A PEDAGOGY OF HOPES AND DREAMS: AN INVITATION TO A DYNAMIC

CRITICAL LEARNING PROCESS

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and daughters. Thank you Mom for always believing in me, praying for me, and supporting me. Thank you to my daughters, they are my strength and my biggest cheerleaders. I love you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to document and better understand the power of invitation using the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) theory of change and dynamic-critical pedagogies as an invitation into a space for learning, teaching, and development. In this qualitative study, I employed the method of critical ethnography and dynamic-critical pedagogies to engage the research participants in critical conversations. The invitation guided me and a research team of teachers, parents, and additional stakeholders in exploring what conditions establish and foster a campus climate that will facilitate effective partnerships among leaders, educators, students, and families. The invitation guided participants of the school community to imagine how they can co-construct a campus climate that encourages the creation of sustainable relationships with schools to provide 4-year-olds a meaningful educational experience.

This type of research is significant to school leaders, educators, families, and a community because the methods employed are engaging and creates an invitational space to a dynamic learning process. The greatest impact of this research is using dynamic-critical pedagogies to study theory in action with the goal of painting the picture of a community to better understand its work from the inside out with the goal of influencing its practices of engagement and sustainability; the work highlights the dynamic-critical ontology of raising healthy children, their families, and systems as they become life-ready and life-long learners.

I. THE POWER OF INVITATION: THE EMERGENCE OF A CRITICAL ONTOLOGY

The world is shifted through invitation rather than mandate (Block, 2008, p. 98). We all have been invited to many different occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, quinceñeras, and gatherings with family and friends. But have these invitations been impactful and taken us on a path of learning and self-discovery? Invitations have been powerful and impactful in my life. During my education in the master's and doctoral programs, I was invited to tell my story by my professor; through this process, I transformed from the storyteller to the storymaker (M. A. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010). My story changed as I learned more about myself by exploring my narrative through different lenses.

The following are the stories of how invitations have changed the trajectory of my life. They represent my process of becoming and how it has influenced my practice as an academic and school leader. Dynamic-critical pedagogies are strategies used to engage participants in thinking, listening, telling stories, and having dialogue for the purpose of learning together (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Dynamic-critical pedagogies include Circle, which is used to establish trust and foster relationships, and Gracious Space, which is creating a space where people are invited to learn in public (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016; Hughes, 2012). The Community Learning Exchange (CLE) theory of change can engage a researcher and participants in *pláticas* in which they look at issues relevant to the local context (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The focus of this study was to invite participants to embark in a learning journey similar to my experiences that led to my ontology. This study was an invitation to re-imagine a new reality for the education of 4-year-olds.

Roots are Strong

Figure 1 is an image I drew in the Summer of 2014 when I was enrolled in a master's of school leadership program. The course was titled Understanding the Self, and we had to

explore who we were by examining our development of self historically, biologically, culturally, and politically. When a class project was presented to us that had to be in a form of an artistic rendition, this is what I drew for this assignment.

Figure 1. Roots are strong.

I placed the symbol of a beautiful lighthouse at the core of my exploration; the lighthouse from my hometown has always been intriguing and caught my eye. The lighthouse is a representation of my roots and my beliefs that have made me who I am today as a student, researcher, and leader. I use this historic lighthouse as a representation of hope and the context through which my values and passion guide my work. Through my journey of self-discovery, I was able to author a more critical ontology. The roots represent my ontology, the "deep rich fertile stuff" guiding the thoughts, values, and actions of community within this research. The tree represents me and my daughters. The storm represents the obstacles that have been part of my life. The following are stories of self-understanding, discovery, and the awareness and development of my ontology, which was at the root of this study.

Where am I Going and How am I Going to Get There?

I grew up in a small town in South Texas and accepted an invitation to attend Southwest Texas State University (SWT) in San Marcos, Texas. When I was 18 years old, a friend invited me to go to college. Most students are invited to think about college by their

parents or school counselors. I know my parents wanted me to seek educational opportunities, but these conversations never happened at home, nor did they happen with my school counselors. Counselors had conversations with "other" students—those they felt would be more successful. To be honest, I do not know why these conversations never arose with my counselors, but I was in conversation with myself about going to college. I accepted my friend's invitation and decided to go out into the world on my own and seek a higher education. In 1991, I graduated from high school and became the first in my family to venture off to college in search of an opportunity that would expand my life—an education.

The summer prior to my leaving for my first fall semester, I needed to do several things to make my college trip possible. I worked at a local grocery store to earn money to pay for all the essentials I would need for my dorm room. The next hurdle I encountered was how I was going to get there. I did not know how I would arrive in San Marcos at that time, as my family was not able to bring me for move in day because we did not have reliable transportation to make the 5.5-hour journey. I was lucky to have my privileged friend who had extended the invitation to go to college with her, as she had her own vehicle and offered me a ride. I recall packing up my friend's red Acura Integra and saying my goodbyes to my family. I remember the guilt I felt surrounding leaving, but the 5.5-hour road trip was the best decision I ever made as a young adult. My life changed forever when I accepted the invitation and took a leap of faith and went off to college. The simple invitation of "come with me to Southwest Texas" was "more than just a request to attend; it [was] a call to create an alternative future, to join in the possibility" (Block, 2008, p. 114). I had no idea what the experience of leaving to attend college would be like, but I felt it was what I needed to do. Figure 2 shows pictures that are representative of my journey from a small town to a college town.

Figure 2. My journey.

I arrived in San Marcos with just my clothes, bedroom accessories, and about $200 in cash that I had saved from my summer job. I quickly discovered I needed to learn how to navigate the complex institutional systems that were foreign to me but would help me to be successful in college. How do I register for classes? How do I apply for financial aid? How can I be responsible for myself? Where can I work? Navigating the system was challenging for me and I did not have parents who could help me, but the life experiences my parents provided for me as a child prepared me to have perseverance. My parents also taught me that when you want something, it takes hard work and dedication. My parents were both working-class people who worked hard to put food on the table and to keep a roof over our heads. Because my parents were not able to support me financially, I had to work while I was in college. I held a work-study job and would work other part-time jobs to make ends meet. It took me 5 years to complete my bachelor's degree, and this journey came with plenty of challenges. Some challenges I encountered were a lack of support, I did not feel a connection to the university, and I had no guidance from the university on what classes to take. There was little support in navigating my educational path and I changed my major about three times. By the end I just chose a major because I needed to finish, and I finally graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology. These experiences provided me the work ethic that I still have today in my life and career.

There is More to This Life

My life forever changed when I had children. I put my heart and soul into being a wife, mother, and educator. Once my daughters left elementary school and moved on to middle school, I felt as though I had done an excellent job of helping them to be independent and successful in school by providing them with many learning experiences and meaningful conversations. I had always put my family first but now I began to feel there was more for me out there, especially when it came to my career. I had been a teacher for 12 years and loved being a teacher, but I felt I was stagnant—change was not something I embraced, but I wanted to make a greater impact on students and families.

In 2014, I received an invitation to attend a CLE at Fuentes Pre-K Center (a pseudonym). This invitation led to another invitation. One day I was sitting in my classroom during my planning period and a call came over the intercom that I had a visitor and she was headed to my room. Out of nowhere, a director of curriculum and instruction from the Camino Real Consolidated Independent School District (CRCISD; a pseudonym) was sitting down with me and extending an invitation to join a cohort and get my master's degree in school leadership. She had identified me as a leader in schools and personally invited me to attend an information session about a master's program for school leadership in partnership with Texas State University. I was confused and puzzled by the invitation because I had been an educator in this school district for 15 years and no one had ever had a conversation with me about being a leader; it felt like my days in high school and never being invited to attend college. I had worked under the same leadership for many years and never had a conversation with leaders about continuing to grow as an educator and to seek other learning opportunities. Upon reflection, I know now that was the current leadership's way of putting me in my place, and for them that was me in my classroom and them leading.

This conversation gave me fuel and I accepted the invitation. I went through the process of interviewing and applying for the master's in school leadership program at Texas State University. The process was intense and involved reading articles and having discussions, writing, and being reflective. After a gruesome and uncomfortable process, I was selected and accepted as a student for Cohort 1 for CRCISD and Texas State University. According to Block (2008), a "genuine invitation changes our relationship with others, for we come to them as an equal" (p. 117). It was this invitation that changed me. This invitation led to my engaging collectively and collaboratively in conversation with colleagues about how to improve our schools and communities.

Understanding the Self

Classes for Cohort 1 began in the Summer of 2014, and my first course was titled Understanding the Self. On the first day of class, I was scared yet eager to embark on this new learning adventure. To my surprise, this class was not like any other ordinary lecture class, it was intimate, thought provoking, and, I am not going to lie, very uncomfortable. We met in a circle and had to share all about "Who we were?" "Why we were here?" and "Who were we taking on this journey with us?" Sharing this kind of information about myself was out of my comfort zone—my heart was racing, my palms were sweaty, and tears started coming out my eyes and rolling down my cheeks. After reflecting on that moment, I realized the tears were tears of pride and of feeling honored and privileged to be in the circle. As the course went on, Circle was a daily occurrence and soon became a way of expressing how we felt, sharing experiences, sometimes crying, and asking questions. Circle brought the class material to life in a dialogical manner. The pedagogy of Circle has left a long-lasting learning effect on me. This type of communication has given me the Gracious Space (Hughes, 2012) I needed to express myself in a safe environment where I would not be judged, and, most importantly, someone was listening. Circle has changed me to be vulnerable, humble, and

connected to others. Before beginning my master's program, I was someone who did not like or welcome change; I preferred things to be the same or not change because it was comfortable and easier. For example, I was a bilingual kindergarten teacher for 11 years, and the teachers were always being asked to embrace changes that were usually about the curriculum. Many years ago, curriculum changes caused me some distress, but I never questioned authority and I continued to follow the demands even if I knew they were developmentally inappropriate for kindergartners. If I had the knowledge of communication I have now, I would have been able to start conversations, lead a circle, and provide a Gracious Space (Hughes, 2012) to communicate the change and how we could still incorporate developmentally appropriate activities throughout the kindergarten day. As I reflect on why I needed to take a course on understanding myself, I now know that understanding "me" is critical for building relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Understanding the self is important when you want to lead change. Figure 3 is a photo of the pedagogy of Circle and how it led to understanding the self and building meaningful relationships.

Figure 3. Circle.

Arrival

During my experience as a graduate student, I learned long-lasting leadership skills that have created in me a desire to continue my educational journey. After completing my master's program in 2016, I was not ready for the feeling of belonging and learning to end. I felt I belonged with a group of colleagues who had the same goals, values, and desire to

improve our schools as I did. I felt lost knowing my learning endeavors were about to end. I felt as though I was not fully developed or not where I needed to be at that point in my life. I felt there was more for me out there. I had this pulling force within me, telling me I needed to be somewhere else and seek other opportunities. At the time, I was not sure what I was going to do next and I was not prepared to give up on this feeling. After days of reflection and digging deep within myself about this feeling, I decided I needed to continue my educational journey. With the support of my family, friends, and colleagues, in 2016, I applied to the Doctoral Program in School Improvement at Texas State University. Soon, an invitation came for an interview. Once again, I was scared, but this time I was confident in myself because I felt prepared with a skill set from my master's program, such as communication and listening skills and the vocabulary to articulate myself in a scholarly way. The process was intense, but I felt resilient and confident. I waited with anticipation for an acceptance letter, which I received on March 3, 2016. I was ecstatic, yet nervous as I was about to embark on a new journey.

These stories of invitation, becoming, and being in conversation with others represent how I acquired knowledge I never knew I had. There is always an invitation to continue to change and develop who we are and to develop a framework that guides us in the work we do in our communities and organizations. For example, COVID-19 created challenges related to not being able to engage with families in person. No visitor policies and virtual engagement have added to the barriers we must overcome. The work of the self is never finished, and the truth of the matter is many of us never know, nor are invited to engage in this developmental process.

Problem Statement: Implications of a Growing and Changing Texas

The Central Texas community in which I conducted this study is situated in one of the fastest-growing counties in the United States (Weilbacher, 2021). From the years 2010–2020,

the county saw 53% population growth, according to the U.S. Census (Weilbacher, 2021). The community needs to respond to this growth and the associated changes. In addition, COVID-19 has created other changes in schools, such as a decrease in enrollment in early childhood centers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment at Fuentes Pre-K Center went from 494 students in the 2019–2020 school year to 333 for the 2020–2021 school year, a 33% decrease. With the shifting demographics in Texas, leaders and educators in this Central Texas community must be prepared to teach a diverse young population. According to the U.S. Department of Education (Sabol et al., 2018), two-thirds of 4-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood education centers or programs and this number is expected to continue growing (Sabol et al., 2018). Creating a healthy introduction to schooling is vital to success in school and life for students and their families. Research confirms that high-quality early childhood education is critical to a child's development and family economics, especially for children of low-income families (Johnson-Staub, 2017). Educators within early childhood education centers need to be prepared to meet the needs of this growing population by creating spaces for dialogue and inviting families to be engaged in schools and make collaborative decisions about their children's schooling. Creating effective networks of communication and collaboration among families, school leaders, and educators can begin the process of developing school systems that are responsive to the needs of the community. Research shows children from low-income families struggle more with schooling compared to children from more economically stable families and are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college (Murdock et al., 2014). A good early and healthy introduction to schooling, through early childhood education, can change future outcomes by increasing future income. An early and healthy introduction to schooling, however, is about more than the socioeconomic status of families, it is about supporting the whole child's socio-emotional, cultural, and linguistic needs.

Texas has seen significant growth in its population and with this growth has come a change in the diversity of the population that has "heightened the need for appropriate public policy response to improve and expand specialized programs, especially pre-kindergarten programs" (Murdock et al., 2014, p. 6). Murdock et al.'s (2014) predictions of the shifting demographics are reflected in the Central Texas community in which this study took place, as the Hispanic population grew from 35.3% in 2010 to 40.1% in 2020 (Weilbacher, 2021). The demographics have shifted, and as leaders and educators we need to take steps to meet the needs of this diverse population. With the shifting demographics in this Central Texas community as well as the state, community leaders should create an invitational space that nurtures meaningful learning opportunities for prekindergarten students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Diversity and the need to take action are at our doorstep, though deficit perspectives are pervasive in the educational literature and practice. Deficit perspectives tend to blame a person or a group of people from diverse cultures based on the belief that they do not value education (Sebolt, 2018). According to Sebolt (2018), teachers believe parents do not value education if they are not involved in traditional ways, such as by attending conferences, parent–teacher organization meetings, and other school activities (e.g., Back to School Night, Open House, Literacy and Math Nights). Regrettably, we do not know the parents nor have we created a space that is inviting them to become partners in their child's education. The lack of an inviting space is the beginning of a fractured and disconnected community. These fractured systems begin to marginalize the power of parents to connect; this emptiness creates disengagement, leads to loneliness, and erodes a sense of belonging for families, students, and teachers (Block, 2008). This void dismisses the familial capital of teachers and families whose gifts remain to be unraveled. This study represents an invitation to think differently

and to join me in the journey to awareness, development, and transformation of our individual lives, our organizations, and the world around us.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to document how the power of invitation can establish conditions that foster a campus climate that encourages effective partnerships among leaders, educators, students, and families that enable them to provide an effective education for 4-year-old children that will put them on a path for success in education and life. This study is an invitation to re-imagine! I invite you, the reader, to witness the co-construction of a safe, trusting, and dignified community that is committed to identifying the awareness, skills, and imagination needed by educators, students, families, and leaders to support a process for learning and development as we change our world. Through this study, I attempted to articulate the power of an invitation by inviting research participants to share their stories of impact, change, and tension as they expanded their understanding of systems at the levels of self, organization, and community. I collected their stories through *pláticas* with families, school personnel, and community stakeholders (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). I captured the living campus climate that has informed the development of a vision of the work as it relates to school climate, curriculum, and instruction. "Plática becomes critical pedagogy when it yields action" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 162). *Pláticas* are symbolic of what is required to create change by building relationships in a way that honors the stories of the parents whose children have been marginalized because of their social, cultural, and economic status. It is through this knowledge that this inquiry was inviting and results can be used to inform the conditions necessary to create an inviting space (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). This study demonstrates how a diverse community can come together to create long-lasting relationships with schools. Currently, there is limited literature on how dynamic-critical pedagogies, which are "specific strategies to engage in thinking, listening, and

dialogue for learning" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 82), can create sustainable change in an organization. In this study, I employed dynamic-critical pedagogies to study theory in action with the goal of painting the picture of a community to better understand its work from the inside out with the goal of influencing its practices of engagement and sustainability; the work highlights the dynamic-critical ontology of raising healthy children, their families, and systems as they become life-ready and life-long learners.

My ontology, my way of being and doing, is grounded in my personal values and beliefs of building meaningful relationships. The strategies I employed to guide this research were providing Gracious Space and engaging in *pláticas*. I aimed at the heart of collaboration, with the goal of informing school leaders of ways to create effective networks for sustainable change. It is this knowledge gained through engaging in *pláticas* that will continue to inform the conditions necessary to create effective networks (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?

2. What conditions establish and foster a campus climate that promotes effective partnerships between leaders, educators, students, and families?

3. How does a school community co-construct a campus climate that informs creating sustainable relationships with schools?

Significance of the Study: An Invitation for the Researcher to Imagine a Different Worldview

This study was an invitation for me, as the researcher and a research team of teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to explore what fosters a campus climate that supports effective partnerships among leaders, educators, students, and families. This type of research

is significant to school leaders, educators, families, and a community because the methods employed "are not tried and true but tested" and get to the heart of the work to create change (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 79). If we do not invite leaders, educators, families, and community partners to be in conversations, it can negatively affect the school climate, relationships, and the education of 4-year-olds. This research is significant in that it represents a different way of engaging a researcher and participants in the research together in the hopes of creating a new reality (Stinnett, 2012). The greatest impact of this research is that teachers, parents, and stakeholders learned together as we analyzed school systems and the cultural context of the conditions in place in an early childhood center. I designed this research to explore climate, cultural context, values, and practices to inform how to establish the necessary systems that are sustainable over time.

Background: Teacher and Leader

Fuentes Pre-K Center was the site of my first teaching experience in 1996, after graduating from college at the age of 23 years old. I recall working at Fuentes Pre-K Center as one of my best experiences and it was what led me to become an educator. I left Fuentes Pre-K Center to continue my education and get my teacher certification. I vowed to myself that I would one day return to Fuentes Pre-K Center, the place that inspired me to be an educator and created a love in me for early childhood education.

At the time of this writing, it is the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year and this will be my fourth year as a school leader at Fuentes Pre-K Center. My first year at Fuentes Pre-K Center consisted of building trust and relationships with teachers and establishing meaningful relationships with families and students. As each new school year approaches, I look forward to the invitations that will continue to make Fuentes a place of growth and learning for teachers, students, families, and leaders.

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA, n.d.-c), the goal of prekindergarten is "for all Texas children to enter school with the foundational knowledge and skills to be curious, confident, and successful learners. In partnership with families, schools and communities" (para. 1). Early childhood educators do everything within their power to create a safe and nurturing learning environment by creating spaces for curiosity and providing opportunities for authentic learning through meaningful, fun, and engaging activities. Students learn through developmentally appropriate play and other activities, such as songs, rhymes, storytelling, and drama. Play is essential to learning. Safe learning spaces are also essential for families. School leaders and families need to collaborate to ensure a healthy introduction to schooling that develops the whole child through a meaningful and purposeful learning environment.

My educational philosophy of how we learn is based on a learner-centered ideology, in that there needs to be a focus on educating the whole child and not just feeding them the curriculum. A whole child, learner-centered education requires building a relationship of trust and mutual respect with each individual learner and their family. Building relationships based on trust is essential to learning. A learner must feel connected and safe in their learning environment. This brand of learning is based on the learner's needs and is self-directed. The learner needs choice based on their interests while the educator facilitates the learning. Learner-centered ideology takes into consideration the assets in the community and how they can contribute to the content within the curriculum to make it culturally relevant. A learner-centered education focuses on the whole individual. A learner-centered ideology also takes into consideration funds of knowledge, which is a "positive view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134) that can be used to scaffold what students learn at home and connect to learning at school.

Study Setting: A Central Texas Community

Schools in the chosen Central Texas community have gone through many changes as far back as to when schools were first established. In this Central Texas community, early childhood education has been part of local and state discussions for many years. State and local leaders know the importance of getting a great start to schooling, but to them that means getting 4-year-olds to be kindergarten ready. Kindergarten school readiness is a term used by policymakers that can be defined as children's readiness, academically, in the areas of language, literacy, and math (Barnett et al., 2020). In 2013, local school board members approved changing the half-day prekindergarten class and making the local prekindergarten campus full day so children would be prepared for kindergarten. There is more to schooling 4-year-olds than getting them ready for kindergarten. Prekindergartners need opportunities to play, socialize with adults and peers, and develop language, and all of this must occur in a safe and nurturing environment. Families need opportunities to be engaged and invited to make decisions about their children's schooling.

CRCISD consists of 12 campuses: one high school campus, one alternative school, two middle school campuses, seven elementary campuses, and one prekindergarten campus. On May 27, 2019, the 86th Session of the Texas State Legislature adjourned, passing 120 education bills. One of these bills was House Bill (HB) 3, which was signed into law by Governor Abbott on June 11, 2019. HB 3 required school districts that had existing half-day prekindergarten for 4-year-olds to be extended to a full day, effective for the 2019–2020 school year (TEA, n.d.-b). Fuentes Pre-K Center is a full-day program and a Title I campus that serves prekindergarten 4-year-old students who meet TEA eligibility for prekindergarten in CRCISD. To qualify for prekindergarten, one or more of the following criteria need to be met: income requirements, linguistically (speaks another language other than English), have a parent who is a disabled veteran, active military, or have a disability. Fuentes Pre-K Center

also serves the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), formally known as Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), Head Start (Community Action), and a two-way dual language program.

Student Demographics

During the 2019–2020 school year, Fuentes Pre-K Center had an enrollment of 494 students and the demographics were 82% Hispanic/Latino, 12% White, 4% Black, and 1% Asian; 23% of students were emergent bilinguals (EBs), 10% were ECSE, and 93% were economically disadvantaged. Due to COVID-19, enrollment decreased. During the 2020–2021 school year, Fuentes Pre-K Center had an enrollment of 333 students. Each year since COVID-19 enrollment has increased. Currently for the 2022–2023 school year, enrollment is up to 460 students. The demographics for the 2022–2023 school year are 65% Hispanic/Latino, 14% White, 12% Black, 1% Asian, and 8% American Indian; 21% of students are EBs, 19% are ECSE, and 89.5% are economically disadvantaged. Fuentes Pre-K Center is an inclusive campus and invites others who do not meet the TEA criteria to attend by paying an affordable tuition compared to other early childhood educational settings in the community. Currently, 7% of students pay tuition to attend Fuentes Pre-K Center.

Teacher Demographics

Fuentes Pre-K Center has a total of 27 teachers and 27 instructional support staff as a requirement of a high-quality prekindergarten program. The demographics of teachers are 44.6% Hispanic, 51% White, and 4.5% Asian. The average years of experience of teachers at Fuentes is 11.5 years. Eighty-seven percent of teachers hold bachelor's degrees and 13% hold master's degrees. Fuentes has a high retention rate with only five teachers leaving in the past 5 years. Due to COVID-19, we had one teacher resign and one instructional assistant retire. Five teachers were relocated to other campuses due to low enrollment.

Theoretical Framework: Using Dynamic-Critical Pedagogies to Create Change

The theoretical framework guiding this inquiry (see Figure 4) was based on M. A. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) framework from their book, *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education: Uniting the Power of Place and Wisdom of People*. This study was deeply grounded in praxis and the use of dynamic-critical pedagogies to create change.

Figure 4. Theoretical framework: "Un choque."

Figure 4 is a representation of a collision or blending of my conceptual and theoretical framework with the theories in use. I named this image Un Choque, a collision. Anzaldúa (1999) wrote about a cultural collision where she felt the struggles of being from two cultures. I was feeling this struggle and this collision of framework provided me clarity. This framework blends a theory in practice that captured the dynamic-critical nature of the research. This framework also guided the methods of this research..

The CLE axioms guided the work to create a deeper understanding of how sustainable change is created through real lived experiences. Through real lived experiences, the Ecologies of Knowing help make meaning, organize our thinking and learning experiences from the micro (self) to meso (organization), and to the macro (community) in a non-linear organic way.

CLE Theory of Change

The CLE theory of change invites us to look at ourselves, families, school organizations, and our communities, by recognizing the assets, telling stories, and honoring

place (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). I implemented the CLE process and through these pedagogies, provided the necessary and sufficient conditions to nurture meaningful relationships. The CLE is a worldview, not a program or a one-time event; "it is a way of life" that creates meaning-making through real lived experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23). The CLE process uses life as pedagogy for learning, development, and change.

The Ecologies of Knowing

The ecologies of knowing were at the center of the theoretical framework and informed the guiding research questions. The ecologies of knowing organize the lived learning experiences before, during, and after the CLE experience (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Research partners make meaning of the experience from the center, which is the self (meso), and then on to the organization (micro), and the community (macro; M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

RASPPA: Relationships, Assets, Stories, Place, Politic, and Action

RASPPA holds the CLE theory of change together; it intertwines relationships, stories, place, politic, and action with the ecologies of knowing (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). RASPPA moves us from a deficit way of thinking to identifying assets and telling our stories shows how assets are developed. Place is where assets and stories emerge from when you build trust. Building trust is the politic that leads the collective to action (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

CLE Axioms

The CLE axioms are learning as leadership and action, *pláticas* and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy, local knowledge and action, encourage crossing borders, and assets and hope (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE axioms guided the work to create a deeper understanding of how sustainable change through real lived experiences is fostered (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). In this study, participants came together collectively to

share their gifts and the challenges they faced from multiple lenses, and then the organization or community can collectively lead sustained change and inform action and identified change (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Parents, school personnel, and community stakeholders participated in dynamic-critical pedagogies, such as Circle and *pláticas*, to name a few. This pedagogy is the bridge that creates a space where students, families, and teachers want to be.

Circle is part of the restorative practices process and has made its way into the CLE pedagogies. Circle "acts as an invitation to change one's relationship with oneself, to one's organization, and to the wider community" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 82). I used *pláticas* to capture the stories of the parents, school personnel, and community stakeholders. I documented, organized, and analyzed these stories through the ecologies of knowing and filtered them through the axioms of a CLE (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). I used the ecologies of knowing to organize the adult learners' thinking and learning from life experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Through real-life exchanges, the ecologies of knowing help make meaning, organize our thinking and learning experiences from the micro (self) to the meso (organization) and to the macro (community) level in a non-linear yet organic way. As the stories are explored, theory emerges to get a deeper meaning of the experiences (Patton, 2015).

Plática is "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). *Pláticas* provide opportunities to share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders feel connected to collectively discover critical issues as we work collaboratively to create a space where we learn and grow together (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). Gracious Space is critical in creating relationships and providing the space for having tough conversations (Ruder, 2009). Providing Gracious Space during engagements and *pláticas* was critical as I was bringing together research participants who may have come

with unique experience and language barriers. According to the Center for Ethical Leadership (n.d.), Gracious Space has four critical elements: spirit, setting, invite the stranger, and learn in public. When these elements are included in engagements with participants, the conditions for Gracious Space can emerge, which has the possibility of transforming a community and creating change.

Type of Study

This study was a critical ethnography in which I employed the dynamic-critical pedagogy of the CLE theory of change framework to build relationships with the research participants and to invite participants to look at local issues to identify assets (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016; Hagues, 2019; Madison, 2012). Building relationships around the positive communication practices of the CLE leads to increased parent engagement and collaboration. The pedagogical practices of a CLE are meant to change the traditional approach of sit-and-get meetings or presentations through more focused and meaningful conversations. This research represents our present way of doing things and reveals how things could be through the lens of a critical theorist. Using the lens of a critical theorist and together with the research participants, I examined how we can foster partnerships that provide 4-year-olds a skill set to succeed in school and life. A critical theorist is one who participates in the study by "engaging stakeholders" to identify injustices and learn about how school systems work (Hagues, 2019, p. 439). A critical theorist is immersed in the study alongside the participants and sees themselves as "a learner and collaborator, supporting the community members who have not previously had a voice" (Hagues, 2019, p. 439). I was at the center of this study and was immersed in critical conversations with participants. I entered this study as an equal ready to learn, collaborate, and engage alongside the participants.

Road Map

The following is a road map about the structure and organization of this dissertation. Chapter I included stories of how invitations have been powerful in my life. I laid out how my roots, upbringing, lived experiences, and educational journey have influenced my beliefs and how I lead others. Chapter II demonstrates how deep-rooted beliefs have caused persistent tensions and tells the story of schooling in the chosen Central Texas community. Chapter II also provides the historical and current context of an early childhood school setting in this Central Texas community, followed by a review of literature from early childhood theorists who have influenced early childhood education.

Figure 5 is a drawing that represents my connection to this Central Texas community and how I was able to navigate institutional systems to shine light on the practices used in an early childhood center. Figure 5 is a representation of Chapter II. Chapter II is a bridge that connects me with this Central Texas community and shows a connection with my learning through stories. Within the chapter, stories are imbedded that show how dynamic-critical pedagogies and invitations are impactful and how we can create an ecosystem of effective partnerships that enable the effective education of 4-year-old children.

Figure 5. Bridging a connection.

Chapter III lays out the methods I employed to capture the stories of the participats

and their experiences.

II. PERSISTENT TENSIONS: STORY OF SCHOOLING IN A CENTRAL TEXAS COMMUNITY

A lighthouse continuously stands strong through many storms but still manages to be a beacon of light for others. This literature review provides a beacon of light into the persistent tensions in education, in schools, and in how we lead schools. These tensions many times lie within the institution itself but are also influenced by local, state, and national politics. These tensions influence the decisions that affect local schools as well as school practices and leadership. This literature review provides the historical context of an early childhood education center in the chosen Central Texas community and the tension within the schools and their history. Community becomes a place, process, and a beacon of light that brings to light ideas of informing a new reality and expanding the imagination. The history of schooling in this community brings to light the tensions that are still occurring despite the history of this community as noted in the following section. The literature presents the ways in which schools were established to serve a certain population.

A lighthouse sees many changes in its years of standing tall and serving as a beacon for others, and it continues to shine a light on us as a reminder that there is hope but there are implications if we turn the light off. The book *Changing Texas* (Murdock et al., 2014) has implications for the education of a diverse and growing young population in a Central Texas community and the state. With diversity at our doorstep, community is defined as an alternative way of being and doing. The different reality that is proposed becomes the ontology that is guiding the thoughts and values so community becomes a place, process, and collision of ideas that will inform a new reality. My questions, inquiry, and curiosity reflect but a humble attempt to shine a light into this journey of uncharted pathways.

The History of Early Childhood Education in a Central Texas Community

Schools were established in 1877 in Camino Real (a pseudonym) shortly after the town was founded (García & Guajardo, 2018). At this time, schools were segregated, and Anglo children attended school on the campus of Southwest Texas State University, African Americans attended a school for colored people, and Hispanics were banned from attending public schools in the city (Cantu, 2016). However, in the early 1900s, the first "Mexican School" was established for Mexican Americans. This was the beginning of many generations of Mexican American students and families being subjected to many injustices such as "institutional discrimination, segregation, and inferior learning conditions" (García & Guajardo, 2018, p. 732). Mexican American students were not allowed to speak their native language. Speaking Spanish at school came with punishment. Bus transportation was not offered, and students would have to walk to get to school. The school building was inferior to other schools and lacked basic resources such as running water (García & Guajardo, 2018). In 1949, the "Mexican School" was named Southside School for Mexicans and was located on the site of what would become Fuentes Pre-K Center in the 1960s. In 1966, leaders in CRCISD hired their first Mexican American principal, Francisco Contreras, also a former student at Southside School (García & Guajardo, 2018). Mr. Contreras created different learning experiences for students who attended Fuentes Pre-K Center, and he wanted and advocated for the school to get the same resources as other local schools (García & Guajardo, 2018). Although the local school board had outlawed segregation in schools and began to integrate African American and Mexican American students with the Anglo population, Fuentes Pre-K Center had a Hispanic population of 100% (García & Guajardo, 2018). The conditions for learning for Mexican American students were inferior, but community members and the community continued to advocate for equitable schools.

Fuentes Pre-K Center remained in the same building that once was the "Mexican School" or Southside until 2010. This same building is where I first stepped foot inside a school as an educator and where I began my career. Today, this building is a cultural center that commemorates the Hispanic culture and is named El Centro Cultural Hispano. In 2015, Fuentes Pre-K Center got a new building.

Fuentes Pre-K Center has a school culture and climate that is positive, nurturing, and caring. Teachers and staff are friendly, fun, and love working with children. Parents feel welcomed and believe their children are receiving a good education. New leadership at Fuentes Pre-K Center has fostered a culture of collective leadership. There is a belief system in place at Fuentes Pre-K Center that all staff members have the assets and expertise to make collective campus-based decisions. Teachers have high expectations for student learning and engage in professional learning communities (PLCs) to gather data to evaluate, monitor, and review student progress and use these data for the purposeful and meaningful planning of instruction, pacing of students' learning, and determining differentiated instruction and instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students. Teachers and staff demonstrate a genuine willingness to support each other, students, and families.

At Fuentes Pre-K Center, we help students reach high levels of readiness with a whole-child approach. Through a whole-child approach, we make sure students are healthy and safe by providing opportunities to be in a classroom setting that is supportive of each student's needs, is engaging, and challenges their thinking. Fuentes Pre-K Center's curriculum is student-centered and play-based. Through a play-based curriculum, students are assessed using formal and informal ongoing assessments based on the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines. To support students' social and emotional development, Fuentes Pre-K Center uses Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which equips every teacher with a toolbox of strategies that helps them build the confidence and competence they need to

address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of every student. Special programs meet the needs of our students through inclusion classrooms, creating the least restrictive environment. Fuentes Pre-K Center also has four dual language classrooms to meet the needs of our EB students. Special classes are geared toward the implementation of instruction to enrich student learning in all domains of the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines such as a STEAM classroom, an engineering classroom, library, physical education, social emotional learning (SEL), and play and inquiry. Play and Inquiry is a collaboration with Early Childhood Education (ECE) at Texas State University where students engage in open-ended play with open-ended materials.

Implications of the Shifting Demographics

Camino Real is a town located in Central Texas. The first inhabitants of the area were Native Americans who lived and thrived on the land off the banks of the Camino Real River. In the early 1700s, Spanish immigrants built one of the oldest roads, El Camino Real, to expand the Spanish empire by connecting Mexico City and Louisiana (Cantu, 2016). After the Civil War in 1865 that ended slavery, the town saw an influx of Mexican immigrants who had opportunities to work in the fields and farms of the area. Although Mexicans had lived in the area for many years, they are not represented in census records. The first documentation of Mexicans in the area was a census from 1870 that included 45 people, and the next migration of Mexicans occurred after the Mexican Revolution of 1914 (Cantu, 2016). Since this time, the population of Camino Real has continued to grow.

In 2014, Camino Real was identified as the fastest-growing city in the United States, as the population had increased 69% since 2000 (City-Data.com, 2017). According to the most recent U.S. Census data, Camino Real has an estimated population of 63,071. Leaders in this growing community need to be prepared to educate its young members and their families to be successful in school and life.

With the shifting demographics in Texas, teachers in this Central Texas community must be prepared to teach a diverse young population. Research shows a high-quality early childhood education is critical to a child's development and a family's economics, especially for children of low-income families (Johnson-Staub, 2017). Research shows children from low-income families perform lower on standardized testing compared to children from more economically stable families and are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college (Murdock et al., 2014). Good partnerships among educators, students, and families can create the conditions necessary to foster relationships and put students on a trajectory to be successful in school and life. In short, a different way of teaching, learning, and leading is necessary for this new cohort of learners to be successful, as the status quo will not serve them right. Below an alternative vision is presented for this emerging educational vision grounded in the thoughts of social constructivist and community builders.

Community: Informing a New Reality

According to M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016), it is within our communities that we live and grow, "so the healthier our communities, the more effective they become" (p. 29). It is critical to know where the power within our lives and communities exists so the work of the community can be informed through an action plan and the hope that a community can change. Community is coming together for the better good, to improve where we live and grow. Freire (1998) stressed the importance of connecting with community in order for people to fulfill their civic responsibilities to one another. "It is also in this sense that the possibility of true dialogue, in which subjects in dialogue learn and grow by confronting their differences, becomes a coherent demand required by an assumed unfinishedness that reveals itself as ethical" (Freire, 1998, p. 59). The community in this study engaged in dialogue and learned from each other while using the local context and issues.

A community is more than a place where you reside, a neighborhood, or a school. Community is belonging and having something in common with a group of people. M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated community is not just a physical space, it is a "generative structure informed by a set of ideas, practices, struggles, hopes, and dreams" (p. 5). Community is where people can come together in a physical space and work together on what is meaningful to them. Community does not occur overnight, it is a process that takes time and is a way of life where we invest in building relationships, identifying our assets, and respecting the spaces we occupy all in an ethical manner (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Part of being in community is creating meaningful relationships and seeing our communities through an assets-based lens.

Block (2008) stated being in community is belonging. Creating a space where people feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging is critical to building community. Building community is more than gatherings such as picnics or events. McKnight and Block (2010) wrote that building community "involves the more fundamental tasks of rearing a child" (p. 67). Community and relationships are critical to learning. McKnight and Block identified three properties of a competent community: it is focused on the assets of its members, it nurtures associational life, and it welcomes strangers with hospitality. The authors explained that in identifying and using people's assets, "We begin to see that the neighborhood is a treasure chest. By opening the chest and putting the gifts together in many different ways, we multiply the power of its riches" (McKnight & Block, 2010, p. 70). To build community, it is essential to work together and to celebrate and use the assets each member possesses.

Block (2008) stated "community building requires a concept of the leader as one who creates experiences for others—experiences that in themselves are examples of our desired future" (p. 86). The desired future is to create spaces where leaders and educators come together to think critically, ask questions, and build relationships to influence instruction,

schools, and the community. A community's members, however, must be aware that something needs to change and then have hope that they can create that change. During these unprecedented times, it is normative structures that lead us to disaster. It is these values of a different reality that we must adopt to respond to the present conditions and begin to push for a different narrative that is grounded in a different value system, commitment, action, and structure for the work we do in schools and the community.

The CLE is an event, and the critical and dynamic pedagogy of the CLE is what guided this research. The CLE consists of five axioms that are the beacon of light will guide the process. The CLE axioms are learning as leadership and action, *pláticas* and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy, local knowledge and action, encourage crossing borders, and assets and hope; these axioms are what guide the work to create sustainable change through real lived experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). When participants come together collectively to share their gifts and challenges through multiple lenses and lived experiences, then an organization or community can collectively move toward sustained change (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Although the theorists that follow have informed the foundational understanding of early childhood education, they become the beacon of light that will guide a new reality and worldview that situate the concepts and thoughts within a space of practice.

Early Childhood Education Theorists

Theorists such as Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and John Dewey developed theories of early childhood development and ways to create a healthy introduction to learning for children. These theorists have laid a foundation for today's early childhood educators. Vygotsky and Dewey would agree that children learn best in an environment that encourages independent thinking (Garhart Mooney, 2013). These theorists also pinpointed how collaborative learning environments can benefit the overall development of all children

(Ogunnaike, 2015). I turned to these thinkers to build a robust learning theory that informed the praxis of this inquiry.

Vygotsky

Lev Vygotsky brought a new perspective to early childhood education though he did not have any schooling in the areas of psychology and development (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Vygotsky's theories have made "contributions to our understanding of young children's development" (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p. 63). Vygotsky believed a learning environment must include others such as adults or peers who are more knowledgeable and learn together through "joint participation, conversations, dialogues, interactions and apprenticeship" (Ogunnaike, 2015, p. 10). Vygotsky believed learning and the construction of knowledge occur through play and interaction (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Vygotsky is well known for what he called the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which can be defined as "what a child can do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Ogunnaike, 2015, p. 12). When a child is in the ZPD or on the verge of constructing new knowledge, the child can benefit from interaction with adults or peers (Garhart Mooney, 2013). When a child is in the ZPD, they depend on interactions with others for constructing new knowledge so they can become independent later. Vygotsky believed educators must know the needs of the child and where they are in the learning process so they can help support learning.

Play has always been emphasized as important to a child's development. Vygotsky strongly claimed that play is essential to creating the ZPD because it provides children opportunities to make believe, create rules, practice self-regulation, problem solve, and activate prior knowledge (Ogunnaike, 2015). By engaging students in critical pedagogy, or what Vygotsky called the ZPD, through using local knowledge, place, and assets to gain knowledge, authentic learning will occur and there is hope for a better future (M. A. Guajardo

et al., 2016). Play is how children develop language, social and emotional skills, and learn how to be problem solvers.

Dewey

John Dewey was an educator who influenced early childhood in the United States (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Along with other theorists such as Vygotsky, Montessori, and Piaget, Dewey believed a child's education should be child centered and involve the child's world and community (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Children learn through doing and the curriculum must be relevant to students' lives and involve real-life materials and experiences that prompt children to explore and become independent thinkers (Garhart Mooney, 2013). This philosophy clearly challenges the more traditional ways of schooling such as rote learning and memorization. Luff (2018) stated "experiential learning is at the heart of early childhood education" (p. 448). Children learn through play and active exploration of their environment, which allows for the construction of knowledge that can occur in different contexts such as social, cultural, and ecological (Luff, 2018). They also learn through interacting with others such as peers and adults (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Dewey stood firm in the belief that "education and experience are related, but not equal" (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p. 21). Experiences are effective when teachers follow the interests of the learners and provide meaningful opportunities with familiar activities (Luff, 2018). The activities and experiences teachers plan need to be purposeful and meaningful. Therefore, Dewey believed planning meaningful interactions that match children's interests and backgrounds should be taken into consideration when planning curriculum (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Children are naturally curious. Luff (2018) stated Dewey defined curiosity as "moving from the energetic explorations of physical curiosity, via the questioning and investigations of social curiosity, to the more sustained and systematic problem-solving of intellectual curiosity" (p. 449). This is critical to creating life-long learners who are critical thinkers and problem solvers. Dewey

also believed education will always be a part of our lives: "Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for the future" (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p. 16), but we should teach based on what the child needs at a certain point in time and the curriculum should be based on the child's home and other life experiences.

Deficit Perspectives

Deficit thinking takes many forms, such as a way of thinking and behaviors toward those who are believed to have a deficiency, a limitation, or a shortcoming based on family, linguistics, or culture (Valencia, 1997). Shifting the deficit perspectives held by leaders and educators to see the wealth students and families possess is critical to the change and collaboration needed to make schooling successful for our youngest learners and their families. According to Yosso (2005), "Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75). The phenomenon of deficit thinking has been documented by many scholars and continues to be perpetuated by society and school systems. According to García and Guerra (2004), the majority of teachers have good intentions and are caring, but they are not making the connection with the hidden deficit perspectives that "have a significant influence on their own identity, educators' role definitions and instructional practices" (p. 154). School leaders want to provide some type of intervention, assuming there is something to fix when it comes to students and families. We try parent engagement activities that are not relevant to the needs of our families. We implement classroom strategies or programs that are not relevant to how 4-year-olds learn. Then when these efforts fail, we want to blame the students and their families, and then our "deficit beliefs are likely to be reinforced, and the cycle repeats itself" (García & Guerra, 2004, p. 151). To create meaningful change as leaders and educators, we must begin to examine ourselves and begin

to see the wealth of knowledge and assets students and families possess rather than their deficits.

Community Cultural Wealth

Very similar to funds of knowledge, with a focus on the capital of families, Yosso (2005) identified six types of community cultural wealth (CCW): aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, linguistic capital, resistant capital, and navigational capital. Aspirational capital means having high hopes and dreams for oneself or family and staying focused on a goal regardless of the barriers and obstacles to reaching the goal (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011). Familial capital and social capital are the values that are shared among family and friends (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011). One example is the networking of families to gain goods or services from each other. Linguistic capital represents the skills individuals develop by communicating and knowing more than one language. Resistant capital is the "values, knowledge, and tools used to nurture oppositional behavior that challenges and stands in the opposition of inequality" (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011, p. 76). The last type of capital is navigational, which is the skills one acquires and needs to navigate their way through systems that are not inclusive (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011). An example of navigational capital is being a minority first-generation student and having to navigate institutional systems to acquire an education.

Parent Engagement: The Early Years

There is voluminous literature on parent engagement and parent involvement. Research has made it evident that parent engagement is an important component of educational policy because it can lead to positive academic outcomes for students and their families (Gross et al., 2019). Parent engagement is included in the State of Texas educational policy: "A school district shall develop and implement a family engagement plan to assist the district in achieving and maintaining high levels of family involvement and positive family

33

attitudes toward education" (TEA, n.d.-a, slide 9). Research shows that when parents are engaged in their student's education and school during the preschool years, children have positive outcomes in the areas of math and literacy (Gross et al., 2019). Parent engagement needs to includes parents in the decision making of all school processes, including curriculum and assessment.

The terms parent engagement and parent involvement are sometimes used interchangeably, though there is a difference. These terms are also defined in many ways. According the to the U.S. Department of Education, parent engagement occurs when parents and educators participate in "two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (Gross et al., 2019, p. 747). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines parent engagement as "parents and schools working together to support and improve students' learning development and health" (Gross et al., 2019, p. 748). The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement defines parent engagement as a "shared responsibility to actively support children's learning and development" (Gross et al., 2019, p. 748). The TEA defines parent engagement as a "mutual responsibility of families, schools and communities to build relationships to support student learning and achievement, family well-being and the continuous learning and development of children, families and educators" (TEA, 2018, slide 4). According to the TEA (2018), family engagement should be "fully integrated in the child's education experience, supports the whole child and is both culturally-responsive and linguistically appropriate" (slide 4). Family engagements need to be inclusive and meet the needs of diverse families and take into consideration their linguistic needs by providing engagements in their native languages.

Of the many definitions of parent engagement, one thing that is common is that it is a partnership on the part of parents, educators, and stakeholders to support children and their

families through their child's learning and development. The literature on parent engagement has some gaps, as it does not demonstrate how to meaningfully engage parents and make them part of their child's development through their school years. It is left up to school district leaders to make a parent engagement plan (Gross et al., 2019). Considering the importance of parent engagement in state policy and practice, there is minimal research on how educators and all stakeholders define and practice parent engagement (Gross et al., 2019). This research explored how to engage parents in authentic and meaningful ways.

The Power of Invitation: Inquiry as Action

Possibilities begin with an invitation. When you invite others to be part of the possibility to which you are committed, it is an act of sincere generosity and it is more than just an invitation to attend, it is a request to come together to "create an alternative future, to join in the possibility we have declared" (Block, 2008, p. 114). The Center for Ethical Leadership defines this as creating a Gracious Space by inviting the stranger (Ruder, 2009). An invitation with Gracious Space is deeper than just gathering, it is authentic and meaningful, and you are invited to partake in critical conversations. According to Block (2008), an invitation can be refused at no cost and for those who accept an invitation, there is no incentive or reward in return. When you show up, you show up because the invitation is something that is meaningful to you such as working toward common goals. The world is shifted through invitation rather than mandate (Block, 2008, p. 98). An invitation that is accepted gives the stranger the power to bring the spirit that is needed, and it means so much more when they decide whether to show up or not (Block, 2008). If it is mandated to show up, then it is not an invitation.

Storytelling as Meaning Making

Telling stories about ourselves and our past experiences and histories enables us to connect with others by valuing each other's stories. According to M. A. Guajardo et al.

(2016), storytelling is an invitation to explore and inform assets, struggles, celebrations, hopes, and dreams within your community, but also within yourself. "Storytelling sets the stage for a specific brand of learning as we begin to remember, reflect, and re-author our own story" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 44). There is always an invitation to continue to change and develop who we are and to develop a framework that guides us in the work that we do in our community and organizations. As I now know, the work of the self is never finished.

Community Learning Exchange Theory of Change

M. A. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) CLE theory of change was the guiding light for this study. The CLE is about reimagining school and community partnerships in a way that empowers community members to come together, engage in deep conversations, and find solutions to the problems affecting their communities (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). It is when we are in community that we live and grow. Freire (1998) noted the importance of connecting with our communities in order for people to fulfil their civic responsibilities, "in which subjects in dialogue learn and grow by confronting their differences" (p. 59). The "CLE theory of change invites us to look at our families, our neighborhoods, our communities, our organizations with an eye for relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 4). The dynamic-critical nature of the CLE theory of change is necessary for building community as the work is anchored in moving away from deficit thinking models and toward an asset-based model of development as we identify and unravel the "good in people and communities" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32). The ontology and meaning making process of the theory of change within a local context informed the assets and stories of this research and became the actions. The conditions of today have forced us to re-imagine our world, personally and professionally, which requires no less than to be fully present and bold in our thinking.

The CLE is not a program or a one-time event, "it is a way of life" that creates meaning making through real lived experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 30). A CLE provides a space where powerful interactions and conversations can occur; this is where the "spirit of the CLE comes alive" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 9). The CLE provides a safe space and time for participants to convene in meaningful and purposeful ways. Through CLEs, people's gifts and experiences are celebrated through storytelling and they are encouraged to share the knowledge and insights they gained from the CLE with others in their community. It is through these opportunities of dialogue that we can continue to make a greater impact and continue to foster an abundant community (McKnight & Block, 2010). This is the alternative view of the world that is necessary for us to move forward into a different reality. COVID-19 pandemic times have heightened the need to explore and imagine a reality beyond our normative structures. I propose the CLE as a worldview and theoretical structure that is grounded in research, presents it values, proposes an ontology that acknowledges the power of place and the wisdom of people, proposes a theory of change that is informed by its internal values and augmented by its local ecologies, and presents the ability to be malleable to its cultural context and local ecologies. Having said this, I propose that the CLE is a legitimate and time-tested worldview and viable theoretical framework that aligned with the vision of my research. In the next section, I lay out the anatomy of this theoretical framework.

Anatomy of the Theoretical Framework

The CLE experience brings to mind the axiom, "Conversation and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23). Change cannot happen without being in dialogue. Freire (1998) explained, "Education takes place when there are two learners who occupy somewhat different spaces in an ongoing dialogue" (p. 8). *Pláticas* are used to capture the stories of parents, school personnel, and community

stakeholders. Telling stories matters because it is a way that we make sense of our world, they help us to build and sustain relationships, and, most importantly, stories "help us see the possibilities and hope beneath layers of despair" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 19). *Plática* is "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). *Pláticas* provide opportunities to share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders feel connected to collectively discover critical issues that are important to them (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). *Plática* is a research approach of collecting stories by building relationships and by coming into the *plática* as one who honors the stories rather than one who just wants to gather data.

Block (2008) stated we must have conversations that count to create community transformation as "it is when we choose to speak of invitation, possibility, ownership, dissent, commitment, and gifts that transformation occurs" (p. 98). Asking good questions is what gets to the heart of the conversations when we are having *pláticas*. Block stated "questions open the door to the future and are more powerful than answers in that they demand engagement" (p. 180). This research gets to the heart of the work by asking good questions and having *pláticas*.

Ramón Valle and Lydia Mendoza identified *plática* as a more culturally appropriate form of engaging (Valle & Mendoza, 1978). Valle and Mendoza (1978) identified *plática* as a "friendly, intimate and mutualistic manner" (p. 33) of engaging in dialogue. According to the authors, *pláticas* are a more appropriate methodology because of their focus on the cultural formalities of the interview process. Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) explained *platicas* as a method and as a process.

Gracious Space: Transforming our Learning Spaces

During pandemic times, the need to transform our learning spaces is a new reality. Learning spaces for students look different, as some students are learning from home and others are returning to school to a learning space that keeps them socially distant. Teachers' learning spaces have changed as well. Professional development is virtual and now more than ever teachers need a Gracious Space in which to learn and grow as they navigate remote learning. School leaders are tasked with guiding teachers to continue to learn and grow as professionals. Recently, I was facilitating a PLC meeting with teams of teachers. Teachers were invited to come to the meeting ready to share a prerecorded video lesson and to give colleagues feedback. The questions teachers were given to reflect on were: What do you want all students to learn? How will we know if they learned it? How will we respond if they did not learn it? Teachers came prepared and the learning that occurred was beyond the questions on which they were asked to reflect. Teachers learned that the space among colleagues was safe and those who were once strangers were no longer strangers. One teacher said to a colleague, "I have complete confidence and feel comfortable to use your lessons with my class" (personal communication). At this moment, emotions took over because the pandemic has been challenging, yet teachers continue to make learning experiences meaningful and impactful for all students when they are provided a space that is safe and nurturing.

Gracious Space is something most have experienced at one point in their life, but it may have been called something else such as a neutral space or a safe learning zone. The Center for Ethical Leadership defines Gracious Space "as a spirit and setting in which we invite the stranger and learn in public" (Ruder, 2009, p. 3). Gracious Space is an invitation to be in a space that is safe, where all voices are heard, and where everyone is treated as an equal. Gracious Space is critical when inviting others to be in critical conversations, as it allows you to build relationships so you can provide a space for having tough conversations

(Ruder, 2009). According to the Center for Ethical Leadership (n.d.), Gracious Space has four elements: spirit, setting, invite the stranger, and learn in public. When these elements are included in engagements with participants, it creates Gracious Space, which has the possibility of transforming a community and creating a learning partnership.

Spirit

The spirit is a feeling of being welcomed and invited. The spirit is about being present, not just physically but emotionally; you must be embodied in the space and work, as it is a way of being connected and in relationship (Ruder, 2009). When inviting others to a space we must prepare ourselves "to bring our best self into every interaction" (Ruder, 2009, p. 3). The one who invites the stranger must be welcoming, have compassion, bring a level of curiosity, and always have a sense of humor (Ruder, 2009). The spirit an individual brings to a space when being in relationship with others is being gracious.

Setting

The setting is the physical space you create so there is a sense of being productive, healthy, and connected to others (Ruder, 2009). When a person is entering the space you have created, they come in isolation; the setting you created is welcoming and it lets the strangers know "they came to the right place and are not alone" (Block, 2008, p. 145). You set the space to feel hospitable by providing food, beverages, artifacts, and the right lighting and room temperature that fit the energy and spirit you want to create. Breaking bread together is something all cultures do; to create Gracious Space, the food must be intentional and reflect the diversity that has been invited (Block, 2008). The setting is intimate and the stranger feels welcomed by the space and the set up.

Invite the Stranger

In Gracious Space, a "stranger" is someone "who is not typically involved in the conversation; someone with a different background, perspective, skin color, gender,

geographic orientation, or any other quality that may make him or her seem different"

(Ruder, 2009, p. 4). When considering systemic change and complex and new ideas for

change, we want to invite strangers who are not used to being in conversation, as the multiple

lenses these strangers bring need to be seen and heard. According to Block (2008), the simple

act of inviting the stranger is more powerful than anything that may happen in the space—the

invitation is an act of generosity.

Learn in Public

Learning in public is to be present, direct, and fully "apply deep listening and learning

to the diversity you have gathered into Gracious Space" (Ruder, 2009, p. 4). Most

importantly, learning in public requires a level of humility and a willingness to explore

assumptions about others (Ruder, 2009). Learning in public requires a person to let go of the

way things have always been done, the "right way" and be "willing to change one's mind and

open one's heart" (Ruder, 2009, p. 4). Learning in public requires a level of vulnerability that

is created by an invitation that is sincere and Gracious Space.

Circle

The process of Circle entails Gracious Space. Circle is part of the CLE process with

the intention that "acts as an invitation to change one's relationship with oneself, to one's

organization, and to the wider community" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 82). Circle goes

back to ancient times and takes from these practices of culture and community to provide

spaces that open up possibilities for making connections, collaboration, and meaning making

(M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Circle is an invitation to transform relationships with yourself,

your organization, and your community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). As adult learners, we

need to feel safe and trust others, our voices need to be honored, and we need to have

dialogue about pressing issues all while building relationships with others.

Each CLE begins and closes with Circle that establishes "community by ensuring that each person has an equal voice" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 83). An important aspect of Circle is to "affirm the dignity of everyone based on his or her humanity and not the person's title" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 83). Circle creates a safety net or *confianza* that provides families, school personnel, and community stakeholders who participate in the dynamic-critical pedagogies, such as Circle, a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Ecologies of Knowing

As adult learners, we are all at different levels of self-development, and the ecologies of knowing can be used to organize adult learners' thinking and learning from life experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Figure 6 shows a representation of the ecologies. The ecologies of knowing include the micro, which is the self; the meso, which is the organization; and the macro, which is the community. The ecologies are not isolated events, rather they are "like life itself . . . bordered by permeable boundaries that leave room for exchange and interplay but serve the purpose when making meaning of the engagement before, during and after the CLE" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). The ecologies of knowing guided this study in the development of questions and meaning making.
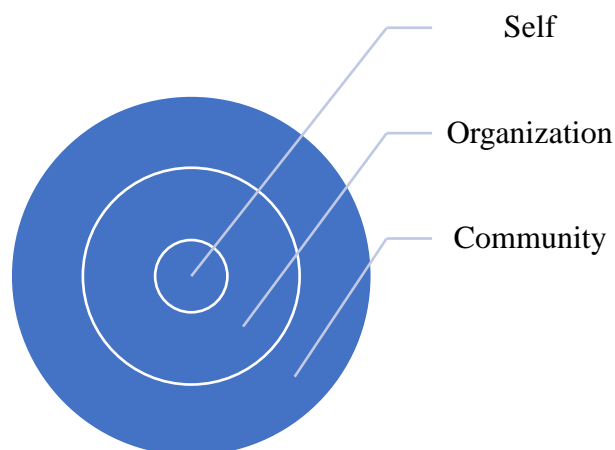
Figure 6. Ecologies of knowing (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Self

The self is where all learning begins, and learning starts with our families. The development of the self is essential and is informed by our relationships with our families. According to M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016), it is within our families that our sense of self begins to develop. When we learn others are necessary to meet our needs and we begin to collaborate and build relationships, we begin to grow, change, and develop (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Community "is where people come together with the intent to build, teach, and learn with each other" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 5) and to be self-reflective to create change within ourselves, organizations, and communities.

Organization

We are always part of an organization. People grow up "in organizations and as educators know families, schools, churches, and other social collectives become mediating entities between the self and the larger society" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29). Being in these spaces requires that we get to know people and be in collaboration. It is the job of organizational leaders to create spaces to welcome young people and families into their organizations.

Community

According to M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016), it is within our communities that we live and grow, "so the healthier our communities, the more effective they become" (p. 29). It is critical to know where the power within our lives and communities exists so the work of the CLE can be informed have an action plan and hope that a community can change (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Freire (1998) stressed the importance of connecting with community in order for people to fulfill their civic responsibilities to one another.

A Conversation Between Theory and Practice

In this chapter, I laid out the persistent tensions of a Central Texas community. I provided details about the historical context of a local early childhood center and what it looks like now. This chapter also included a discussion of the influences of early childhood theorists and their contributions to early childhood education. I defined the practices I used to put the theory into practice using Gracious Space, the CLE dynamic-critical pedagogies, and the theoretical framework. Chapter III shines a light on the methods I used to capture participants' stories and make meaning of the data.

III. "UN CHOQUE"

In this chapter, I lay out the methods I employed to capture the stories of participants and the type of study. I also describe the data collection methods and protocols used for data collection. Last, I describe the process used for data analysis and meaning making.

Figure 4 presented an image titled "Un Choque" (Anzaldúa, 1999), or collision, and served as a summary of the research methodology. The image is a representation of a collision/blending of my conceptual and theoretical frameworks with the theories in use. This blends a theory in practice that captures the dynamic-critical nature of the research. I created this image as an individual framework to help me understand my journey of self-discovery within the context of this work. This work required me to balance the I within the we. This image gave me a visual representation of the continual development of my self-discovery. This framework guided the methods of this research. However, there is always an invitation to continue to change and develop as the work of the self is never finished. The image I drew is exactly what shaped me and my emerging identity as an engaged scholar, but I also realize I am on a journey of self-discovery of who I am. I am continually being shaped by my experiences that informed this research.

The image of the lighthouse and the tree is me, the "self," which is at the center of what informed this research and framework. The lighthouse is a symbol of the strength and resilience that have shaped who and where I am now. The lighthouse symbolizes the strength I had when I made the decision to leave "*mi tierra, mi gente*" to seek opportunities and to discover who I am (Anzaldúa, 1999). The lighthouse is also a representation of my cultural upbringing. The tree has my characteristics such as being loving, nurturing, and an introvert. The light of the lighthouse is the beacon of light that guided me and provided the lens I used to guide this research.

My experiences as an educator and leader in the CRCISD have informed my world, my work, and my research. My personal values and beliefs of the importance of building relationships are what guided this work. This research gets to the heart of how we engage with families, and I plan to use the results to inform other school leaders of ways to create effective networks and to engage parents meaningfully. Through this study, I documented how the power of invitation can foster a campus climate of effective partnerships that can provide 4-year-old children an education that will put them on a path for success in education and life. It is this knowledge of engaging in meaningful ways such as through *pláticas* that inform the conditions necessary to create effective networks (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). This research provided an understanding of the challenges families face and ways of creating effective networks where school leaders, teachers, families, and community members work together toward improving early childhood education.

As an educator, attending professional development is required, but have you ever been invited to a CLE? I recall being invited to a CLE that was going to take place at Fuentes Pre-K Center as part of a colleague's graduate studies. I gladly accepted the invitation. Upon entering the space, I recall feeling very anxious when I saw the set up. I walked into a space where chairs were arranged in a circle. This was not a typical professional development where you sit at a table with other colleagues and can be a passive learner if you choose. The setup was intimate. The learning exchange began with an opening Circle and the facilitator posing a question. After the opening Circle, the exchange continued with breakout sessions and lots of dialogue and discussion focused on local issues. I left this learning exchange with a desire for more—it sparked my curiosity, and I was intrigued by the conversations that were ignited, as they were meaningful and applicable to the local context. This invitation soon led to other invitations that have led me to be in this space as a researcher. This process led to my becoming an academic and leader, and to my leadership practices. The dynamic-critical

pedagogies of the CLE are what have informed my views and work as an educator, leader, and researcher.

My experiences as an educator and leader are grounded in a history that has not been troubled or analyzed. To explore how an invitation can lead to powerful experiences, it is important to use methods that are deeply grounded in practice and authentic to who I am, it "is about a way of life" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 5). It is not a one-time event, but something you do every day, it is who you are. "It's about living a life where we invest in our relationships, recognize our gifts, explore our stories, respect our place, and do all this in an ethical manner" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 5). A qualitative approach is used to document how the power of invitation can establish conditions that will foster a campus climate for effective partnerships by gathering the stories and experiences of participants to get a better understanding of how they make meaning and how they make sense of their world, with the ultimate goal being to uncover and interpret these meanings (Merriam, 2009).

This chapter outlines the methods I used in this study to explore the following questions using a qualitative approach. I used the CLE dynamic-critical pedagogies to research the phenomenon that an invitation can establish the conditions that foster a campus climate for effective partnerships. These partnerships can then create spaces that will foster effective partnerships that will enable an effective education for 4-year-old children that will put them on a trajectory for success in education and life. In this study, I explored the following questions:

1. Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?

2. What conditions foster a campus climate that promotes effective partnerships between leaders, educators, students, and families?

3. How does a school community co-construct a campus climate that informs creating sustainable relationships with schools?

Dynamic-Critical Pedagogies

The methodology for this study was rooted in the CLE dynamic-critical pedagogies, which create meaningful ways to convene. Research participants engaged in using the dynamic-critical pedagogies. The rationale for using the dynamic-critical pedagogies was my personal experience with the CLE and the fact that these methods have been used in the work of the CLE and "have been tested – they are not tried and true but tested" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 79). Dynamic-critical pedagogies are effective in creating a space that is safe and collaborative. There is evidence that dynamic-critical pedagogies create an invitational space that is "life changing and radical," and these pedagogies outlined the predicted results of this study. The pedagogies are:

> Invitational: Where all are welcome, locals and outsiders, elders, and the young known members and strangers
> Empowering: Where people who may have previously been silenced or marginalized have a substantial voice
> Relational: Where stories are told, honored, and heard
> Engaging: Where people share their wisdom with known and new networks to unpack and address difficult issues
> Experiential: Where real work is tried in a real setting, with participants providing the case study rather than exploring outside case studies
> Impacting: Where action plans are designed and executed to develop new narratives for healing
> Public: Where people are free to operate in community spaces free of judgement
> Reflective: Where time and space are carved out for individual and group analysis
> Rejuvenating: Where the spirit is restored, and new dreams are advanced. (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 80)

These pedagogies are life changing and are effective strategies and practices that engage participants in a dynamic learning process. When provided a Gracious Space to learn in public, these strategies are empowering and impactful.

Critical Ethnography

I used the qualitative approach of critical ethnography using the CLE theory of change pedagogy to examine how an invitation can establish the necessary conditions to foster partnerships between school and families. These partnerships give families a skill set

and provide opportunities for them to participate in their children's education to ensure children are on a trajectory to succeed in school and life. Critical ethnography is being in community or social networking where researchers and participants are seen as involved in the research together in the hopes of creating a new reality (Stinnett, 2012). The researcher in critical ethnography is immersed in the study alongside the participants. According to Madison (2012), a critical ethnographer moves from "what is" to "what could be," moving participants to take local issues and working together toward making change (p. 5). The process of the critical ethnography is the beacon of light that allows a researcher and participants to develop new understandings that will shape the future. As the critical ethnographer, I used my positionality and the "resources, skills and privileges available to me to make accessible—the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach" (Madison, 2012, p. 6). A critical ethnographer uses their privilege and resources to bring participants together to have critical conversations.

Three strategies have been used by critical ethnographers: collaboration, using multi-vocal texts, and self-reflection (Stinnett, 2012). Collaboration means building relationships with research participants and brings the research participants into the research process to create a school community based on their hopes and dreams or "what could be" (Hagues, 2019, p. 439; see also Stinnett, 2012). In this study, I used the dynamic-critical pedagogies of the CLE approach to employ the strategies of a critical ethnography. A CLE approach is a "process for convening diverse groups of people and ideas across traditional and artificial boundaries including places, cultures, ages, and realities" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 22). This way of convening is critical for researchers and research participants to develop the awareness, skill set, and imagination needed by educators, students, and families to support this learning and development. Relationship improvement built around positive communication practices can lead to increased advancement in community and conflict

resolution. The concepts of building relationships and positive communication practices change the traditional approach of sit-and-get meetings or presentations through more focused and meaningful conversations. This process changes the social dynamics, leading to improved school culture and climate. Social interactions shape the beliefs that will guide future decision-making. Deliberate and meaningful interactions sustain positive parent and community relationships. This style of communication as a norm brings about a more supportive and enlightened culture, recognizing communication as both speaking and listening. Learning to listen and making time to listen leads to an improved school community and sustainable partnerships with families as partners in their children's education.

Research Partners

The context of the study is near and dear to my heart. My first educational work experience was at Fuentes Pre-K Center, which was located at what once was Southside Elementary or the "Mexican School." I became an instructional assistant straight out of college. My experience working at Fuentes is what began my journey to becoming an educator. I continued my education by becoming a certified bilingual teacher through alternative education. I came back to teach at CRCISD, but always had a longing to return to Fuentes. Invitations throughout my personal educational journey have given me opportunities to grow in my leadership and, after 20 years of teaching, I am now the principal of Fuentes Pre-K Center.

As an educator, I always put my students and families at the forefront of everything I did. I built my classroom around meaningful relationships with students and families. I valued my students, their culture, and their language. I selected my research participants using purposeful sampling and invited them to become partners in this study. Research participants were families of students currently enrolled or had been enrolled in the past at

Fuentes Pre-K Center. Research participants included current educators and past educators of Fuentes Pre-K Center and current school leaders. I also invited stakeholders from the local community to be research partners. All participants were informed about the specifics of the study and I obtained informed consent from each participant. Participants were given guaranteed confidentiality and could choose to use a pseudonym. Participants chose pseudonyms for this study.

Setting: A Local Early Childhood Center

The setting was a prekindergarten elementary center in a Central Texas community between two major cities in Texas—Austin and San Antonio. This community was the fastest-growing city in the nation for 3 years in a row, from 2013–2015. The community has a total of 12 schools: one high school, two middle schools, one alternative school, seven elementary schools, and one prekindergarten center. Fuentes Pre-K Center is a Title I campus that serves prekindergarten students who meet TEA eligibility in CRCISD. Fuentes Pre-K Center also serves the ECSE program, formally known as PPCD and Head Start (Community Action). EB students are served in a two-way dual language program. Currently for the 2022–2023 school year, Fuentes Pre-K Center has an enrollment of 460 students and the demographics are 65% Hispanic/Latino, 14% White, 12% Black, 1% Asian, and 8% American Indian; 21% of students are EBs, 19% are ECSE, and 89.5% are economically disadvantaged. Fuentes Pre-K Center is an inclusive campus and invites others who do not meet the TEA criteria to attend by paying an affordable tuition compared to other day care services in the community. Currently, 7% of students pay tuition.

Positionality: A Place of Privilege

Critical ethnographers must take into consideration their privilege and biases (Madison, 2012), and my positionality as a school leader in the setting was a privilege I recognized. As a leader at this school, I needed to put aside my biases, have a critical eye for

capturing a true picture of our current situation, and be willing to take the critical steps to create change. As a critical ethnographer, I brought my beliefs and values into the research, such as the value of building relationships.

Ontological Position and Epistemology

My ontological position was using the lens of the CLE as a framework for meaning making and data analysis. My epistemology was the dynamic-critical pedagogies of a CLE that I used and put into practice. My experiences as an educator and being immersed in the context of the study for the past few years have put me in a position of privilege where I am able to use dynamic-critical pedagogies to collect data. Table 1 shows the data collection methods I used within this research.

Table 1. Data collection.

Group *Pláticas*	One-on-One *Pláticas*	Artifacts and Documents	Archival Data	Researcher Journal
Families (current and past), teachers (current and past), school leaders, and community stakeholders	One family, one teacher, and one community stakeholder	Agendas, planning matrix, stories, photos	Schedules, academic reports, student and teacher demographics	Journal/ Notebook
3-hour group *pláticas* semi-structured Circle dynamic-critical pedagogies	One 30- to 45-minute semi-structured conversational *plática*	Collected before and during *pláticas*	Collect archival data	Record reflections, thoughts, and ideas during engagements, artifacts collected, and *pláticas*
Analyze photos, transcribe audio recording	Audio recording, transcribe *pláticas*	Analyze artifacts and documents collected	Analyze archival data	Journal notes transcribed

Data Collection: Social Technologies

I collected data using social technologies. Social technologies are sometimes considered social media such as Facebook and Twitter, but in this study, I re-imagined social technologies by using human interactions. I used social technologies to collect and make sense of the stories and lived experiences of the research partners that aligned with the research questions. I collected data through one group *plática* that included families, teachers, school leaders, and community stakeholders. I also conducted one-on-one *pláticas* with a family, a teacher, and a community stakeholder. I used these *pláticas* to capture the stories of the parents, school personnel, and community stakeholders. Telling stories matters because stories help up make sense of our world, they help us to build and sustain relationships, and, most importantly, they "help us see the possibilities and hope beneath layers of despair" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 19). I used a researcher's journal to record any reflections,

thoughts, ideas, important comments, posture of participants, tone of voice, and facial expressions that are not usually captured in recordings. It was through these interactions of using dynamic-critical pedagogies in which the research partners felt safe and shared their experiences and stories.

Group Pláticas

I invited all research participants to participate in the group *plática*. I sent a formal invitation to the participants and it was optional to accept the invitation. Participants who accepted the invitation engaged in a 3-hour *plática* to share their experiences in schools. The group *plática* was guided by a planning matrix (see Appendix F) and protocols that guided the data collection. The group *plática* (see Appendix C) was semi-structured using Circle, Gracious Space, and dynamic-critical pedagogies and guided by me as the researcher asking good questions. Good questions were at the heart of this research to capture the experiences of all participants. We held the group *plática* at El Centro Hispano Cultural (former Southside School) with families, teachers, and community stakeholders. During the gathering, I collected artifacts and documents from the research partners. An ethnographer assisted in capturing photos and recordings during the group *plática*.

One-on-One Pláticas

I conducted one-on-one, 30- to 45-minute *pláticas* with a selected family, one teacher, and one community stakeholder. The one-on-one *pláticas* (see Appendix D) were semi-structured and conversational in nature. Questions were aligned with the research questions. However, because *pláticas* are an authentic and natural way to have conversations, I was flexible with the questions. *Plática* is a research approach of collecting stories by building relationships and by coming into the *plática* as one who honors the stories rather than one who just wants to gather data (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). I allowed the research

partners to have a conversation about other pressing issues if they arose organically. The one-on-one *pláticas* were audio recorded and transcribed.

Artifacts and Documents

I collected artifacts and documents from the group and one-on-one *pláticas*, including planning matrixes, protocols, photos, charts, and any documents that were produced. Documents generated by me as the researcher, such as agendas, questions, and planning matrixes, supported the gathering of qualitative data. The data collected through documents and artifacts were used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The data collected furnished descriptive information, verified emerging hypotheses, and offered historical understanding. Photos capture so much more than an image, as a photo "can tell the story of what the photographer thought was important to capture, what cultural values might be conveyed by the particular photos" (Merriam, 2009, p. 145). I used the photos I collected as a way to remember and reflect on the details that emerged and that might not have been captured during the *pláticas*.

Archival Data

Prior to the study, I collected archival data from primary resources such as historical information, schedules, academic reports, and student and teacher demographics. I also collected archival data from resources such as articles, U.S. Census information, TEA reports, and school reports. Primary resources are considered documents from resources that are "closest in time and place to the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 152). I used these archival data to make meaning of the historical context of the study and to develop and align the research questions for the study.

Researcher's Journal

I kept a researcher's journal throughout the study to collect observations and record field notes. I used this researcher's journal to document reflections, thoughts and ideas about

the *pláticas* and artifacts collected. A researcher's journal gives the researcher important

points to recall and then to later make more detailed notes soon after an observation

(Merriam, 2009). After every *plática*, I took time to reflect and summarize the field notes,

draw a diagram of the setting, and add anything that needed to be remembered at a later time

(Merriam, 2009). The journal provided an opportunity for me to document what was going

on, informed future data collection, and helped guide me in making meaning of the data.

Data Analysis and Sense Making

The stories I told of how my ontology emerged and the theoretical framework were

how I organized and made sense of the data collected. I analyzed the data using the ecologies

of knowing, the CLE axioms, and RASPPA: relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and

action (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). I used the axioms during the lived experiences of the

CLE and filtered those experiences using the ecologies of knowing by finding themes that

represented how the participants grew and changed and how they applied their learning in

their organizations with the hope of influencing the community. RASPPA was spiraled into

the analysis of the data. By creating relationships built on trust, I was able to collect the

stories of the participants and have them identify their assets within their place. The most

important part of RASPPA is the politic, where one is "focused on acting for the betterment

of the self, organization, and the community" and creating action to work toward improving

our organizations and communities (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

I captured and analyzed stories to co-construct meaning using the ecologies of

knowing for organization of place and space, the CLE axioms for values, and theory of

change for relationship, ideas, and actions. *Plática* is "an expressive cultural form shaped by

listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional

conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). *Pláticas* provided opportunities to

share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders felt connected to collectively

discover critical issues within the local context (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). Providing Gracious Space during the *pláticas* was critical as I was bringing together participants with differences such as language barriers and skill set. According to the Center for Ethical Leadership (n.d.), Gracious Space has four critical elements: spirit, setting, invite the stranger, and learn in public. When these elements are included in engagements with participants, it creates Gracious Space, which has the possibility of transforming a community to create change.

The following are the steps taken to analyze and make sense of the data. All the audio recordings of the group and one-on-one *pláticas* were transcribed. Next, the research questions were organized into the ecologies of knowing. Research Question 1 focused on the self, Research Question 2 focused on the organization, and Research Question 3 focused on community. The CLE axioms were the lived experiences from the group and one-on-one *pláticas*. Next, the data were analyzed to identify themes into the three ecologies of knowing. Last, RASPPA was spiraled to identify relationships, assets, stories, place, politics, and action.

IV. STORIES OF BELONGING EMERGE

In this chapter, I tell the stories of belonging that emerged during the data collection process. Chapter IV includes a thick description of the dynamic-critical pedagogies I employed during the data collection. I present the data in narrative form and provide a clear and robust theoretical explanation for the meaning-making of this study.

Creating a healthy introduction to public schooling is vital to the learning and development of children and their families in school and life. Just like educators provide a safe, Gracious Space for their students to learn and grow, leaders must create the same inviting spaces for those they lead (e.g., teachers, families, and community stakeholders). Leaders and educators within early childhood education centers need to be prepared to meet the needs of this growing population by creating spaces for *pláticas* and inviting families to be engaged in schools and make collaborative decisions about their children's schooling. Through meaningful collaboration, we can demonstrate how a community can come together to create lasting relationships with schools and successful learning environments. Creating effective networks of communication and collaboration among families, school leaders, and educators can begin the process of developing school systems that are responsive to the needs of the community. The act of an authentic invitation leads to powerful *pláticas*, which establish conditions that foster a campus climate that encourages effective partnerships among leaders, educators, community stakeholders, students, and families. The pedagogy of hopes and dreams is used to create spaces for adult learners to grow and learn alongside 4-year-old children as we put them on a path to success in school and life.

Guiding Light

This chapter is organized by the original research questions serving as the guiding light. The following research questions guided the data collection:

1. Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?

2. What conditions foster a campus climate that promotes effective partnerships between leaders, educators, students, and families?

3. How does a school community co-construct a campus climate that informs creating sustainable relationships with schools?

This chapter includes a timeline of the research partners' entry into the Fuentes Pre-K Center, a description of each research partner, and their connection to the school and community. It includes a description of how I organized the data using the ecologies of knowing to identify the themes that emerged. Last, I provide a narrative description of the data and meaning-making through the stories that emerged from the research partners. I wove the CLE axioms, the ecologies of knowing, and RASPPA into the narrative to provide a clear and robust theoretical explanation for the meaning-making of this work.

Timeline of Entry

Figure 7 is a visual representation of when each participant made an entry to Fuentes Pre-K Center. The timeline, all about research participants, and data analysis use pseudonyms for all research partners.
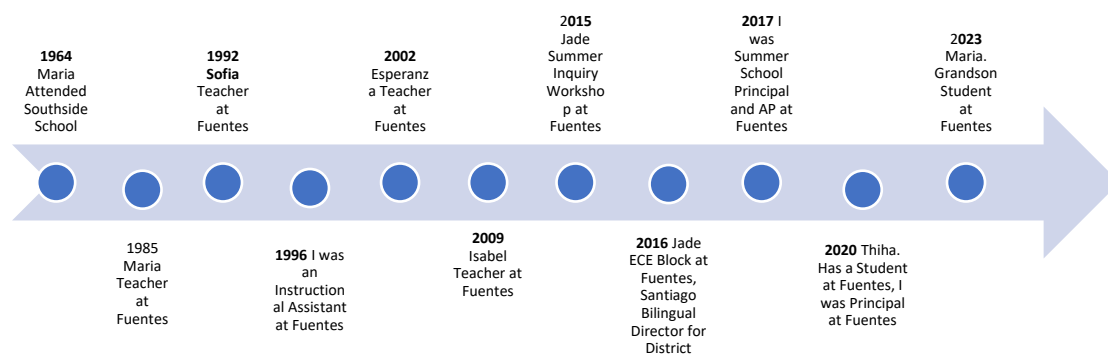
Figure 7. Timeline of research partners' points of entry.

About the Research Participants

Thiha is a parent of a former student who attended Fuentes Pre-K Center during the 2019–2020 school year. I met Thiha when his child attended Fuentes Pre-K Center, as I was serving as the assistant principal. I also had a PhD course with Thiha when we were doctoral

students. His child attended Fuentes Pre-K Center the school year we shut down schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thiha is originally from Burma (Myanmar) and came to Texas State University as an international student in 2018. Thiha moved to Camino Real with two of his four children to settle in the United States because he "was not sure of how it would be here." One year later, his wife and two younger children came and joined him in Texas. Thiha. and his family have been part of the Camino Real community since moving to the United States. All of his children attended CRCISD schools. Thiha recently earned his PhD in school improvement and is currently seeking work.

Isabel is a colleague and friend; she and I have been on a learning journey together as doctoral students in the school improvement program at Texas State University. We met as master's degree students during a leadership workshop and had a conversation about joining the doctoral program. Isabel is originally from El Paso, Texas, and currently lives in New Braunfels, Texas, with her husband and four children. Isabel was a former teacher at Fuentes Pre-K Center; this was her first job after graduating college. Isabel has taught in New Braunfels as a dual language teacher and is now a leader in a neighboring school district as an elementary principal.

Santiago is a former colleague and school leader. I met Santiago when he became the Bilingual Director for CRCISD. During that time, Santiago led the district in starting a dual language program, including at Fuentes Pre-K Center. I had the honor of working with Santiago as a bilingual instructional coach during the roll out of the dual language program in CRCISD. Santiago is originally from El Paso, Texas, and currently lives in New Braunfels, Texas, with his wife and four children. Santiago has been a teacher, school principal, and bilingual director and is currently an elementary school principal in a neighboring school district.

Sofia is a colleague and my *comadre* (godmother of my child). I met Sofia in 1996 when I was hired to be her instructional assistant at Fuentes Pre-K Center. Sofia took me under her wing and became a mentor and a good friend. Sofia was an inspiration and the reason I decided to become a teacher. Sofia also became someone I looked up to because or her faith and spirituality; her faith and spirituality are the reason I made her my *comadre*. With Sofia's encouragement and invitations, I joined an alternative certification program to become a certified teacher. I have had the privilege of working with Sofia in different capacities, most recently as the school leader of Fuentes Pre-K Center. Sofia is originally from Crystal City, Texas, and came to Camino Real in 1987 to attend Southwest Texas State University (SWT). Sofia began her teaching career at the old Fuentes Real Pre-K Center and has been a teacher at Fuentes for over 30 years as a bilingual educator.

Esperanza was born and raised in Camino Real and began her teaching career at the old Fuentes Pre-K Center. Esperanza has a daughter and is a proud and single mom to her daughter. Esperanza always knew she wanted to be a teacher, as she loved education and loved going to school. Esperanza has been an educator for over 20 years at Fuentes Pre-K Center. Esperanza has a lot of pride surrounding coming from and being a part of the Camino Real community and proudly represents who she is and where she came from every day. Esperanza is currently enrolled in a master's program in school leadership.

Jade is originally from Meza, Arizona, and currently lives in Austin, Texas. Jade began her teaching journey in a little "hippie school" in South Austin. Through a colleague, Jade, was introduced to Fuentes Pre-K Center where an amazing summer program was held. The summer program was a collaboration with the school district and the local university. Summer camp students and the school district's EB students would come together for the Play and Inquiry Summer Workshop. That moment when Jade visited the summer program was when she realized and knew amazing things were happening in Camino Real and that

there was something special about Fuentes Pre-K Center. I met Jade when I became a leader in the district and had the opportunity to collaborate with her as the summer school principal and through the Play and Inquiry Summer Workshop. Jade is currently a senior lecturer in the College of Education (Early Childhood) at Texas State University and teaches an early childhood block at Fuentes Pre-K Center where college students learn about how to teach prekindergarten and have opportunities to learn from teachers, students, families, and the community.

Maria was raised in the Camino Real community and attended the nearby former Pre-K Center growing up, back when the school was considered the Southside School. Maria attended schools in CRCISD and graduated from high school. Maria knew she wanted to go to college after high school but her father worried the university up the hill was too big for her and feared she would get lost navigating through the university system. Against her father's wishes, Maria attended Southwest State University and became a teacher. Maria began her teaching career in a neighboring community and school district. I have always known Maria as Mary, because when she attended school her name was changed by adding the letter y to her name and dropping the letters i and a so it would not sound so much like Spanish. I met Maria before I even knew Fuentes Pre-K Center existed. I met her as a student at SWT, where I worked as a work-study student at the university's child development center. After graduating college, I became an educator and had the privilege to teach alongside Maria at the old Fuentes Pre-K Center and at an elementary campus in the district. Maria is now retired after humbly serving her community as a teacher servant for 42 years. Maria currently has a grandson who attends Fuentes Pre-K Center.

About the Researcher

I was born and raised in a small fishing community along the Gulf of Mexico in a region of Texas known as the Rio Grande Valley. I graduated from the high school in my

hometown and, despite many challenges, moved to Camino Real to attend SWT. I graduated

from college in 1996 with a bachelor of science in psychology. After graduating college, with

encouragement from Maria, who was a teacher at the university's child development center, I

applied for an instructional assistant (IA) position at the old Fuentes Pre-K Center. In the Fall

of 1996, I was hired and worked as an IA under the supervision of Sofia. I worked at Fuentes

for 2 years as I completed my alternative certification program. After completing my

certification program, I worked for 1 year in a neighboring school district and then began

teaching as a kindergarten teacher in CRCISD in 1999. I have taught kindergarten, first

grade, second grade, and fourth grade as a bilingual educator. In 2017, I left the classroom

and became a bilingual instructional coach. In 2018, I became the assistant principal at

Fuentes Pre-K Center and in 2020, I became the school principal.

Dynamic-Critical Methods as Findings

The method of dynamic-critical pedagogies are also findings. The method used to

collect data was the CLE dynamic-critical pedagogies of invitation, Gracious Space, Circle,

pláticas, building relationships, and a place to speak of our hopes and dreams for the future of

4-year-olds. The first step taken was to find a place to convene for the group *plática*. "Place

is important because each community has unique strengths, assets, and gifts, along with the

stories" that make the place meaningful to the gathering (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

There is power in a space that is being occupied. Place gives historical context to the space, it

brings people together to *pláticar*, and it gives people an opportunity to learn about a

community of which they may not be a part. Some participants were familiar with the space

but did not know of its historical context. The place chosen for the group *plática* was the old

Fuentes Pre-K Center, which once was the Southside School that provided schooling for

Mexican American children. This place was chosen because it is a place with history and

stories that can continue to inform us of our reality and how to continue the work as we move

forward. Southside School was turned into Fuentes Pre-K Center and was where many of the participants began their teaching careers, including myself. Currently, the building is a historical marker in the community and is used as a cultural center called El Centro Cultural Hispano (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. El Centro.

Next, I sent participants an invitation via email. The invitation was intentional and informed the participants of the details about the gathering. Authentic invitations open up opportunities to gather and be in community with others.

The group *plática* was audio recorded using Open Voice Recorder Pro. The recordings were broken up into three recordings: opening Circle, Learning Walks/group *plática*, and closing Circle. The audio recordings were transcribed for analysis.

Gracious Space

The day of the group *plática*, the place was set to be inviting with light snacks and refreshments for the participants. Chairs were set in a circle as an invitation to the learning and conversations to come. The purpose of having refreshments is for participants was to build unity, community, trust, and respect for each other, creating Gracious Space. Gracious Space is an invitation to be in a space that is safe, where all voices are heard, and where everyone is treated as an equal. Gracious Space is necessary when inviting others to be in

critical conversations, as it allows you to build relationships so you can provide a space for having tough conversations (Ruder, 2009). Gracious Space is what will get to the heart of the gathering. As participants arrived, they greeted each other with hugs and welcomes. Participants conversed as they had light refreshments. Some participants knew each other well and others who had not seen each other in a while caught up with each other. Participants greeted and introduced each other to participants they did not know.

Opening Circle

After having time to meet and greet each other, I invited the participants to gather in Circle. I informed the participants of the agenda and before beginning Circle, I explained the reason for gathering in this way. Gathering in Circle is a way to develop strong relationships, trust, and work together as a collective. Next, I introduced the talking piece and explained its significance. The talking piece was an art piece I created of a lighthouse that was part of what guided this research. I also shared the history and purpose of the talking piece. The talking piece was to be moved around the circle and passed to the left. When a participant had the talking piece, it was their turn to respond to the questions asked and the other participants would listen attentively and hold back on comments. I invited the participants to introduce themselves by answering the following questions:

1. Who they are?

2. Where they are from?

3. Why did you accept the invitation to come today?

Each participant had a turn to answer the questions to introduce themselves. When one person was done introducing themselves, they would pass the talking piece to the person on the left.

Learning Walk

Next, I invited the participants to a Learning Walk. Learning Walks as dynamic-critical pedagogies "were inspired by the work of Miles Horton and the Highlander Center in New Market Tennessee" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 98). The group *plática* was held at El Centro Cultural Hispano, which has history and local artifacts about influential Hispanic leaders and Hispanic culture. The goal of the Learning Walk was for the participants to learn and have conversations about the space they were in and explore the history of the people and place. "The physical act of having a side-by-side conversation rather than a face-to-face conversation changes the way people relate" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 98). Participants walked together in pairs to explore the cultural center, the spaces, and the artifacts. During the Learning Walk, participants shared stories and reminisced of when they taught when it used to be the old Fuentes Pre-K Center. Maria told the story of living in the neighborhood where El Centro Cultural Hispano is located and how she came to this school when it was the Southside School. She shared how her family would walk to the *tortilleria* that was down the street to buy *masa* for *tamales*. Esperanza, who was a teacher at Fuentes when it was the old Pre-K Center, recalled where her room was and how students would play in the spaces outside of the classroom with water tables and easels for painting. I pointed out the classroom where I started my first teaching job as Sofia's IA. The parent participant shared how he was grateful that we had a center that shares and values their culture. Learning Walks are used as dynamic-critical pedagogies because they are a way to learn from others and give us inspiration and time to reflect about the space we are occupying (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). After participants had time to explore, we came back and met in Circle and shared the Learning Walk experience.

Group Pláticas

After participants shared their Learning Walk experience, we continued in Circle and started the group *plática*. When the participants received the invitation to the group *plática*, I asked them to bring an artifact that represented an invitation that had opened opportunities for them to learn and grow. Invitations have come in different forms for me and provided opportunities for me to grow and develop throughout my life. I wanted the participants to share an artifact that represented an invitation in their life that gave them opportunities to learn and grow. After sharing their artifact, I asked the participants to organically discuss the following questions:

1. Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?

2. What is your experience with the campus climate?

3. What does it feel like to send your kids to school, teach here, lead others?

4. What needs to change to create sustainable relationships and continue to be partners in the education of your kids/students?

5. How do we create the change?

Group Activity

Next, I asked the participants to create an art representation of their collective stories, ideas, and discussions. Play is another dynamic-critical pedagogy used to allow participants to be in "fellowship and community, and it is a powerful bond between people as well as between people and places" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 114). Participants had the option to work alone or with a partner. Play can happen in many ways, and for this activity art was the form of play used. Participants were excited to see the various materials laid out, such as paper, canvas, paint, markers, scissors, stickers, sequence, yarn, and other material scraps. Participants began to explore the materials and have conversations about what they wanted to create. Some participants worked alone on their creation and others worked with a partner.

Closing Circle

The last part of the group *plática* was closing Circle. I invited the participants to gather in Circle for the closing. Participants shared and gave an explanation of the piece and how it summed up their learning that happened as a result of the group *plática*. After all participants shared their art piece, I reminded them of the talking piece and which way it would go around the circle. Participants reflected on one final question: What moved you during this time together? The closing Circle allows participants and the researcher to reflect on the experience and the time spent together. Closing Circle is a time for the researcher to reflect on the stories that emerged around the research topic and research questions.

One-on-One Pláticas

I held one-on-one *pláticas* with one family of a previously enrolled student at the Pre-K Center, one educator currently working at the Pre-K Center, and one stakeholder from the local community. Each one-on-one *plática* was approximately 30–45 minutes and took place at El Centro Cultural Hispano, though one participant opted to have the *plática* over Zoom. As participants arrived, I greeted them and reminded them of consent and confidentiality. The following questions guided the *plática*s and collection of observables, also known as the data:

1. Can you tell who you are and what your work is?
2. What has this invitation pushed you to think about?
3. How did the pedagogies or strategies of group *plática* move you or provoked you to think differently?
4. What stories did you create together as you engaged collectively with others during the group *plática*?
5. How has your thought process changed about Fuentes and this community?
6. What are your hopes and dreams for your school community and what do you want students to leave with during their time at Fuentes?

68

7. What is the ambiance of Fuentes PreK Center? Describe the feel of the learning climate.

8. What gives you energy to be engaged and what can we do differently?

All one-on-one *pláticas* were documented through audio recordings using Voice Recorder Pro and Zoom, after which they were transcribed.

Rationale for Using Dynamic-Critical Pedagogies

The rationale for using the dynamic-critical pedagogies was my personal experience with the CLE pedagogies and the fact that these methods have been used in the work of the CLE and "have been tested – they are not tried and true but tested" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 79). Dynamic-critical pedagogies are effective in creating a space that is safe and collaborative. There is evidence that dynamic-critical pedagogies create an invitational space that is "life changing and radical" and in the experience of M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016), these pedagogies outlined the predicted results of this study.

Organization of Data

I based the research questions on the ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community (see Table 2). Question 1 focused on the self, Question 2 had emphasis on the organization, and Question 3 was about community. The ecologies of knowing helped me to make meaning of the data before, during, and after the *pláticas*. I organized the data by finding themes within the data and organizing them into the three ecologies of knowing.

Table 2. Data analysis matrix.

Research question	Ecologies of knowing	Themes
RQ1: Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?	Self	Relationships Invitation Learning journey Emergence of stories
RQ2: What conditions establish and foster a campus climate that promotes effective partnerships between leaders, educators, students, and families?	Organization	Connection Employment Friendships Language Collaboration Support
RQ3: How does a school community co-construct a campus climate that informs creating sustainable relationships with schools?	Community	Policy Place/Space Culture Demographics Assets

I identified the following themes through the analysis of the data. In the ecology of self, the themes that emerged were relationships, invitation, learning journey, and the emergence of stories. In the ecology of organization, the themes were connection, employment, friendships, language, collaboration, and support. In the ecology of community, the themes were policy, place/space, culture, demographics, and assets. Spiraled within the themes was RASPPA: relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action.

Meaning-Making

As mentioned in Chapter III, I analyzed the data I collected using the ecologies of knowing, the CLE axioms, and RASPPA: relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Figure 9 is a visual representation of the meaning making. The axioms guided the work and helped me make meaning of the data I collected during the *pláticas*. The stories and conversations captured during the lived experience were filtered using the ecologies of knowing by finding themes. RASPPA was spiraled into the

analysis of the data to identify relationships, assets within the community, stories, the importance of place, politics, and action.

Figure 9. Un caracol: meaning making.

The lived experience of the dynamic-critical pedagogies sparked many memories and emotions for some participants. The following are some of the stories and conversations that emerged. Within the stories, the ecologies of knowing (i.e., self, organization, and community) are woven into the meaning-making of the experience. RASPPA brought to life the lived experiences of the *pláticas*. The dynamic-critical pedagogies from the *pláticas* encouraged the participants to tell and own their stories, as "too often individuals, their organizations, and their communities learn very distorted stories about themselves that have been developed and propagated by those who do not really understand or values them" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34).

The stories below emerged from the *pláticas* convened for this research. Research partners were given an invitation and space to share their stories and their hopes and dreams. I invited participants to bring an artifact that represented an invitation in their life that opened opportunities for them to learn and grow.

Stories of Self

Maria shared a story about when she lived in the community next to El Centro. Maria stated, "I'm glad this building has stayed. I'm glad it's a cultural center." She went on to tell her story:

> The whole community was Hispanic; everybody knew each other at that time. It was so long ago. There was one Hispanic teacher when I came to school, when it was Southside School. They would say we had to speak all English. All the lessons were in English. First grade, it's a blur. Outside we would speak all Spanish. There wasn't a playground. I remember there was like three or four swings. It was just like an open field. We would just walk around and play tag or hide and seek, and we would swing on the swings. Years later, I talked to a former teacher and she said she would have a lot of kids in the classroom because a lot of the families were migrant families. They would get pulled out of school, like in April so they could go to the *trabajos* in other states and they would come back late in October. She said sometimes students in second grade were 12 or 13 years old. I remember she said they would help the little ones. When I was in third grade, Mr. Contreras, he was the principal and a third-grade teacher. By this grade, I remember already knowing English. I think at that time too, instead of being put down, it made you want to strive harder. It would make you want to do more to not let them think you're always going to be somebody who does nothing for their community. For 42 years I served the community. I never thought of it like that. I had always thought, I'm teaching, it's my job.

Figure 10 is a picture from Maria's first year teaching in a neighboring school district. Maria's hands have molded the futures of many students.

Figure 10. Maria's first year of teaching in 1980.

The local school organization and community affect us as learners in our journeys of self-development. The development of self starts with family and is informed by the world in

which we live. Maria shared how she and her mother would walk to the local *tortilleria* to buy *masa* and she recalled having to walk to the "Church on the Hill" near the university because it was the only Catholic church in the area. The act of telling her story was powerful––Maria owned her story and she felt empowered when her story was validated and valued by the research partners. Place was dynamic for Maria, as she was able to tell stories about the history of the place, which, in turn, helped other participants to understand and learn about the community she grew up in at a different period in time. She was a witness to the lives of individuals, organization, and community. When Maria stated "I'm glad this building has stayed. I'm glad it's El Centro," she was indicting she had always seen this place as an asset to the community, even when it was the Southside School. Maria had seen this place in different times and she never mentioned the deficiencies, but rather focused on the assets and strengths of the community.

Maria told another story, as she could not find an artifact to represent invitation, so she told the story of when she was in high school and was thinking about what she would do after graduation:

> I couldn't find the artifact that I really wanted to bring of the invitation. When I was in high school, like a sophomore in 10th grade taking Spanish, this one day, my teacher brought an article from *Camino Real Daily Record*, and it was going to become federal law or state law that they're going to implement bilingual education in Texas. She had cut it out and gave it to me and I probably lost it. I remember her telling me, "Look this is something you could do that you would want to do when you go to college." I feel like she's the one that took me under her wing. I never talked to a counselor or anything about college applications or financial aid or anything. She put that wanting to go to college in me.

Invitation is the beginning of what makes people live their hopes and dreams. An invitation needs to be personal, informative, authentic, have good intentions, and set a person up to be successful. Maria's teacher's invitation was intentional and gave her the drive to be the educator she was for 42 years. The invitation is what advocates and embedded mentors do for their students. The theme of invitation emerged consistently among the participants' stories.

Stories of Organization

Jade told her story as a community stakeholder within the school organization that has been invited to occupy space at Fuentes Pre-K Center. Jade shared an artifact that represented an invitation that opened an opportunity for learning and growing to young learners at Fuentes and to her university students (see Figure 11).
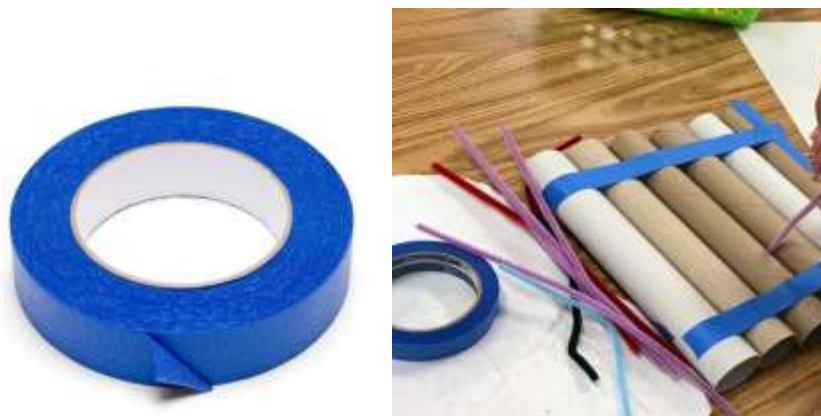
Figure 11. Blue tape creation.

Jade's story about her artifact was as follows:

> I brought a roll of blue tape [laughter by participants] because it is the force that holds our curriculum together, but really, it's the people and the invitation that the blue tape represents to have a connection with a young learner who has this vision, this idea, and to help them facilitate that and making that a reality. One of the things that struck me the most, I did a lot of learning. It was the learning walk. I feel like I learned so much about each of you and about this space. Besides the inequities of the building and the space, like not having a playground and all those things. But the richness and the beauty of the love, the *cariño*. The agency that you all had to make learning happen for your students in the space, just listening to you describe the music space, the movement space, the beautiful area where you had play and inquiry out here in the spaces, when you would open the doors. So, I wonder often about that invitation for teachers, to trust their hearts in educating young learners and barriers that are put, sometimes physical barriers, sometimes structural barriers or the political barriers that are placed in front of teachers who know what their students need, know how to listen, and know how to engage. It's also an invitation for connection with families at home, because now this child has carted home, possible in a backpack or an intern walking them out to the bus or the car with this thing that they've constructed. Now there's an invitation for that home–school connection. The family member now is probably thinking, oh, what is this garbage that you brought from school connected with blue tape? It's also an invitation for that family to find out. What did you make? What is this? What did you learn at school today? To see a school that values young learner the way they do. I think sometimes we're at Fuentes all the time, and the teachers there may not think what they're doing is radical because they've been doing it for so long. They've been doing it out in this back area [she points to the space where the old Fuentes Pre-K classrooms were]. They've been doing it in their own

classrooms. What's happening here is radical. It's this idea that young learners who are coming at 4 years old from home, young learners that people think come with deficits because of the way their background is framed, their language is framed, or ethnicity is framed, and their identities are framed. This is a school that sees everything that they bring from home as an asset and believes in that home school connection and believes in empowering young children and making the space in our day for this weird thing called play, but really it is all about how humans learn, right? How we capitalize on that learning is just really powerful and I consider myself lucky every day.

Jade told her story as a person who had been invited to take up space at Fuentes Pre-K Center. Jade is a professor who has her early childhood education classes at Fuentes. Jade shapes the minds of aspiring educators so they will be able to create spaces where young learners have the opportunity to learn in a space where they get to play and are valued as thinkers and creators of stuff, a space where they have choice and are seen as researchers and problem solvers. The theme of invitation emerged in Jade's story as she pointed out the power of invitation that a piece of blue tape has for a student whose assets are valued and not seen as a deficiency. The invitation is now extended to the university students to wonder and ask questions about the student's creation. The invitation is extended to the bus driver who sees this student getting on the bus with this creation. The invitation is extended to home where it sparks a conversation with families. When an organization focuses on the assets and strengths of the community, "then there is hope" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34). Hope that as an organization we build on the strengths that already exist and that the people who come to learn at Fuentes, whether as a 4-year-old or a university student, discover their gifts. Jade mentioned how much learning she did from the people she was engaged with during the Learning Walk and the space she was in. People gather when someone tells a story, we want to know each other and our stories. Place is powerful because it makes us think about the history of inequities and the importance of telling the story so it can continue to inform the work we do as educators. What emerged from the collaboration with Jade was political. We

have built a relationship that is focused on one thing—to establish and foster a campus

climate that promotes effective partnerships among leaders, educators, students, and families.

> We have university students who are Latino. We have students who have come from a place where they weren't invited to learn. We've had them come from places where maybe they didn't have the same agency learning, and that has driven them to become educators themselves, to create classrooms that are rich in learning. The space has been such an invitation for them to learn about students. There's a struggle there sometimes with us creating that space. You all are continuously creating those spaces for our students and they accept those invitations in different ways.

> Building relationships is what keeps the learning collaborative going. Providing

university students a Gracious Space to learn and grow gives learners an opportunity to grow

and develop as they learn to be teachers based on what we as an organization value for our 4-

year-olds.

Stories of Community

It is within our communities that we live and grow, "so the healthier our communities,

the more effective they become" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29). We create healthy

communities by working as a collective to understand ourselves and the relationships with

organizations that will inform how a school community can co-construct a campus climate

that creates sustainable relationships with schools, families, and the community. The

following is a back and forth robust *plática* between participants that emerged out of

community:

> Sofia: I think one of the things when I first started here, since we were so small, it was that family sense. I think that now with our university partners, the family is just growing, we kind of feel like it is a good thing. It's a hard thing, but family has always been part of what Fuentes is.

> Eulogia: I remember doing home visits, and I always felt like it built really strong connections with families. I just felt like families were more engaged and involved once you made that connection.

> Maria: We always talk about relationships. We always told families, we're not here to look at what you have or what you don't have. It's just we want to get to know you. Like, we want you to be able to trust us. We're going to have your child and help them. You're giving us your most precious thing.

Eulogia: I felt like once you made that connection with them, they knew to trust you, and everything was good. You had good relationships. Students were really good. They supported you.

Sofia: I felt like it was a team effort where, yes, this child is doing this, but let's work together. It was much easier, I felt, to make that connection with the parent and get that support.

Esperanza: I used to love doing home visits. Again, I taught Head Start for 18 or 19 years, so I did them all the way through, and we would go twice a year. But you're right. You would definitely build those relationships with those families. They knew you because you went into their homes like, wow! And they would feed you. They would be making tortillas and ask do you want one? Yes. This was so good. I grew up in these poor neighborhoods. I grew up, I guess you could say, in the projects or whatever. I was raised in these poor neighborhoods for years. My parents still live there. And I remember making full circle, like, oh, yeah, my parents live there while going down the street or, hey, oh my gosh, I used to live in that apartment, right. And then being at Fuentes, the new Fuentes with some of the newer teachers that were there, having to go on home visits and them saying like, you know, talking down about the neighborhood, and I'm thinking like, you know, you never know who you're going to meet. You never know who's listening. So be really careful of what you say because she's talking bad about the neighborhood that I grew up in. My parents still live there, you know, and so I kind of just looked at her and I said, you know, not all people that live there are bad people. You just have to get to know the community.

Maria: Recently, I saw this parent, of a student that lived in the poor neighborhoods, and he told me, oh, her name was Maria, too. I don't know. I can't remember everybody, all the parents, but that one. Her son was named Victor. And I remember she told me he got married. They just bought a house in a nice subdivision and he's an engineer. And she just went on and on about that. She remembers when I went to their house before he started Pre-K and everything. I've always told parents, they're bilingual, they're going to get far. They encourage them to know both languages.

Santiago: I wanted to share something, but then hearing you both, I wanted to change a little bit because the district has struggled. Leadership has struggled to kind of measure the impact of Fuentes, right. They want to see it in numbers. They always want to see data, and data, meaning test scores. As you guys are sharing these experiences, I wonder when we can say, why don't we just look at it from a different perspective? Right? Why don't we look at it from that mom that shared where her son is now and that he actually started at Fuentes? Because sometimes, ultimately, Fuentes impacted his life so that he is where he's at right now. I'm just kind of curious if that would give an understanding to the district. You don't have to look at any other way, because what's been happening ever since he was here, even when it was moved over there, it's been very productive, right? And the fact is that you guys have them for 1 year. That is one thing that they don't understand. Like, in elementary, they stay in the same building for several years. Under the same leadership philosophy, kind of like an understanding of vertically aligning with teachers. But at Fuentes, it's kind of elusive. Like, it's not a very concrete way of saying, well, the test scores in third grade over here represent Fuentes. That's kind of what's the struggle that the district has had. How many have graduated? Why don't

we look at it beyond that? They don't have to graduate to be successful, at the end of the day, they don't have to. I'm sure there's business owners here that never graduated, and they're business owners that went to Fuentes. So, success means just different measurements of success is what I think, as you guys are sharing about these experiences. We're looking at it as linear. So, only students that come to Fuentes, like, what about home visits? What about the impact that you guys have when a teacher goes to the home and what motivation that mom, dad, aunt, or grandma had? It's like we only want to see it from a student's perspective. We got to use it from maybe a community or family perspective, in a sense. So, I'm just kind of like, oh, my gosh, we're missing the boat. We're missing and misunderstanding the impact of this place.

Jade: From my perspective, the people who are working at Fuentes and their families are so hard at work. Hard at work being family members, hard at work in their lives. The teachers work tirelessly. Every person on that campus, I don't even know how they catch their breath because they're just working so hard. And so, all of it is shared with the district. I see you're talking about data and data points. Right? They work hard to share that data, but that doesn't tell even one millionth of the story of what happens. But they're working so hard to add to their labor to say, okay, well, now you have to justify what's happening in your school. You need to share the successes and share the joy to add to their labor to tell those stories. I think they're too busy making all of that happen. To add to their labor to make them tell the story, to justify all the things that are happening that we can't see in a chart or a graph. So, I'm wondering how to share that message or that information with the district. I rarely see them and I'm not there all the time, but I would say I'm there every day. I rarely see folks there who would come to see. I remember seeing you a lot [points to Santiago] when you worked there because I know other folks are busy. But I think it's something that has to be experienced. It really is something that I would invite anyone who wants to know what good is happening there to see. Just like I couldn't know what's happening with a family that is good and beautiful without getting to know that family and being there to just see what they are on paper, to look at their data. There's a lot of assumptions that we make about people based on their data. And I think a lot of assumptions may be made about Fuentes based on data. We wouldn't do that to a family, I hope, make those assumptions that they don't have good, rich, beautiful, and wonderful things happening in their family because we painted these numbers on them. To do that to a school, that I think really has embraced this idea of community, embraced this idea of young learners and seeing them as capable, I would say that there needs to be more time where district leadership is spending time at that school, listening to teachers sitting on the carpet, sitting around, seeing how hard they are working. I see it every day. I'm in aww every day. But I think that would be my invitation would be to come and to see. I think you're right. I think we need to be in that space to learn from it and see the benefit of it. I'm a 4-year-old human and now I'm in school and this is my very first experience in formal schooling. I always tell my students it's a place where kids figure out, do I like school? Is school going to like me back? I would say that at Fuentes unequivocally, I'm putting my arms around you. School does not just like you, school loves you. School is caring enough about you to stop and listen to what you're crying about or need in the hallway or to stay late and make sure that you have what you need for school the next day. That to me, I think is immeasurable. Because we don't know what would happen otherwise. If they don't see themselves as valid members of that learning school community, then the rest is

lost. So, I think that's something that they do very well. Is it challenging? Yes, there's always a challenge, but I think that's immeasurable.

Santiago: I think there's key people at the district level that may need that experience of going and visiting and seeing things from a different perspective or hearing from parents, because it can't be taken on by the teachers. There's too much work still. I think we just need to be more creative and we have people that can get those stories so that we can represent to the community and to everybody and to legitimize. This is a good point. When do you come and tell me, hey, I love what you all are doing. I can see it, right? But if I'm not there, then what? I come and I'll sound like a fake. Because you all know how it is. If I don't show up more than once and I just show up one time and say, oh man, you guys are doing an awesome job.

Eulogia: They need to be immersed in it too. Come to Fuentes. Come sit down and play with a kid in the hallway, outside in the classroom. I think you have to be in the space to really understand.

This *plática* gets to the heart of the work of the CLE. The *plática* started with participants telling stories of the meaningful ways in which teachers build relationships with families. The stories of families and their experiences when their students attended Fuentes sparked dialogue about how to measure success beyond quantitative data. The *plática* that emerged organically "is an empowering dialogue that communicates and makes known our abilities to bring about change in our communities and world if we act collectively with one another" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29). What the CLE does is it fosters a safe space and trust to enable participants to look at organizational issues within the local context (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). This process is not possible without the CLE theory of change or RASPPA. It begins with building meaningful relationships, identifying the assets within the organization and community, telling and listening to our stories, convening in a place that has history, being political by wanting to do good for our community, and taking action to create sustainable relationships with students, families, teachers, and the community. To be clear, this is politic that is grounded in sustainable culturally congruent values that inform action for the public good.

Invitation to Play: Collection of Art

During the group activity, participants created an art representation of their collective stories, ideas, and discussions using various materials. Participants shared their art piece in the closing Circle. The art pieces and used to enhance the stories of participants and explaining the "why" of a powerful invitation . Art is a dynamic-critical pedagogy that invites participants to express their ideas and their learning related to the purpose of the gathering in kinesthetic and visual ways that give way to stories that help provide a thick description of the *pláticas* and the pedagogy. The following are the art pieces and the learning that occurred from this dynamic-critical pedagogy.

Door Wide Open

The art piece in Figure 12 was created by Thiha, who worked on this piece alone. Thiha explained that this piece represented his daughter's experience and their experience as a family:

> This is the dragon. This was a new place to her and new people, so very different from her identity. She had a really good time at Fuentes. She said she really loves her teacher and she usually associate herself with Fuentes all the time. It is welcoming and inviting. It is the door wide open, not physically but the wide open for our family into caring hands. We were in the caring hands when she was in Fuentes. So, this represents my daughter's experience and our experience.
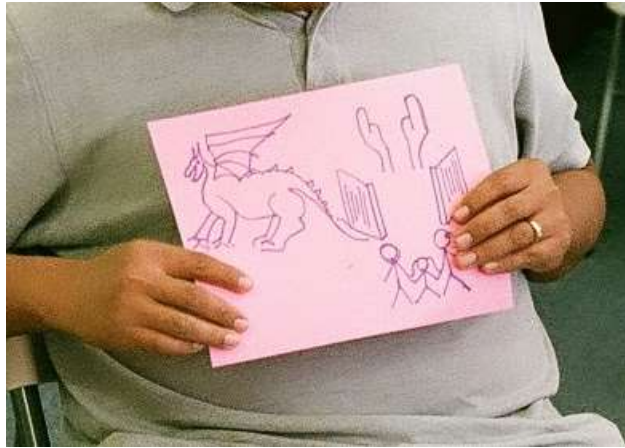
Figure 12. Door wide open.

Child at the Heart

The next art piece (see Figure 13) was created as a collective by two participants, Esperanza and Sofia. They chose to create a painting. The following is their interpretation of their learning through this art piece:

> We drew and painted a heart and a child at the heart. The child is obviously why we do what we do and why we love it so much. This really has to be a job that you love to do in order to give it justice. With everything that you do daily, you need to be able to enjoy what you're doing.

Figure 13. Child at the heart.
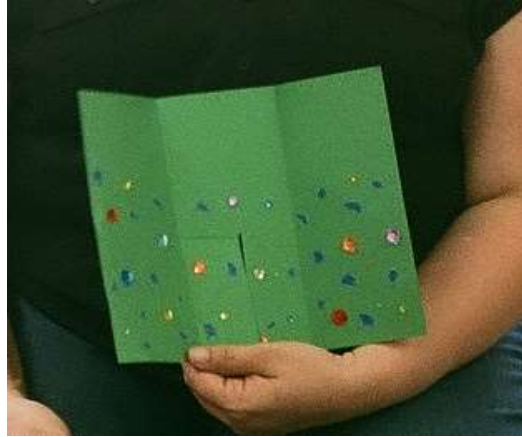
Treasure

The next art piece (see Figure 14) was created by Jade, who worked on her creation alone. The following is how she summarized her learning during the *plática* and the dynamic-critical pedagogies:

> So, I created a very unassuming outside door. I was thinking that the door, you can't tell anything that happens from the outside. You might be able to guess or wonder

what's happening. The door is slightly ajar, so that is that invitation, that opening welcome. But inside is all the treasure. And sometimes there's treasures like the blue tape and each one of these little jewels. Of course, I was drawn to the sparkly things. I can't help myself, to represent the people and their stories, some of the big people and some of the little people that I get to learn with and from every day.

Figure 14. Treasure.

Foundational Pillars

Figure 15 is a collective effort piece created by Santiago and Isabel, who chose to do a painting as a summary of their experience and learning. The following is their interpretation of the art piece:

My partner and I were just talking about Fuentes, she wanted openness and an open invitation, and she said, well, why don't we draw Fuentes and kind of have people coming in? So, we Googled a picture of Fuentes. That's kind of what we're thinking about, just making sure that Fuentes has this sense of belonging. And I think you [Thiha] mentioned about people and what people represent. I think we have obviously captured teachers here who have been working here in this new building, but the spirit was carried from here to there. And I think that's what I wanted to make sure that I represent. We wanted to represent the building, but in essence, the most important part is how you feel when you walk in there. The pillars represent the foundation for these kids' educational careers.

Figure 15. Foundational pillars.

Paper Chain

The last art piece (see Figure 16) presented is a paper chain. Maria worked alone on

her art piece and created a paper chain to chronologically represent her learning:

I made a chain. Each chain represents a different decade, starting from El Centro, this building, and the memories I have being a student and then coming back and teaching Pre-K here. I kept thinking about the changes. When we taught and we were teachers here, we invited the parents, by the home visits and by calling them. It was just trying to get a hold of them and getting in touch with them and making them feel welcomed. It felt like we kind of outgrew this building and we went into the new building. But you never forgot the foundation or the things we had learned from years past. At that time, it was through home visits and through phone calls, but now teachers text and share using different technological ways about the kids learning and having the parents feel welcome and informed of what's going on with their students. So, I feel like it's been a chain, and it can continue. It will change. Like you say, they have to have that heart to work with the kids, and hopefully one day it'll be Pre-K for all. It'll adjust, and you'll keep adding to the chain and have that experience for all the kids.

Figure 16. Paper chain.

Synthesis of Data

Through the stories, *pláticas*, and the dynamic-critical pedagogies employed, I, as the researcher, was able to learn so much about each person's experience, the impact of the invitation to learn, and how place can inform future work in developing the self, the school organization, and the community. Figure 17 is my response to the learning I did from the participants.

Figure 17. Learning together.

The following is my response to the *pláticas* and the learning that took place as a collective:

Everything everybody said, down to the chain link, that was so creative. We need to keep adding to that story. We can't stop where we are now. I know the work we do is really good, maybe sometimes not noticed, but I think we need to keep adding to that chain, keep working with our heart, and keep the spirit of the 4-year-old always in mind. Keep our heart and eyes open to see all the little jewels that we have inside that you can't see from the outside, and continue to provide that support that our families need. Thank you Thiha for sharing your story. I know coming to this new country 3 years ago and putting your kids in school for the first time in the United States, was scary. But at the same time, you felt like we welcomed you in, we cared for you and your family, and I think that's the heart of what Fuentes does. Let's keep learning

together. I feel like I've learned so much from you and I want to continue these conversations and continue to have *pláticas* together, because I think we can really create that change that we need and communicate the message that we want to get out to the community about what Fuentes really is. It's not just numbers, it goes deeper than numbers. It's about the invitation to learn together, building relationships, seeing the assets within our community and sharing our stories.

Chapter V presents the findings and how they connect to the literature that supports a new way of thinking and convening. This chapter explains why we need change how we do invitation.

V. INVITATION TO RE-IMAGINE

The purpose of this study was to document and better understand the power of invitation using the CLE theory of change and dynamic-critical pedagogies as an invitation into a space for learning, teaching, and development. In this qualitative study, I employed the method of critical ethnography and dynamic-critical pedagogies to engage the research participants in critical conversations. As the critical ethnographer, I used my position and the "resources, skills and privileges available to her to make accessible—to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach" (Madison, 2012, p. 6). The invitation guided me and a research team of teachers, parents, and additional stakeholders in exploring what conditions establish and foster a campus climate that will facilitate effective partnerships among leaders, educators, students, and families. The invitation guided participants of the school community to imagine how they can co-construct a campus climate that encourages the creation of sustainable relationships with schools to provide 4-year-olds a meaningful educational experience.

In this chapter, I provide a synopsis of the findings. I connect the findings to the literature that supports this new way of thinking. The chapter concludes with implications for a collaborative action for current and future leaders of Fuentes Pre-K Center, followed by recommendations for what we need to do in the areas of developing the self, recommendations for leaders within the organization, and recommendations for the community. Last, I discuss recommendations for future research and final thoughts.

Findings and Connections to the Literature

The spirit of the CLE pedagogies and experience is what helped me make meaning of the research data. The themes that emerged from the research are the values of the people who work in the organization, who live in the community, who send their students to the Pre-

K Center, and who are authentically invited to grow and learn. The findings confirm what the literature states—the CLE dynamic-critical pedagogies provided an opportunity to nurture meaningful relationships. The following are the findings based on the research questions and the literature that supports the CLE and dynamic-critical pedagogies as "a way of life" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 30). The CLE worldview is something that becomes a part of who you are and what you do every day.

Research Question 1

Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?

In this context, an invitation is deeper than just a request to show up to participate, sign in, and be counted without a voice, it is not an invitation to a party, or a fiesta where you just show up and mingle. The invitation I am referring to is deeper, it is an authentic and meaningful invitation, it is an invitation wrapped in Gracious Space, it is about building relationships, it is about being vulnerable and this invitation leads to transformational experiences. Invitation is a dynamic-critical pedagogy. Invitation begins with building trusting and authentic relationships with students, families, teachers, and community partners. Before an invitation is extended to gather, a person must feel connected to the person inviting them. All participants felt connected with me as the researcher and each other because they all had a relationship with me and had a connection to the place. This sense of connection created a circle of trust. The best learning occurs when we feel connected to others and trust each other. "The CLE invites us to experience and live through relationships that allow us to experience learning and leading as dynamic social processes, and have conversations for pedagogical purposes" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 30). This is why we need to re-imagine how we do invitation as process, and to what ends.

An invitation into a space needs to be purposeful and meaningful to the gathering. Space gives context to the gathering. The place I selected for the gathering was purposeful.

The place has a history that was connected to the participants, the organization, and the community. All participants had a connection with El Centro, which was a Gracious Space for all the participants as they felt they were in a safe space to be vulnerable and learn and grow together. Gracious Space is critical when inviting others to be in critical conversations, as it allows you to build relationships and provide a space for having tough conversations (Ruder, 2009). Participants shared stories of El Centro. The CLE itself is an invitation to come together and address issues related to the local context and the issues participants feel are important to them, the organization, and the community. School leaders are tasked with engaging families and guiding teachers to learn and grow as professionals.

The researcher or the CLE host must extend an invitation through in-person communication and follow up with a formal invitation. The invitation I extended to participants was meaningful and authentic. Participants were quick to respond to the invitation, they were interested in the topic, and after the gathering they were wanting to continue to have *pláticas*.

Research Question 2

What conditions establish and foster a campus climate that promotes effective partnerships between leaders, educators, students, and families?

Invitations to be in community with each other through meaningful engagement are what will foster a campus climate that promotes effective partnerships. The leader of a campus must build healthy relationships with students, families, teachers, and community stakeholders in order to create trust. Building relationships is what will set the foundation to get at the heart of the work that needs to be done.

I used dynamic-critical pedagogies to foster such relationships. First, I extended a meaningful and authentic invitation to participants. Participants met in Circle to honor everyone's voice. Circle created a safe space that allowed participants to have deep and

honest conversations. Place was purposeful so participants were inspired to tell their stories

and encouraged to see the values and assets within the organization and community. Learning

Walks allowed the participants to explore the space while having conversations with a

partner. Learning Walks "freshen our perspectives, sharpens our thinking, and adds a way of

learning from others not often considered as vital in our busy schedules" (M. A. Guajardo et

al., 2016, p. 98). Maria's stories added a level of learning to all the participants, as she told

stories of her experiences as a student in the building we were in and then being a teacher in

the very same building. Stories about the building we were occupying, the neighborhood,

learning, and teaching emerged from the different pedagogies. Dynamic-critical pedagogies

engaged participants in the work that I believe is what will move Fuentes to create a campus

climate that promotes effective partnerships among leaders, educators, students, and families

as we learn and grow together. Dynamic-critical pedagogies allowed the participants to

"engage in thinking, listening, and dialogue for learning," learning about the self,

organization, and community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 82). This type of engagement is

needed to move away from deficit ways of thinking about families and identifying assets in

the organization and community to create effective partnerships.

Research Question 3

How does a school community co-construct a campus climate that informs creating

sustainable relationships with schools?

A school community must work as a collective to co-construct a campus climate that

informs creating sustainable relationships. At the end of the *pláticas*, participants had

experienced Circle, telling stories, and having conversations. Dynamic-critical pedagogies

scaffolded the learning because as the researcher I kept in mind that everyone was at different

levels of development. I was intentional "to balance the learning within three ecologies of

knowing: self, organization, and communities" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). I did this

by being intentional in planning the dynamic-critical pedagogies and the questions asked. In order to co-construct a campus climate that fosters creating sustainable relationships, we must begin to engage in meaningful ways. The CLE dynamic-pedagogies engaged participants in a way in which they taught and learned from each other, they were reflective, and, most importantly, everyone who shared their story was honored for their contribution to the learning from the *plática*.

Maria's stories of living and learning in this community were inspiring. Maria told stories about the historical context of the place, which, in turn, helped other participants to understand and learn about the community she grew up in at a different time in history. Maria stated, "I'm glad this building has stayed. I'm glad it's El Centro." Maria opened participants' eyes to see the assets in the community.

Ecologies of Knowing: Collective Change Efforts

The implications for this way of being are critical to creating change within ourselves, organizations, and communities. The *pláticas* engaged participants in different ways, which made the conversations personal, emotional, and required vulnerability. The ecologies of knowing allowed participants to make meaning of the conversations and their experiences depending on the level of their own development (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The following are recommendations for how to continue the work of self-development among leaders, teachers, families, and stakeholders; recommendations for the organization; and recommendations for the community.

Recommendations for Self

The research participants and I are committed to continuing the work of creating a space where 4-year-olds and their families feel invited to engage meaningfully throughout their time at the Pre-K Center. After our group *plática*, one participant made a comment "that we should do this again soon." We need to create space and process for this type of

engagement. "It is a space where you can be self-reflective, we do not do this enough, teachers, families, and community partners need this time." We need this type of research method, a method that is inviting, engaging, and transformative to people closest to the issues of our community. The voices of my research partners organically cite the voices of CLE organizers, the CLE is sustained when it becomes part of our lives (M.A Guajardo et al., 2016). The embedded recommendation is to live the CLE with our research partners, families, and our students.

Aligned with the first recommendation above is to make time for having critical conversations. This will require us to slow down and make time from the busyness of work, to have meaningful conversations with teachers and create Gracious Space where teachers and leaders can be reflective to improve upon their own practices. This type of engagement needs to be planned to build meaningful relationships and trust through *pláticas*, home visits with families, Learning Walks, and time to be reflective. The systems we put in place need to support the values, vision, and articulated needs of a community and their children. The systems cannot be for serving the technical systems, but serving the children and their families and this is when the research methods of CLE worldview emerge as findings. When children are put first, the systems can support the values, vision, and needs of a community. This type of engagement is not happening enough, as one participant said "we need to do this more often."

The second recommendation is for school leaders to be examples and motivators for others, to lay a foundation for teachers and families to see themselves as leaders. School leaders should be encouraging others to grow and develop into spaces of leadership. This includes inviting teachers to join a master's program in school leadership. For families, this can be the start of them having agency and taking action for what they believe is best for their child as they embark in their educational careers and life. Ownership and full participation in

the educational process of their children should be articulated and modeled through the CLE framework as we create the conditions and institutional spirit that set families up for success. We only have students in the school building for 1 year, and the impact of their first schooling experience can put students on a trajectory for success in school and life and enable their families to serve as full partners in the education of their children and community.

The final recommendation is for school leaders to create transformational space for learning where all stakeholders have opportunities to build meaningful relationships, build trust, and have conversations about children's school experiences so we can create inviting spaces for children to learn, play, and grow. This is a different type of inquiry and engagement grounded in education and community development (García & Guajardo, 2016). This would consist of inviting teachers, families, and community partners to continue having *pláticas* and engaging using the dynamic-critical pedagogies. It is important that we work together to continue to improve the vision and mission of schooling. My role as a leader, researcher, and citizen is to create the conditions that will foster this induction to success for children, their parents, and community partners for the successful participation in our educational system. My role is to become the change I want to see in the world of our schools and families.

Recommendations for Leaders in the School Organization

Fuentes Pre-K Center sets the foundation for many students in the school district. Fuentes is the first school many students attend before they embark into the work of schooling. Fuentes values students and families and embraces the assets they come with to build on their knowledge.

The first recommendation for school leaders in the organization is an invitation to come learn and grow with us. The CLE organizers believe "learning is a leadership act and that leadership is at its best when it is in collaborative action" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p.

24). This is an invitation to learn about and to join us in a dynamic-critical learning process.
You are invited to learn about the good that is happening in the school and the cultural
context and action that facilitate this change. This school community has embraced 4-year-
olds and we want to share these experiences for others to learn. This is an invitation to spend
time at the school in a classroom, listening to teachers, sitting on the carpet, sitting in the
hallway, and see how hard teachers and students are working. You are always welcomed and
invited at Fuentes, it is a Gracious Space. This would look like leaders being in the space to
learn from it and celebrate the power of place and the wisdom of its people (M. A. Guajardo
et al., 2016).

The second recommendation is an invitation for leaders in the school organization to
find different ways and age-appropriate means of measuring school success for 4-year-olds.
How do we measure the impact of Fuentes? How do we tell the story of Fuentes? And how
do we influence children and families so they can take Fuentes through life in schools?

Understand and see that teachers, students, and families are more than just data points.
Data points do not even begin to tell the story of what happens at Fuentes. The CLE invites
us to tell and share stories in a Gracious Space where research partners "can tell stories across
generations" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 66). You are invited to see things from a
different perspective, hear the stories families have to share about their students who went to
Fuentes and where they are now. Document the stories and share with the community
through publications and other forms of media. Invite other school leaders to recreate the
spirit of Fuentes in their school so children will find a Gracious Space in the schools they
attend in their community.

Recommendations for Community

The Fuentes school community is a tight-knit community, it is like family. It is when
we are in community that we learn and grow (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). When we invest

in our community, we will be more effective as we work collectively to co-construct a campus climate that informs creating sustainable relationships. This community made an investment when they passed the bond election to build a new PK center and we need to reciprocate by being public about the work. Imagine sending this good work to other schools in the district.

The first recommendation for the community is to build on the campus climate by creating meaningful relationships with families. One story that emerged in the findings is how teachers felt connected with families when they had home visits. Participants felt they made connection with families and families trusted them when we would come to their homes. Home visits is a way to gather as a community and have *pláticas* and share stories to learn and grow from each other. Community can be established by inviting all stakeholders to engage in dynamic-critical pedagogies to build relationships to bring about the change we want to see in schools and our community. The CLE organizers teach us that when the dynamic-critical pedagogies are used, there can be community change and that these pedagogies should be used based on the needs and assets of the community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

The second recommendation is to strengthen relationships with community partners. Invite new community partners to come and learn at Fuentes. Currently, we have a collaboration with the local university. University students have the privilege of learning to be early childhood educators from students and teachers at Fuentes. This collaboration needs to continue and expand to include more student teachers and residency teachers.

Future Research

Further research is needed to explore and add to the literature of how an invitation into a space leads to the development of self that moves a person to want to lead others in meaningful and engaging ways to create change. Future research needs to be done using the

94

CLE dynamic-critical pedagogies to guide teachers, leaders, and families to get to the heart of the work that is important and how this work leads to the development of self, organizations, and communities.

Additional research at the level of self is needed to continue to develop teachers, families, students, and community partners to better understand who we are and the world we know. This study included a small sample of participants, so this research and the pedagogies can be expanded to include all educators, families, and community partners within the school community. The dynamic-critical pedagogies invite participants to look deeply within themselves in a way that pushes them to understand who they are, build relationships, and understand their role as a bigger part of society. Who am I? What is my work? This type of engagement that develops the self is critical to creating change in our schools and community. At the organizational level, additional research is needed to understand the impact an organization can have on all its stakeholders when it creates inviting spaces to engage and makes it a way of being.

Final Thoughts

My experiences as an educator and a leader have put me in spaces where I have learned about who I am and my world in a dynamic-critical way, and have informed this research. I want others to experience the invitations that have put me in this space, in this space of sitting and writing a dissertation as I work toward a dream I never thought possible, a PhD. I close this dissertation with deep sentiments knowing there are hopes and dreams for a better future for 4-year-old children, teachers, families, and our community. I have hope that invitations will come to open new doors of opportunities to those I inspire to go on a learning journey and that they will be inspired to do the same for others. I have hope that collectively we can continue the legacy of Fuentes and that the history and stories of Fuentes will be told. It was an honor to be on this journey of learning with amazing educators,

families, and community partners to influence the youngest of learners in our school systems, our 4-year-olds.

Last, the completion of this dissertation is an invitation to my daughters, nieces, and nephews to continue to learn and grow. Never give up on your hopes and dreams.

APPENDIX A

Key Terms

Community Learning Exchange. The CLE is about reimagining school and community partnerships in a way that empowers community members to come together, engage in deep conversations, and find solutions to the problems affecting their communities (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE is not a program or a one-time event, "it is a way of life" that creates meaning-making through real lived experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE provides a safe space and time for participants to convene in meaningful and purposeful ways. Through CLE experiences, the capacities of families are built to identify their assets. The CLE consists of five axioms that are the guide that will lead the process. The CLE axioms are learning as leadership and action, *pláticas* and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy, local knowledge and action, encourage crossing borders, and assets and hope. These will guide the work to create sustainable change through real lived experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). When participants come together collectively to share their gifts and the challenges from multiple lenses, then an organization or community can collectively lead sustained change and empower action (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

CLE Theory of Change. The CLE theory of change is an asset-based model that values "relationships, assess, and places" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32). Creating and building an invitational space is at the heart of the CLE theory of change and will lead to a community-building approach that begins to see the assets in a community rather than the deficits (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE theory of change can be used to invite members of a local school community to identify issues of curriculum and pedagogy and have critical conversations that move toward action (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Not only can the CLE theory of change be used to identify issues within a community, it can be used to

create an understanding of how complex change is and begin to build leadership within an organization (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The following defines the CLE theory of change, or RASPPA: relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33). RASPPA is what M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016) called an assets-based development theory of change. Assets-based development weaves together relationship building, storytelling, place, politic, and action to move us away from deficit ways of thinking and acting (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Dynamic-Critical Pedagogies. Dynamic-critical pedagogies are sustained practices that are grounded in the local context and people and based on values (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). Dynamic-critical pedagogies can be adapted to the local context and needs and "should be used based on the unique strengths and needs of each community" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 77). Dynamic-critical pedagogy is "where knowledge and action are co-constructed by teachers, learners, and community partners" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 77).

Pláticas. *Pláticas* are used to capture the stories of parents, school personnel, and community stakeholders. Telling stories matters because they are a way that we make sense of our world, they help us to build and sustain relationships, and, most importantly, stories "help us see the possibilities and hope beneath layers of despair" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 19). *Plática* is "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). *Pláticas* provide opportunities to share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders feel connected to collectively discover critical issues that are important to them (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). *Plática* is a research approach of collecting stories by building relationships and by coming into the *plática* as one who honors the stories of others rather than one who just wants to gather data.

Ecologies of Knowing. The ecologies of knowing can be used to organize participants' thinking and learning from life experiences through the three ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The ecologies of knowing include the micro, which is the self; the meso, which is the organization; and the macro, which is the community. The ecologies are not isolated events, rather they are "like life itself . . . bordered by permeable boundaries that leave room for exchange and interplay but serve the purpose when making meaning of the engagement before, during and after the CLE" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27).

Gracious Space. Gracious Space is something most have experienced at one point in their life, but it may have been called something else such as a neutral space or a safe learning zone. The Center for Ethical Leadership defines Gracious Space "as a spirit and setting in which we invite the stranger and learn in public" (Ruder, 2009, p. 3). Gracious Space is an invitation to be in a space that is safe, where all voices are heard, and where everyone is treated as an equal.

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: A PEDAGOGY OF HOPES AND DREAMS: AN INVITATION TO A DYNAMIC CRITICAL LEARNING PROCESS

Principal Investigator: Eulogia Martinez, **Email:** eulogiamartinez7@gmail.com, **Phone:** (512)787-1305

Faculty Advisor: Miguel Guajardo, **Email:** maguajardo@txstate.edu

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

This study is an invitation to re-imagine! I invite you, the research participant, to witness the co-construction of a safe, trusting, and dignified community that has committed to identifying the awareness, skills, and imagination needed by educators, students, families, and leaders to support a process for learning and development. You are being asked to participate because you are part of an early childhood community.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:

Group *pláticas* for two hours (one time). Group *pláticas* will consist of two or three groups of participants with 4-5 participants in each group *plática*. We will meet with other participants to discuss how collectively we can co-construction of a safe, trusting, and dignified community that has committed to identifying the awareness, skills, and imagination needed by educators, students, families, and leaders to support a process for learning and development. Discussion topics may include school culture and climate, school systems, effective partnerships, and community. The researcher will help guide the discussion. To protect the privacy of group members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and we ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the group *pláticas* with anyone else. The discussions we will audiotaped to make sure that it is recorded accurately

One on one *pláticas* for 30-45 minutes (one time). If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in one brief *plática*. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. During the interviews, you will be asked about your experience in the group *pláticas*. The interview will be audio-recorded, and the researcher may take notes as well.

What are pláticas? *Pláticas* provide opportunities to share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders feel connected to collectively discover critical issues that are important

to them (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). *Plática* is a research approach of collecting stories by building relationships and by coming into the *plática* as one who honors the stories of others rather than one who just wants to gather data. A time be will set up to meet with the researcher at El Centro Hispano Cultural.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

In the event that some of the group *pláticas* or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time.

There may be unforeseen circumstances traveling to and from the research site such as hazardous road conditions, traffic, and dangerous weather conditions.

Please seek the advice of your primary care physician if you are experience any mental or physical discomfort brought about by the methods and procedures of this study.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

The benefits of the study will be, the researcher will employ dynamic-critical pedagogies to study theory in action with the goal of painting the picture of a community to better understand its work from the inside out with the goal of influencing its practices of engagement and sustainability; the work highlights the dynamic- critical ontology of raising healthy children, their families, and systems as they become life-ready and life-long learners.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The researcher and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study. Participants will be provided with light snacks and refreshments.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you accept the invitation to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Eulogia Martinez: eulogiamartinez7@gmail.com

Project 8364 approved by the Texas State IRB July 19, 2022. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334-(meg201@txstate.edu)

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording:

Yes _____ No _____

Your participation in this research project may include photos. Photos will assist with accurately documenting experiences. You have the right to refuse photos taken of you. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to photos: Yes _____ No _____

_____   _____

Printed Name of Study Participant   **Signature** of Participant   Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

_____

PROTOCOL FOR GROUP *PLÁTICAS*

Plática is "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). *Pláticas* provide opportunities to share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders feel connected to collectively discover critical issues as we work collaboratively to create a space where we learn and grow together (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).The *pláticas* will engage research participants who are one current family enrolled at the Pre-K center (family may include one or more family members), one family previously enrolled at the Pre-K center (family may include one or more family member), one educator currently working at the Pre-K center, past educator who worked at the Pre-K Center, one current school leader who works at the Pre-K center, one community stakeholder from the local community. The anticipated number of participants is 10. A total of one group *pláticas*, which will take approximately two hours total. Group *pláticas* will take place at Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos (211 Lee St. San Marcos, Texas). All group *pláticas* will be documented through audio recordings, researcher journal, and through collection of artifacts and photographs.

Arrival:

The first part of the group *pláticas* will be arrival of participants. As participants arrive they may help themselves to breakfast item snacks. When all participants have arrived, the researcher will ask participants to meet in Opening Circle (participants will sit on chairs in a circle). Research participants will be asked to bring a photograph or artifact to share, that represents an invitation that has opened opportunities for you to learn and grow.

Opening Circle:

- The researcher will have a talking piece that is meaningful to the purpose of the group *pláticas.* The talking piece is a way to ensure that all voices are heard and shows respect for the speakers and listeners.

- Participants will be informed of the why we are gathering in circle. Circle is a way to develop strong relationships, trust, and work together as a collective.

- The researcher will tell a story about the talking piece and how it will be used.

- The researcher will invite participants to introduce themselves by answering the following questions:

  1. Who they are?

  2. Where they are from?

  3. Why did you accept the invitation to come today?

Group *Pláticas*:

- Participants will break up into three groups and sit in a circle.

- Participants will be asked to share in their groups the photograph or artifact that represents an invitation that has opened opportunities for them to learn and grow.

- Next participants will discuss the following questions:

  1. Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?

  2. What is your experience with the campus climate? What does it feel like to send your kids to school, teach here, lead others?

  3. What needs to change to create sustainable relationships and continue to be partners in the education of your kids/students?

- When participants are done sharing they will collectively create an art representation of their collective stories, ideas, and discussions.

Closing Circle:

- Participants will gather in the large Circle for closing.

- Participants will share and tell about their collective art piece.

- After participants share, the researcher will remind the participants of the talking piece.

- The researcher will ask a final question of refection.

    1. What moved you during this time together?

End:
Participants will be dismissed, and they will sign up for a one to one *plática.*

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR ONE-ON-ONE *PLÁTICAS*

Plática is "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). *Pláticas* provide opportunities to share stories through Gracious Space, where all stakeholders feel connected to collectively discover critical issues as we work collaboratively to create a space where we learn and grow together (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). The one on one *pláticas* will engage research participants who are one current family enrolled at the Pre-K center (family may include one or more family members), one family previously enrolled at the Pre-K center (family may include one or more family member), one educator currently working at the Pre-K center, past educator who worked at the Pre-K Center, one current school leader who works at the Pre-K center, one community stakeholder from the local community. The anticipated number of participants is 6. Participants engage in one, one on one *pláticas*, which will take approximately 30-45 minutes. One on one *pláticas* will take place at Centro Cultural Hispano or the participant may choose that the researcher goes to their home. All one on one *pláticas* will be documented through audio recordings, researcher journal, and through collection of artifacts and photographs.

Arrival:

As participants arrive they will be greeted and reminded of consent and confidentiality. The researcher will have a bag of snacks for the participant.

One on One *Pláticas*:

The researcher will begin the one on one *pláticas* by asking the following questions:

1. For the record will you state who you are.

2. Why did you accept the invitation to participate in this study?

3. How did the pedagogies or strategies of group *pláticas* make you feel?

4. What did you learn about yourself as you engaged collectively with others?

5. In what ways do you believe you have changed as a result of group *pláticas***.**

6. What are your hopes and dreams for your school community?

7. What are your hopes and dreams for your school/students/child?

8. What is the ambiance of Fuentes Pre-K?

9. Do you feel welcomed at Fuentes? If yes, what makes you feel welcomed? If no, what makes you feel unwelcomed?

10. How are you involved in the school engagements and community engagements?

End:
Participants will be thanked for their participation and dismissed.

INVITATION TO A DYNAMIC-CRITICAL LEARNING PROCESS

You're Invited

You are invited to take part in a dynamic-critical learning process to share your knowledge of

- How does a school community co-construct a campus climate that informs creating sustainable relationships with schools?
- What promotes effective partnerships between leaders, educators, students, and families?

When: Saturday October 8 at 8:00 a.m.

What: We will have group pláticas and one on one pláticas with participants in the local community. Photos and audio recordings may be taken.

Where: Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marocs, 211 Lee St.

If you want to participate or have any questions regarding this study, please contact:
Eulogia Martinez
eulogiamartinez7@gmail.com
(512)787-1305

PEDAGOGY OF HOPES AND DREAMS PLÁTICAS

Pedagogy of Hopes and Dreams Pláticas
Saturday October 8, 2022

Saturday October 8, 2022	Snacks / Drinks
El Centro Cultural Hispano	Coffee, Orange Juice, Water, Pastries, and Fruit
Estimated # of Participants	
12	

Plática Protocols

Time/Activity	Purpose/Key Points	Person/s Responsible	Resources	Questions
Arrival Time: 8:00-8:30 • Meet & Greet • Participants eat Breakfast items • Sign consent forms	Build unity, community, trust, respect for the other/self • **Sign in sheets** • **Consent** • **Agenda**	• Researcher	• Tables • Food • Tablecloths	Frame the day Agenda Overview before opening Circle
Opening Circle Time: 8:30- 9:15	**Purpose/Key Points** The researcher will have a talking piece that is meaningful to the purpose of the group *pláticas.* The talking piece is a way to ensure that all voices are heard and shows respect for the speakers and listeners.	**Person/s Responsible** • Researcher	**Resources** • Talking piece • Agenda • Researcher Journal	**Questions** The researcher will invite participants to introduce themselves by answering the following questions: 1. Who they are? 2. Where are they from? 3. Why did you accept the invitation to come today?

	Participants will be informed of why we are gathering in Circle. Circle is a way to develop strong relationships, trust, and work together as a collective. The researcher will tell a story about the talking piece and how it will be used.			

Learning Walk

Goals:
- Participants will explore the artifacts in EL Centro with a partner.
- Participants will gain further knowledge about the physical space that they are occupying.

Guiding Question:

Group Pláticas
9:15-10:00

Goals:
- Participants will break up into two or three groups and sit in a circle.
- Participants will be asked to share or tell a story in their groups about the photograph or artifact that represents an invitation that has opened opportunities for them to learn and grow.
- Next participants will discuss the following questions:
- Next participants will discuss the following questions: (facilitated by Eulogia, Yolanda,

   Ben)

1. Why is an invitation into a space important to teachers, families, and students?
2. What is your experience with the campus climate? What does it feel like to send your kids to school, teach here, lead others?
3. What needs to change to create sustainable relationships and continue to be partners in the education of your kids/students?
4. How do we create the change?

Group Activity: Create an art representation of their collective stories, ideas,	Objective/Key Points Create an art representation that sums up their	Facilitator • Research er	Resources • Art supplies (markers, tape,	Questions

and discussions. (One per group) **Time: 10:00-10:30**	conversations, stories, and ideas			constructi on paper) • Chart Paper	
Closing Circle Time: 10:30-11:15	**Objective/Key Points** Participants will gather in the large Circle for closing. Participants will share and share about their collective art piece. After participants share, the researcher will remind the participants of the talking piece.	**Facilitator** • Researcher	**Resources** • Talking Piece • Researcher Journal		**Questions** The researcher will ask a final question of reflection. What moved you during this time together?
Clean up					

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