narratives and storytelling to explore the experiences of racial oppression. Although CRT emerged in the legal field, it has crossed into many other disciplines. In the field of education, it is used to uncover educational problems (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2013). CRT outlines several tenets that guide this theory in the field of education, a) racism is normal in the United States, b) interest convergence provides little incentive to eliminate racism c) race is socially constructed d) intersectionality and anti-essentialism creates multiple identities that must be acknowledged e) voice and counter narratives must challenge the dominant narrative (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Rodríguez, Martínez, & Valle; 2015).

As an extension of critical race theory (CRT), Latino critical (LatCrit) theory (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Villalpando, 2004), examines the inequalities the Latin@ population faces. LatCrit expands beyond the Black and White dichotomy of race and racism, which is what separates LatCrit from critical race theory. Furthermore, it addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists “such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype and sexuality” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 311).

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) outline the five essential themes of LatCrit. The first theme is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, which acknowledge there are more complex forms of oppression than class and race can account for. There is an intersection of class, gender, language, and immigration status, which can contribute to race and racism. The second theme is the challenge to dominant ideology, which claims the educational system is objective, focused solely on merit, color-blind, race

neutral, and provides equal opportunity for all students. Furthermore, this theme challenges the deficit frameworks attributed to Chicana and Chicano education inequality. The third theme is the commitment to social justice. This theme “envision(s) a social justice research agenda that leads toward (a) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and (b) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups” (p. 313). The fourth theme acknowledges the centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color. It values their lived experiences and uses authentic methods to collect their experiences. The final theme of LatCrit is the focus on a transdisciplinary perspective that values knowledge and perspectives from many different fields in order to better understand issues of race, sexism, and class in education.

A LatCrit theoretical framework facilitates an examination of the educational experiences of Latin@ educators. The use of this theory acknowledges the experiential knowledge of communities of color. For me, this framework informs and values the experiential knowledge of Latin@ educators and can contribute to understanding the experiences of Latin@ educators in the San Marcos community. LatCrit also creates space to explore the nuances that accompany race and class such as gender, history, culture, and language to name a few. Additionally, LatCrit allows me to focus on how and why Latin@ educators interrogate and negotiate systemic and political forms of oppression, including race, immigration status, gender and class, in our educational experiences.

### **III. SAN MARCOS**

The first summer of my doctoral journey, I was enrolled in a community development class. During this summer long class, our assignment was to research the history of a particular community in Central Texas. The community we would be learning about was San Marcos, where I lived and was employed as a teacher. I spent the summer digging through historical archives at both the public and university libraries, and driving around finding significant and historical buildings. Through my research, I learned about the school segregation that had occurred in the district in which separate facilities for Anglo, African American, and Mexican American students were used to educate students. Furthermore, after the district was forced into integration, the school that had been used to educate Mexican children was used to house the district's early childhood program. I became fascinated by the events that had transpired in San Marcos and was curious to learn more, which eventually led to the development of this topic.

#### **Historical Context of San Marcos**

San Marcos is a small, Central Texas town located along the I-35 corridor, between the urban cities of Austin and San Antonio. The town sits on the Balcones Fault, which is the boundary line between the Texas hill country and the coastal plains. Several books have been written documenting the history of San Marcos. Dobie (1948) and Talbot (1961) both provide an overview of the creation of the town, which I summarize below to provide a historical context to the setting of this study.

San Marcos has a rich history that dates back 10,000 years. The area's first inhabitants were Native Americans who settled in this area because of the beautiful San Marcos River, which has the third largest collection of springs in Texas. The Native

Americans thrived on this land until the late 1600's, which marked the arrival of Spanish people.

In the late 1600's and early 1700s Spanish immigrants created one of the oldest roads in this area, known as El Camino Real, as a way to create a road that linked Mexico City to Louisiana. As part of the Spanish king's orders and as a means to expand the Spanish empire, the first attempt to establish an official town in this area occurred in 1808. The colony was named San Marcos de Neve and consisted of 81 settlers who were led by Felipe Roque de Portilla. Due to floods, droughts, and the war for Mexico's independence from Spain, the town was abandoned by 1812.

In 1831, Juan Martín Veramendi obtained a land grant of 49,000 acres, which included the San Marcos area. The land was never used and remained undeveloped. A federal census conducted in 1850 "listed 41 households and 387 individuals in Hays County, including 259 Whites and 128 slaves. The count was conducted of people "in or about St. Marcos" (Milecam, 2001b, p. 9B). After the passing of Veramendi, his daughters, who inherited the land, sold it. In 1851, three White men William L. Lindsey, Edward Burleson, and Dr. Eli. T Merriman were the first to survey and lay out the town of San Marcos (Bourgeois & Teja, 1996).

A good friend of Edward Burleson, John Pitts, bought 640 acres of land from him and formed a settlement of about eight miles, which was known as Stringtown (Talbot, 1961). Most of the residents of Stringtown were relatives and friends of Pitts from Georgia. When these settlers came to Stringtown they brought with them African American slaves. "African Americans arrived in Hays County at the same time as Anglo settlers, and little is known about their early lives here. The reason is obvious: records of

the area's early history were written by Whites who at that time and for many years afterward saw the slave population as less than equal, and their story as not as worthy of being recorded" (Palomo & Giles, 2001, p. 7B). As slaves, African Americans did not have rights and were viewed and treated as property. Censuses taken during the time show the complete disregard for African Americans. They only reported African Americans under the slave inhabitants section, which only documented the number of slaves owned under each slave owner's name. "The form had no place for such personal information as their names, much less occupation or birthplace" (Milecam, 2001, p. 9B). Because of the complete disregard for African Americans during the time, little is known about their experiences in San Marcos.

In 1861 the Civil War began which halted the growth of San Marcos. When the war ended in 1865 slavery was outlawed and Stringtown vanished. The end of slavery also marked the migration of Mexican people to the area due to the many opportunities for work on the farms and fields. Even though many Mexican people had lived in the area for many years, even before the creation of the United States, their presence is not documented.

The 1870 Census, the first to show the presence of Mexicans, listed 156 Mexican-Americans most of them born in Mexico living in Hays County. Only about 45 of those lived in San Marcos and the rest, farm laborers and their families, were scattered throughout the rural areas. (Palomo, 2001, p. 14B)

The need for workers along with the Mexican political turmoil were the reasons for the steady migration of Mexican people to area. Census records taken in 1880 show

more than a 200% increase in residents who were born in Mexico or were children of recent immigrants from there, from 156 in 1870 to 382, with all but a handful concentrated near Stringtown and south of San Marcos or in the Mountain City area. (Palomo, 2001, p. 15B)

This census marks the first time complete Mexican families were recorded as living in the area. The next migration took place around the time of the Mexican Revolution in 1914. The town continued to grow as more people moved to area (see Figure 5).

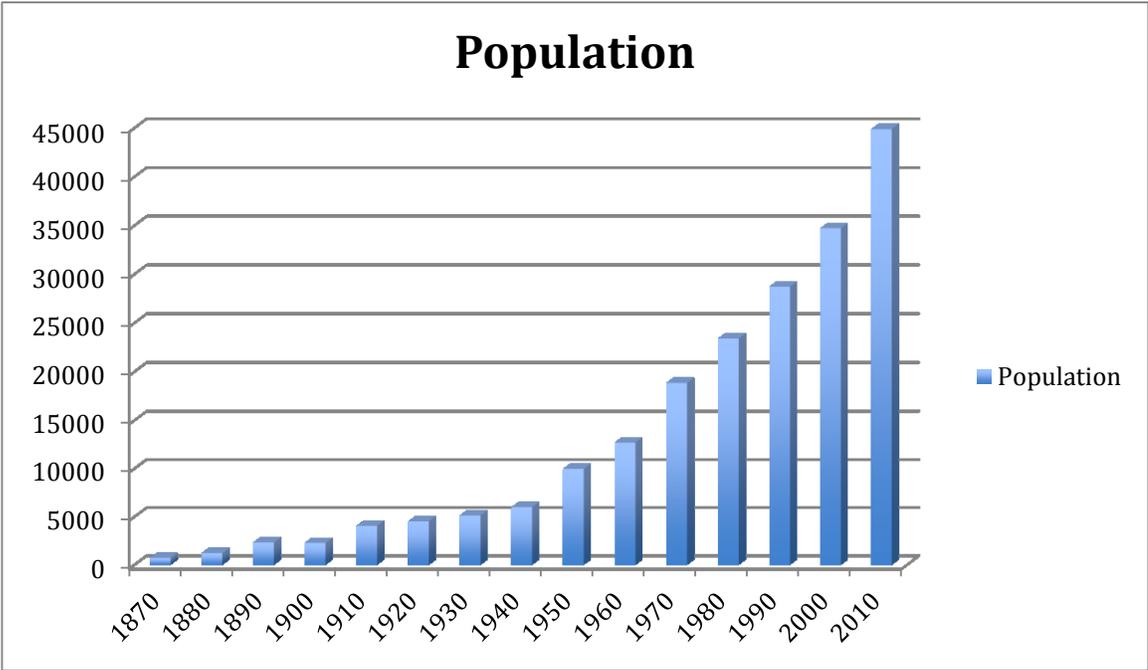


Figure 5. San Marcos Historical Population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

The town has continued to grow since 2010. It was recently named the fastest growing town in the United States for two consecutive years (Rollins, 2013; 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population as of 2014 consists of 54,076 residents, meaning that San Marcos has grown by 9,182 residents, representing a 20.5%

increase (Rollins, 2014). The rapid growth is primarily attributed to an increase in enrollment at Texas State University, a state university that was first established in 1899.

### **San Marcos Stories from the Community**

As Latin@s our stories have often gone unwritten and unacknowledged in the literature despite the long history of Latin@s in the United States. The need for us, as Latin@s, to document and tell our stories is crucial. *Sueños y Recuerdos del Pasado* (Davis, 2000) is the result of a community effort to document the presence and experiences of Mexican Americans in San Marcos since the 1900s. In the preface, Soila Rodriguez writes,

There have been several publications written about the history of San Marcos and Hays County, but nothing about Hispanic contributions. An omission such as this is lamentable because Hispanics have contributed greatly in the development of the social, artistic, economic, and political culture of San Marcos and Hays county. (Davis, 2000, preface)

It would be unjust to ignore the experiences and contributions that Latin@s played in the San Marcos community. To provide a historical context of Latin@s in this community, through the voices of Latin@s is important for me as a Latina scholar. Additionally, this fits with my LatCrit theoretical framework which works to empower and give voice to the Latin@ community. Thus below I provide a collection of stories from Latin@s in the San Marcos community.

#### **Mr. Pedro Garza**

One afternoon, I walked into my colleagues' classroom after all the students had left. When I got there, she was having a conversation with an elderly man, Mr. Pedro

Garza (pseudonym), whom I had never seen before. He was at our school as a substitute custodian for the week. I introduced myself and he resumed his conversation with my colleague. He began to tell us about his niece who used to be a teacher but is now an administrator at a school in South Texas. He talked about how proud he was of her and then he began to tell us how he is so proud to see Spanish-speaking teachers. As he said this, he was filled with emotion, his voice began to crack, and tears ran down his face. He took a moment to regain his composure and told us things were very different when he was growing up. “Back when I was at school there was only one [Latina teacher], Ms. Petra Nicola. Times were very different then, no Spanish speaking people would even graduate from high school.”

Having some experience with the history of the district, I asked him if he had attended Bonham Pre-K center back when it was Southside elementary, the school for Latin@ students. He said yes and we talked for about 30 minutes about what school was like for him and how speaking Spanish at the school was not tolerated.

I was taken aback by the conversation and felt very emotional myself. I could see the pain of his experiences as a Latino student in our district and his genuine happiness to see that things have changed since he was a student. Deeply moved by this experience, I continued to think about the horrible injustices Latin@ students had faced. The district, like most in the country, has a history of segregated schools. “The San Marcos school district was organized in 1876” (Bourgeois & Teja, 1996, p. 35). During the time Anglo children attended school on the Southwest Texas State University Campus. African Americans were not allowed on the campus and had their own school for colored people.

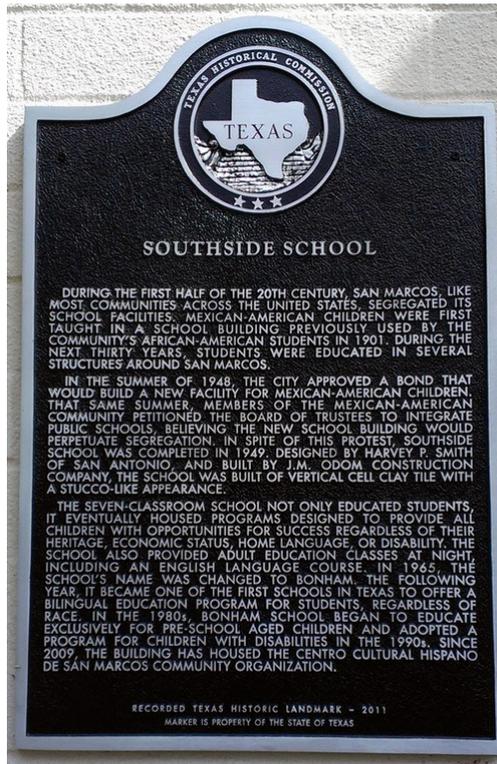
Davis (2000) provides a review of the education for Latin@ students in the

community. Prior to 1901 the district banned Latin@ children from attending city schools. In April of 1901 the *Mexican school*, as it was called, was created by the district to educate Latin@ students in the San Marcos community. The school was housed in the establishment that had previously been used for the African American students. The following year the school was moved to a local church. Aside from having a separate facility, Latin@ students also experienced less access to resources and basic needs. The school lacked running water, an issue that Latin@ citizens brought up to the school board in 1912. Additionally, Latin@ students' native language was not valued and frowned upon. "In November 1919 the school board instructed the principal of the Mexican school to use the English language exclusively both in the classroom and on the grounds" (Davis, 2000, p. 26). In 1925 a new wooden facility was constructed to house the Mexican school due to an increase in the number of Latin@ students. The new school continued to lack running water a request that had been made by Latin@ citizens and continued to be ignored. In 1949, despite protests from the community to integrate schools, the district completed a new school named Southside School. The school was known as the Latin American school and consisted of seven classrooms. One of the first Mexican teachers hired by the district to work at Southside School was Petra Nicola, the teacher Mr. Pedro Garza remembered. "The elementary students were grouped into low and high classes within each grade level, which meant that student often spent as much as nine years at Southside by the time they finished the sixth grade" (Davis, 2000, p. 27). This set up discouraged many students from continuing their education, making it difficult for Latin@ students to graduate from high school. Furthermore, students at this school continued to face discrimination and a lack of adequate resources. They were not

allowed to speak Spanish, just like Mr. Pedro Garza shared. Moreover, during this time bus transportation was provided to Latin@ students. Minnie Flores shared, “there was a bus that came out to pick up one Anglo girl who lived out by us. But the bus would not pick us up and drove right past us” (Renick, 2006, p. 69). Unfortunately, these situations made it difficult for Latin@ students to be successful in school.

Integration of San Marcos schools happened in the 1960s as a result of Brown vs. the Board of Education. The process was slow and very contradictory. Dunbar, which was the school for African Americans, was finally closed in 1964. It was the political agenda of Celestino Mendez, the first Latino to serve on the San Marcos Consolidated school board.

Presently, the Southside School building remains in the community. In 1965 the school’s name was changed to James Bonham to follow the tradition of the other elementary schools that were named after Texas heroes. In 1970, the building housed the district’s first full day pre-k which consists of mostly Latin@ students and continued to do so until 2009. In 2009, the building became the home of Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos, which serves to preserve and promote the history and culture of Latin@s in the community. In April of 2013, the Southside school building received a Texas historical marker to commemorate the history of the building (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Southside School Historical Marker. “Photograph by the author”

Unfortunately, the building is currently in jeopardy. “The San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District board held an executive session during the Jan. 26 [2015] meeting to discuss the possibility of selling 2.5 acres of land the current administration building sits on” (Campos, 2015, p. 1). Although no decision has been made yet, the land is being appraised to determine its value. Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos (Centro), which currently leases the building has not made a decision as to what will happen to the non-profit if the building is sold by the school district. Mrs. Vasquez-Philo, president of Centro said, “We don’t know what is going to happen, but we are definitely still open during our regular business hours” (Campos, 2015, p. 1).

**Mrs. Estella Gómez**

One Friday afternoon in 2013, several teachers and I decided to go out to dinner. As we sat waiting for our food to arrive, we began talking about our frustration with some of the programs at work. Discussing our bilingual program, I brought up the fact that one of the campuses had once been the school for the Mexican students. Only one of my colleagues, Mrs. Estella Gómez (pseudonym) knew about this and she began to share the following story with us,

I don't speak Spanish but I understand it. My parents spoke fluent Spanish but didn't teach us. In 1976 when my mom went to register my older sister at Bonham she witnessed an Anglo teacher discriminate against a Mexican student. The little boy was in the hallway asking to use the restroom in Spanish and the teacher was screaming at him saying she didn't understand him. He was crying and she had no compassion for him, she was being so rude and didn't even try to understand him or help him. At that moment my mom decided to leave the school and enroll my sister in school somewhere else and because of that she never taught us or let us speak Spanish. She did not want us to be treated like that because of our language. So we grew up always hearing Spanish but we were never allowed to speak it.

I was so saddened and upset by what she shared. Like Mr. Pedro Garza, her family had experienced the punishment that Latin@s faced for speaking Spanish in the San Marcos schools. As we continued to talk that night Mrs. Gómez shared how her father had attended school at Southside elementary as a child:

My dad did not even graduate from High school and he is a genius. We all know it was because of the racism that existed in San Marcos; at that time, it was rare for a Mexican student to graduate.

Like many Latin@s in the community, her family's experiences demonstrate the injustice Latin@s faced in school.

**Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez Philo**

I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez Philo for the first time the summer of 2013 while hosting a community meeting for teachers, staff, and community members of the San Marcos school district for a class project at Centro, which Mrs. Vasquez Philo oversees. My professor, Dr. Miguel Guajardo, took the picture below on the day I met her (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7.* Mrs. Ofelia Vazquez Philo and I.

While speaking to her I realized her grandson had been a student in my fifth grade classroom the year before. Furthermore, her son-in-law and I had worked at the same school, and he had been my teaching partner the year before.

“You don’t have to know the answers. The answers come from the people...” (Jacobs, 2003, p. xvii). This quote epitomizes the power that comes from people. A power that often goes unnoticed when relationships and people are not valued or put first. I learned this lesson during the conversation I had with Mrs. Vasquez Philo, a pivotal moment that transformed my role as an educator and as an agent of change. I was so embarrassed that I had never met her before and did not know anything about her despite being the teacher of her grandson and colleague of her son-in-law. This made me realize, I had not developed personal, authentic relationships with her grandson or son-in-law and I knew very little about their personal lives. The power and experiences they brought with them went unnoticed, and because of this, I lost a huge opportunity to discover them for myself and share them with my class. I never knew enough about either of them to tap into important local resources.

As Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez Philo and I engaged in conversation, she shared stories about her experiences in the San Marcos community. She talked about what school was like when she was a child and how that influenced her work and advocacy for Latin@s in the community. Along with the stories she shared, her autobiography has been captured in a documentary titled, *Voices of Hays County History: Ofelia Vasquez-Philo, San Marcos* (Kidd, 2009).

According to Kidd (2009), she was born in Seguin, Guadalupe County, Texas, on December 28, 1932. Although her family originally lived in Seguin, they moved to San Marcos when her father was offered an opportunity to work for Mr. Freeman at the Freeman ranch.

My father agreed because at that time it was during the depression and he was working for WPA in Seguin digging ditches in the streets for one dollar a day. And of course a lot of people were very poor and receiving help during that time and my father did not like that. He would rather work and make ends meet as best as he could rather than stand in line and wait for groceries at the relief program. (Kidd, 2009)

Mrs. Vasquez Philo attended school at St. John's parochial school, a private Catholic school. The tuition was 50 cents a month and sometimes when her family could not afford it, "my mother would sometimes send butter and eggs to the nuns in lieu of the tuition" (Kidd, 2009). Since they lived far from the school, her father would bring her and siblings to town where they stayed with another family during the week, the Gonzalez family.

He would come and pick us up Friday night take us home for the weekend and bring us back Sunday night. We had the most wonderful nuns out of Victoria and they were the Incarnate Word sisters. They were very good, very strict didn't allow us to speak Spanish and told us it was for our own good. I remember I would love to talk a lot and in the playground I would forget and start speaking Spanish since it was my first language. So Sister Agnus would say 'Ofelia you are not supposed to be speaking Spanish you have to learn English. Remember, if you want to learn a lot learn everything you can you have to speak English so I am going to have to send you over to clean the vigil lights. The vigil lights are those little red and white candles by the alters in church and they got really black so I would get handed a cloth with a little oil in and there I would be cleaning the

vigil lights (laughter) as punishment. I would do that for about 15 or 20 minutes and then play again. (Kidd, 2009)

Mrs. Vasquez Philo was able to attend St. Johns parochial school up to the eighth grade, the highest grade it offered. After that, students had to attend the junior high, located on the Texas State University campus because the San Marcos school district had a partnership with the university and was located on campus.

Instead of continuing school, she shared,

My father, I guess like many other Hispanic families, believed that a girl really didn't need that much education. So I was asked by my father to stay home and help mother with the children and with the cooking and all the household chores. And although I loved school very much and I would have liked to keep on, I just decided to abide by his rules and just stayed home as well as my sister. (Kidd, 2009)

It was not until after she married that she decided to finish school. She attended night school for 18 months and received her GED.

Although she did not attend the San Marcos school district herself, she did send her children to public school after the parochial school they attended closed. As a mother she has several problems with the school district.

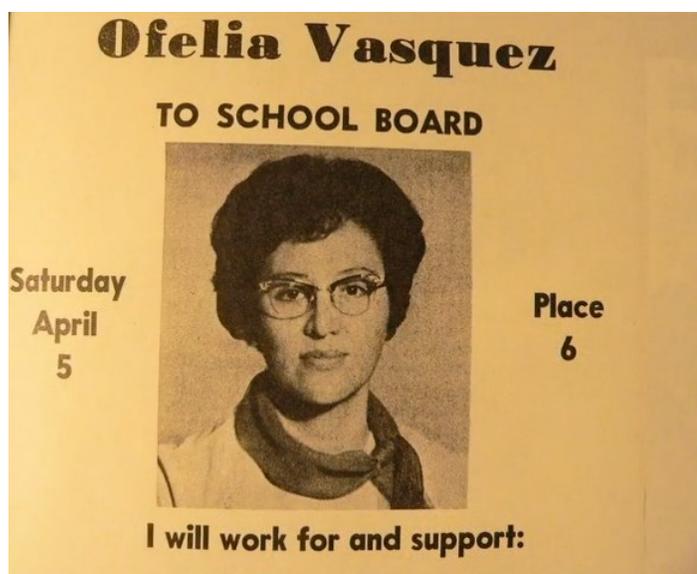
I had a couple of bad experiences with the public school system. One was the fact that I felt that the cheerleader program was a little bit biased in that there were no Hispanic girls in their cheerleader program. Not too many in the band and a lot of it may have been the economics but I also felt that if the school board tried better they could have brought more in.... Also I kept looking for books that had

anything to do with Mexicans or Hispanic history in the library and I could never find any. (Kidd, 2009)

These issues bothered her and other Latin@ community members so much they decided to do something about it. They believed they needed a Latina on the school board. Until then, no Latina female had ever been on the school board. The first Latino male to be elected was Celestino Mendez in 1963.

So we looked around and nobody wanted to do it, nobody wanted to run for the school board (laughter). ‘You do it.’ ‘No I’m a women I can’t.’ ‘No but you can, yes you can.’ ‘You’re more interested in this and in that.’ ‘You’re the right person for it.’ [comments from community members] So I said. ‘Well, okay I guess I am it.’ But I don’t have the money, I don’t have the clothing and several things that I would need. ‘Oh we’ll supply that and we got that.’ ‘We will help you with the campaign.’ (Kidd, 2009)

The community and several organizations such as the League of Women Voters, the Gardenia Club, church organizations, and the American GI Forum helped with the campaign. They offered financial support and helped promote and encourage people to vote for her. The photo below is the campaign flyer that was used to promote Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez during the 1969 election (see Figure 8).



*Figure 8.* Campaign Flyer.

To the surprise of many, she won the election and became the first Latina to serve on the San Marcos school board. As explained in Kidd's (2009) documentary,

These were terrible years because we had the famous boycott, school boycott, during that time. Of course it was controversial because the rest of the school board members felt that the students were violating the law and they wanted to bring in a lawsuit against those board members that had supported the boycott and the people in the community that had supported the boycott. Of course that didn't go anywhere and so eventually we won and things settled down and began to look better. They started hiring more Hispanic teachers and one counselor and more staff in the front office. Things started getting better. They started bringing in textbooks that talked about Hispanic history and things started getting a little better. Yes, three years [in the school board] was enough because it was very time consuming for me.

Even though she chose not to run for school board anymore, Mrs. Vasquez Philo has

been involved in many other projects to document the history of Latin@s in the community. She worked alongside the historical commission team to document the experiences and oral histories of other Latin@s in the book *Sueños y Recuerdos del Pasado* (Davis, 2000). Additionally, she developed the idea for Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos as a way to preserve and celebrate the Latin@ culture. The center opened its doors in 2010 and is located at the old site of Southside School, which once served as the segregated school Latin@ students (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez Philo at Centro Cultural Hispano (Landis, 2012).

Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez Philo is a trailblazer in the community. Her activism and advocacy for Latin@s have had lasting impact on the San Marcos school district and community. She has won many awards and recognitions for her work as a historian, activist, and trailblazer. Her efforts to document the stories and Latin@s in the community serve to remind people of the importance of Latin@s, and contributions they have made in San Marcos.

## **Discussion**

This chapter provides the historical context of the development of the San Marcos community. From the Native Americans who inhabited the area to present day, San Marcos has experienced a steady migration of people, which has caused the town to grow. Moreover, the increase in the Latin@ population has changed the demographics of the town, impacting the demographics of the San Marcos school district as well. To provide more insight into the community, the stories of Mr. Pedro Garza, Mrs. Estella Gómez, and Mrs. Ofelia Vasquez Philo tell the history of the San Marcos community through the eyes and voices of Latin@s. Their stories serve as a reminder of the struggles and obstacles Latin@s have faced in the San Marcos community, school district, and the nation. These stories offer a glimpse into the resiliency and activism of Latin@s and their commitment to social justice.

#### IV. COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF OBSERVABLES

My experiences as a teacher in the San Marcos school district have allowed me to become an insider or a key informant (Patton, 2002) in the district. To explore and gain an understanding of history and our experiences, it is important to utilize methods that are authentic and appropriate to collect our stories and experiences. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). It is this focus on understanding experiences that separates qualitative research from other types of research. Therefore, this study will follow a qualitative approach.

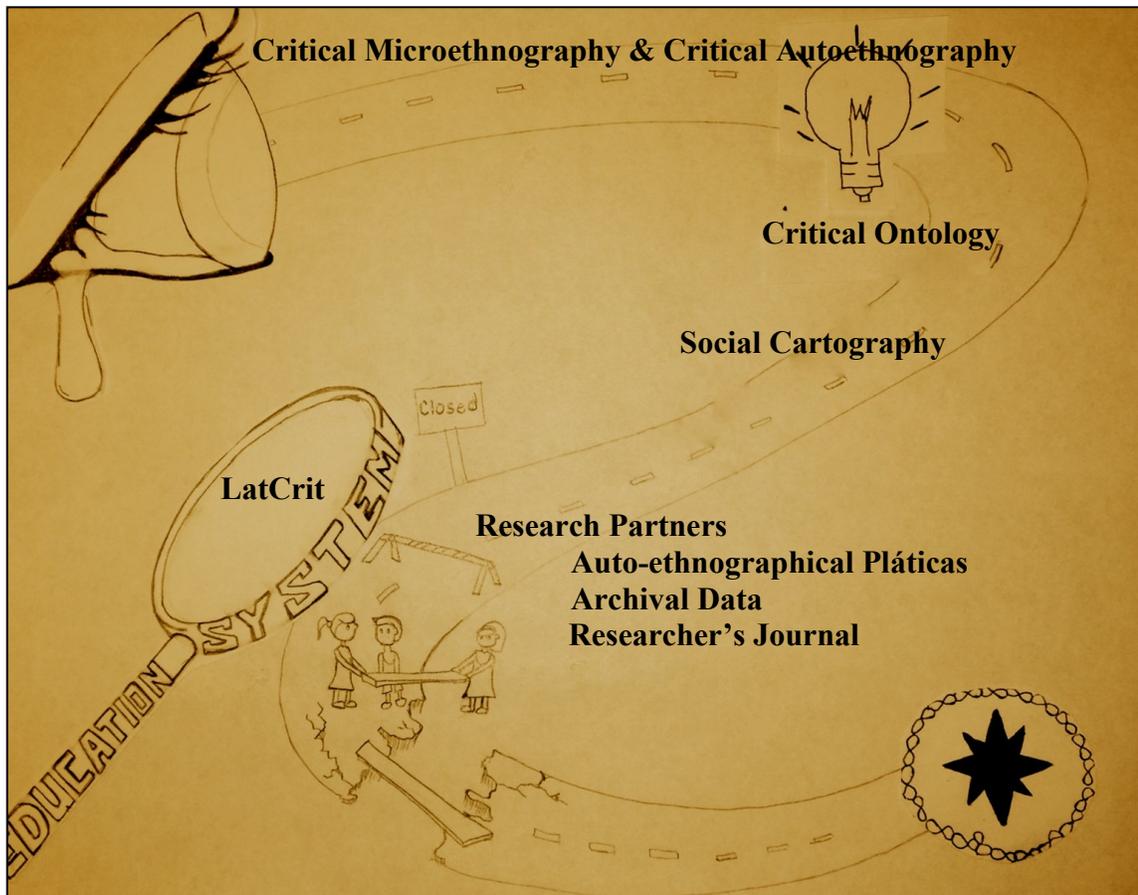


Figure 10. Conceptual Framework.

This map represents the conceptual framework guiding this inquiry (see Figure 10). It provides a guide for the methods for this study. Critical microethnography (Pane & Rocco, 2009) and critical autoethnography (Jones, 2005) are listed at the top as they represent the primary methods for this research method. The lens on the magnifying glass represents LatCrit theory (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004), which is the theoretical framework guiding this work. This lens allows us to explore our educational experiences as Latin@ educators and values the experiential knowledge of communities of color. The light bulb in this case symbolizes the exploration and awareness of our critical ontology as educators, which helps us to explore how power shapes us and how it impacts our view of the world. The three people in the map represent each research partner. Social cartography (Paulston, 1996; Valadez, 1992) is positioned in the center for two reasons. First the conceptual framework itself is a cartographic map developed using social cartography. Second, social cartography will be used to create life maps that present our lives as intergenerational Latin@s over the past century.

### **Critical Microethnography**

Critical microethnography is one of the methods for this study. This method aligns with the focus of my study because of its critical and ethnographical roots. Critical microethnography “provides qualitative, observational, cross-cultural, and ethnographic data” (Pane & Rocco, 2009, p. 8). Originally developed by educational anthropologists Frederick Erickson and Ray McDermott in the 1970s to study discourse analysis (Erickson, 1992; McDermott, 1977; Trueba & Wright, 1981), microethnography now encompasses the analysis of both verbal and nonverbal forms of language (Duranti,

2004).

It builds from a critical epistemology by addressing issues of class, power, and culture (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; McLaren, 2003; Willis, 1977). This is crucial to understanding the critical ontology of educators and getting to the core of how power shapes the world. Furthermore, this method derives from ethnography which “has been defined as the descriptive study of culture” (Spradley, 1979, p. 3), because it provides a way to explore and understand educators within their community contexts (Cazden, 2001; Rist, 1970; Spindler & Spindler, 1994). To capture the culture of the community and school district, I will utilize ethnographic methods to understand the creation and development of both places.

As Latin@ educators within the San Marcos school district, utilizing critical microethnography can prove helpful for us to focus on documenting issues affecting the Latin@ community. Furthermore, this method is useful to explore and make sense of the way power and knowledge play a role in our experiences and meanings that we give to our own practices (Carspecken, 1996).

### **Critical Autoethnography**

This study uses autoethnographic methods that evolved from ethnography by combining characteristics of ethnography and autobiography (Patton, 2002). It is referred to as the *new ethnography* (Goodall, 2000) because it allows researchers to share their personal experiences. Patton (2002) describes it as “the study of one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture and its many variations” (p. 85). Furthermore, Haynes (2011) suggests that autoethnographic narratives and stories may “be used as a means of exploring the epistemology of the self within broader social and cultural narratives” (p.

146). Autoethnography is used in this study to connect our culture and personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This method values our experiences as legitimate research.

Critical autoethnography is about “making the personal political” (Jones, 2005, p. 763). Aligned with the goals of critical research the purpose of critical autoethnography is to be aware of how power shapes various contexts and to “create space for a dialogue and debate that shape social change” (Reinelt, 1998, p. 286). This method allows researchers to explore their lives from a historical and cultural context (George, 2012).

Critical autoethnography gives space for us as researchers to engage in autoethnographical pláticas and to create our own autobiographies. Furthermore, we can interrogate and make sense of our lives from a critical perspective and understand the way our critical ontology informed our work as educators in the San Marcos school district. Guajardo (personal conversation, 2016) proposes this method is especially important when the traditionally observed, the researched, becomes the observer, the researcher; this shift presents an immediate third space that should be explored. This is a strategy to shift the traditional power dynamics to a relational power connection, and sharing one’s own story is a movement towards this space.

Combined, both of these methods allow me to engage in an in-depth study to understand the history of ourselves, the school district, and the San Marcos community. This is a story that captures the culture of the place and combines the experiences of people to bring history to life. These methods privilege the stories of people, especially the Latin@ community, which have often been marginalized. I will harvest, digest, and

present the stories and experiences of people who have been a part of this community for the past century.

### **Research Partners**

In order to capture the ecology and context of the experiences of Latin@s in the San Marcos school district, it was important to collect the intergenerational experiences of Latin@s who were employed by the district and have witnessed the change and shift in the community. Therefore, my research partners for this study will consist of two educators, representing different generations, who worked for the San Marcos district at different times. Both of my partners have worked for the San Marcos district at some point in their careers. Their particular experiences within their schools make them key informants (Patton, 2002) because they will be able to provide insight about their particular school environments during different periods in time. The three of us range in age between 28 and 81; we were each born in a different generation, and began working for the San Marcos school district in different time periods (see Table 6). Collectively we have twenty-nine years of experience working in the district.

I came to know about my first research partner when searching through archival data. His name, Frank Contreras, came up as the first Latino principal in the San Marcos school district. I was intrigued to learn more about Frank and his experiences, therefore he was the perfect research partner for this study. My second research partner, María Soledad de García, (pseudonym) and I have known each other for the past four years. We met while working at the same elementary campus. After getting to know a little bit about her and her experiences within the district, I was also fascinated to know more about her life and experiences.

The curiosity that I had about both Frank and María along with the following purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) criteria: (a) self-identify themselves as Latin@, (b) worked for the San Marcos district, and (c) born in different generations made Frank and María excellent choices as my research partners.

Table 5  
*Research Partner Information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Birth Year</b>	<b>Present Age</b>	<b>Began Working at SMCISD</b>	<b>Years at SMCISD</b>
Frank Contreras	1934	81	1965	5 + 15 (as a student) = 20
*María Soledad de García	1970s	mid 40s	late 1990s	about 20
Yvette Cantú	1987	28	2009	7

\*Pseudonym

After using purposeful sampling to identify the educators I wanted to invite to become my research partners for the study, I contacted them personally to invite them to participate in the study. I met with each person individually, to discuss the specifics of the study and reviewed the informed consent form with them (see Appendix A). Official consent to participate in the study was given by both of my research partners. Mr. Frank Contreras is a public figure of whom I learned about through historical research. He chose to use his real name instead of a pseudonym in the study, therefore his real name and photos are included. For protection, María, was given a pseudonym and her photos are pixilated.

Although the three of us serve as the primary focus of this research study, this study includes the stories and experiences of other members of the San Marcos community. The inclusion of these stories is deliberate and consistent with the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo, et al., 2012; Guajardo et al., 2016) which includes the self,

organization, and community. The additional stories are other foci from the organization and community level. Furthermore, they serve as witnesses and part of the triangulation of this work.

### **Observables**

The following observables were used as data for this study. To collect and understand the stories of our lived experiences, it is extremely important to use methodologies and data collection methods that are responsive and congruent with the research questions. Guajardo and Guajardo (2013) write, “pláticas might be called dialogue, conversation, or perhaps storytelling but in our Mexican-American cultural or historical context we are much more drawn to plática” (p. 163). Pláticas consist of a dialogical framework where two people are engaged in conversation to provide opportunities to co-construct spaces while getting to know one another (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). Pláticas are the natural method we watched and used to tell stories throughout our lives, from my mom and aunts sitting around the living room platicando to my abuelita sharing her stories with me as a child. Pláticas are a natural and authentic way to communicate therefore, this data collection tool allowed us to document our stories in a manner that is authentic to our upbringing and “makes sense to us culturally, politically, ontologically, and epistemologically” (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). Stories are how people make sense of themselves and their worlds (Shannon, 1995). It is through this method, that my research partners and I will share our experiences and stories with each other.

### **Autoethnographical Pláticas**

Each research partner and I engaged in four, sixty-minute face-to-face pláticas to

share stories about our life growing up, our history, and our experiences of schooling during our lifetime. These pláticas, served as a way to dialogue with each other and remember, retell, and recollect our life histories. A list of guiding questions for the pláticas about our teaching and personal experiences were prepared, (see Appendix B) however, since pláticas are organic conversations, we were not bound to these questions. The questions served as a springboard to have the conversations. We also engaged in a fifth, and final, group two-hour plática where we shared our life maps and observables and helped to make sense of the themes that emerged (see Appendix F). There was space for my research partners and I to dialogue about other issues that surface. In addition, due to the dialogical nature of pláticas, I shared just as much information with my research partners as they did with me. I audio recorded every plática, for transcription purposes and data analysis.

### **Archival Data**

In addition, archival data was collected prior to the implementation of the study to provide an accurate picture of the town and the Latin@ community. I collected archival data from primary sources, such as newspapers, U.S. census information, Texas Education agency reports, school board meetings, and school annuals. Throughout the study I also collected photographs, documents, journals, and artifacts, the research partners wanted to share in order to tell their story. Anthropologists traditionally refer to these items as material culture (Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands, & Spyer, 2006) because they have special historical or cultural meaning. The archival data collected were used to create life maps.

Social cartography (Paulston, 1996; Valadez, 1992) a form of mapping, was used

to help us tell our story through the use of various artifacts such as photographs, documents, journals, pláticas, and other engagement processes. This mapping presents our lives as intergenerational Latin@s over the past century. In addition, the life maps were layered with information that included the context of our lives and our roles as public educators and citizens in the city of San Marcos. The life maps were shared during our final two-hour plática and were used to spark pláticas about our experiences as Latin@ educators.

### **Researcher's Journal**

I kept a researcher's journal throughout the study to collect observations and field notes. I documented observations and notes during and after our pláticas in my journal. In addition, the journal allowed me to reflect on our pláticas, observations, artifacts, and life maps. Janesick (1999) writes about the importance of a research journal as a way to “refine the understanding of the responses of participants in the study” (p. 56). My journal also served as a place where I documented my ideas and included any further questions or areas to explore. Furthermore, the journal helped me make sense of the data. In conclusion the journal served as “a checks and balance in the entire course of the qualitative research” (Janesick, 1999, p. 521).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers are continually searching for patterns, rhythm, flow, critical moments, stories, and symbols and they look for evidence that explains the existence and meaning of these (Bernard, 1995). As a result of the multiple layers of data collected, data analysis was ongoing throughout the exploration of observables and collection stages (Merriam, 2009). The different layers of data were analyzed using an

inductive approach to make sense of the collected data (Merriam, 2009). More information about each phase of analysis is provided below.

### **Archival Data Analysis**

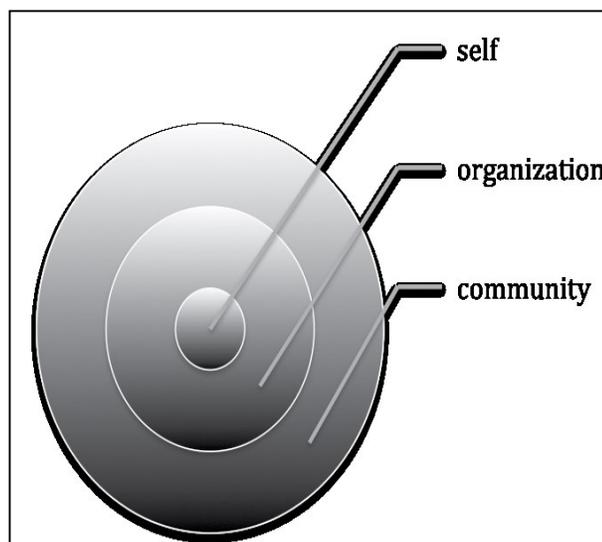
The first phase of analysis focused on the archival data that were collected for this study. For these data, two layers of analysis were implemented. The first layer involved collecting the history of the development of the San Marcos community. This included reading through historical books about San Marcos, census data, newspaper articles, and archival data. Data gathered from these sources were organized in a linear format to develop a timeline of the development of San Marcos. The same process was then repeated for the second layer, which consisted of data collected about the development of the San Marcos school district.

### **Autoethnographical Pláticas Analysis**

The second phase of analysis consisted of the autoethnographical pláticas. These were initially analyzed inductively to uncover themes. Each plática was read individually and coded for themes. After they were coded, I compared the themes to the five essential themes of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) theory which include, (a) intersectionality of race and racism, (b) challenge to the dominant ideology, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color, and (e) a transdisciplinary perspective. If the theme was an example of one of the five LatCrit themes, I recorded the specific LatCrit theme as well. Once all pláticas were coded, they were then juxtaposed and in some instances, the individual themes were grouped into larger themes. This helped me identify any common themes that emerged among all of our stories.

## **Sense Making**

To make sense of all the data collected, I needed to find a way to organize and identify the connection between all of my data sets. Therefore, I utilized the ecologies of knowing framework (Guajardo et al., 2012; Guajardo et al., 2016) to organize the data collected (see Figure 11) and provide an additional layer of analysis. The ecologies of knowing are useful to “make sense of our role as agents of change at the three levels of self, organization, and community” (Guajardo et al., 2012, p. 20). The three layers associated with ecologies of knowing were used to analyze and organize data. These layers provide a micro to macro understanding of our experiences and provide context for this research.



*Figure 11.* Ecologies of Knowing.

During the analysis process, I developed the following matrix (see Table 6) to combine all the layers of my analysis into one chart. The matrix helped me organize and make sense of the five pláticas and all the archival data collected.

Table 6  
*Data Analysis Matrix*

<b>Research Partner:</b>	<b>LatCrit Tenets (Solórzano &amp; Bernal, 2001)</b>				
Ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012)	Tenet 1 Centrality & intersectionality of race and racism	Tenet 2 Challenges the dominate ideology	Tenet 3 Commitment to social justice	Tenet 4 Centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color	Tenet 5 Trans-disciplinary perspective
Self					
Organization: San Marcos CISD					
Community: Local & United States					

First, I used the ecologies of knowing framework to analyze data about ourselves as individual research partners. I placed themes that emerged from the pláticas in this category. Then I included information about the organization, which, in this case was the San Marcos school district. Data for this row were taken from both the autoethnographical pláticas and my historical data. In the final layer, the community, I recorded relevant information from both the autoethnographical pláticas and historical data. I also recorded examples from the autoethnographical pláticas and historical data that matched any of the five tenets of LatCrit, in the appropriate row (see Appendix G, H, and I). This framework was then used to develop a life map using social cartography (Paulston, 1996; Valadez, 1992).

### **Creating a Museum**

In September of 2016 I had the privilege of visiting Santiago, Chile as part of an international. During this trip, I visited the GAM Centro Gabriela Mistral where I had

the opportunity to tour exhibit titled *Chile Desde Adentro*, which is based on the book by the same title, by Meiselas (1991). The exhibit captured the story of Chile during the dictatorship of Arturo Pinochet from 1973 to 1988. Not knowing much about Chile, I was intrigued to learn more about the history of their government. As I walked through the exhibit, the walls were filled with photographs, artifacts, and videos; I was mesmerized. Through these visuals, the exhibit captured the oppressive conditions of the dictatorship and the political activism and resiliency of the Chileans, which eventually led to the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of a democratic Chile. The exhibit was so powerful because it captured both the historical events and the experiences of people who lived during that time. I was captivated by the power of visuals to capture and tell stories.

I wanted to create a chapter that honored our experiences and told our story in a way that engaged the reader more actively. My chapter was bland and I was stuck. I struggled with how to best represent our story in a way that was dynamic and honored our personal stories, the story of the organization, and the story of the community. How could I as an ethnographer and a storyteller capture and paint our story in a powerful way? As I expressed my frustration during a conversation with my colleague, Patricia Rocha, she listened intently, and then said “How about an exhibit?” Confused at first with her response, I replied, “Tell me more.” She responded, “You know like an exhibit in a museum that portrays the story of your dissertation.” In that moment I instantly visualized the exhibit in Chile. I remembered the exhibit vividly, the power of images and artifacts that captured the history and the experiences of people, but most importantly the emotions and feelings experienced as I walked the halls of the exhibit. In that

moment of clarity, I knew that creating a museum was the perfect way to present our stories.

Social cartography (Paulston, 1996; Valadez, 1992) was used to create a living museum as a way to present the research findings of this study. The creation of a museum aligns with social cartography (Paulston, 1996) because it allowed me to map our story through the use of artifacts. The artifacts serve as visual images of the museum titled *San Marcos Desde Adentro*. The visuals for the museum were selected after analyzing the data and present the common themes that emerged among all of our stories. The creation of the museum is a form of mapping that presents our lives as intergenerational Latin@s over the past century. Furthermore, it is used as a way to disrupt the traditional method of presenting data and to honor and privilege the stories of our lives.

Inspired by Francis' (2014) use of ethnodrama to present his data as dialogue between his research partners, I borrow this concept to add richness to our museum. The dialogue between the three of us is derived from the transcripts of our pláticas. The transcripts included are true to our individual pláticas, but have been woven together and are presented as a single conversation, in much the same way individual yarns are woven together to create a single tapestry. They have been altered in very few instances, solely for grammatical purposes, or transitional phrases to fit the flow of dialogue. My reason for including this dialogue is two-fold. First, including the dialogue is a way to privilege the voice of my research partners and their power as storytellers. Second, the dialogue serves a form of narration, providing captions, if you will, for the pieces in our museum.

## **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Various efforts were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. First of all, the use of both critical microethnography and critical autoethnography as methods for this study served as a way to collect the most robust form of data. This ensured that the data collected came from multiple sources, increasing the trustworthiness and credibility of the data. Moreover, my prolonged engagement with my research partners, which lasted over ten months, fostered the relationships that we developed. This allowed us to engage in genuine and authentic pláticas because we had developed a trusting relationship with one another and were able to share deeply personal information with each other. In addition, I utilized triangulation to ensure the accuracy of the data. “Triangulation, using multiple sources of data, means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives, or from follow up interviews with the same people” (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). Therefore, the archival data and transcripts of the pláticas were cross-checked with the artifacts, life maps, and my researcher’s journal. Furthermore, I conducted member checks with my research partners throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure validity and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the individual and group pláticas, I shared findings and interpretations with my research partners to solicit feedback to ensure that my interpretations were accurate. Maxwell (2005) shared,

Member checking is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective

they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own bias and misunderstanding of what you observed (p. 111).

Through member checks, my research partners helped to co-construct and make meaning of the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Procedures required for ethical research (Patton, 2002) were followed and permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted before data collection began. First of all, archival data were collected from publically available documents such as books, newspapers, U.S. census information, Texas Education Agency reports, school board meetings, and school annuals. These sources were used because they are all open access records, available to the public, thus ensuring the creditability of these data.

Detailed information about the study and risks were discussed with both of my research partners before they gave informed consent. One of my research partners decided to use his real name and photographs in the study, and written permission about his decision to do so was also gathered. My other research partner was given a pseudonym to prevent identifiable information being used to connect her to this study since she is still an employee of school district. Further, her photographs are pixilated to prevent anyone from identifying her. In addition, the audio recordings of pláticas were used strictly for educational purposes (see Appendix A).

### **Tensions**

This study portrays our courage as three Latin@s in the community who were willing to be open and share our story with the world. This demonstrates our willingness to be vulnerable in sharing intimate and powerful moments of our lives with each other

and with the readers. This vulnerability is not grounded in hopelessness, but fuels the courage that stems from our faith in the transformational power of storytelling and our ability to imagine a better San Marcos.

This is a testament of our commitment to social justice and our passion for improving the system of education for children, families and teachers in our community. My research partners and I share our lives and experiences, because we have hope for a better tomorrow. We use our agency to speak up and do so with the hope this can be used to impact change in the San Marcos school district and community. Our hope is that San Marcos students receive the best education and grow up in a community that is supporting and caring of all its residents. Moreover we share our story because we know that it is necessary to understand and learn ways in which we can improve the educational experiences of Latin@ educators, Latin@ students, and leaders nationwide.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study is unique because it targets and combines two gaps in the literature, Latin@ educators' experiences and the exploration of critical ontology. Both of these topics are underrepresented in the literature and learning more about each area can contribute to school improvement initiatives. Moreover, the use of critical microethnography and critical autoethnography, represent innovative methods in educational research. Combined, these methods contributed to a dynamic and complex research study, which focused on understanding the experiences of Latin@s, within the cultures of the organization, community, and nation. As such this study called for collecting multiple sources of data in order to capture the history and stories of people and places at both the macro and micro level. Thus resulting in the creation of a museum

titled *San Marcos Desde Adentro* to present the findings. Combined, all these contribute to the innovation and strength of this study.

This study is relevant because it addressed the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, which focuses on Latin@ Educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The purpose of this initiative is to aid in the transformation of the education field so that it is more representative of the changing demographics of its students. Therefore, contributing in the recruitment and retention of Latin@ educators is imperative. This study answers the call of this initiative and makes a strong contribution to the field of educational leadership by focusing on this urgent school improvement plan. My aim is to increase the body of literature on Latin@ educators in hopes of expanding the presence and persistence of Latin@s in the fields of teaching and leadership. Information about Latin@ educators can inform teacher and leadership preparation programs and professional development strategies for existing teachers. To this end, this study offers an avenue that can contribute to the diversification of the education profession. Additionally, this study contributes to the local history of the San Marcos community and school district. It provides implications of practice for educators and celebrates the contributions of outstanding Latin@s in both the community and school who have pushed both spaces to be more inclusive and for Latin@ students.

## V. SAN MARCOS DESDE ADENTRO

By combining autoethnography and social cartography (Paulston, 1996), I have crafted a life map of our story, thus creating a living museum of our lives as three Latin@ educators in San Marcos, Texas. This museum provides an insight into our experiences through artifacts we have collected over our lifetime such as photographs, documents, and journals. In addition, the museum also includes artifacts that were acquired through archival research such as newspaper articles and school board meeting minutes. As researcher partners, Frank, María, and I have served as the curators of this life-long museum. To capture the complete story of our lives, our museum also includes the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012; Guajardo et al, 2016) to provide context to our lives and to paint a complete picture of the world we have lived in. Artifacts in our museum also include the history of the organization, which provides the story of the San Marcos school district. In addition, some artifacts encompass the community, to provide a macro perspective of the major events that were significant in both in the San Marcos community and in the United States. This is necessary to capture the complete story of our experiences during the last hundred years.

This museum captures the collective and individual experiences of Frank, María, and me. The purpose of the museum is to share our experiences and story in a way that captures the history and spirit of our lives. Our hope is that this museum contributes to the preservation of the history of the San Marcos school district and community, and that it can be used to spark dialogue and change for the community.

## About the Curators



*Figure 12.* Frank Contreras.

Frank Contreras is currently 81 years old and a native of San Marcos, Texas. He was a graduate of San Marcos High School, class of 1955. After graduating from Texas State University he began his teaching career, working for Del Rio Independent school district. In 1965, he joined the San Marcos school district as an elementary teacher. A year later, 1966, he became the first Hispanic principal in the history of the San Marcos school district. Under his administration at Bonham Elementary (previously named Southside Elementary), he began the first bilingual program, one of only two in the state of Texas. In 1970 he left to become the Chief Consultant for the Division of Technical Assistance for School District Desegregation at the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Six years later, he became Division Director for Migrant Education at TEA and then in 2000, he joined Texas State University as Director for the Center for Migrant Education. Mr. Contreras retired in 2012, but continues to be active in the San Marcos community through his involvement with local organizations. He currently serves on the board of the Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos and is a member of the San Marcos City Park Commission. In 2008, he was recognized as a distinguished alumni of San Marcos High

school and in 2014, he was honored by the City of San Marcos as a Modern Day Trailblazer.



*Figure 13.* María Soledad de García.

María Soledad de García was born and raised in South Texas. After graduating from high school she moved to San Marcos, Texas, to attend Southwest Texas State University. She was the first person in her family to receive a college degree. After graduating, she began her career as an elementary bilingual teacher. She has worked for the San Marcos school district for the close to twenty years. She is an extremely talented teacher who cares about each and every one of her students both in and out of the classroom. Her expertise and leadership have helped her become a teacher leader at the multiple campuses where she worked. Furthermore, she is an advocate for bilingual students and families. She is passionate about improving education for bilingual students, and is currently completing her master's degree in Educational Leadership. She plans to further her education and pursue a doctoral degree in the near future. María currently lives in San Marcos with her husband and children, is an active member of the community.



*Figure 14. Yvette Cantú.*

Yvette Cantú is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. She was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley. After graduating salutatorian of the Santa Maria High School graduation class of 2005, she moved to San Marcos to attend Texas State University. In 2009, she became the first person in her family to receive a college degree. She began her teaching career in the San Marcos Consolidated school district in 2009, as an elementary school teacher. In 2012, she became an elementary Gifted and Talented facilitator after completing her master's degree with a focus on Talent Development. Her expertise and effectiveness have led to her being recognized as the 2014 State of Texas Rising Star Teacher of the Gifted, by the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, for her commitment to diversifying and making the gifted and talented program more representative of the Latin@ population.

### **Museum: San Marcos Desde Adentro**

What follows is the weaving of our collective story presented through a museum titled *San Marcos Desde Adentro*. We invite you, the reader, to follow us on a walk through our museum. The three of us will guide you through the museum and will serve as narrators engaged in conversation as we tour the pieces in our museum.

The first piece is our museum is our collective life map (see Figure 15), which includes our individual life maps embedded into the ecologies of knowing. Aside from our lives, the map also captures the history of the San Marcos school district, community, and the nation. The map captures about 140 years of history.

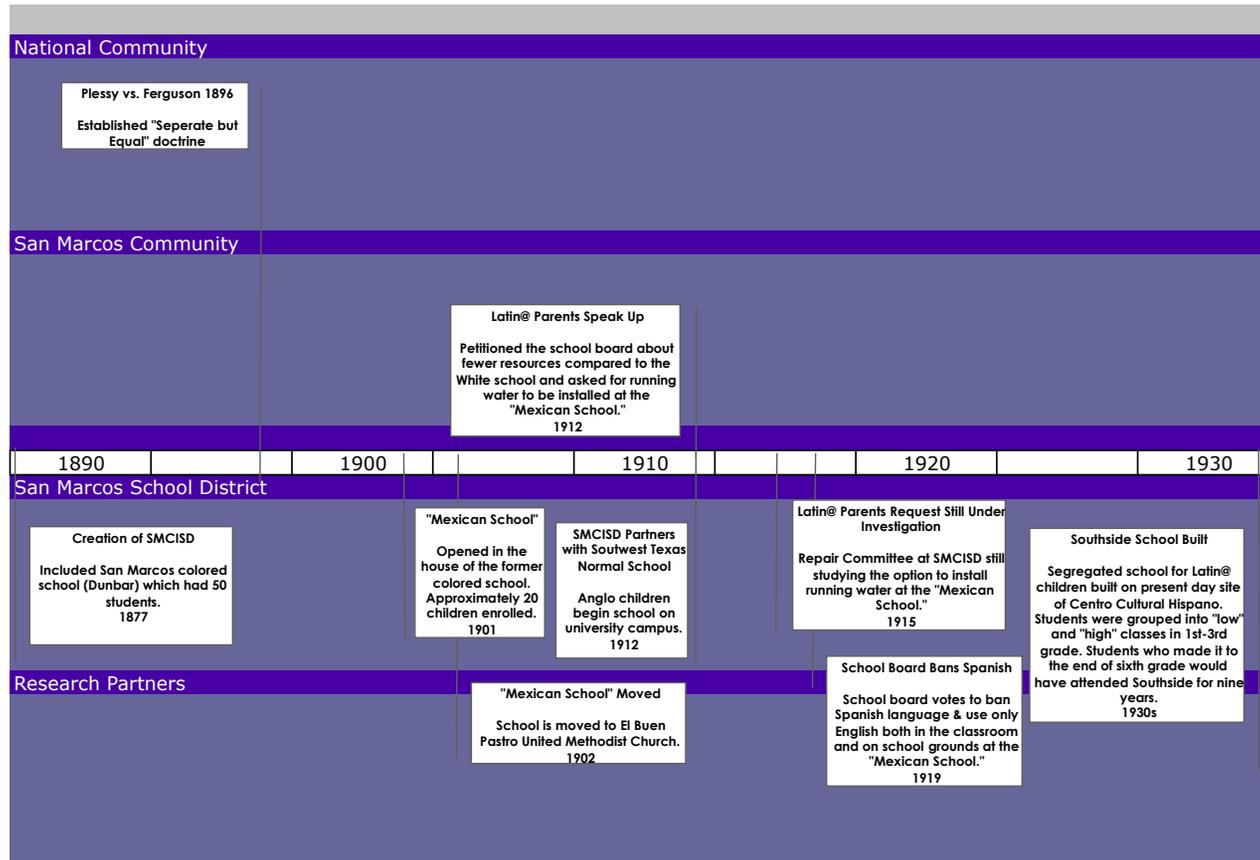


Figure 15. Collective Life Map.

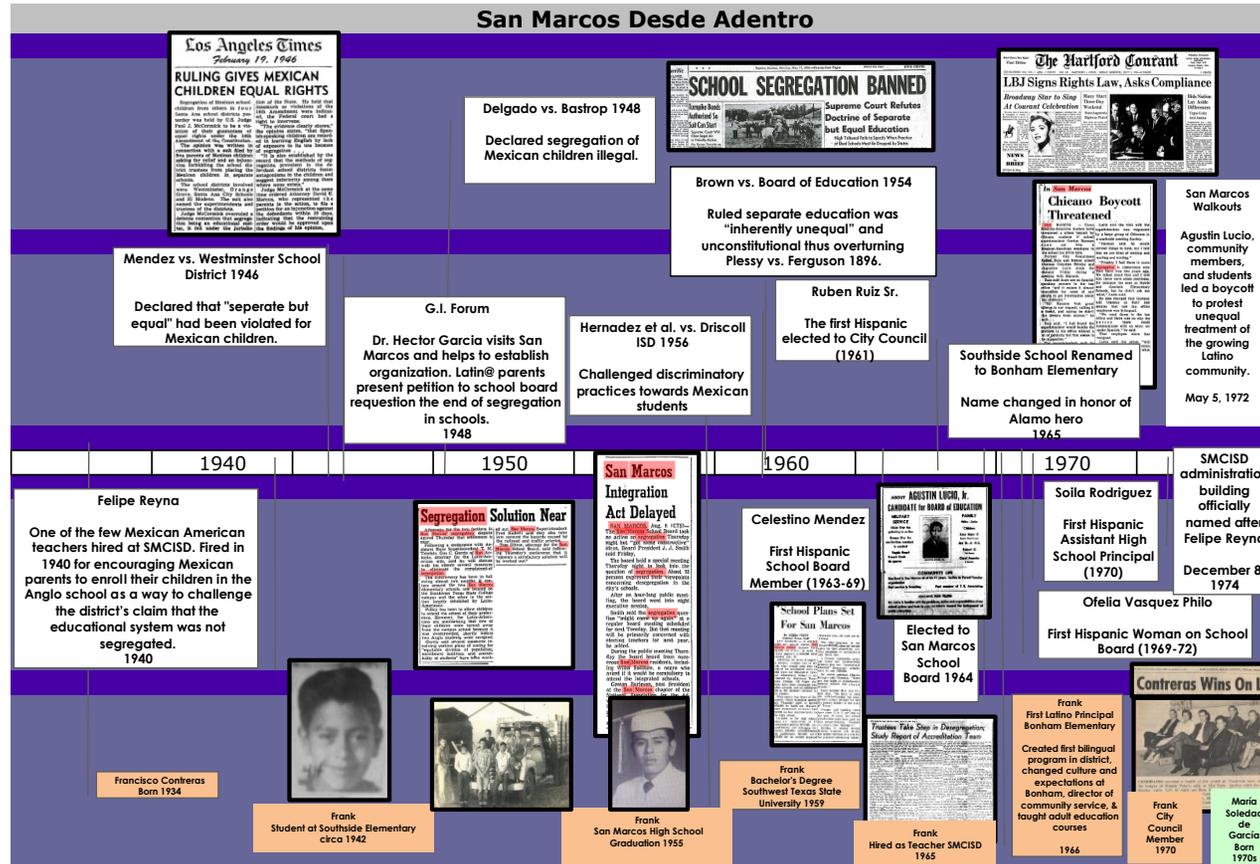


Figure 15. (cont'd.)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (Ruling Gives Mexican Children Equal Rights, 1946); (Segregation Solution Near, 1948); (School Segregation Banned, 1954); (San Marcos Integration Act Delayed, 1955); (LBJ Signs Right Law, Asks Compliance, 1964); (Agustin Lucio Jr., 1964); (Trustees Take Steps in Desegregation: Study Reports of Accreditation Teams, 1964); (School Plans Set for San Marcos, 1964)

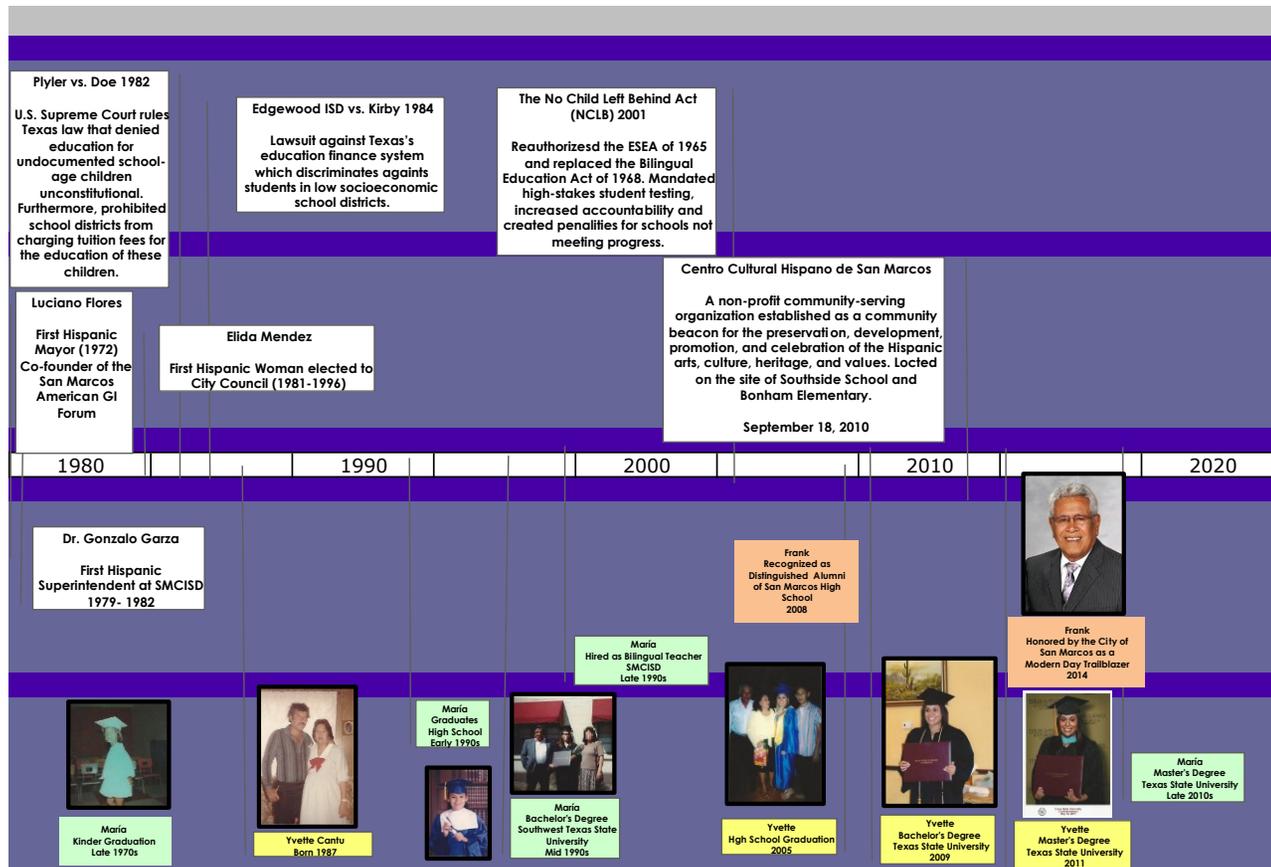


Figure 15. (cont'd.)

(Contreras Wins Last on the Box, 1969); (In San Marcos: Chicano Boycott Threatened, 1971)

## Nuestras Raíces



Figure 16. Border Crossers. “Photograph by the author”

Frank: Let me begin by mentioning my parents and my family. We are nine siblings, five brothers and four sisters. My father, Francisco Contreras, was from Mexico from the state of Guanajuato. He immigrated when he was about 14 or 15 years old.

Yvette: My roots are also in Mexico. This photo brings back so many memories of crossing the international bridge as a child when my family and I would walk across to Mexico. At about the halfway point on the bridge, this sign was posted to mark the international border on the water that separates Mexico from the United States. It is a reminder of my family’s journey and of where I come from. This picture represents, *la tierra de oportunidades*... a place that many immigrants like my parents idolized; the idea that in the United States anything could be accomplished through hard work. So they left Mexico, their native land, in search of the American Dream. And because of that choice, I was born and raised in the tiny border town of Santa María, Texas. Most of the citizens of Santa María were Mexican immigrants who came to the U.S. in search of a better life. Growing up listening to stories about my family’s journey made me appreciate and value all the opportunities I had.

María: My family, from what I know, was not from Mexico, they did not immigrate here from Mexico. I don't know how they ended up in South Texas, but everyone assumes that because I am Hispanic, I came from Mexico.

I have a neighbor who is German, and sometimes we used to disagree because at first, she would ask me, "What do you do for the holidays? Do you go visit your family in Mexico?" Offended I responded, "No, my family is not from Mexico, I don't have family there. My family has always been in the United States. I think my family lived in this area when it was part of Mexico." She would say, "Well you are Mexican!" I do wonder about my roots, but have always called myself Hispanic. Just recently when everybody began using the word Mexican-American and Latina, I began to use those terms too because I identify myself with those terms as well.

### **Nuestra Comunidad**



*Figure 17.* Our Community. "Photograph by the author"

Frank: My mother, Apolinaria Lucio, was born and raised here, in San Marcos. We lived on a farm just east of what is now the Embassy Suites. All of that area was agriculture, we planted cotton and corn, primarily *maíz* west of Hunter Road. I was born in 1934, on the Marcos Jackson farm. Several years later we moved closer to downtown

in the old *Mexicano* neighborhood on the south part of the river. We lived very close to Southside elementary, which is now the Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos. That's where I grew up; it was part of my *querencia*, my love.

We were forced to move out of there by the county under a program named urban renewal, however the north side of the river remained as residential land, which is where the Anglos lived. We had prime land, we were so close to the river, my sister even had a waterfront property. During that time, there was one person that I knew who challenged the law, but at that time, my parents, and others thought, "well, *es el gobierno*." They believed they were powerless against the government but if we had been organized and challenged it, I know there would be properties on both sides of the San Marcos river, not just one side. Now you know why properties are only one side of the river.

I remember there was a flood at the early stages of that project. There was a big flood, and water went inside our houses about three or four feet. All the roads and pavements were washed off during the flood. The city was already beginning to take that land away from us because I remember my parents wanted to fix our house but we had to get a building permit and they would not issue building permits. They would not fix the streets. This went on for several years before urban renewal became a reality. By the time they bought us out, the value of the land had decreased significantly. I now live on the North part of the river and it is very expensive to get property there, gosh, we had such a prime property! I have memories of spending summers there; we would go swim in the river. That was our recreation after school. It was all a wooded area, by the banks, and we didn't have any swimsuits, so we would go skinny-dipping! This is a memory that makes me bitter.

María: Wow Frank, you know so much about the history of the community since you grew up here. I did not grow up in San Marcos. I came to San Marcos because I felt like I had to leave South Texas. I was the only one left at home, my brothers and sisters had already left and I know why they left, because they did not want to deal with the stress of my father's mental illness. I felt really guilty and I almost did not go to college because I didn't want to leave my mom alone. I was really scared to leave my mom alone but I did it anyway because I had friends who were going. When I was going to school, no one ever said, "go to school, you're smart." Everybody knew our family; they knew that my brothers didn't finish school, so I think school staff thought let's not waste time on her. My sister, they knew she graduated number 11 in her class. She was really smart, she could have gone to any college, but she chose not to. So, really no one encouraged me to go to college. I just had one friend that was going to Southwest Texas State and I said, "I'm going to go too." [Laughter] That's how I ended up in San Marcos in the early 1990s. Now I have lived here for about 25 years, so I consider myself a local.

Yvette: My story is similar to yours María. My decision to leave the Rio Grande Valley for college and attend Texas State University was due to a recruiter who visited my local high school and took several of my peers and me to visit the campus. Given the historical context of the university, as a teacher preparation school, and my desire to become an educator it was the perfect place to study. So I decided that I would move in the Fall of 2005 and become the first person in my family to attend college and earn a degree. I remember my parents were not really sure of my decision and highly encouraged me attend a university closer to home. My Tia María who was a graduate of Southwest Texas State University came one afternoon to my house to speak to my

parents about letting me go. She had even called one of her friends at the University who worked in the technology department and who offered to give me a work study job so I would have extra money when I came. My parents eventually agreed, and I came to San Marcos in August of 2005 and have lived here since.

## Segregación

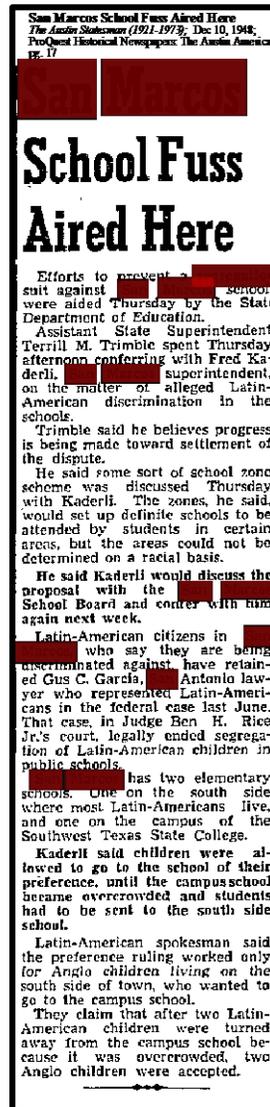


Figure 18. Segregation (San Marcos School Fuss, 1948)

Frank: I went to school at what was then Southside Elementary, which is now where the Centro Cultural is located. At that time the district was segregated and there

were three different schools. Campus Elementary, which was located on the Southwest Texas University campus, was for the Anglo children, Southside was the school for Mexican students, and Dunbar Elementary was the school for African Americans. There were three separate wooden buildings at Southside. Two houses, each housed two classrooms, and there was a building, a barrack, that had about six classrooms.

Going to first grade, my very first year of school in 1940, was very traumatic. Because I was the youngest, my sisters tried to prepare me to go to school on the first day. They would say “the first thing the teacher is going to ask you is ‘what’s your name’ so let’s practice that.” We would practice, and I would say ‘Frank.’ On the first day of school, the teacher asked me my name and I blacked out. I was afraid of the teacher, so I wouldn’t say anything. My name on my birth certificate is Francisco Lucio Contreras Jr. but at school they changed it to Frank Contreras because it was too long, so ever since that time I became Frank.

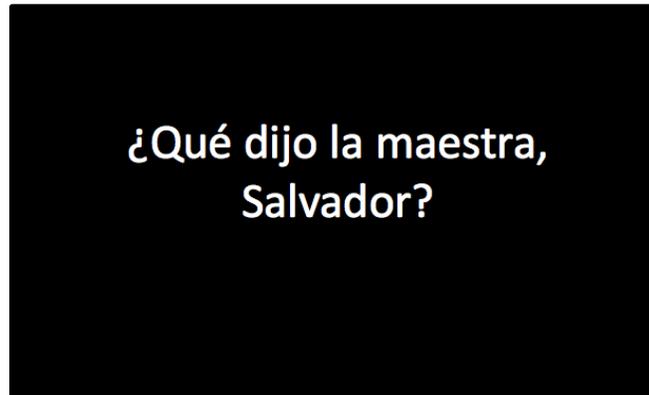
At Southside there were as many as 50 to 60 students per classroom so there were not enough desks for us. There was no desk for me. I would sit in the back of the room on an apple crate. There were not enough books or materials, so we did the best we could. As an adult I found out that during that time, the state financial support for a school was based on the number of students identified through a census not average daily attendance like it is today. The census consisted of the number of children who were of school age from each family in San Marcos and based on that, the school district would receive money from the state. So the school district was earning money for all the students at Southside year round, yet we didn’t have enough furniture, we didn’t have enough supplies; we didn’t have any of those things. The ugliest memory that I have is

of the restrooms. There was no sewage so our restrooms were outside. There were holes in the ground where one would sit, awful, awful, awful, *gusanos y todo* [worms and all].

Yvette: I can't even imagine how difficult it must have been for you Frank. I feel so sad that this community has this history of school segregation and no one really knows or talks about it. I have lived in this community since 2005 and have taught in this school district for a number of years and just found out about it recently. Your story and the story of many others who attended Southside is so important and so valuable. We need to share this so that it helps people in this community heal from the pain. It is important to acknowledge the discrimination and segregation that occurred so that people understand the narrative that shaped this community and so we can begin to honestly move forward in this community.

María: I had no idea about the events that transpired here either. As a matter of fact, my first job was at Bonham, the school where Southside once stood. In the late 1990s, when I graduated from college, a job opened at Bonham for a teacher's assistant (TA) position. I was trying to find a job while I figured out what to do since I had graduated with a double major in psychology and biology. I got hired at Bonham as the TA and helped in a prekindergarten classroom. That is when I decided teaching was what I was going to do.

## Nuestro Lenguaje



*Figure 19. Our language.*

Frank: The practice at that time, 1930s through 1970s, was that we were not allowed to speak Spanish. We did not know how to speak English so it was very traumatic. I remember being hit twice because I was speaking Spanish. I needed to ask those students who could understand English what was going on in class and sometimes I would wait for recess to ask and get the gist of what was going on, but sometimes I would ask them in the classroom and that was when I was punished for doing that. I remember being hit with a ruler because I was speaking Spanish in first grade. The teacher asked, “what is the first rule of English?” and I turned to a peer and asked, ‘¿qué dijo la maestra, Salvador?’ and then immediately, I felt a bang on my right hand.

The practice, in most of the state, when you did not know English was that you would go to low first grade, high first grade, low second grade, high second grade and then you went to low third and high third grade. So by the time you went to fourth grade, you would have been in school six years. I did well in school despite the situation we were in. I remember my third grade teacher, Mrs. Wren, she kind of pushed me, drove me to do hard work. At the end of third grade she even double promoted me to fifth

grade. There was a provision that I enter school the following year in September but here was no way I could because we were migrant farm workers so when I came and enrolled in December the following year, they put me back in the fourth grade.

Yvette: Frank, I am so sorry that you had to go through this abuse for speaking Spanish. Although I did not experience the level of physical abuse like you did for speaking Spanish, I also experienced trauma. Spanish is my native language because it was my first language and the language that my parents speak. Even though they have lived in the United States since the early 1970s they do not speak English. So when I went to school I spoke Spanish. I knew some English because I remember I would watch Sesame Street so I knew basic things like counting, numbers, and colors by the time I went to kindergarten. But in the small town of Santa María, everyone spoke Spanish; it was our way to communicate. At school however, Spanish was not valued, we did not have a bilingual program and I went to school in the early 90s. It was a sink or swim model, so I entered kindergarten and had to learn English in order to keep up. Although I don't recall anyone at school saying anything negative about our language, I internalized and knew from an early age that it was not viewed as an asset; the goal was to learn English. So I felt that my Spanish language was inferior to the English language.

María: I spoke Spanish at home, too. I remember that I spent a lot of time with my grandma; she lived across the street from my house. She spoke Spanish and I used to go to her house and we would make cakes. She did speak broken English but only with the people that she needed to speak English with. I knew conversational English by the time I went to school and I picked up the English language quickly. In school we spoke English, so I too felt like Spanish was not really important. First of all, you weren't

allowed to speak Spanish in school back then, when I started kindergarten you just had to speak English.

In college, I remember having roommates, and they would ask, ‘Why do you talk in English and in Spanish when you talk to your mom? That’s weird.’ So a lot of times, too, I wouldn’t want them to hear me. I kind of lost my Spanish, because I didn’t speak Spanish anymore. So then I just spoke English all the time. Actually, I remember being worried about becoming a bilingual teacher, because I thought, I do not know Spanish anymore, how am I going to do bilingual? However, when I started working with the kids, it all came back to me. It was not until I became a bilingual teacher that I realized the importance of knowing and speaking Spanish. Now I speak Spanish with my students and their families. I didn’t teach my daughters Spanish, they wish that they spoke Spanish and sometimes ask me why I didn’t teach them.

## Ética de Trabajo



*Figure 20.* Frank as a Migrant Worker.

Frank: At that time (1940-1960s) most of the families that lived in San Marcos were migrant farm workers. This is a photograph that was taken of a group of us while we were working the fields, I am the third one in the front from left to right. We would migrate in the summer, down to Corpus Christi, the Rio Grande Valley, the Panhandle, in Texas. We would return to San Marcos in December, which was the cycle that we followed as migrant farm workers. So I only went to school from December through May, because September, October, November, and part of December we were working the fields.

By the time I went to junior high, I was three years older than the Anglo students. I probably had a mustache and who would want to go to school like that with the *gringos*? I was embarrassed, taller and older than everyone else but my parents insisted that I go. By the time I went to junior high, Mexicans were allowed to be enrolled in school with the Anglos. The junior high was a building next to Campus Elementary on the university campus. We didn't have any Hispanic teachers, there was one only teacher,

Mr. Hernandez. Later I found out that Miss Nicola was Hispanic too but she never spoke to us in Spanish. I remember we had to walk to school, come home to eat lunch, and walk back. We would run down the hills to where I lived in *Barrio Pescado* by the park, and then we would run back to make it on time and if the train was in the way, we would go when it stopped or we would go under it. There must have been busing for the rural students because I know that there were kids from Wimberley who were brought in by bus. There were also farmers' children who came in a bus but we did not have any buses.

One of the most difficult things for me at junior high was in history and in English class, you have to give reports in front of the class and the difficulty came in that my primary language was Spanish. To speak English, I would have to think in Spanish and then translate it. So that was enough of a reason for me to drop out of school. It was terrible.

I only went to school one complete year, which was my senior year. I told my father, 'Daddy I need to stay this is my senior year, I have some things to do' and I stayed behind.

Yvette: I grew up hearing stories from my parents about their experiences as migrant farm workers in the 70s. They would go to *el norte* and worked picking cotton and cucumbers. Because my parents were older, they did not have to go to school but their younger siblings did. They would have to miss school and several of them dropped out because they were older than students in their grade, so school was very difficult. Even though I did not live the migrant experience, I can relate because I have heard many stories from my family. It was difficult to do well in school if you had to miss months and to make matters worse many of my uncles were placed in grade levels well below

their age. For me hearing these stories from my family and knowing how hard they worked, helped to instill a hard work ethic. I knew that I had to work just as hard in order to thrive and do something positive in my life. I recall vividly, my father waking up early in the morning before sunrise and getting home after the sun set working as a laborer in a palm tree and citrus nursery. They would grow, harvest, and do landscape all around the Rio Grande Valley. About ten years ago, the company went bankrupt and he lost his job. I remember that was a scary time because he was the sole provider for our family. I was a freshman in college at the time and my parents really struggled until he found a job at the local school district doing landscaping and maintenance. My father always went to work and he never complained. He has been working since he was 17, this year he will turn 60 and he is still working. I like to think that my work ethic comes from my dad.

María: Like your dad, Yvette, my mom worked all her life. She had graduated from high school but that was it. Dairy Queen was her first job. I remember being old enough to recall that she worked there for many years. After some years, three houses down from my house, one of our neighbors opened a daycare center, and my mom started working there as the cook. I would love to go work with my mom, because it was only three houses down, and my best friend, you know, our neighbor friend, we would just be in the school the whole day. We would play with the kids and we pretend to play teachers. I was maybe in second or third grade. My mom liked working there, and then the neighbor had to close down her business so my mom started working at Wal-Mart, which is where she retired from recently.

My grandma worked out of her home, and she had this spiral. She would jot down how much each person paid her for the cakes and everything, and how much

supplies she had to buy for the week in order to make the rest of the cakes, and how much money she was going to be able to keep from what she made. But she did it all by hand, no fancy cash register. She never used a bank. She always had her own money like set aside for herself. She was able to manage a little business on her own with just a pencil. She couldn't write really well because she hand wrote some recipes for me, and so like she would misspell some stuff but for my grandma to have learned all that even though she didn't go to school, she was brilliant. She is now 91 years old.

### **La Educación Como Vía de Escape**



*Figure 21. Education as an escape route.*

Frank: I was an A and B student and I do not think it was because I was intelligent, but because I wanted it. Picking cotton, there was a challenge among my friends, to see who could pick the most cotton. You know, I always wanted to be the best so when I was at school, it was a piece of gravy. That is one of the positive things that carried over from working in the fields to any environment, of wanting do my best and

translating it into my studies. So I studied, I wanted to do well, and I did well. Since I came to school three months late every year, I would read the textbooks from the beginning, I would read everything, so, when the final came in January, I had already read everything that had been taught.

Ironically, I was good at English grammar and I could not understand why the English speakers, the *gringos* did not know the grammar. I do not know how I did well, but there was the trauma of having to translate from Spanish to English. There were not many Hispanic kids or *Mexicanos* at the high school so we kind of stayed to ourselves. The teacher that I remember the most when I went to high school, told us on the first day of school, ‘By the way, all of you, all of you starting today have an A with me. You have a hundred. You have a hundred on my records, now, it is up to you to keep that hundred.’ I said, ‘Wow, I used to start from the bottom. Sometimes they thought that I couldn’t get off the bottom. Now, this is different.’ It motivated me to keep that A, to keep that hundred. I also remember the English teacher Mrs. Ray who would push me, who would say, ‘Frank, this is not enough. You can do better, you can do better.’ She taught me to do the very best. At that time there was a day of workshop for the teachers, and the students remained and every classroom elected a student who would be the teacher for that day. I was selected to be the English teacher. When we went to take a group picture, they did not want me to be in the picture because they thought I was not the elected student to be the teacher, so the principal had to come and tell them that I was the person representing the teacher in this class. I don’t really remember the math teacher and I could have been a math major, I was good at math. When I went to high school there were few Hispanics, not many. I enrolled in algebra but they created a classroom

for us, Mexicans, because the perception was that we could not do algebra. To this day, I remember the name of that teacher. So, the impact that we have on children is tremendous, it's everlasting and if it's not pleasant, it leaves a scar, an injury that doesn't heal completely.

When I graduated high school, my father asked me 'Well Frank, what do you want do? Do you want go continue to pick cotton with me or do you want go to college?' I said, 'No sir, I want to go to college.'

Yvette: I felt the same desire that you did Frank. For me, doing well in school was the way I could pay back my parents for all of their sacrifices. I have always felt a huge sense of responsibility to thrive and be someone, because they were robbed of that chance. This internal motivation is what pushed me to excel. When I graduated high school, I was so proud, not because I had earned a diploma but because of the way my parents looked at me. As I stood on the podium of my high school graduation giving the salutatorian speech, I remember looking for my parents in the crowd. Once I found them I began my speech, 'Primeramente quiero dar gracias a mis padres porque ellos son la razón por la que estoy aquí. Gracias por todos sus sacrificios.' I could see my mother's eyes were red and filled with tears that were rolling down her cheeks. My father's eyes beamed with joy. In that moment, I felt a huge knot in my throat and took a moment to compose myself before I continued with my speech. All of my dedication and hard work had paid off not only for me but also for them. All of this has been possible because of what they taught me.

María: For me school was my safe place. I never told a lot of people my personal life, but we lived a really hard life. My dad, we did not know this until he was older, but

he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. He had a lot of drinking binges, when we were little so there was a lot of domestic violence. He was gone for a long time, on drinking binges that lasted a long time. I remember once, he broke everything in the house. But, you know, it was just one of those things that I erased out of my memory because I had to go on. It was really a strange childhood. It wasn't always happy. I tried to forget and move on. I would wake up the next day and go to school and that was my safe place. But then I would come home and eat dinner, and when my dad was not home by a certain time, I knew it was going to be one of those nights. I would have a lot of anxiety, I would get stomachaches and I would throw up a lot because, I would get so scared because I knew what was going to happen. So I always had some type of anxiety, and I think that's why I became more OCD too, because I wanted to have control of some things when I didn't before. It was tough, sometimes I had to wake up the next day, even after not sleeping all night because it was two or three o'clock in the morning when he would get home and all this stuff was going on. So it was not always a happy childhood, sometimes it was really rough. But, school was an escape for me and the reason that I chose leave my home for college. When my father was older and diagnosed with his medical conditions, his behavior and actions all made sense. He was sick and we never knew.

## La Universidad Estatal



*Figure 22.* Texas State University. “Photograph by the author”

Frank: I enrolled at Southwest Texas State University and I wanted to be a choir director because I had been in choir all throughout high school, so I majored in music. I quickly changed my major my first year which was in 1955, because of the experiences I had when we went on a tour. There were very few Hispanics at the university at the time. I was the only Hispanic in choir and we went on a tour in Texas, and we had to stay with families, and they could not find a place for me to stay, because I was Hispanic. They finally found one, but I remember they were having a difficult time. I said to myself, ‘I don't want to go through that,’ so I changed my major to education instead.

There was a lot of discrimination at the university since there were very few Hispanics. I had to take a special speech class, because I had an accent. They forced all the Hispanic students to take the special speech class. When I wanted to enhance my Spanish, I enrolled in a Spanish course. The professor told the class on the first day, ‘I want you to know my rules here, if you speak Spanish you cannot earn a grade higher than a C because you already know Spanish and it is not fair for those who don't.’ So fluent Spanish speakers made lower grades than non-Spanish speakers in a Spanish class. I do not know if it was a written policy at the university, but the same thing happened in

the education department. I never made a grade higher than a C in my education courses but in all the other courses, math, English, etc., I made primarily A's. I remember in a particular class, doing really well in exams, scoring in the upper 10% of the class and at the end of the semester when I got the letter grade, it was a C. I went to the teacher, and I said, 'I need to visit with you. I know I did very well on the tests, but I received a C in the class.' He said, 'well, I have already totaled your score Frank, and that is what it came out to.' I said, 'let's look at your grade book.' He replied, 'I don't have it with me.' I pressed further, 'I remember I did very well.' 'Well that's just the way it is Frank!' he replied. As an undergraduate I should have asked more, but I was naïve. I knew that all those things were wrong.

María: I happened to go to college because my friend, Tracy, did. I said, 'Well, I want to go there, too,' so we both packed, and hopped in her car, and came to Southwest Texas State University in the early 1990s. It was pretty big, but not as big as it is now. Most of the students were Anglo; there were hardly any Hispanics when I came in college. I think the few were in the other departments. It was a little bit of a culture shock, but I liked it. I wanted to know more about other people because I didn't associate a lot with other races being that I was from South Texas.

I did get homesick some, but I knew I did not want to go back. I just could not go back. I didn't have a car or anything. I had to walk everywhere, take the bus everywhere, but I liked it. I did not get to see my family often, just during the holidays, or if my friend Tracy was going home, or I would hitch a ride with somebody.

I majored in psychology. Actually, I wanted to go into nursing. I was going to take my pre-requisites at Southwest Texas and then I was going to go to Baptist Medical

in San Antonio and finish my nursing degree there, but then I changed my mind. That is why it took me five years to graduate because I changed my major. Then, I already had all those biology and chemistry courses under me so I have a double major in psychology and biology.

The whole time I was in school, I worked at the child development center. I really enjoyed working with kids. I always helped in the classroom. In the mornings, I would get there and I would work a couple of hours before I had classes then I worked in the evenings until they closed. I always worked in the classrooms and I even got extra jobs working there because parents asked, 'Would you be interested in coming in and taking care of our kids?' They trusted me, I used to nanny for one family on the weekend too. I would stay with the kids all day Saturdays and drive them to their swimming lessons, piano lessons, and ballet lessons. That is what I did. Other than working with my work-study, which was not a lot of money, I had to find other jobs too, to be able to continue living in an apartment and all that kind of stuff.

My worst memory of attending the university was that they actually changed my name. They believed my name was too difficult to pronounce so they changed it and gave me another name. It was very traumatic. To this day, if I ever run into someone that I went to college with and they call me by that name I get really upset. It is a horrible memory that I have. I cannot even say the name out loud because it is very upsetting.

Yvette: It is interesting that even though all of us went to Texas State during different decades, we had similar experiences. I came to Texas State in 2005. It was hard at first because I was away from home for the first time. Also it was very large and

there were very few Latino@s. I remember that all the Latin@s from the valley became friends immediately. We found each other and helped each other through college. Since I didn't have a car, I would catch a ride with my peers when they were going to the valley to visit. It was tough but we helped each other through it. I was fortunate that I excelled in college and always did well. But I had to work in order to make ends meet. I had a work-study job on campus and also worked as a waitress. I stayed busy and focused on college because I did not want to let my family down. I was lucky to have good experiences in undergrad. I met many people who helped me.

In the Fall of 2011, I decided to further my education and pursue a master's degree. During the last semester, I had the worst experiences. I was enrolled in a school law class and had been assigned to prepare a position paper on a certain case. On TRACS, the online class site, our professor had posted the exact assignment along with the answers written in a narrative format. Multiple peers and I thought this was strange and wondered if the professor had done this on purpose so that we could all make a good grade. I used some of the ideas he presented in the example to craft my paper. A week after turning in the assignment, I received an email from the professor asking me if I had used the example. I replied and let him know that I had looked at the example and used some of the arguments the paper presented in my own paper. A day later he emailed me back informing me that he had reported me for plagiarizing and was turning me in for academic dishonesty. I was shocked and began immediately crying. I knew that many of my peers had also looked at the example and used the ideas presented to craft their own papers. I was so worried that I called Dr. Guajardo to ask him for advice. He listened to my situation and told me to consult the research librarian to find out what the rule for

citing a document posted by the professor might be. The librarian did some research and could not find any specific information on referencing a document posted by professors but did suggest it was always best to acknowledge that some information was taken from another document.

The following class, I asked my peers if they had received an email asking if they had used the example. The professor had not contacted a single other one of my 20 peers, and in fact they had already received a grade for the assignment. This made me angry, I was the only person being accused of plagiarizing, and wondered if it had anything to do with being the only Latina in the class.

After class, I approached the professor to see if we could discuss the situation. He began by handing me documentation about academic dishonesty. Before he could continue, I expressed my concern for being the only person accused of these allegations when the whole class had used the sample. Confused he asked how we all had access to the sample. I told him he had uploaded the sample for TRACS, however he assured me that was not true and that the sample had only been given to his previous semester class. I asked him if he would allow me to access my TRACS site on the computer to show him. He allowed me to use the computer and when I pulled the sample up, he was stunned. He immediately apologized and said he had no idea that he had uploaded the sample for us to access. He said he would be dropping the charges and that I had nothing to worry about. I was so relieved, being only three weeks away from graduation. Still I will never forget being the only person accused in my class, and know that being a Latina played a role in his decision to accuse me.

## Becoming Maestros

Mr. Buckner read the following letter from Mr. Rodriguez:

“Many times the school board has stated the following policy: All other factors being the same, we will only hire Mexican American and Black teachers until the ratio of these teachers is the same as the school population.”

I move we re-affirm this policy and instruct the superintendent to pursue it vigorously.

Mr. Buckner said, “I don’t believe I ever remember seeing this policy before.”

*Figure 23.* San Marcos School Board Meeting Minutes November 20, 1972.

Frank: The irony was when I graduated from college, I wanted to stay in this area, but they were not hiring *Mexicanos*. They were not hiring *Mexicanos* in San Marcos, New Braunfels, Lockhart, or Austin. I couldn’t find a job in Central Texas so I went to teach in Del Rio. I was so naïve, and I didn’t know why my students weren’t making as much progress as I wanted them to, because I wanted them to all have As so I figured I was doing something wrong. I decided to work on my master’s during the summers at Southwest Texas University so that I could become a better teacher. I took curriculum courses and reading methodologies and at the same time I was working on my administration degree.

I always wanted to come back to San Marcos, it was my *querencia*, by then I had been in Del Rio five years. So every year I would apply to schools in the Central Texas area and hear nothing. I would call and I would write and they would say that they had no vacancies. In 1965, I finally had interviews in several Central Texas schools. They

offered me a job in New Braunfels, San Marcos, and at Gary Job Corps. I chose San Marcos, even though they were paying more at Gary Job Corps, and I taught at Crockett Elementary for one year. By that time, the community was pressuring the school board and the superintendent to hire *Mexicanos*. They would not hire *Mexicanos*. The only other person that was there when I came was Madita Muñoz, she was the only other Hispanic teacher. Much later, one of the parents of my student and I became friends and he said, 'Let me tell you something that happened when you came Frank. When we all got the notice that you would be the teacher, parents had a meeting to decide whether they should let their children be assigned to your class and to discuss what they were going to do about it. They did not want their children with a Mexican teacher.' I could not believe that he had the courage to tell me this, it was really upsetting.

The summer of 1966, after I taught one year at Crockett, the Superintendent called me and said, 'Frank, this Joe Hutchison, your superintendent.' I thought, oh my God, what have I done, and I said, 'yes, sir, yes, sir, what can I do for you?' He said, 'how would you like to be Principal at Bonham?' I said, 'yes, sir. I would like to.' He said, 'You are not asking me how much we are going to pay you?' I said, 'no sir, whatever you are going to pay me is fine, I want the experience.' That is how I became the principal at Bonham, by that time the school had been renamed to Bonham instead of Southside. The school board was pressuring the Superintendent and the community was pressuring the school district about their lack of *Mexicanos* in the district. This was occurring during the time of *La Raza Unida*, and the *Cinco de Mayo* organization. During that time, there were many instances of schools' discriminating against Hispanics. The leader, Jose Angel Gutierrez, made the national news, because he said, 'the only way

to defeat the *gringo* is to kill the *gringo*.' This got so much attention and angered many people. Later he explained, 'I meant kill the gringo politically.' It was this pressure that led to my appointment as principal of Bonham, not the goodness of their heart or that I was very good, I happened to be there at the time, and this pressure was able to live. That is how I became the first Hispanic principal in the San Marcos Consolidated school district.

Bonham at the time consisted of grades one, two, and three. All of the students that attended and were zoned to the school for Hispanics because they came from *Barrio Pescado*. We also had a special education class, and those students lived in different neighborhoods in San Marcos, and were bused to Bonham. At that time, I was also volunteered to do adult basic education at night. So aside from being the principal, I was the director for Adult Basic Education. Adults come at night and took classes. I was also the Director for School Community Liaisons.

María: I worked as a TA for one year while I was working on my alternative certification in the late 1990s. San Marcos would not hire me because they did not hire teachers going through alternative certification. I really needed a job, so I got hired as a bilingual teacher in a district nearby for one year. The following year, once I had my certification I was hired in San Marcos. My job was kindergarten bilingual at one of the elementary schools.

I have had good experiences working as a teacher in San Marcos, however, my biggest problem is that I do not see any significant growth in, or big concern about, the bilingual program. Nobody cares about the bilingual program. Nothing has changed about it, for the past 17 years since I started working here. Everything is still the same,

other than how we identify students. It has always been a late exit model, since I've been part of the district. That's a long time to not change things, 17 years.

They want us to be strong bilingual teachers and really teach students the content and curriculum, but yet there is never any curriculum writing for bilingual. Bilingual needs to have its own curriculum. If you're going to want us to teach that academic language, which that is what they say bilingual students are lacking, and yet we do not have proper training or professional development and we do not have a good curriculum, I do not see how it is possible. Our regular curriculum does not address bilingual students and neither does the scope and sequence. Nothing at the district level is being created to support bilingual students, it is very frustrating and that is how everybody feels in the district right now.

It goes back to lack of personnel too, we do not have bilingual instructional coaches or people we can go to for support. That doesn't help, it doesn't. And I just feel that we are not properly trained and yet we are expected to make miracles. I mean some programs I have always seen, are unequal in the district. Now, the way that bilingual students count and affect the accountability ratings, you better care about them because they count a lot. You cannot keep brushing them under the carpet.

There was one time where things got really frustrating that I felt like gosh, 'what do I do to get my bilingual status off?' Because I'll always have it and they are always going to place me in a bilingual classroom. It is very hard to do well with no resources, you are expected to do miracles and teach these kids everything they need to know, yet we have no support, no resources like I said, and no professional development that's relevant to bilingual students.

More recently, I finally got to transfer to a new school and I'm really happy. The reason I had to move was leadership. It was a lack of leadership, and I just strongly believe in a good leader to help run a school smoothly and to feel appreciated for what you do. The past three years in my former school, that was missing. I needed to be somewhere where I was appreciated for working hard for my students. I was getting really frustrated about leadership, and I could no longer just sit and complain. If you want something changed, then you need to go out there and do it. So that's why I moved.

Yvette: I joined the San Marcos School district in August of 2009. The district had rezoned and was opening two new elementary schools, so there were many vacancies. I was hired on at Mendez Elementary as a first grade teacher. Our principal was one of only two Latina principals in the entire district at the time. In retrospect, she hired mostly Latin@ teachers to work at Mendez. I had great experiences working at Mendez, but did grow increasingly frustrated with the deficit thinking that I encountered about students and families. Moreover, the increased pressure of standardized testing and the lack of adequate resources at our school drove me to seek another position.

In August of 2012, after completing my master's degree, I was hired as a gifted and talented teacher for Bowie and Travis Elementary. The best part about this position is that has given me the flexibility to use my creativity and implement new ideas and practices into my classroom. Although this position has been amazing and I have been able to push my students to grow, I am disappointed that only certain students are able to experience and benefit from enriching curriculum. It breaks my heart that I only work with students that are identified as gifted and talented because I truly believe that all students are gifted at something. Moreover, I see a huge discrepancy in the gifted and

talented program across the district. There is almost double the number of students that are identified for the program at Crockett elementary compared to any other elementary school. All the other elementary schools are much more ethnically and economically diverse than Crockett elementary. This is highly problematic because it perpetuates the stereotype that poor students of color cannot be gifted. A proposal (Gifted and talented, 2015), which was organized by some parents and community members about this problem, was brought forward to the school board in June of 2015, in hopes that three more gifted and talented teachers would be hired so that we could all work at one campus and focus our efforts on identifying more culturally and ethnically diverse students. However, the proposal was rejected and the school board voted to instead hire one additional gifted and talented teacher.

I wrote the following poem to capture one of the most significant experiences in my life as an educator. This experience portrays one of the cracks in my journey. This crack that is represented in the conceptual framework (See Figure 9) a crack that as a Latina and an educator I often face.

May 22, 2015  
A day I will never forget  
Excited about the future  
I eagerly waited  
Everything was going well  
Until that moment  
His words  
They stung like daggers in my heart  
A culturally incompetent White man  
With the power to shatter my dream  
In his eyes I was  
Incapable of being a leader  
I was a Latina, a woman,  
Too young, too beautiful  
My master's, my PhD coursework,  
My experience as a teacher,

My numerous state and national awards  
That did not matter  
My sense of hope for change vanished  
Then came the realization  
not much had changed  
since Frank's time in 1965

### **Nuestro Activismo**



*Figure 24. Our Activismo "Painting by the author"*

Frank: During my time working at SMCISD there were a lot of things that I changed. I do not remember having any teacher observations or student teachers at Southside when I was a student. So when I became the principal, I noticed that we didn't have any student teachers or observations from the university but the other schools in our district did. I went to the education department to speak to the chair. I explained, that teachers needed to observe, and know our school exists because when they graduate they might work at a predominantly minority school and we want teachers to come out with good methodologies and good instructional practices. As a result of my persuasion, they agreed to send student teachers.

During that time, we also had a week off in between terms for the teachers to visit with the parents. Teachers would visit with the parents and go to their homes to talk about how students were doing. We didn't have that at Bonham, so I raised this concern to the superintendent and he said, 'we don't have that because Mexican families do not care about the education of their children.' Imagine that, what parents do not care about their children, their blood? They do! So I changed that stereotype and for the first time ever our teachers at Bonham visited with families. I went to the superintendent and I said, 'Next year I want to have that. I want to have a parent week.' I got together with the teachers and said, 'We need to involve the parents. We need to do two things. We need to go to the house and we need to invite them here to come over.' Some didn't think that it was going to work but we did both. In fact, of all the families that I had, there was only one family who did not visit with the teacher. It was a friend of mine, his nickname was Tile. I spoke with him and told him, 'Tile you need to go to school to show your child Jose, that you care.' He said, 'I care, Frank but you take care of those things.' He never did come but I visited with him. After we did this, the superintendent could not believe that almost 100% of parents participated.

Also, I remember the district would not hire Mexican teachers and I asked why they would not hire Hispanics and they said because they couldn't find them. Then one summer, I was in charge of the summer program and the majority of teachers that I hired were Hispanic teachers. By the time I left Bonham, almost all the teachers were Hispanic teachers. The other schools didn't have many Hispanic teachers. I was able to get almost all Hispanic teachers because I actively looked for Hispanic teachers, I advertised in the newspapers and flyers that we were hiring at Bonham.

During that time, 1966, there was only one bilingual program in Texas, in Laredo, Texas. I had gone to the University of Texas, one summer for a summer institute on teaching English as a Second Language and even though I did not like the methodology they were using, it gave me the courage to do something different. Shortly thereafter, I had read about a bilingual program in Laredo, in some journals about bilingual education, so I decided that is what we needed at Bonham. I wrote a paper to present the idea to the superintendent, and he took the paper and we talked about it. Then he told me to go see the assistant superintendent and I did, and explained, 'I went through all of this, children need to understand the instructions in order to comprehend and to learn. Their language is Spanish, we need to teach some concepts in Spanish and things will get better.' He then asked 'you think it will work?' I responded, 'yes, it will work!' Then he said, 'well, if all the *Mexicans* get educated, who is going do the domestic work?' I was shocked and responded, 'It's not about the work, our students need to have options, for years to come besides domestic work!' After that conversation, I got permission from the superintendent to go visit the school with some teachers. We went to Laredo United for several days and observed.

After that, we started the first bilingual program in the district at Bonham. The students' outlook changed when we did that. Their outlook is different when they feel important, when they feel that their language is appreciated. At that time the method we used was not good, the part of teaching concepts in Spanish was good but the concept of teaching English as a second language was not. It was very cruel, because you would say, this is a glass, repeat for me, this is a glass. It was not a natural type of learning, but

it was better than kids not understanding at all. That was the beginning of bilingual education in Texas.

I also tried to bring fine arts to the students. I was fortunate that one of my friends from high school had majored in music and was the choir director at the San Marcos high school. I convinced him to do dress rehearsals at Bonham. So we had many performances at Bonham for the students.

There was a lot of advocacy from the Mexican community during the late 1960s and early 70s. We had boycotts, we had the walkout in 1971, I was already the principal, and I was one of the organizers, behind the scenes. With the Latino men and Agustin Lucio, all of us would get together and organize those things. I would write things for him and including the demands from the Mexican community. There was a time when we were asking the Hispanics not to go to school, but we agreed that I should not openly support or participate in the boycotts or walkout so that I could continue to be the principal and not risk my job.

I also recall that the nurse that was hired to come to Bonham once or twice a week, was collecting lice from the kids. She was selling the lice to the biology department at the University. I was furious when I found out and told her she could not do that and if the kids had lice, she had to work with their parents to correct the situation.

My agenda at Bonham was to set an expectation that all kids could learn if given the opportunity. I did not want anything watered down; I wanted a culture of high expectations. Even when I was a student at Southside, they had low expectations of the kids and of their parents. So when I became the principal, I worked to change that and to prove that those beliefs were not true. We tried to have a school that would reach and

involve all the kids and families. To be honest, I think the district did not care what happened at Bonham, so that is why they let me do everything that I wanted to. I worked at Bonham for four years and then took another job with the district.

From Bonham, I went to Goodnight Junior High. The superintendent told me that they needed a Hispanic person there, and if I would take the assistant principal job there, they would pay me considerably more. So I took it even though I had second thoughts. Goodnight, at the time, was where the Mendez campus is now, it was a seventh, eighth and ninth grade campus. It was much like Bonham when I first started working there. There was only one *Mexicano* teacher, the industrial arts teacher. I remember whenever I went to the teacher area, the lounge, the teachers who were talking would immediately be quiet when I walked in. I don't know what they were talking about but I figured they were talking about Hispanics.

One thing that took me time to understand was the reason why Hispanic girls would drop out at the junior high. I finally figured out it was because they went to PE and they had to shower in public afterwards. I remember I talked to the principal and he did not believe me even though the girls were dropping out. The boys would also miss periods but they would stay in the restroom. They would stay in the restrooms and I would go and talk to them and send them to the classroom and I remember the teachers did not like it. During a staff meeting, I told them that they had to evaluate themselves and the environment in the classroom. I said, 'you have to make it more interesting for them, look at it this way, to these boys the restroom is more appealing than your classroom?' They did not like that.

They had Coordinated Vocational Academic (CVA) education, which was a model of teaching concepts through practical industrial work. But 95% of students in that program were Hispanic. One time I observed the class, the teacher had made an agreement with the Coca Cola Company to bring in the broken machines, and the kids would fix them. I thought, ‘What kind of skill is that?’ The students were not learning any academic or practical skill, it was terrible. I’m a little suspicious with special classes such as those that take students out of the regular classroom. I’m very, very suspicious! So I questioned the rationale or purpose of the classes but nothing was done about it. Even now, I look at career education classes at the high school with suspicion because of what was occurring with these classes in the past, it was segregation. By placing students that were believed to be under-achievers in these courses, much like low first, high first grade for Mexican students there was segregation. The same thing happened with all the students that were latecomers, they were placed in the CVA classes, I questioned that too, but those were the practices then. I recall that one day, the principal was meeting with the CVA classes and the students were supposed to return a paper to him the next time, he said, ‘make sure that they are not greasy when they come back. Okay?’ That gave me and insight into his philosophy, what he really thought of the Hispanic students. He didn’t even attempt to pronounce Mexican names. He was not a leader but he was a keeper of gates.

During that time, the unrest and the demand for more Hispanic teachers from the community continued. So the district had a workshop from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) on cultural awareness, and I met the Director of the Office of Civil Rights. They had just created an office, called the Technical Assistant for School Desegregation. At

that time, the state of Texas was not moving to integrate the schools after Brown vs. State Board Education, and a judge ruled that the state was not moving in the implementation of that law so they created that office to assist with school desegregation. The office was supposed to write plans, on how to merge segregated schools. I got to know the people from TEA, those two days that they were at the training. Shortly after that, the director called me, he said, 'Frank I have an office here that was just created by a court order and I would like for you to come and work here.' By that time I perceived, I was not going to move up in the district. I wanted to move to central office, or director of curriculum or assistant director, or something else. I knew I would be unable to move up professionally at SMCISD so when that opportunity came I took it. That is how I ended up as Chief Consultant for Civil Rights at TEA. As the Chief Consultant of Civil Rights, I got to visit a lot of schools. There was so much discrimination in the schools. We visited schools and campuses that had over 66% minority students. This gave me an opportunity to see a lot of the same things that occurred within San Marcos school district, grouping by classes all over the state.

María: During my years at SMCISD, my main concern has been the bilingual program. I finally feel like we are going to do something for it, and I hope it moves forward. We had a meeting, this fall that is going to maybe change some things in the bilingual program. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the late exit model. I voiced something that I thought maybe, people might take wrong during that meeting, but I needed to say it, because I really feel it. But before anybody started talking about it, I said, 'I think my issue first is that we need to resolve the issue of how we place students, like identification, before we decide on a late exit model or whatever model we want to

do because right now the identification of bilingual students is not a fair test. You are testing 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds before they start pre-K and you are giving them a language assessment. If you gave that to every student whether they were bilingual or not, they are all going to be limited English proficient. A 3-year-old and 4-year-old only knows between 200 and 500 words, and they only know 500 if they come from a language-rich environment.’ And so then, everyone at the meeting just looked at me like, and one of the assistant principal responded, ‘That’s right, I never thought about that.’ I responded, ‘You are testing three and four year-olds, and giving them the same test that I’m giving second graders right now!’ It is a really hard test. They have to do verbal analogies, identify vocabulary, pictures, and then there is also a reading and letter recognition assessment. It is in English and Spanish, so you have to test them in both to see which one they are stronger in, and then that’s when you decide if they’re stronger in English, then you can recommend that they be English instruction. So that’s what’s happening. The parents are saying they only speak Spanish at home, they’re giving them a Woodcock Muñoz test, and just because the parents say they speak Spanish at home, they’re going ahead and identifying them as limited English proficient, even though they scored higher in English. This is the first meeting that we have had that gives me hope, it was a start, I can tell you that much. At the end of the meeting, the bilingual coordinator informed us that she would begin to research and look over other language models. But every year we go through something like this it seems like, but nothing ever gets done. So hopefully this will be a good step in the direction.

I just feel there is a lot of disservice in the program. Nobody advocates for these kids and no matter what, they matter, it is like you take an oath when you are going to be

a teacher that you are going to provide a good education for all students and when we say all students then we need to mean it. Do not just put it on your mission statement because it sounds good, truly mean it, that you are here for all students, to meet all their needs, not just their academic needs. That's another thing, I feel like, yes, we need to meet their academic needs but there is so much more that we need. They need so many things, the whole child, emotional and social. I think that's what made me, when I was working at Bonham, realize that I wanted to work with kids. I always related to them and thought, that was me when I was a kid, I was always free lunch, I spoke Spanish and I always think, that was me. I do not remember a lot of my school experiences because I don't think I had good ones, and I think I kind of blocked most of them out. How could a kid not remember their school experience? They should always remember them, they should have a good time. They should remember their teacher.

I care about my students and their families, the whole child. There is one particular family that I have developed a strong relationship with. I have taught both of the daughters. At times, I would pick them up from their house and bring them to school when they did not have a ride. I also give them clothes and books. I do this because the girls are super smart and the parents care so much about their education. They don't have a lot of money and they live in a small travel trailer but they always have their girls nice and neatly dressed. I was having a conversation with the mom and telling her 'I don't know what you do with your girls, I said, but you're doing exactly what every parent should be doing. Your girls are so smart. What do you do?' I wanted to know. She replied, 'I read to them, I talk to them. We don't have cable so they do not watch TV, it's talking, telling stories.' She buys them books in English, even though she does not know

English, but she tells the girls to read the books to her and it helped them practice their reading. She inspired me, that mom.

When I started teaching kindergarten, it was mandatory that all kinder teachers do a home visit before school started. So we used to do home visits all the time, and we would go to their homes and the parents were just so kind. They always wanted to feed you, and come in, usually had dinner ready for you when you got there. I remember one home had four pieces of plywood to make a square. One bed, one TV, and that was a home for one family at one time. There was no running water. It makes you think about the privileges that we have like our nice homes and also about what our students need. So when you go to their homes you know how to meet their needs and what else they need. A lot of times teachers say things like, these kids need a bath or they are hungry, no one takes care of them. But if you ever go to their homes then you realize, they might not have those things like running water or light so they only use candles. So we have to know where they're coming from, don't just complain. Have food for them instead of saying 'oh my God, their parents can't even feed them.' Like the child that is sleepy in class, well, I was that child because my dad got home in the middle of the night and caused havoc all over the house and we had to run to my grandma's house in the middle of the night. So when these kids come sleepy, who knows what's happening in their homes? You have to remember where you came from, and I think just knowing. That's an issue I have with some teachers. I think everybody needs to have this multicultural training, because not everybody is, what's the word, I don't know how to say it without sounding racist, because there is a lot of, there's a few Anglo teachers that I work with now and they seem to, not like working with these kids, in other words. They don't

know, culturally, they don't know where they're coming from because they've never had to be without or they've never been there. I think everybody should do a home visit, but not just for the student you choose, someone that you know is going to be a difficult child, not just an easy kid.

Yvette: I agree with you both. I can relate so much to the story you told, María because when I was growing up, we didn't have running water at my house. We used to rent this home, and in the meantime while we were renting, my parents bought this other lot and were building our very first home. In the rental house, we had no running water. I remember we had a well and an outhouse. We used to have to take a bath in one of those tin *baños*, the ones that are often used to hand wash clothes. I remember when I worked at Mendez, sitting at meetings and hearing teachers say, 'These parents just don't care.' I was confused, what do they mean? I was poor, we had no running water and my parents cared. You're talking about me. Those things are personal to me. How do you make other people understand things that people haven't lived? This is my issue when you look at 75% of our population at San Marcos is Hispanic, but yet 75% of the teachers are Anglo. I'm not trying to say everybody should be Latin@. If we want all our students to succeed, we need people who are sensitive and can understand and relate to our students and families. Our students need to be able to see themselves in us as grownups to know that they can do it. This is why I am so passionate about the injustices in our district and community. I was that student and according to statistics it is a miracle that I succeeded. That is why I will do whatever it takes to ensure that our Latin@ students are being successful and if they are not I will be sure to let my voice be heard.

Another thing that I think is important, that both of you mentioned, is to speak up

and let your voice be heard. I make it a point to voice my concerns and ask questions when we are in meetings even though sometimes I know that my comments or questions are not well received. I remember being in a meeting about a new instructional program that the district was adopting and after the presentation, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction asked if any of us had any questions. I raised my hand and politely asked, ‘Is there any research that shows that this program is effective?’ The room was completely silent for several minutes before the assistant superintendent responded. He replied, ‘There is not any research on this specific program but there is research that shows that project based learning is good for students.’ I pressed further and asked, ‘Can you tell us why you all settled on this particular program or company instead of others that also use problem based learning?’ Again silenced filled the room for what felt like five minutes before he deflected the question and made a comment about how problem based learning is the direction the district was moving in. The meeting ended shortly after that and as I walked out, several teachers addressed me personally and thanked me for asking questions. I reminded them that as teachers it is important for us to be critical and voice our concerns about decisions that affect us. I left the meeting feeling proud that I used my voice and that I encouraged other teachers to use their voices too, but I knew that my questions had not been well received by the assistant superintendent.

At a recent professional development meeting, the presenter opened up the session by asking the group of teachers what challenges we faced as teachers working in San Marcos. Teachers slowly volunteered and addressed concerns such as lack of resources and lack of preparation time. The concerns then became about our students and

their families, things like they are poor or have broken families, or their families do not help them at home. As I heard these comments, I became very angry and interrupted, ‘I think we need to be very careful about what is being said because we are making assumptions and stereotyping groups of people.’ After my comment, the discussion ended and the presenter thanked me for my comment and reiterated my point about being careful about stereotyping. It is these instances that confirm that deficit thinking is pervasive in our district and that teachers are not often forced to rethink their biases and stereotypes.

Another thing that I am passionate about is also bilingual education. That is why I chose to start an afterschool Spanish club. I can see that students do not embrace the Spanish language and are even ashamed of speaking Spanish in school. I can relate to this feeling and I do not want students to feel less than because they should be proud that they are bilingual, it is a very important skill in this world. On the first day of our Spanish club, I asked students to share why they chose to attend Spanish club. Students went around the room introducing themselves and sharing their reasons. I was extremely touched to hear their reason, they shared that they wanted to be able to communicate with the grandparents, they wanted to be able to make friends with people who speak Spanish, one student who was biracial said he wanted to be able to communicate with his father’s side of the family. I even had one girl share that she wanted to learn Spanish, because her aunt told her she could make more money by being bilingual because she can communicate with more people. The responses were those of eight, nine, and ten year olds. Their responses were so powerful and I was extremely touched. It was a powerful reminder of the disservice we do to children by not teaching them Spanish. They are

eager to learn Spanish, it is a part of their identity and culture, and they want to be a part of that. This knowledge opens a different world to their life! The club was so successful that in the hallways the students will greet me in Spanish. This is a small victory in changing the perception of being bilingual in our schools.

This school year, my job shifted to include more of a leadership role in the gifted and talented department. With more leadership comes more power to impact change and help make our program more equitable across the district. I was fortunate to be selected as one of 12 national Javits Frasier scholars by the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), which gave me the opportunity to be part of a network across the country that fights the underrepresentation of children of color in gifted programs. As a result, this year, I travelled to all the elementary schools to provide enrichment classes to first and second graders. My goal with the enrichment classes is to provide enrichment to more Latin@ students in hopes of increasing the number of Latin@ students identified as gifted at each elementary school. This has been a wonderful responsibility, because it is something that I am passionate about and that I hope makes a difference in diversifying the gifted and talented program. I have also created a district web page and Facebook page so that more parents and community members know about our program and have access for nominating their children.

## Nuestra Esperanza

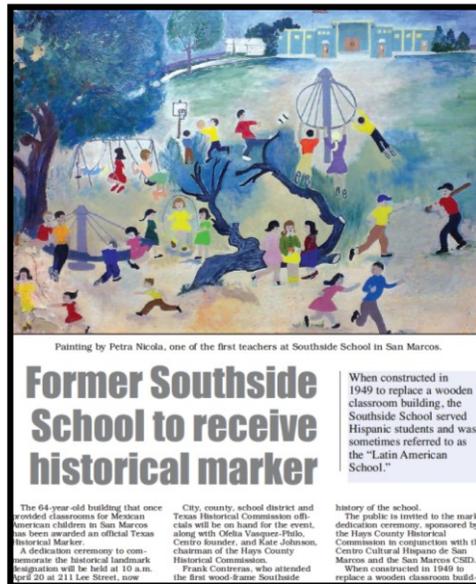


Figure 25. Our Hope ("Former southside school," 2013).

Frank: On April 20, 2013 I was selected to give a speech at a Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony for Southside Elementary. I share with you this part of my speech because it captures my hopes and dreams for this community.

Just as we requested the Historical Commission to preserve this old structure, I feel it is equally important to us to preserve the memories of the students that attended here and to show that we have overcome the institutional inequalities that I and those who attended school in this very building, experienced as children. It is fitting for Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos to now be in this building preserving our cultural heritage and compensating for those inequities.

We attended school here at a time when we were treated like second class citizens... made to feel inferior. And here we are today... at a Cultural Center. My intent has not been to focus on the negatives but to showcase the strength and

perseverance that our community has shown. This should be a dedication also to honor **all** the students that attended.

Southside School students who were not given a real opportunity to complete their education, and for many, in spite of those conditions, went on to achieve a good life for their families. Some of my classmates, went on and had successful businesses and were part of the economic development of this community. Few went on to serve in elected positions or had careers in public service. A few of us made it to college with the help of teachers that went the extra mile and encouraged us to do more.

We are appreciative that the Hays County Historical Commission saw fit to take the steps to preserve this building. And with Centro Cultural here now, we hope that we can continue to preserve the history that took place here, especially the history that shows that something good can come out of something not so good. So I leave you with this thought.

Would it not be fitting and appropriate for our School Administration and Board of Trustees to lead the charge to designate this building -- in perpetuity -- for Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos to continue the good work of preserving our history, culture and rich traditions-- as a gesture of goodwill and to compensate for the inequities that the previous educational institution fostered?

María: My hope comes in the utility and power of stories. The most important thing I have learned is the utility and importance of your own story. I think reflecting, and having to tell your story, although it is not easy, it is so important. Going through the first summer of my master's program and having to dig deep into my personal story was

extremely transformational and healing for me. That is my hope for us as educators that we can connect and get to know one another through our stories. I think it is so important and valuable that we also get to know the story of this community so that we can truly understand how we can help. My hope is that people are open to telling their story and using that to find commonalities between one another, and ultimately working together to make San Marcos as better place for everyone.

Yvette: My *esperanza* is that this community can heal from all of the injustices of the past so that we can begin to move forward and create a better community for all of our students. I believe that it is imperative to shed light to the history and events that occurred in San Marcos so that they never happen again. Moreover, I believe there is so much power in using our voice to share our story, a story that is often not told and forgotten. My hope is that we can facilitate dialogue about how to improve systems and practices so that all students and especially the Latin@ students are successful in our school district and community.

### **Discussion**

The museum captures our collective experiences as Latin@ in Texas. Moreover it provides an insight into the context and community of San Marcos. The museum also catapults our personal and private struggles to a public space that will hopefully help others reflect, share and learn from our collective struggles. This will also provide the opportunity for us to acknowledge and learn from a history that should never be repeated. What follows is a discussion utilizing the LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) theoretical framework. The discussion is then organized according to the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012) to make sense of the findings from the micro to macro level.

## **LatCrit Tenets**

The five tenets of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) appear and are present throughout all of our experiences (centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, challenges the dominate ideology, commitment to social justice, centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color, and transdisciplinary perspective). We have each experienced the first tenet, which is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism. This tenet posits there are more complex forms of oppression than class and race can account for. There is an intersection of class, gender, language, and immigration status, which can contribute to race and racism. Because we were all Native Spanish speakers, we experienced various forms of discrimination and oppression. Frank attended public school from 1940 to 1955 and endured both physical and emotional trauma because he spoke Spanish. Students at that time were struck, physically, for speaking their native language. Even when he attended the university, he had to take a special speech class because of his supposed accent. This was mandated for all Hispanic students at the university, which he attended. Both María and I suffered emotional trauma for speaking Spanish. María went to public school from the late 70s to early 90s. During that era students were not allowed to speak Spanish. The trauma from this experience was so extreme she stopped speaking Spanish altogether and feared she had forgotten the language later in life as she prepared to become a bilingual teacher. I, Yvette, attended public school from 1991 to 2005. At the time there was not a rule that banned us from speaking Spanish however, there was huge emphasis on speaking English so I internalized that my Spanish language was not as valuable and was inferior. For me, my gender has also caused forms of oppression throughout my life. One example I shared

was not being selected for an assistant principal job which had to do with the fact that I am (1) a woman, (2) a person of color, and (3) young. For the three of us, racism and discrimination go beyond our race, which is what this theme posits.

The second theme of LatCrit challenges the dominate ideology, which claims that the educational system is objective, focused solely on merit, color-blind, race neutral, and provides equal opportunity for all students (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, this theme challenges deficit frameworks that are attributed to Chicana and Chicano education inequality. Our stories demonstrate how the three of us persistently challenge this ideology. Our experiences have informed and proven to us the world is not a fair place and schools are often to blame for systemic racism. Because of this, we are quick to challenge deficit thinking and beliefs about Latin@ students and families. We have all worked to disprove stereotypes that prohibit students from learning. Frank challenged the myth that Latin@ parents did not care about the education of their children when we implemented home and school visits with the families at Bonham elementary. Maria brings up the disparities and unequal education and resources for bilingual students as the main culprit whenever someone wants to blame Latin@ students and their families for the education gap. I challenge the status quo and systems that have been in place that privilege some students and marginalize others, including the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in the gifted program, and the conditions that foster and allow this to occur.

This critical awareness of the world and the unequal systems that work toward benefiting and excluding people is a result of the development of our critical ontology. Moreover, this knowledge informs our advocacy and serves as a form of resistance

against the system, which translates into the third LatCrit theme, a commitment to social justice. This theme “envision(s) a social justice research agenda that leads toward (a) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty; and (b) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 313). As a result of our awareness and critical ontology the three of us have worked for change to make SMCISD a better place for students. Frank began to change things in the late 1960s when he became the first Latino Principal in the history of SMCISD. He worked to eliminate the stereotypes about Latin@ students and families who attended Bonham elementary and even started the first bilingual program to help students be successful. His undercover involvement with the Walkout of 1971 helped to empower the Latin@ community to advocate for themselves and demand the district be more inclusive of minorities. During his time with SMCISD, he pushed and advocated for Latin@ students and made many positive changes. María has long been an advocate for bilingual students and families. She has advocated for a change in the direction of the bilingual program, a program that has remained the same since she joined the SMCISD team in the late 1990s. In this time, she has worked with bilingual students and families and empowered them to feel welcomed and proud of what they are doing with their children. I have worked to challenge deficit thinking and unequal practices at SMCISD. I have also been active and involved in diversifying the gifted and talented program. Moreover, I have implemented programs, such as the Spanish club, with the goal of promoting the value and importance of the Spanish language, to shift the notion of being bilingual from a deficit to an asset for students. Together we have all used our voices and actions to challenge injustices and to advocate for a better education for Latin@ students.

The fourth theme is the centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color. It values their lived experiences and uses authentic methods to document their experiences (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). This theme appeared in the values and assets that Frank and I shared about our Latin@ students and families. Frank utilized this experiential knowledge to prove that Latin@ parents cared about the education of their children and therefore successfully implemented home visits at Bonham Elementary. María draws on her personal experiential knowledge about the life of struggling families in her class, gained through home visits, and picking up children on her way to school. I tapped into my students' experiential knowledge to have students reflect and share their reasons for joining the Spanish club. This gave my students an opportunity to have a voice and share their experiences, created an immediate bond between all of us, and helped to strengthen the relationships we built.

The final theme is a transdisciplinary perspective that values knowledge and perspectives from many different fields in order to better understand issues of race, sexism, and class in education. Our critical ontology and development has led to our awareness of the multiple factors that impact the disparities and injustices in education. We each understand schools are not the only ones to blame for system racism. We know multiple factors have created and perpetuated the injustices and marginalization of Latin@s in this country. We have a historical understanding of the conditions that foster this system at the national, community, and district levels. Frank has used this transdisciplinary awareness to become an advocate in other places besides school. He has been a community activist and change agent in the San Marcos community. In 1969, he ran and was elected to serve on San Marcos City Council. Since then he has been

involved in many different organizations. Currently, he is a member of the board of Centro Cultural Hispano and a member of the City of San Marcos Park Commission. He has always been involved in local politics because he knows power comes with politics. Furthermore, local politics can have a huge impact on the education system.

The five LatCrit themes that Solórzano and Bernal (2001) developed are apparent throughout our experiences. This exemplifies the unique challenges that we, as Latin@ educators, experience both in our personal and professional lives as we navigate traditional White stream institutions (Bourdieu, 1977a; Urrieta, 2009). Furthermore, this highlights the systemic and institutional racism we have experienced, and that often make our workplace an uncomfortable space for Latin@s.

### **Ecologies of Knowing: Self**

Our stories provide a glimpse into the marginalization and injustices we faced as both Latin@ students and educators. This portrays the first theme of LatCrit, which is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). These experiences resulted in trauma that had an effect on our identity and cultural development. According to Helms, Nicolas, and Green (2012) racism and micro-aggressions can create trauma even though the trauma might not be readily visible. This trauma, in turn, can result in self-blame, feelings of confusion, shame, or guilt (Carlson, 1997). The effects of our trauma manifested in feelings of inferiority and ultimately a sense of shame about our identity. It was not until we gained critical awareness that we each realized those feeling were a result of the racism and discrimination we had experienced. This realization helped to heal our identity development and was a sense of cultural rehabilitation. Furthermore, it marked another phase in our journey, which

informed our critical ontology. Unfortunately, this process is not often explored in education and is something that is important for students, educators, and families to contemplate. It should not be something only a few people experience but it should be a part of the educational development of all children, families and teachers. The utility of identity and cultural development can prove useful to heal and build strong connections with one another.

### **Ecologies of Knowing: Organization**

At the level of the organization, the findings highlight the history and development of the San Marcos school district and the greater P-20 education system. Our collective experiences reveals a sad truth, despite our lives spanning over 80 years, the three of us shared similar stories of racism and discrimination in school. The only difference between my experiences and Maria's compared to Frank's is that he experienced an overt form of racism. He grew up during a time when racism was socially accepted and extreme measures were taken to ensure students of color did not have the same opportunities as Anglo students. He attended segregated schools, in awful conditions, that did not even closely compare to the schools Anglo students attended. Moreover, the discriminatory educational practices at the time forced students of color to have to repeat grade levels making them much older than their Anglo peers. Additionally, students of color were physically punished if they spoke Spanish at school. Frank's experiences echo those experiences of Mexican American students in the Driscoll Consolidated Independent school district that were captured in the documentary *Stolen Education* (Alemán & Luna, 2013).

María and I were born after *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), the landmark case which declared segregated schools as unconstitutional. Therefore, we both attended schools that were integrated, and had a majority of Latin@ students. Despite this we both experienced forms of discrimination for speaking Spanish. María's name was even changed without her permission in the 1990s, at the university, because it was supposedly too hard to pronounce. We both continue to witness deficit thinking and unequal access and services for Latin@ students. Even in 2015, I experienced racism when being interviewed for an administrative position. López and Burciaga (2014) argue that we as a society celebrate the landmark of *Brown v. the Board of Education* without critically examining the results of this case. They posit, "while the decision remains one of the most significant in U.S. history, it also remains one of the most unfulfilled" (p. 807). This study echoes their argument and exposes the fact that despite the 61 years that have passed since this landmark judicial decision, racism and discrimination is still experienced by Latin@s in their schooling experience. As Latin@ educators we encounter systemic and institutional racism the organization in which we work which hinder the success of Latin@ students.

### **Ecologies of Knowing: Community**

At the level of the community which includes both the San Marcos and United States community, this study reveals the resiliency and commitment of people to challenge the dominant ideology, another theme of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). In San Marcos the Latin@ community have continuously challenged the status quo and demanded a better education for their children. They have been responsible for integrating schools, organizing and causing the historic Walkout of 1971, were

responsible for electing Latin@s to school board and city council positions. This reveals the commitment, power and agency the community has to create change.

## VI. STORIES OF BECOMING

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of critical ontology (Kincheloe, 2003) and how this informs the being, work, and advocacy of three intergenerational Latin@ educators in Central Texas. Our museum and narratives in the previous chapter provide an overview of our experiences and an insight into the community of San Marcos.

### Research Questions

The themes and tenets of LatCrit have been useful to make sense of this research data. What follows is a discussion of each research question. The discussion will help to make sense of the findings that emerged as a result of this study.

#### Research Question One

What is the critical ontology of three San Marcos CISD Latin@ educators?

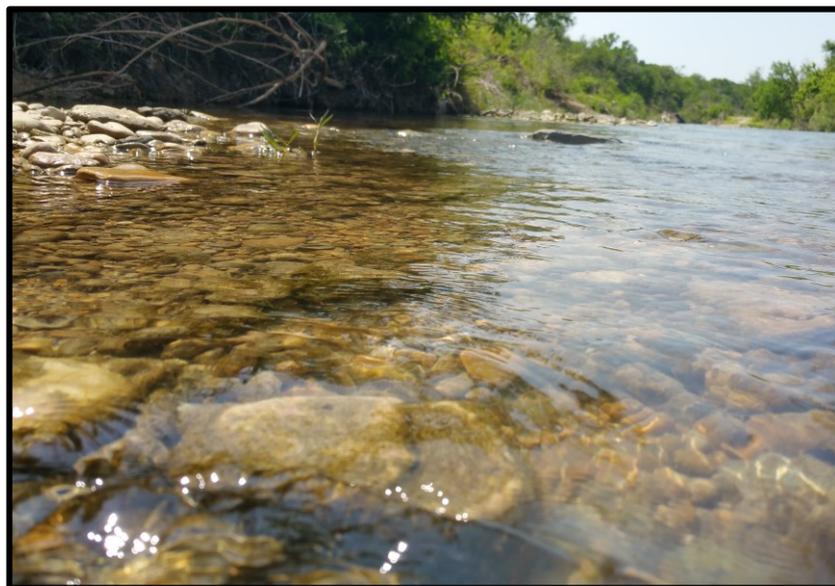


*Figure 26.* El Sol y La Luna. “Painting by the author”

This painting of *El Sol y La Luna* is the representation of our journey and critical ontology. It tells the story of the development of our identity. It represents the issues of identity we all experienced. All three of us shared stories of feeling different and inferior when we were kids. These experiences had a lasting impact on our identity. Having to attend a segregated school and being punished for speak Spanish made Frank feel different and inferior from an early age. This experience marked his identity and had a lasting effect on his life. For María and I, growing up in South Texas, one of the poorest areas in the United States, had such a deep affect, that we both tried to escape our identity by leaving South Texas behind. This sense of shame for being a minority shaped our identity and the way we viewed ourselves. Like the *luna*, that is depicted as sleeping in the painting, our identities were hidden and in essence, in the dark. For years, we carried shame about our identity. It was not until our adult lives that we finally awoke, like the *sol* in this painting. All of us shared how one person pushed us to reflect on, and think about our lives. For Frank, his history professor pushed him to rethink Texas history from the perspective of Mexico. This marked the beginning of his critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), which led him to discover another point of view. It was then that he began to rethink his identity. For María and I, it was a university professor and mentor who pushed us to reflect on our lives. This led to our awakening and the beginning of our critical consciousness. Once we all woke up and gained critical consciousness, we began to notice how power played a role in the world and how this same power was responsible for the feelings of inferiority and shame we had experienced as children. This marked the development of our critical ontology. Furthermore, this made us recognize the shame we

carried for being Latin@s was a real phenomenon, caused by the dominant ideologies that sustain the status quo in this country.

Our critical ontology is part of a developmental process that has informed who we are and is part of our unfinishedness. Freire (1998) describes this unfinishedness as essential to our human condition. “Whenever there is life, there is unfinishedness, though only among women and men is it possible to speak of an awareness of unfinishedness (p. 52). This unfinishedness manifests itself in a fluid and always evolving state of being. Therefore, our critical ontology has manifested as a developmental process for the three of us. A fluid state of being that shaped the way we saw the world. As Frank said, it is a process of evolution, shaped by critical awareness and reflection, that continues to evolve. Furthermore, it is rooted in the principles of lifelong learning and the understanding that we are always learning and growing.



*Figure 27. The Shaping of Our Critical Ontology. (Garcia, 2016)*

I use the image above as a logic model that captures the shaping of our critical

ontology. The image captures the San Marcos River, which connects us to the beautiful river that runs through our community, yet it also represents our journey. Frank, María, and I are all represented by a rock in this image. We all started our lives at different places and time periods in this river, and it is through this river that we have lived and navigated our lives. Like a rock in a river, at times we have moved swiftly, and times we have moved slowly. We have encountered many obstacles and have been led down many tributaries in this river. What combines us is the critical moment of abrasion, or crash, with another rock, which we encountered on our journey. This crash was so powerful and significant that it shaped our jagged rock into a smoother more polished rock. This actual phenomenon, which smoothens the jagged texture of river rocks, represents the internal shaping of our critical ontology. It was so powerful and disruptive that has reshaped our view of the world and our view about ourselves, thus marking the development of our critical ontology. This has helped us to recognize the power that contributes to the marginalization and disenfranchisement of students and families, helping us to develop the language, questions and political awareness to act on injustices. Most importantly is has shaped our advocacy and has given us the opportunity to change and disrupt these spaces within our world. As a result, we have been able to continue on our path in the river, crashing into other rocks, and slowly changing the ecology and texture of those rocks, thus contributing to the changing the ecology of the river. Like rocks in the river, we continue on our paths and our critical ontology and advocacy continue to develop in a fluid nature, always changing, and always moving forward. This shaping of our critical ontology has reframed and informed the way we live our lives and employ our agency.

## **Research Question Two**

How does the critical ontology of these Latin@ educators inform their being, their work, and their advocacy?

Our critical ontology has been a result of our development and evolution. It has been shaped by our experiences and reflections, and has resulted in a shift of our identity, our work as teachers, and our role as activists in the community. The passion the three of us exemplified is a result of our ability to identify with our Latin@ students. We see ourselves in our students. It is this personal connection that informs our work ethic, our agenda, and our advocacy. This is our driving force and what keeps us motivated. When I hear deficit comments about poor minority students I immediately think about myself and act on them. When María sees a sleepy or tired child, she can relate to that student because she thinks about her own experience, and uses it to inform her engagement. It is this ability to truly understand our students' experiences that informs our passion as educators. Although it is challenging, and often times we feel defeated in our ability to impact change, it is a form of resistance to work inside a system and simultaneously fight against the status quo of the system that has been set up to fail Latin@ students.

Our collective story helps to inform the experiences that we as Latin@s have faced. The stories reveal that systemic and institutional racism continue to plague the lives of Latin@s. Understanding this inequity and acknowledging that racism still occurs in more covert ways than in the past is the first step in moving forward to heal our communities. As educators, we draw on our personal experiences with racism, identity, and cultural shame to advocate for Latin@ students and families. This informs and

sustains our advocacy and commitment to changing the systems that cause this systemic racism and marginalize Latin@ students and families.

### **A Call to Action**

The following is a call to action, which was developed by the research partners, and portrays our commitment to social justice. The action plan is organized using the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012) and makes recommendations at the level of self, organization, and community.

### **Recommendation for Selves**

The three of us have a commitment to continue to work for the equity of Latin@s both in and out of school. Although Frank has retired, he continues to serve the community by sharing his story and his experiences with the community. He has discussed his story at public places such as the opening of the Centro Cultural Hispano, with numerous students pursuing their master's and doctoral degrees, and now he has shared his story with you the reader. He is committed to being involved as much as he can and continues to be involved in the local politics of San Marcos.

María is committed to continue to work in this district. She will be graduating with her master's in Educational Leadership in May of 2016 and plans to seek a leadership role within the district to have a bigger role in the decisions that impact all students. Furthermore, she is committed to continue her personal development and growth as an educational leader and has applied to a doctoral program. She is committed to being Dr. García one day. Her decision to pursue a doctorate is rooted in her commitment to become better educator and a strong Latina role model for her children.

My commitment is to always be a lifelong advocate for Latin@ students and families no matter where my journey takes me. For the immediate future, I am committed to become involved in more community development and work outside the school system to increase the opportunity and access for Latin@ students and families. Furthermore, as a Latin@ scholar I am committed to working alongside Latin@ communities and families to transform our communities and schools.

### **Recommendation for School District**

The San Marcos school district is currently in a state of transition. Due to the resignation of the superintendent and two assistant superintendents coupled with the majority of the school administrators nearing retirement age, the district is in a state of tension and flux, reflecting present and future uncertainties regarding leadership and organizational change. I believe and hope that a better future lies ahead for this school district and for the Latin@ students and families who trust that SMCISD is providing the best education possible. A better future will only be achieved if major changes are enacted. I include four recommendations below for the school district that are imperative to drive change.

My first recommendation is about recording and preserving the history of the school district. There is so much potential and richness in recording the history of the school district and community and using this as teaching tool for students, teachers, and school leaders. There is a wonderful opportunity to use the pedagogy of place to teach the history and connect this history to the larger narrative of this community and nation. Imagine the possibilities of teaching students the history of this school district and connecting that to Texas, the United States, and world history? This would allow

students to gain a more complex and deeper understanding of how history played a role in the formation of the school district and community in which they live. The same history can be used as professional development for teachers and school leaders who are employed in this district and community. Gaining this historical understanding can be utilized to dispel myths, stereotypes, and deficit thinking about the students and families, and give faculty and staff a clearer understanding of how the context has created the current realities that exist in San Marcos.

My second recommendation is that the school district develop a plan for recruiting and retaining Latin@ educators. While this step doesn't address the need to become a culturally competent school district, it does take the first step needed in helping our district to become more culturally competent. It is important for the school leaders and school board members to use data to understand the huge gap in demographics between students and teachers. For the few Latin@ educators who are currently employed within the district a plan for retention is necessary.

The third recommendation is the creation of an assets mapping process for the school district. This asset mapping process would consist of developing a partnership between district leaders, community members, teachers, and students. The goal of this partnership would be to develop a process that would change the climate in this district to one of inclusivity and one that values the perspectives of all stakeholders. The assets mapping process would be a framework to create a better education system for all students and families in San Marcos. The process would be used to develop a conversation and collect data that could be utilized to make decisions about how to improve programs and systems in the district. This process could be used to constantly

modify the status quo and ensure that the district changes in a way that values and respects all students and families.

The final recommendation is for the district to develop an alternative plan to engage families and the community. It is time that we move past counting attendance at parent conferences and other school events as community involvement. My recommendation is that we develop a more authentic plan to engage families and communities so their voices can be heard. It is imperative that they are active in designing the goals and mission of the San Marcos school district. The implementation of community meetings, home visits, and community walks can provide a way to start developing and healing relationships with the community.

### **Recommendation for Community**

San Marcos is a beautiful place with a rich history, and is one of the longest inhabited places in the country. The history of the San Marcos community can be traced in several books, archival data, and through a collection at the San Marcos Public Library. However, the community lacks a place where the history of the community can be mapped and persevered.

I recommend developing a historical museum for the preservation of the history of San Marcos. San Marcos is privileged to have a university and several museums in town however none of them focus solely on the history and development of the San Marcos community. The creation of a museum for San Marcos that captures the rich history of this community would contribute to the preservation and history of this community. This museum would be a place where residents, visitors, and students of SMCISD could benefit by developing a deeper, more personal connection to the

community. Furthermore, this dissertation and the museum *San Marcos Desde Adentro* could be added to this museum to contribute to the history and capture the living knowledge and ecology of this community.

### **Future Research**

Further research is needed at several different levels to explore and add to the body of literature surrounding both critical ontology and Latin@ educators. I provide a call for future research using the ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012) to guide the various components of research needed.

At the level of the self, additional research is needed to understand how critical ontology develops and informs the teaching of educators of all races. This study focused on three Latin@s in a particular community so exploring this with more educators of all races can be useful to learn more about this concept. Furthermore, exploring the transformational experiences of the development of critical ontology might be useful to understanding how this concept can contribute to educators' personal development and growth. Lastly more research that examines the experiences of Latin@s educators nationwide is needed to learn more about how we can recruit, maintain, and sustain Latin@s in the education profession. This is critical as we see the Latino diaspora spread into schools and community across the country and into Canada.

At the organizational level, research is needed to study how an educator's critical ontology impacts the students and school community. Moreover, research that looks at the school, college, and career experiences of Latin@ educators is necessary to find ways to fix the Latin@ educational pipeline.

Nationally, further research into the ways teacher and educational leadership preparation programs can help to develop the critical ontology of educators is needed. In addition, research on the process and development of critical ontology is needed to develop a framework for this concept. Conducting further research on critical ontology can inform school leadership practices and contribute to this body of literature. Research methodology courses should also expand the epistemological way of knowing to expand LatCrit and community based research strategies that invite and privilege local knowledge and wisdom as legitimate, authentic and important knowledge that can inform the history, present, and future work of communities.

### **Closing Thoughts**

As the demographics of our nation continue to change it is urgent that we, as school leaders and scholars, focus on creating schools where Latin@ students can excel. I close this dissertation with an immense sense of hope for a better future. A hope that if we learn about our history, our schools, and our communities, this nation will not repeat the mistakes of the past. I have hope that history and stories can unite people and bring healing. Moreover, I have hope in the many Latin@ educators who are activists and are both working and fighting in the education system to help rectify the mistakes of the past and provide a better education to children. Furthermore, I dream and hope that the San Marcos community can come together and unite for a better future for all of the students in the district.

The completion of this dissertation is testament to the power and change that is possible in our communities. On March 11, 2016 we held the defense of this dissertation in English and in Spanish. This was a deliberate way to include and have my parents

participate in my defense. Furthermore, it served to disrupt the traditional method of defense and was form of resistance in within the system. It was an honor to end this dissertation that explores the segregation of Latin@s by speaking Spanish at the Ivory Tower! Within the life cycle of my inquiry we have gone from segregation to celebration of our communities' diversity, bilingualism and our stories. It is with these thoughts that I leave you, the reader, the gifts, visions, and actions of our story and critical ontology not as an end, but as a step towards action from *San Marcos Desde Adentro*.

## APPENDIX A

### Consent Form for Research Partners

#### Consent Form

#### Please Keep This Consent Form for Your Record

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the qualitative study. The goal of the study is to capture the experiences of Latin@ educators. Please read the information below before deciding to participate. Feel free to ask any questions regarding anything you do not understand. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any time. To end your participation, simply notify the researcher that you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Title of the Study:** Esta es Nuestra Historia: An Intergenerational Study with Three Latin@ Educators

**Researcher:** Yvette Cantu, Doctoral Student, Texas State University-San Marcos, yc1014@txstate.edu, (956) 376-9391

**Supervisor:** Dr. Miguel Guajardo, Ph.D., Associate Professor for Educational Leadership, mg50@txstate.edu, 512.245.6579

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is explore how the critical ontology of Latin@ educators inform their being, their work, and their advocacy?

#### **What is expected of you as a research partner?**

1. Participate in at least five pláticas with possible follow-ups. **Pláticas will be audiotaped on a recorder.** You have the right to request that the recorder be turned off at any time. You are not obligated to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. Research collected through the pláticas and artifacts can be used for academic presentations and publication purposes. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy and identity. Participation in this project is voluntary and you may choose at any time not to participate without any penalty.
2. Share documents and artifacts such as photographs and any other objects that will help tell the story of your life. I will make copies or take a photograph of these documents and objects with your permission.

**What are the risks of participating?** There are no physical or mental risks for participating in this study. However, you may experience some discomfort during our pláticas while recalling memories related to your personal experiences growing up or as

an educator. If this occurs we can stop the plática, or you can change the subject. In addition, you may seek counseling services available to students on campus by contacting the Texas State Counseling Center at (512) 245-2208 or email [counselingcenter@txstate.edu](mailto:counselingcenter@txstate.edu). Services for participants are free to registered students, though the number of sessions allowed may be limited. The following list includes providers who are available on a sliding fee schedule should the need arise.

Austin: <http://www.integralcare.org/> Phone: (512) 472-HELP

Hays County: [http://www.hillcountry.org/services/mental\\_health/default.asp](http://www.hillcountry.org/services/mental_health/default.asp) Ph: (877) 466-0660

San Antonio: <http://www.chcsbc.org/> Phone: (210) 731-1300

Although there are not any known risks for participating in this study, please feel free to call me or my supervisor if you have any questions regarding this study, please ask now or when you feel comfortable.

Unless you have provided me permission to use your actual name and pictures a pseudonym and pixilated images will be used to protect your identity.

**What are the benefits of participating?**

Benefits for the participants: By participating in this study you will contribute to a better understanding of Latin@ educators, who they are, ways in which they are working in our educational system, and the things they are doing to improve the educational success of minority students. You will contribute to a gap in the literature and give a voice to Latin@s who are underrepresented in the field.

**Is there any compensation for participating?** No, there is no compensation.

**How can I discontinue participating and whom should I contact if I have any questions?**

Please remember you can withdraw your authorization and discontinue participating in this study at any moment without penalty. For questions about the study, please contact me by phone at (956) 376-9391 or by email at [yc1014@txstate.edu](mailto:yc1014@txstate.edu). For questions or concerns, regarding the rights of participants and duties of investigators, or if dissatisfied with any aspect of the study, you may contact IRB Chair Jon Lasser at 512-245-3413; email: [lasser@txstate.edu](mailto:lasser@txstate.edu), or Becky Northcut, Compliance Specialist at 512-245-2102; email: [bnorthcut@txstate.edu](mailto:bnorthcut@txstate.edu)

**PLEASE RETURN THIS SHEET  
CONSENT FORM**

Signature and printed name of the investigator soliciting consent

As the researcher conducting this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks involved in your participation:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

You have been informed of the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks involved in participating in this study and have received a copy of this form. You have had the opportunity to ask questions before signing and you have been informed that you may ask questions at any time. You consent voluntarily to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not relinquishing any of your legal rights.

“It is possible the investigator may want to use some of the recordings produced in this study in presentations and academic/scientific demonstrations. Please sign below if you agree to allow the use of the recordings where you appear.”

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Research Partner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

“With my signature I am giving permission for the audio cassettes, documents, and photographs provided for this study to also be used for educational purposes.”

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of the Research Partner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature accepting to participate in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Plática Guide**

#### **First Plática**

This plática will focus on having a conversation about our family and life experiences.

Research partners will be asked to bring at least three photographs or artifacts about their families and life experiences.

- Start with filling in a timeline with historical events that are important in our lives
- Share three photos or artifacts and plot them on timeline
- Talk about family and life experiences

In preparation for the following session, research partners will be asked to think about their schooling experiences and to bring three photos or artifacts from their schooling experiences to talk about and add to the timeline.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Plática Guide**

#### **Second Plática**

This plática will focus on having a conversation about our schooling experiences.

Research partners will be asked to bring at least three photographs or artifacts to share.

- Start with adding any significant dates that are important to the timeline
- Share three photos or artifacts and plot them on timeline
- Talk about schooling experiences

In preparation for the following session, research partners will be asked to think about their experiences working for the San Marcos school district and to bring three photos or artifacts from their work experiences to talk about and add to the timeline.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Plática Guide**

#### **Third Plática**

This plática will focus on having a conversation about our experiences as educators working in the San Marcos school district. Research partners will be asked to bring at least three photographs or artifacts to share.

- Start with adding any significant events while working for the San Marcos school district on the timeline
- Share three photos or artifacts and plot them on timeline
- Talk about our experiences educators in the San Marcos school district

In preparation for the following session, research partners will be asked to think about their role as advocates while working for the San Marcos school district and to bring three photos or artifacts from their work as advocates to talk about and add to the timeline.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Plática Guide**

#### **Fourth Plática**

This plática will focus on having a conversation about our advocacy while working for the San Marcos school district. Research partners will be asked to bring at least three photographs or artifacts to share.

- Start with adding any significant events while working for the San Marcos school district on the timeline
- Share three photos or artifacts and plot them on timeline
- Talk about our experiences as advocates in San Marcos school district

In preparation for the following session, research partners will be asked to reflect on how their ontology impacted their work as educators. Furthermore, research partners will be asked to bring any additional photographs or artifacts that they want to share and add to their timeline.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Group Plática Guide**

#### **Fifth & Final Plática**

This plática will focus on sharing our life maps and stories with one another.

Additionally, this group plática will focus on reflecting about our life and work within the San Marcos district and making sense of the data.

- Start with adding any additional significant events, photos, or artifacts to timeline
- Each of the research partners will take turns sharing their life maps.
- Reflection questions:
  - What events defined the person/educator you have become?
  - How did your ontology impact your role as an educator?
  - What does this mean for schools and students?

## APPENDIX G

### Data Analysis Matrix

#### Frank Contreras

*Data Analysis Matrix – Frank Contreras*

<b>Research Partner: Frank Contreras</b>	<b>LatCrit Tenets (Solórzano &amp; Bernal, 2001)</b>				
Ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012)	Tenet 1 Centrality & intersectionality of race and racism	Tenet 2 Challenges the dominate ideology	Tenet 3 Commitment to social justice	Tenet 4 Centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color	Tenet 5 Trans-disciplinary perspective
Self	Attended Segregated Southside School Spanish Speaker Migrant Farm Worker	Shift in Identity	Decision to work in San Marcos, his <i>querencia</i> Reason for pursuing master's degree	Draws on personal experiences and assets of his family	
Organization: San Marcos CISD	Deficit thinking & resistance from other teachers, administrators in SMCISD	First Latino Principal in SMCISD Myth that Latin@ parents	Implemented: Bilingual Program Home & School Visits	Values families & students Values Spanish language	
Community: Local & United States	Southwest Texas State University: Discrimination for being a Latino- reason for changing major Had to take Speech for accent Lower grades for being a Latino	Questioned inequitable policies at Southwest Texas State Westminster v Mendez 1946 Civil Rights Act 1964 Brown v Board 1954	Involved in Walkout of 1971 Worked for School Desegregation Director of Migrant Education Board Member Centro Cultural Hispano	Involved in the idea of forming Centro Cultural Hispano	1969 Member of San Marcos City Council Member of the board of Centro Cultural Hispano Member of St. John's Catholic Church Member of the City of San Marcos Park Commission

## APPENDIX H

### Data Analysis Matrix

#### María Soledad de García

*Data Analysis Matrix – María Soledad de García*

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**Research  
Partner: María  
Soledad de  
García**

**LatCrit Tenets (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001)**

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	Tenet 1 Centrality & intersectionality of race and racism	Tenet 2 Challenges the dominate ideology	Tenet 3 Commitment to social justice	Tenet 4 Centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color	Tenet 5 Transdisciplinary perspective
Ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012)					
Self	Spanish Speaker Latina	Shift in Identity	Reason for pursuing master's degree  Interested in pursuing a PhD	Draws on her personal experiences as a child	
Organization: San Marcos CISD		Questions Bilingual Program	Works with bilingual students and families and empowers them to feel welcomed and proud of what they are doing with their children  Home Visits  Picks up students to take them to school	Draws on her personal experiences as a child to relate and be advocate for students and families	Advocate for whole child
Community: Local & United States	Her name changed at Southwest Texas State University				Active member of church

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## APPENDIX I

### Data Analysis Matrix

**Yvette Cantú**

*Data Analysis Matrix – Yvette Cantú*

<b>Research Partner: Yvette Cantú</b>	<b>LatCrit Tenets (Solórzano &amp; Bernal, 2001)</b>				
Ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2012)	Tenet 1 Centrality & intersectionality of race and racism	Tenet 2 Challenges the dominate ideology	Tenet 3 Commitment to social justice	Tenet 4 Centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color	Tenet 5 Transdisciplinary perspective
Self	Spanish Speaker Female Latina Age	Shift in Identity	Reason for pursuing masters & doctoral degree	Draw on my family's community cultural wealth	
Organization: San Marcos CISD	Deficit thinking from other teacher & administrators	Questions deficit thinking Questions Bilingual & Gifted Talented Programs Questions curriculum packages	Speaks up when encountering deficit thinking Implemented Spanish Club Active in diversifying the gifted and talented program	Draw on my students & family's community cultural wealth	
Community: Local & United States	Only student accused of plagiarizing in a master's class at Texas State University	Challenged plagiarizing accusation	Advocate for Latin@ students & families		Attend & present at state & national conferences on issues regarding Latin@s

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