

“THEY DON’T LIKE ME, THEY TOLERATE ME”: TRES MAESTRAS NARRATE  
THE PUBLIC SCHOOL EXPERIENCE IN A RURAL TEXAS COMMUNITY:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

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## DEDICATION

To my ancestors here and those who have transitioned before me whose shoulders I stand on. I am eternally grateful for your sacrifice, hopes, and dreams making this work a celebration of who we are through storymaking. To my children Francisco, Isabel, Linda Felina, Isaias, as well as my grandchildren Sofia, Josephine, and all of my future grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren. I give you these familial stories to continue to learn, love, and create your own hopes and dreams. I encourage you to celebrate your ancestors as you grow and engage in storymaking of your own. To my communities Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos and *especialmente mi gente en Sabinal, Tejas* who work tirelessly to be inclusive and make changes for the better, you make a difference. Finally, to all the *maestras* in the field who remain hopeful and have courage to disrupt the system for just cause, thank you for your sacrifice and continued dedication to work in community, serving our children and their families to make hopes and dreams come true. I pray you know your worth, your significance, and how instrumental you are in constructing our future.

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, I engaged community learning exchange (CLE) as a worldview, an epistemological approach to research, practice, and a bridge that builds a connection between school and communities of practice. In this auto-ethnographic study, I explored the oral histories of three generations of Latina Texas public-school teachers in the same family spanning over 60 years. To make sense of their collective experiences as teachers in a small rural Southwest Texas town I used the theory of change, which provides an alternative worldview that moves from traditional educational conditions and approaches to an asset-based worldview. This work's generative nature gives us an action approach that serves as a tool to reflect on the past as an eye is kept to the future work, growth, and development enacting a way of life. Stories, *testimonios*, and collective reflections emerged as powerful tools during three *pláticas* focusing on each of the ecologies of knowing the self, organization, and community.

This study honors the power of place and the wisdom of people through aligning data and observables. Exploring educational environments' conditions through the researchers' eyes, their educational politic that advocated for change, their anatomy of critical consciousness, and what good citizenry looked like and felt like allowed for movement from storytelling to storymaking. These are the stories made when the historically observed become the observers allowing educators, educational leaders, and community members to bear in mind the urgency of disrupting the current public-school systems that have prevailed through generations.

## I. PEDIGREE OF ACTIVISM AND CHANGING THE STATUS QUO

“Sara, they don’t like me. They tolerate me.” These words were spoken to me by Mrs. Trejo, a teacher who had become somewhat of an informal mentor during my first year of teaching, as I congratulated her on being voted Teacher of the Year in 1999. Mrs. Trejo reminded me of my mom at times. Mrs. Trejo was short, smiled every day and got her work done, and her students would hug her in the hallways. So, it perplexed me when Mrs. Trejo’s usual warmth was interrupted by the words that projected from her mouth. I quickly asked, “What do you mean?” I had spent the school year watching her smile and have conversations with the entire school community. She replied, “They don’t like teachers like you and me. Brown-skinned teachers who will push back to do what is right. All of these people [her hand gestured toward the classroom door] don’t like us but they tolerate us because they need us. Just remember that” (S. Trejo, personal conversation, May 1999). Mrs. Trejo retired at the end of the school year but her words resonated in my mind for many years thereafter, igniting within me a desire to push the status quo and do what I thought was *right* for students and their families. Doing what was right for students and their families was not an isolated experience for myself, Mrs. Trejo, and other educators who have developed a critical awareness and then moved into critical consciousness.

Paulo Freire (1998) wrote in *Pedagogy of Freedom* that critical consciousness is that moment when critical awareness moves a person to correct things. How did I know what was right for my students and their families? I certainly did not nor do I have all the answers to the many questions and problems posed throughout my teaching career but what I do have is a curriculum that taught me life lessons filled with morals and humanity

and promotes respect, empathy, and care for my community. My training began long before I stepped foot in an educational institution. The pedagogy and curriculum instilled in me were learned at home. The pedagogy was informed by patience, love, activism, and storytelling as a means of deliberately challenging the status quo and working to re-write the narrative of my lived experience and the life my community has experienced. In this study, I look at critical moments of my personal and family life and document the development of this pedagogy. For the first 4 years of my life, I spent much of my time surrounded by family, including my grandparents, aunts, and uncles, in D'Hanis, Texas. I attended public school in Sabinal, Texas, just 10 miles from my grandparents' home. Much of my time growing up was spent between my home in Sabinal and my grandparents' home in D'Hanis. The stories I share within this study took place in these two places.

My grandfather used storytelling to connect with people around him and build relationships. He worked as a brickmaker for 30 years from 1957 through 1987. He reported to work daily and worked outside in the natural elements for most of the day. He worked under a supervisor who ruled by insults, intimidation, and threats. Workers were mandated to shop from the company store and work without breaks. My grandfather felt workers needed to be treated with dignity and respect and rallied people to advocate for better working conditions and higher pay in a company town by organizing the first worker's union at the D'Hanis Brick & Tile to better his community. My grandfather taught these skills to my father who then further developed and applied these skills to make systematic change when he was elected as the first Latino school board member in Sabinal Independent School District (ISD) in 1983. I learned how powerful storytelling

could be in building relationships as I accompanied my dad on block walks and observed him taking his time to listen to each person. He would connect with each person by having a conversation, which many times included telling a story.

As I reflect on the thousands of students and families I have served throughout my career, I appreciate the years I spent as a teacher leader, organizer, developer, and community builder. It was not until 2014, the year I began a master's program in education leadership at Texas State University, a life transforming experience for me, that I made connections to my experiences, developed the academic language, and moved from silo work to community engaged work. I was introduced to a community committed to challenging the status quo and addressing systematic injustices in the public-school system as together we expanded our imagination on what schools could look like, sound like, and the role they should serve in educating our children and families. These collaborative efforts created a space for critical conversations where members of the community were heard, especially during spaces of tension for families that look like myself and my family, the Mexican American families in my community.

In this autoethnography, I explore the ontological background, educational journey, and work life in public schools of an intergenerational set of Texas teachers. These teachers include my mother, myself, and my daughter as we shared stories about how we worked to better understand education in a rural Texas community. Figure 1 shows my first year of teaching in 1999, marking a critical moment in my career.





**Figure 1. Author's First Year of Teaching in 1999, Marking a Critical Moment in My Career (Photograph taken by Jesse Mojica).**

I first move chronologically along the historical timeline of laws and social structures pertaining to education, including the conditions of education specifically for Latinos in Texas. These conditions and tensions include shifting demographics, parental involvement, the defunding of schools, and the underrepresentation of teachers who look like the students they are teaching. I interweave autoethnographic stories of people and place to provide an alternative worldview that moves from a deficit perspective of the conditions in education to one filled with cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that reflects an asset-based perspective. These stories cross boundaries between the ecologies of knowing self, organization, and community (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

## Background of Story

Texas has a deep-rooted history of racial conflicts and tensions between Anglos and Latinos in the areas of culture, religion, politics, economics, and education.

According to San Miguel (1987), as a result of efforts to ensure Anglo dominance over Texas, Mexicans were forced to speak English in school through a series of amended laws known as the School Law of August 13, 1870. Up until 1953, some states were holding on to the historic 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision as justification to racially segregate schools as long as facilities were seen by those in power as being equal for people of color and Whites. On May 17, 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that students being denied admittance into U.S. public schools because of race was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This created legal opportunities for Mexicans to receive an equitable education in the United States. This included Texas Mexicans like my grandfather, Filomeno Garcia, who battled the natural elements of a long foot journey with *sueños y esperanzas*<sup>1</sup> to build a new life with his wife and provide a better education for his three sons as he made his way into this country by way of the Rio Grande. Although the admittance of colored people into the United States introduced some hope, it was short-lived as “equal protection” was not equitable<sup>2</sup>. With these new laws, my grandfather was

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<sup>1</sup> Spanish rendition meaning hopes and dreams. In the early 1950s, my grandfather was working farmland alongside his brothers. A drought pushed him to seek a new way to survive. He had heard of the United States, a place of opportunities where dreams come true with hard work. He began the journey to achieve the American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which resulted in him securing a good job, having assets, and ensuring opportunities for his children to become educated and live an abundant life.

<sup>2</sup> My grandfather was able to legalize himself with a loan from the ranch owner but experienced inequitable working conditions that included exhausting long working hours

not only battling the natural elements in walking hundreds of miles, he was battling a system that “didn’t want him rather tolerated him” for cheap physical labor.

After the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, “It was suggested that American schools could move forward with racial integration with all deliberate speed” (M. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004, p. 502). Some states integrated at a slower pace, including Texas, sparking pushback from students of color. In the late 1960s, students in Texas led walkouts in response to unfairness and injustices in their schools (M. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). More recently, the late Samuel P. Huntington (2009), political scientist and director of Harvard’s Center for International Affairs, at the time of his Foreign Policy Feature titled “The Hispanic Challenge,” stated, “The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages” (intro). Huntington went on to write “the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants” (para. 6).

According to Murdock et al. (2014), Texas has a rapidly growing, racially and ethnically diversified population. This demographic change clearly remains a critical factor for K-12 education systems in the state. Student enrollment in elementary and secondary schools has increased by 50.7% from 1990–2010. For example, in Sabinal ISD, located in Sabinal, Texas, a town about 60 miles southwest of San Antonio, Texas, where I received my formal K-12 education and this study took place, for the 2018–2019

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on a ranch, low wages, and a lack of medical care, creating a long delay to legalize his family that caused the family to be separated for 3 years.

academic school year, enrollment was 448 total students, with 80.1% identified as Hispanic, 18.8% identified as White, and .7% identified as two or more races. Over 72% are economically disadvantaged and 17.9% are identified as at-risk. As demographics continue to shift across the United States, and specifically in Sabinal, Mexican American students are increasingly facing a reality in which they are overwhelmingly taught by teachers who do not reflect their different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds with less than half of their teachers identifying as Hispanic and the majority identifying as Anglo.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) wrote in *Manufacturing Hope and Despair* that although Latinos are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, by most measures, and particularly in educational achievement, Latinos fall behind other groups. According to Bullock et al. (2014), in 2011, Hispanic students accounted for 50.2% of the 4.9 million school children in the State of Texas. Bullock et al. stated White students achieve 12% higher in mathematics proficiency and 23 points higher in reading than their Hispanic counterparts. Our nation's growing economic inequity, along with challenges such as insufficient educational resources, a lack of supplies, substandard facilities, ineffective teachers, and minimal administrative support, is also affecting school-age children (Bullock et al., 2014). In Sabinal ISD, the fourth grade performance results for the 2018–2019 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) showed the following percentages of students scored at approaches grade level or above: Reading, 100% White, 75% Hispanic; Mathematics, 100% White, 29% Hispanic; and Writing, 60% White, 43% Hispanic (Texas Education Agency, 2018-2019).

Skrla et al. (2004) proposed that to close the achievement gaps and to equitably educate all children, school leaders should use equity audits to measure and monitor *systemic equity*. This is defined as systems and individuals that operate to ensure every learner has the greatest opportunity to learn, enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve excellence (Scott, 2001). Accomplishing systemic equity requires the development of new tools for educators to promote equity and excellence throughout the whole public educational system (McKenzie, 2001, 2002). In typical school settings, educators often avoid discussions of race as a factor in inequitable school outcomes. When educators are questioned about why children of color and children from low-income homes do not do well in schools, they will cite external factors such as blaming children's parents, home lives, their communities, and even their genetics (McKenzie, 2001, 2002; Valencia, 1997).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This work reflects three women's teaching experiences at different periods of time in Texas within the larger context of the state's educational and social history. I move from a large platitude to the most micro of spaces. I paint a portrait at a level of analysis with a broad brush, inviting members of the community to see themselves in us at one point or another. I cast a net wide in data collection in order to re-paint the picture with fine detail. This movement from the macro to the micro lived experiences was intended to help the reader better understand and make sense of our educational history in the South Texas town we have called home for generations.

Simply stated, education is a human, moral, and democratic right, and ideally public schools are the most inclusive way to educate all students in an equitable way

(*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). San Miguel (1987), Montejano (2010), Valenzuela (1999, 2002), Murdock et al. (2014), and M. Guajardo and Guajardo (2004) painted a picture of historical inequities in our communities and schools for Latino/as children and families. I was intentional by inviting my mother, Maria Garcia, and my daughter, Isabel Torres, as research partners for this autoethnographic work. I considered them research partners because it is my ontological belief that one does not do research and learn by themselves, as research and learning are communal processes. I am very much engaged through observations, conversations, curiosities, and adventures in community with my family, educators, and community members. This study includes my research partners' own writing and reflections of their experiences during their teaching careers in the same rural community and public school I attended as a child.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this autoethnography was to capture the conditions of education in public schools in Texas through an intergenerational perspective spanning 66 years. I intended to capture what each of us as a Latina educator negotiated in our pedagogical space and to document a level of insight that will contribute to the state of education at the multiple ecologies of self, organizational, and community levels (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). As educators and community members, we are committed and dedicated to building capacity, building relationships, and creating environments and systems that nurture equity (Skrla et al., 2004). Through capturing the amplified voices of three intergenerational Latinas through *pláticas*, I was able to dive into the realities of public schools for Mexican Americans cross-referenced with historical documents and historiography of community members.

## Research Questions

1. What has enabled three Latinas in the same family to strive for education and higher learning?
2. What does an educational politic that is transformational look like?
3. What are the conditions of educational environments experienced by three Latina teachers in a South Texas community?
4. What does the anatomy of critical consciousness and good citizenry look like and feel like in this South Texas community?
5. What systems of support, beliefs, and actions enable the achievement of a family's hopes and dreams to come to life?
6. What are the stories when the historically observed become the observers?

## Significance of Study

I designed this study to capture the evolution of change and document the celebrations and tensions at different periods in time in a rural Texas public school as experienced by three teachers. I wanted to capture the development and role of three Latina teachers and their experiences that span over half a century of service in a public-school system and community they call home. They have also lived in this community as students or teachers. I use their stories to chronicle the struggles and celebrations of our times. These stories present an evolutionary change in the classroom, the school organization, and in communities that paint the picture of teaching, learning, and leading through the nurturing qualities of a *maestra*<sup>3</sup>. By interrogating our lived experiences, I was able to unveil truths that are not isolated to ourselves. The stories exposed a deep-

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<sup>3</sup> *Maestra*: Spanish translation meaning teacher.

seeded reality that anyone reading this dissertation will critically reflect on their own actions so even the best-intentioned educators and community members will not slip to toxic behaviors that seep into our spaces of play, work, and learning, including the most prestigious and privileged educational space, higher education.

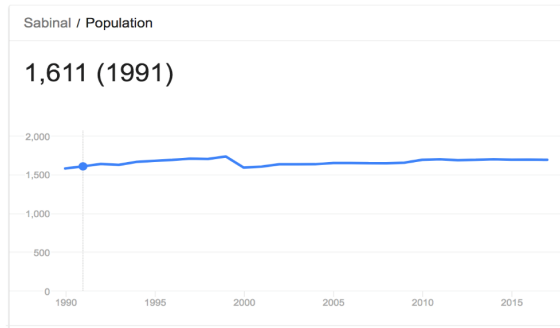
### **Theoretical Framework**

Using M. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education* framework, I designed my research to engage the reader in reimagining what community and school engagement can look like, sound like, and feel like by employing and participating in community learning exchange (CLE) pedagogies. In this research, I privilege the CLE as a worldview, an epistemological approach to research and practice, and a bridge that builds a connection between school and communities of practice. By employing the CLE theory of change, "participants are invited to look at their communities with an eye for relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action also known as RASPPA" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 4). This work encourages communities to work across boundaries to cultivate collective leadership and local solutions to issues. The generative nature of this work and dynamic-critical pedagogies gives us a theory in action that serves as a tool to reflect on the past as we keep an eye to the future of our work, growth, and development enacting a way of life.

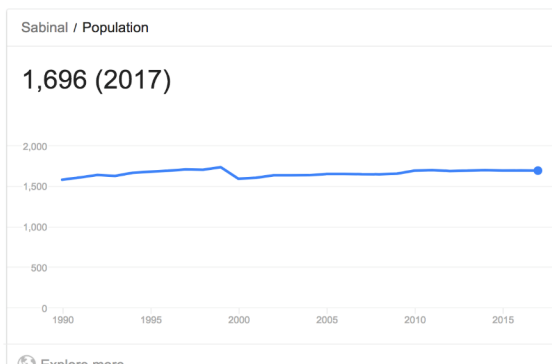
### **Site and Participants**

This study took place in the city of Sabinal, Texas, a rural community with a total population of nearly 1,700 people. Figures 2 and 3 show the population growth of the city of Sabinal from my senior year in high school in 1991 to the year 2017. The population has grown .2% in the 30 years since I graduated from high school.





**Figure 2. Sabinal Population in 1991, the Year I Graduated From High School.**



**Figure 3. Sabinal Population in 2017, the First Year Isabel Worked at Sabinal Elementary School.**

### **Story as Method**

F. Guajardo and Guajardo (2010) stated stories have been used as an instrument for narrative inquiry for many years. Sense is made of storytelling by asking questions about lived experiences, analyzing and critiquing stories, and putting legs on stories by developing action plans in response to stories. Storytelling is viewed as a complex and organic process that is at the core of human activity.

Stories of people of color can help shatter the complacency that may accompany White privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to oppress people (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In the following stories, I present a historiography of my genealogy that exemplifies “good citizenship” and “activism” as well as how people survive, how we continuously find hope in despair, how we push back on the status quo,

and the conditions that nurture this development. I present these stories as pedagogical sources and points of inspiration informing the ontological position of this research.

Through our anthropological maps, graciously shared through storytelling and journaling, we have a platform to share stories that can build communities of support and move from storytelling to storymaking<sup>4</sup>. Finally, we explore how each of us sees ourselves as agents of change within our local context.

### **Curriculum Fostering Good Citizenship and Activism**

#### ***People Find Hope in Despair***

My grandfather, or Apa<sup>5</sup> as we called him, was pushed out of his farmland in Mexico by one of the longest droughts in the early 1950s and immigrated to the United States of America. After he legalized himself, his wife, and three children, he worked to buy his own land, built a small house, and raised a family. Never having attended formal school, he followed his own curriculum, which instilled the morals and the values of respecting others, building relationships by helping people in the community, and hard work. My grandmother, or Ama<sup>6</sup> as we called her, had 4 years of formal schooling in Mexico and taught Apa to read and write. Apa could read and write well enough to sign his name on legal documents and document the flood levels on the kitchen wall (see Figure 4). He valued education so much that even though money was desperately needed and he was encouraged by the stories of the opportunities for large families in migrant work, he decided not to go find work out of state. Despite encouragement from friends,

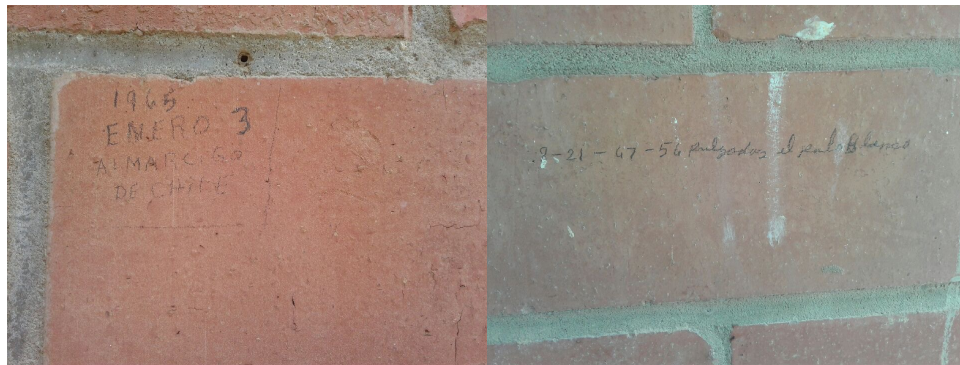
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<sup>4</sup> Storymaking refers to the process of making sense of our lived experiences and to re-author it with others in *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 66-73).

<sup>5</sup> Apa: a term of endearment for my grandfather, Filomeno Garcia.

<sup>6</sup> Ama: a term of endearment for my grandmother, Lisle Garcia de Guerrero.

he did not want his children to fall behind in their schoolwork and responded with, “Nos quedamos porque la education de los muchachos es muy importante”<sup>7</sup>. According to Stanton-Salazar (2001), immigrant parents motivate their children to stay on the academic path in spite of the difficulties and believe success in school is a matter of familial obligation. Ultimately, success in school justifies and honors the sacrifices and tribulations of immigrant parents.



**Figure 4. Apa’s Weather Record Keeping, 1965 & 1967 (Photographer: Bernardo Garcia, 2020).**

Apa’s decision led to struggles to make ends meet every month. Every dollar was accounted for and when unexpected financial setbacks would occur, there would be family discussions on how to respond. I wrote the following poem in the fall of 2018 in honor of the commitment, sacrifice, and struggles my father and my ancestors practiced to provide myself and future generations movement to positions of privilege for a lifetime. Figure 5 shows a photograph of *la noria* still in operation today.

*La Noria*  
(The Well)  
Just enough space for a 13-year old boy  
Suspended by ropes  
Digging 35 feet down with a hand shovel into the Earth  
Each shovel full of dirt poured into a 5-gallon bucket filled to top  
One by one, each 5-gallon bucket extracted  
Pulled up by the proud father who had never accepted charity or a handout

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<sup>7</sup> Spanish translation: “We stay because the children’s education is too important.”

Excavating for a valuable life source- beyond water  
A life source that gets you out of bed every morning to struggle another day  
A life source that's so precisely expressed by Emiliano Zapata when he said "¡Prefiero morir de pie que vivir siempre arrodillado!"<sup>8</sup>  
Hope suspended by ropes digging for self-sustainability in a company town  
The 3 dollars they tried to manipulate out of his pocket  
3 dollars today to pay an unjust charge  
"Pay the three dollars or you won't have water tomorrow" translated the boy  
"Apágalo"<sup>9</sup> replied the father as he turned and walked away  
For too many days the boy dug  
finally reaching water  
suspended from ropes  
Intentional with each brick, lining the walls neatly, carefully, and purposefully  
Placing one row at a time designed to cling to the walls to form a perfect circle as he  
worked all way back up 35 feet to struggle another day

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<sup>8</sup> Spanish translation: "I'd rather die standing than live kneeling!"

<sup>9</sup> Spanish rendition: shut it off.



**Figure 5. La Noria, Dug by the Author's Father, Bernardo Garcia, at the Age of 13 (Photograph taken by the author, 2020).**

The poem is a testament to the commitment and trust Apa built within his family and the complexity and nuance of taking a moral stance. The difficult decisions he made as a leader affected the whole family. Moral decisions often times obligate others to be inconvenienced and participate in sacrificial ways. This poem exemplifies the collectivist nature, respect, unity, and trust each family member had for each other. Apa not settling for an unjust water bill had physical implications on the rest of the family, especially my father, and exemplifies the trust they all had in Apa.

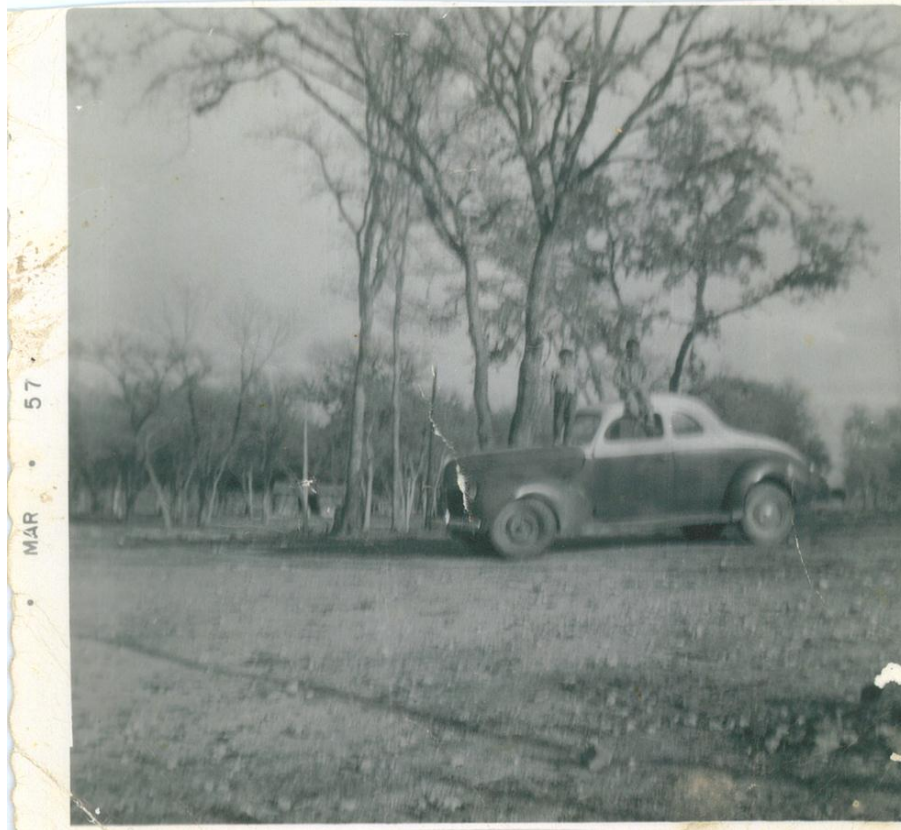
### ***People Survive and Thrive***

The power of community is highlighted especially in times of struggle when there does not seem to be hope. In *The Abundant Community*, McKnight and Block (2010) shared their insights on community and community building. They wrote that community

is built by focusing on people's gifts rather than their deficiencies. In 1962, my father, the eldest of seven siblings at the age of 11 years, was given the opportunity to use his gifts and fill a community need. My father had spent summers during his formative years visiting his Uncle José in Mexico. His Uncle José was a mechanic and had taught my dad the beginning lessons of mechanics, such as how to change tires, change out brake pads, change the oil, and replace spark plugs. José had also passed down mechanic books and pamphlets, a sort of how-to resource. Apa had resorted to trying to save money to pay a mechanic in order to fix the only vehicle the family owned. My father, understanding the severity of the situation, had the confidence he could fix the car, but because my father was only 11 years old, Apa had his reservations. Secretly, every day after school my dad would work on the car. He spent day after day troubleshooting and after a week of troubleshooting with all of his siblings surrounding him, he turned the key and the engine started. When my Apa returned that day, my father invited him to try starting the car one more time. As Apa sat behind the driver's wheel, turned the key, and started the car, a new hope was birthed. My dad became the neighborhood mechanic as neighbors began to bring their cars to be fixed, which became a broad contribution to the common good and exemplified *educacion*<sup>10</sup> in action. Figure 6 is a photograph of the family car with my dad, Bernardo Garcia, and one of my uncles sitting on the top of the car in 1957, which shows how much they valued the car.

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<sup>10</sup> Spanish translation: Education.



**Figure 6. Photograph of the Family Car With My Father, Bernardo Garcia, and One of My Uncles 1957 (Garcia family photo).**

***Politic, Context, and Challenging the Status Quo***

“Sara! Sara!” whisper-shouted my brother, Junior, from the hallway right outside my classroom door. He hand-motioned for me to walk over to him as his smile extended from ear to ear. He was missing his front tooth. I froze in my seat. I was doing my best to use my laser eye communication powers to tell him to just keep walking down the hallway. I tried a hand signal and shook my head “no” to encourage him to keep walking. My brother was not responding to my signals. Junior was a kindergartener and his classroom was a few doors down from my second-grade classroom. Instead, he whisper-shouted even louder and motioned for me to go toward him. He stood at the doorway with his belly protruding just slightly, still smiling. I was petrified and felt glued to my seat. I was being held down by rules that felt like steel chains. The classic classroom rules

of you do not get up, you do not talk, and you never leave the room or go near the doorway without permission. I also knew I could not interrupt the teacher. As I frantically tried to keep my brother moving to his classroom, a kindergarten assistant teacher emerged out of nowhere, grabbed my brother by the ear, and pulled him away from the doorway saying, “No dilly dallying around, get back to class.” As Junior turned his head, I could see his smile disappear and his eyes fill with fear. My fear for my brother outweighed the fear I felt for myself and I rushed to the door to check on him. I looked down the dark hallway and followed the back of my brother and the teacher’s silhouette as the natural bright light filled the end of the hallway. According to Spindler and Spindler (1994), the basic theme is the influence of the teacher’s culture and the school upon perceptions and interpretations of children’s behavior.

At the end of the day, I pushed through the afterschool crowd to find my brother. I spotted him standing on the sidewalk in the carpool waiting area where my dad would pick us up. I rushed to him, asked him if he was ok, and asked what was so important that he needed to tell me. He looked at me and said, “I wanted to ask you if you want to watch cartoons with me after school.” Just about that moment my dad drove up to pick us up. As I jumped in the car I sang like a bird and in detail shared our traumatic experience. Every day my dad would ask us how our day had gone and one story would lead to additional questions. Upon hearing the events of the day, he became unusually quiet and only asked one question, “What is the teacher’s name?” The next day, instead of dropping us off at the sidewalk near the front doors, my dad parked the car and accompanied us into the building. My brother and I had to almost jog to keep up with my dad’s long, purposeful strides as he made his way to the front doors. After walking us to



our classrooms, my dad requested a meeting with the principal. Valencia (1997) noted that cultural and accumulated environmental deficits continue to be embraced by some modern-day deficit thinkers. The only experience my parents had with school personnel prior to this experience was the first 2 days of kindergarten. Unlike myself, Junior had not attended the federal preschool program for preschoolers called Head Start, and therefore he only spoke Spanish upon entering kindergarten. When the teachers realized my brother could not speak English, they immediately requested a teacher–parent meeting. At this meeting, my parents were criticized for not teaching my brother to speak English. The teachers expressed their concern and accused my parents of being irresponsible and neglectful for not teaching my brother to speak English. My parents came directly home and immediately told us from that moment on we would only speak English at home and we could speak Spanish when we went to our grandparents’ house. My dad understood the school personnel’s perception of our family was already one of being irresponsible and neglectful but he still had hope that he could talk with the principal rationally about improving redirecting behavior tactics and that something would be done to improve the disciplinary interactions of teachers with students in our school.

As the principal shuffled papers on his desk, my father realized quickly that the educational system we were in was failing us. There would not be a follow-up meeting, a conversation with the assistant teacher who pulled my brother’s ear, or a change in policy as to what were acceptable consequences for a child standing in the hallway offered by the principal. My Dad took it upon himself to challenge the status quo. Shortly after that

incident, perhaps serendipitously, Willie Velasquez<sup>11</sup>, a community organizer and founder of the Southwest Voter Registration & Education Project, was invited to help organize a select group of Latinos in Sabinal to work on diversifying city elected positions. Mr. Velasquez, a social activist, came to Sabinal from San Antonio to organize Latinos to register to vote. After gathering about 20 Latinos by word of mouth, they would meet in a small back room of a *tiendita*<sup>12</sup> in the middle of the barrio. The group began to reimagine and discuss systematic change with conversations that centered around increasing voter registration, particularly in the Latino community, and strategically made decisions on who could fill public elect offices. Mr. Velasquez walked into the back room with his briefcase filled with maps of Sabinal that were divided into quadrants and made sure all the quadrants were covered by members who could go out and help people fill out registration cards. In 1982, they collected over 200 new voters. After several months of collecting registration cards, the conversation turned to who would be willing to run for different city positions, including the school board. Latinos had attempted to run for the school board in the past but had not had success at attaining a seat. They had fallen short five or six votes for the last few years. This time there was no interest in running because they had been disappointed so many times before. My dad got home and shared the dilemma with my mom. My mom had always been supportive and sometimes borderline pushy when encouraging and believing in my dad. She showed support by sewing a blue suit for my dad to wear when he landed his first professional job, to participating in block walks and running campaigns for my dad in later years.

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. Willie Velasquez and his organizations transformed the political landscape in the Southwest (Sepúlveda, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Spanish translation: small convenient store.

Thinking about all the work they had done in registering people to vote and after a conversation as to who should run for school board between my mom or my dad, they came to a consensus that by default my dad should run for a position on the school board. Soon after, my dad's evenings and weekends were consumed with block walks and one-on-one conversations with people in the community about creating change. On election night, we stayed up late. After the polls closed, the whole family, including my mom, two brothers, and myself, loaded up in our 1956 Chevrolet to go see the results. We drove six blocks up to the city hall where all the lights were off and it was very dark, still, and quiet. My dad pulled out his flashlight to see the results. It took him a few seconds to hop out of the running car, check the results, and then hop back in our car. As my dad broke the news, "*Ya mero, pero perdimos. Chiwawas, oh well we tried*"<sup>13</sup> we all felt the disappointment. Again, in an all too familiar outcome, dad had come so close. He and one of the community members Lupe Tristan had read all of the rules and were familiar with the election process and decided to attend the school board meeting to canvass the votes. On the following Monday evening, the two of them made their way to the school and sat at the canvassing table. After canvassing the votes, my dad was declared the winner. Right at that moment, the incumbent school board member stepped down and my dad sat in the seat. That was the start of many frustrating motions gone un-seconded and 1 to 6 votes until the following year when they were able to get a second Latino elected to the school board. We spent several years thereafter supporting campaigns with many trips to and from the city hall with *ganamos*<sup>14</sup>. Figure 7 is a clipping from the Sabinal Cypress

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<sup>13</sup> Spanish rendition: "Ugh, we lost but came so close."

<sup>14</sup> Spanish rendition: "We won!"

Newspaper in 1984 of one of the campaigns we supported. The author is pictured directly in front of the candidate.



**Figure 7. Sabinal Cypress Newspaper Clipping 1984.**

### ***Conditions That Nurture Learning***

Latino families like mine may be viewed by others from a deficit perspective. Outsiders and even insiders with a deficit perspective on life see from a deficit point of view. Deficit thinking blames the victim. An assertion within deficit thinking theory is that the poor school performance of students of color is rooted in the students' cognitive and motivational deficits, while the instructional structures and inequitable schooling arrangements that exclude students from learning are held blameless (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997, as cited in Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 83). Someone who has lived a life of privilege has not had to worry where they will lay their head at night, can turn the light switch on without any reservations it will light up the room, is able to get from point A to point B any time by hopping in their car, and does not have to think about whether

there will be food to eat or someone home to help with homework. A person of privilege with deficit thinking may describe my family of 13 living in a two-bedroom house at the end of a dirt road as living in poverty and equate that with a life full of discomfort. Some well-intentioned educators believe that if we stop having children or work harder, we would not be living in impoverished conditions and our children would have increased academic performance. On the contrary, our home was filled with laughter, warmth, love, emotional support, and encouragement. A vivid memory I have is being about 5 or 6 years old and sleeping on the floor sandwiched between my Aunt Rosa, who was a year older than I, and my grandmother. Ama would layer two or three handmade, heavy, thick quilts she had sewn on the hard, cold, concrete floor where we would lay our heads to sleep at night. She would share entertaining stories of when she was a child, such as the time she got frustrated with people complimenting her eyelashes so she cut them short with a pair of scissors or the time my Uncle Ramiro, who died when I was 4 years old, as a child sat in the outhouse for 30 minutes talking to a fly that was pestering him warning that if the fly did not stop buzzing and bothering him, the fly would have to die. She shared stories and scratched my back with her calloused hands until I fell asleep. I would wake up the next morning to the sounds of *La Rancherita del Aire*<sup>15</sup> radio station mixed in with the sound and aroma of sizzling bacon and *juevos rancheros*<sup>16</sup>. I would lie very still and listen intently to my grandparents' conversation about the activities for the day that would include some sort of work in the garden. They would compete as to who could grow the best garden. I would observe Ama pack my Apa's lunch in a black tin lunch

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<sup>15</sup> Radio program still in operation broadcasted from Piedras Negras, Coahila, México.

<sup>16</sup> Mexican dish: eggs over-easy drenched in a tomato-based sauce consisting of onions, garlic, and hot peppers.

box. Ama not only cooked all of our meals, including our favorite treats such as *empanadas*<sup>17</sup>, and made sure we had all of our basic needs met, she taught us to appreciate nature and thrilled us with her skills and tactics in catching birds. My Aunt Rosa and I would then trail behind Apa to a small dirt road in front of the house and watch as he walked to the end of the road about 600 yards to work at the D'Hanis Brick & Tile. At noon, I would hear the brickyard whistle blow and in between climbing trees, eating mulberries, and exploring mounds of crushed brick, my Aunt Rosa and I would venture off and from a distance try to catch a glimpse of my grandfather at work or watch him eat his lunch. Every day the men would collect under a large mesquite tree and eat their lunches and have conversations. At the end of the workday, we would stand in front of the house and wait for my grandfather to return from work and go out to the fields where he would have a garden growing and an orchard full of peach trees. Apa would generously share the produce with the community. He would teach us about gardening and share stories that always highlighted morals and ethics. Apa would invest the time to build relationships with us through conversations and listening to us. Figure 8 is a photograph of Apa on the left and my uncle Guillermo in the center of the photo working the fields in 1980. This shows the commitment they had to working the land and growing crops to help sustain themselves and their neighbors.

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<sup>17</sup> Empanadas: Mexican pumpkin-filled turnovers.



**Figure 8. Photograph of Apa (Left) and My Uncle Guillermo (Center) in the 1980s Working in the Fields (Garcia family photo).**

### **Road Map**

These stories of *familia*<sup>18</sup>, schools, and communities interweave the celebrations and tensions of the different periods in time in a South Texas educational system for a Mexican family. They highlight critical moments in my life filled with patience, love, and activism that I frame as cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which flips deficit thinking upside down by providing an alternative worldview. The education that began at home developed my critical consciousness (Freire, 1998), so as a teacher I did what I believed was *right* for the students in my classroom. This conviction led me to the purpose of this study, which was to capture the conditions of education through an intergenerational

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<sup>18</sup> Spanish translation: family.

perspective by documenting amplified voices through *pláticas*<sup>19</sup>. In the following chapter, I include a discussion of the CLE (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) theory of change as a framework that morphs traditional educational structures to portraits of critical transformation in our institutions and communities. The CLE theory of change provides an alternative worldview that moves from traditional educational conditions and theories to an asset-based worldview. Educational conditions include shifting demographics in Texas where minority populations are becoming the majority (Murdock et al., 2014), parental involvement, the defunding of schools, and the underrepresentation of teachers to students according to race. In Chapter 3, I describe how a collection of stories systematically collected by oral history, observations, written reflections, and a review of primary archival data along with interviews of witnesses in our lives will act as a triangulation of our work, our transformation, and our impact on the community and its institutions. My organic approach to analyzing journal entries, autobiographical maps, *testimonios*<sup>20</sup>, and *pláticas* allowed for movement from storytelling to storymaking.

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<sup>19</sup> Conversations in this study are better expressed as *pláticas*, which are “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).

<sup>20</sup> *Testimonios*: A strategy for collecting observables that aligns with a lens that will report the stories of women using feminist interpretations (Covarrubias et al., 2018).



## **II. FROM TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES TO PORTRAITS OF CRITICAL TRANSFORMATION**

Historically, Latino/as have been able to succeed in spite of an educational system that has created opportunity gaps. Federal reform initiatives have made it more difficult for educators to focus on anything other than student performance through standardized tests. Swail et al. (2004) and Delgado-Gaitan (2004) indicated Latino/a families do not participate in their children's education in the way educators typically expect, which leads to the misconception that Latino parents do not care about their children's education. As Latina educators, we have first-hand experience and knowledge that Latino parents not having interest or not caring in their children's education is not the norm in Latino families.

In this literature review, I first provide a historical background of the disparities in educational equity and (in)justice for students of color, in particular Latino students in Texas public schools. Next, I pivot from the historical and traditional deficit model to this research, which has been informed by the Latino/a culture and education. Specifically, the assets each one of us has of social and cultural capital that Yosso (2005) described as community cultural wealth. Then I summarize what we know about theories of critical transformative education and (in)effective strategies such as restorative practice that address disparities through the lens of Latino culture in education. The theoretical framework I used is the CLE theory of change. "CLE is a theory of change that values relationships, assets, and places" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32). This approach moves away from deficit models to one that encourages community members to reimagine community relationships, to cross borders, and to take on a worldview that may be

strange and many times uncomfortable. CLE creates a safe space where community members can engage in critical conversations including issues such as race, gender, and class (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

### **Socio-Cultural Context of This Story**

Murdock et al. (2014) wrote in *Changing Texas* that “Texas has experienced substantial change in education over the past several decades” (p. 107), demographic change being a critical factor. Many theories, such as Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital, have been presented to explain disparities and opportunity gaps in education. Practices that contribute to opportunity gaps may include schools providing a dumbed down curriculum because educators do not believe Latinos are capable of more. Another common educator practice is to organize curriculum by tracking students, which leads to Latinos are overrepresented in lower classes. Students can internalize negative appraisals of their academic capabilities when being tracked, which can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Irizarry, 2011).

Educational leaders in public schools recognize that extraordinary challenges to educational equity and justice exist and the number of students living below the poverty level is increasing (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Latino students are more likely to come from low-income families, to have parents with lower educational attainment, to have lower educational aspirations themselves, and to be academically less prepared for higher education compared to their White peers (Swail et al., 2004). Poor families of color do not engage in their children’s schooling in ways in which teachers or administrators recognize or value (Jackson & Remillard, 2005). Latino families may support their children’s schooling at home in ways that are not visible to teachers and

administrators (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Cultural issues such as violence, substance abuse, unsafe neighborhoods, and fragmented or nonexistent families make the challenges of educating students more complex than in the past (Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2015). These out-of-school factors drive what happens in school hours. With federal laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) having been enforced in the past, educators have not dismissed the potential of any student regardless of the challenges outside of the educational leader's control. In response to federal reform initiatives such as NCLB and RTT, educators have identified disparities in education and created ways to attempt to connect with students through culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. NCLB and RTT have weakened the cultures in public schools K-12 by changing the environments in which teachers, students, and administrators have to work (Moller et al., 2013).

What is transpiring from high stake testing is teachers are dissuaded from centering their lessons around student learning for fear of low student test scores. The NCLB legislation promoted "teaching to the test" and, according to Schneider (2011), "When stakes such as school funding are high, testing drives curriculum and promotes competition between school and teachers who are increasingly being evaluated based upon student test performance" (p. 93). RTT enables the government to select content to be evaluated and teacher evaluations to be measured by student performance tied to eligibility for funds (Schneider, 2011). Teachers are less likely to build collaborative, student-centered lessons when ultimately what is valued is high stakes testing results (Watson, 2009).

De La Garza and Kuri (2014), in an article titled “Building Stronger Communities,” stated areas with the largest minority populations have the most difficulty with student and teacher retention, graduation, and test scores. The Latino population is the fastest growing school-age population and there is a high number of Latino students dropping out of high school. More than 67% of Latino students do not have a diploma (De La Garza & Kuri, 2014).

In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA “warrants the strong involvement of diverse communities and education experts” (Krumm & Curry, 2017, p. 100). The lack of cultural understanding among educational leaders creates a barrier to educational equity. According to López (2003), an issue affecting the underperformance of Latino students is the lack of Latino educators, which includes school leaders. Research shows improving outcomes for students of color requires school leaders who understand the cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of these students (Hopson et al., 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

The inequitable distribution of opportunities also contributes to an interwoven deficit approach to meeting student needs that extends across a number of human rights issues that are part of the social fabric that affects education. In 2017, President Trump and a Republican Congress enacted legislation providing large tax cuts to corporations and the wealthy (Rowell & Hanlon, 2018). According to Rowell and Hanlon (2018), millionaires received a tax cut more than 100 times the size of the average tax cut for families in the bottom 80% of the income distribution. In order to pay for these policy aims of large tax cuts for corporations and millionaires, Trump’s budget cut from several social programs such as Social Security and repealed the Affordable Care Act, leaving

millions of people fewer options for health coverage. Furthermore, much of the education debate and educational policy are framed in business terms and ideologies. Trump's budget proposed cutting the Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants program (Title II) of the ESSA, which provided \$2 billion to states to recruit, prepare, and pay the teaching workforce in previous years. The Department of Education, led by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and the Trump Administration in fiscal year 2020, proposed students and teachers to pay for policy aims through the form of cuts to education programs (Campbell, 2019). According to Campbell (2019), Director of Innovation for K-12 Education at the Center for American Progress, the push for defunding public schools is leading the way to for-profit education through creating an opportunity for private school K-12 vouchers and for-profit schools in higher education that are usually more expensive, have lower graduation rates, and entice students to take out more loans.

### **From Social to Cultural Capital of Education**

Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States (Murdock et al., 2014), making them the new majority, yet they perform and lag way behind other groups. "Behind the statistics lie the accounts of how social class, race, and gender restrict the mobility and life chances of Latino youth-and it is here that social networks and varied access to social support play a most definitive role" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 3). Latino identity requires understanding the separation of ethnic-cultural and racial political identity formations. Their lack of power as racialized people becomes critical to their understanding of this world and of their place in it (Pizarro, 2005). Anzaldúa (2015) referred to a space of ambiguity, or the notion that an individual can exist between two worlds, in her case not Mexican enough to be Mexican and yet not American enough to

be considered and accepted as American. She also wrote about struggling with her own ways of cultural production and the role she played as an artist. She called the space where she struggled with her creations “Nepantla the in-between space” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 28). Nepantla is where her cultural and personal codes clashed. This was a space where she would come up against what she felt the world expected of her. This is a common space for Latino students, especially in academic institutions (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Two sociologists expressed different viewpoints by proposing social capital theory (Tucker, 2015). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) studied three different types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Coleman (1987) defined social capital as a resource that is not tangible, but rather exists in the relations among persons, leading it to have the most influence in K-12 education and community spaces. Although the social capital theory framework did not originate in education, it has made its way into many educational disciplines. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) extended their emphasis of social capital from the aspect of a civil duty to that of reciprocity, meaning an exchange for mutual benefit. No matter how much actual return was expected, the natural result of reciprocity among the two groups made the exchange a positive one (Tucker, 2015).

Stanton-Salazar (2001) reported that based on many years of research on children and adolescents, healthy human development and school success depend on regular opportunities for constructing supportive relationships with various significant others and agents across key institutional places. They made clear that no matter the community being studied, parents, siblings, extended family members, school personnel, peers, neighbors, and community members all play a significant role in youth development.

Still, there are many children and adolescents from low-income families who routinely face school difficulties and emotional crises, or some important developmental challenge alone, with little or no support despite being surrounded and deeply embedded in a network of family, peers, and school personnel who engage with them daily. These people care about them and could serve as a source of social support (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Yosso (2005) provided an alternative to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to the skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups of society (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu posited that cultural capital (e.g., education and language), social capital (i.e., social networks and connections), and economic capital (i.e., money and other material possessions) can be acquired in two ways: from one's family or through formal schooling (Yosso, 2005).

According to Yosso, this interpretation

exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of "culture" are judged in comparison to this "norm". In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society. (p. 76)

Yosso (2005) leveraged Anzaldúa's assertion of "In our *mestizaje*<sup>21</sup> theories we create new categories for those of us left out of or pushed out of existing ones' (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi, emphasis in original)" (p. 77) and used a "Critical Race Theory lens to 'see' that communities of color nurture cultural wealth through at least 6 forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 77). These "forms of capital build on one another as part of

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<sup>21</sup> Mestizaje: Spanish translation for mixture.

community cultural wealth” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 77). Yosso defined wealth as “the total extent of an individual’s accumulated assets and resources” (p. 78). The following is a description of Yosso’s (2005) theory of capital:

- Aspirational capital is the ability to remain hopeful to make dreams a reality when faced with structured inequality. Aspirations are often times developed through linguistic storytelling and *consejos*<sup>22</sup> that “offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions” (p. 77), leading to overlaps with the other forms of capital, including social, familial, navigational, linguistic, and resistant, and therefore leading to an asset-based approach when interacting with students of color.
- Linguistic capital showcases intellectual and social skills developed through communication experiences in more than one language.
- Familial capital comes from the knowledges nurtured among family that has a sense of community history leading to engagements with a commitment to community.
- Social capital can refer to networks of people as well as community resources.
- Navigational capital is the ability to use skills to maneuver through social institutions, in particular those institutions not created for communities of color.
- Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills developed through challenging inequality behavior (Delgado Bernal, 1997; Freire, 1970, 1973; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1994; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

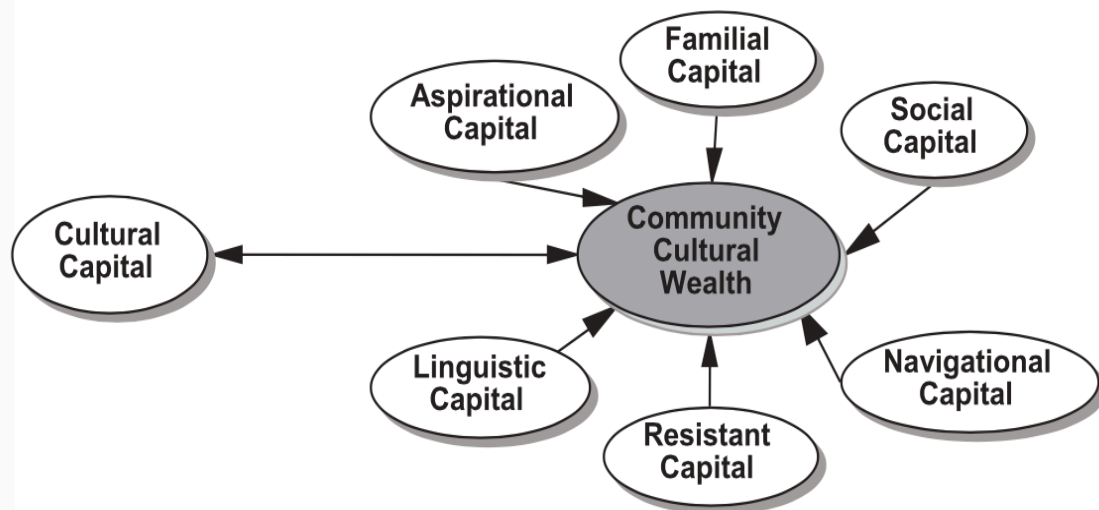
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<sup>22</sup> consejos: Spanish translation for advice (Yosso, 2015).



Research shows “Parents of Color are consciously instructing their children to engage in behaviors and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo” (Yosso, 2005, p. 81).

Figure 9 is a model of community cultural wealth adapted from Oliver and Shapiro (1995) showing the different forms of capital.



**Figure 9. Model of Community Cultural Wealth.**

### **Critical Transformative Education**

With so many challenges presented in today’s schools, school administrators and teachers understand they cannot effectively do the work without radical change in the conditions to their practices. To meet the needs of such a diverse population of students and their families, educators must be willing to respond radically to address the disparities that go beyond the common assumption that anyone can be successful so long as they work hard and “pull yourself up from your bootstraps,” a phrase used in the early 20th century referring to the ability to succeed or something being attainable only by one’s own efforts or abilities (Bologna, 2018).

In one study, a significant contributing factor to the shock experienced by many first-year teachers was the disparity between what they learned in their preparation

programs and their classroom realities (Green et al., 2018). Green et al. (2018) collected testimonies of certified teachers who, with quality professional development, were able to take their personal experiences and implement strategies with their students. Still, several teachers acknowledged the social support provided to them in their own studies made all the difference in whether or not they were successful.

Psychological research has provided important insights to the ongoing ethnic and racial disparities in educational systems. Disparities in education are consistent in just about every marker in education, including academic achievement among elementary students, behavioral referrals in middle school, and graduation rates in high schools and universities (Quintana & Mahgoub, 2016). The U.S. Department of Justice has reported students of color are three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than are White students (Flannery, 2015). Kline (2016) conducted a study in which disparities were found in school discipline data. Zero tolerance policies fail to teach students preventative strategies.

### **Restorative Practices**

Restorative justice is built from the belief that people are connected through a web of relationships and the web becomes torn when a wrongdoing has occurred (Zehr, 2002). Differential treatment in terms of disciplinary practices toward students of color has been justified by some as getting them ready for higher education. In fact, research supports that these disciplinary actions have increased the connection between school disciplinary practices and eventual contact with the juvenile justice system (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

After developing restorative practices in 18 schools ranging from special education schools to secondary schools in a variety of areas, including urban, suburban, and rural areas, Kline (2016) found a decrease in both in-school discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions. The restorative practices included fostering social relationships in a school community of mutual engagement, responsibility and accountability for one's own actions, and respect for others, to name a few.

The concept of restorative practices is foreign to a small rural Texas community such as Sabinal. The 2020–2021 *Sabinal Student Handbook* clearly communicates beliefs with a heading such as “Prohibiting the Use of Corporal Punishment” (Sabinal ISD, 2021, p. 14). The opening paragraph states,

Corporal punishment-spanking or paddling a student-may be used as a discipline management technique in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct and district policy FO(LOCAL). However, in accordance with law, the district may not administer corporal punishment if a student's parent submits a signed, written statement prohibiting its use. A parent who does not want corporal punishment administered to his or her child must return the form included in the forms packet. This signed statement must be submitted each school year. A parent may revoke this prohibition at any time during the school year by providing a signed statement to the campus principal. (Sabinal ISD, 2021, p. 14)

With this school policy in place, students are facing daily inequitable challenges and are not protected by the school system. Each student is dependent on a parent who can read the paperwork and has the time to sign the paperwork. Part of my goal in conducting this study was to decenter the power from school to community and provide school administrators, personnel, and community members an alternative to unethical practices that will restore respect, relationships, and dignity to students and community members. I revisit this idea of decentering power after establishing methods in the next chapter.

## Community Learning Exchange as a Theoretical Framework

One way of enacting institutional change is to engage the community. In *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education*, M. Guajardo et al. (2016) provided a framework, an invitation for us to reimagine what community partnerships look like, sound like, and feel like by participating in CLEs. CLEs are grounded in the following axioms:

(a) learning and leadership are a dynamic social process, (b) conversations are critical and central pedagogies, (c) the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local questions and problem, (d) crossing boundaries enriches how we develop and learn, and (e) hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities [guide the work]. (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 4)

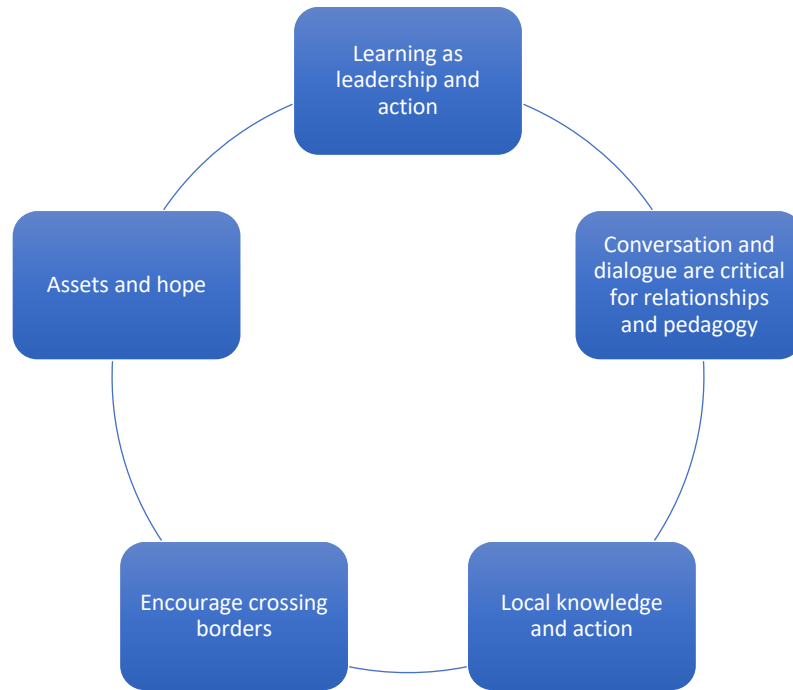
Through the CLE theory of change, participants are invited to look at their communities with an eye for relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action (RASPPA). This work encourages communities to work across boundaries to cultivate collective leadership and local solutions to issues (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). CLE work focuses on engaging communities to improve education for historically marginalized populations. CLEs are not a single event but a way of life in which the community works collectively to respond to local needs.

I understand that CLE can be seen as an event, a single strategy, or a pedagogy, but I use it here as a worldview. This worldview builds on the framing of my literature review in grouping my research in place, privileging the stories of people and reframing the need to move theory from passive to generative and dynamic. The CLE presents this venue from an ontological perspective, an epistemological perspective, and a theoretical construct that is dynamic in a fully articulated theory of change.

## Anatomy of a Community Learning Exchange in Practice

### *Axioms*

Axioms are core values that guide thought, practice, and relationships (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23; see Figure 10).



**Figure 10. CLE Axioms.**

### *Learning and Leadership are Dynamic Social Processes*

Horton (2003) wrote in *The Myles Horton Reader, Education for a Social Change* that teaching and learning should be purposeful and a social act conducted through discussions (p. 6). Material for discussion topics is crafted from the participants' answers to these specific questions: "What are your problems as you see them? What are you up against? What is going to happen next week when you go back into your communities?" (p. 5). Correspondingly, the learning will be different for participants in different community groups. "The emphasis will remain on the neighborhood workers, not the

subject matter” (p. 6). Paolo Freire (1970, 1973), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, described a *conscientization*, referring to a process of developing one’s social reality through reflection and action that leads the oppressed to fight for their liberation (p. 41).

It is a belief of CLE organizers that a leadership act is to learn and best when done collaboratively (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). At the core of learning how to learn within the context of relationships is building the necessary conditions that nurture this development through invitation and in a dignified way (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). CLE pedagogies emerge and nurture learning from and within relationships that include the needs of the collective and imaginations of the designers (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Play is among the CLE pedagogies “that provides distinct and powerful opportunities to support the development of relationships that transcend gender, culture, and generations” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 24). In a democratizing way, it allows us to wonder and enthusiastically see with fresh eyes, thereby allowing for connecting with our “universal child” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 24).

### ***Conversations are Critical and Central Pedagogical Processes***

Creating safe spaces and healthy relationships for participants, learners, and teachers to share their stories is at the core of social learning theory (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). In the learning process, the first point of contact is building relationships mediated by conversations and storytelling (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Conversations in this study are better expressed as *pláticas*, which are “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* are engaged in to gain cultural knowledge as we share, create, and learn about life, academia, and

much more (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016). According to Fierros and Delgado-Bernal (2016) in *VAMOS A PLATICAR: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology*, “*Platicando* has been a pivotal and necessary component of traversing academic spaces that has allowed us to weave the personal and academic” (p. 99).

In order for sustainable and public learning to take place, a safe and inviting space must be created between participants and facilitators (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Honest conversation and storytelling are important to take place in this space because this allows “CLE participants to trust their story has value and will be respected” (p. 24). CLE pedagogy includes a safe environment, storytelling, conversations, and relationships as building blocks (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). These building blocks allow participants to find and develop their voices and move to action (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). New relationships are formed and existing relationships are nurtured through the CLE pedagogies. Framing questions in an artful way is used along with storytelling and conversations to support “participant development and greater understanding of their situations within their home communities can yield health change” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). Paolo Freire (1970), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, stated “the correct method for a revolutionary leadership to employ in the task of liberation, lies in dialogue” (p. 41).

***The People Closest to the Issues are Best Situated to Discover Answers to Local Concerns***

Participants are invited, encouraged, and expected to engage around certain topics to foster creative agency that helps people to find their power and voice (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). According to Horton (2003), when responding to social problems, making the

community's practices fit theories learned in a traditional learning institution is not effective (p. 21). McKnight and Block (2010) stated building community "involves the more fundamental tasks of rearing a child, promoting health, and keeping the streets safe" (p. 67). McKnight and Block continued by listing organizing principles they called *properties* a community must achieve to respond to community competence: focus on the gifts of its members, nurture association life, and offer hospitality, the welcoming of strangers (p. 67). These properties then create the communal conditions for certain *capacities* to emerge in families and neighborhoods (McKnight & Block, 2010). These capacities include kindness, generosity, cooperation, forgiveness, acceptance of fallibility, and mystery (McKnight & Block, 2010).

The CLE process responds to community needs and encourages a collective nature, which "puts power back into the hands of the people most impacted by the conditions and decisions of the day" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). CLE organizers believe that when people from different communities, generations, or with different gifts come together and share their stories, a collective and creative energy begins to take shape that is only possible with those people who reside in local communities who know the issues best. "CLE holds the potential to transform the *how* of community change, thus shifting the traditional, consolidated power dynamic to a collective action" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 26).

### ***Crossing Boundaries Enriches the Development and Educational Process***

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), in *Borderlands La Frontera*, eloquently stated that "a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is the constant state of transition" (p. 25). In order to break the



isolation of people, teams, and organizations, we must willingly experience a world outside our daily comfort zone (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). When national CLEs are planned with people from different backgrounds, different races, and different economic backgrounds, there are many opportunities for participants to cross borders that are easily identifiable (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Crossing borders becomes difficult to notice when participants look like each other, have similar backgrounds, and live in the same community (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). It is important for the facilitator to make the familiar strange, which can happen when the place is changed or the mode of delivery changes from a lecture to one that is conversational and involves an exchange of ideas in which participants are collaborative and engaged (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). “This border crossing of ideas, questions, and learning processes is critically important to decenter the status quo and the traditional ways of knowing” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 26).

McKnight and Block (2010) made it clear that the reality of being in a community is that people have differences in values and visions and by focusing on the individual gifts of community members it goes under the division or above to find common ground. This exercise requires people to not exclude people with differences but to offer their gifts.

### ***Hope and Change are Built on Assets and Dreams of Locals and Their Communities***

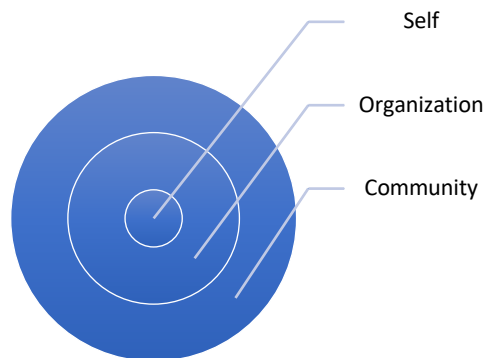
McKnight and Block (2010), in *The Abundant Community*, stated citizens create satisfaction by recognizing their individual capacities and skills as gifts. The neighborhood then becomes a treasure chest. By opening the chest and putting gifts together in many different ways, the power of its riches multiplies in a competent community that builds on the gifts of its people.

CLE participants map their gifts, ideas, hopes, and wishes after they share their stories. Included in the mapping are ideological, relational, and geographical skills (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Validating participants' assets invites them to view their work as opportunities, invitations, and points of action, which can help change participants' minds from distress to hope and possibilities, becoming witnesses to the most radical change (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). A new language is developed that can be used to view the "world as a network of support that expands their community of practice while simultaneously breaking the isolation" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). "Reframing of our daily conditions from deficits to assets helps build hopes and possibilities" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). Horton (2003) stated, "Only when people are able to get their minds off survival will they be able to concern themselves with the reason for living and for a humane society. Living and not working for a living should be our goal" (p. 11).

### **Ecologies of Knowing**

Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposed the ecological systems theory based on the belief that there are multiple aspects of a developing child's life that interact with and affect the child (Guy-Evans, 2020). Prior researchers observed the child in a laboratory in which the studies were unidirectional only focusing on observing a stranger or mother with the child and nothing else. The ecological systems theory consists of five structures that are all interrelated: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Guy-Evans, 2020). These ecological systems can be strengthened in educational practice by teachers and parents keeping good communication working together for the betterment of the child (Guy-Evans, 2020).

As CLEs come to a close, participants will have experienced many conversations, built relationships, gone to field sites, questioned, and had epiphanies and moments of tension (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). According to M. Guajardo et al. (2016), encounters such as these test multiple pieces of knowledge not normally made public. Interactions such as these can push participants into sensory overload so attempts must be made to balance and navigate the learning through the ecologies of knowing: self, organizations, and communities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). M. Guajardo et al. stated the three ecologies organize our thinking and learning experiences from the micro to the meso and then to the macro levels, or spheres in which life is experienced. Such as life, the ecologies are bordered by permeable boundaries that allow for exchange (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Ecologies are not isolated but spiral inward and upward, weaving within a developmental process (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28; see Figure 11).



**Figure 11. Ecologies of Knowledge.**

### **CLE Theory of Change (RASPPA)**

According to M. Guajardo et al. (2016), the RASPPA model holds the theory of change together. It weaves the principles laid out above through three ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community. The first ecological space of self is where the most profound development takes place. Through building relationships, recognizing

assets, sharing their stories, and learning about their place, people change. The second ecological space of organization is where schools or other organizations grow through the same process. In the third ecological space of community, the ecologies are fluid.

Relationships are built between members of organizations and members of the community. “Stories are shared, nurtured, and utilized for deeper understanding of the self, the organization, and the community” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 36).

### ***Relationships***

In order to build trust in the CLE work, there must be investment in building relationships. In CLEs, relationships are supported through *gracious space* (Hughes, 2004). “Gracious Space is a spirit and setting where there is an invitation to the stranger and learning occurs in public” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). For deeper listening and understanding, it is essential that leadership create gracious space to cultivate deeper healthy relationships and is foundational to this work (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

### ***Assets***

Identifying and building assets is important to identifying and building community. Community leaders can move from deficit-based development to asset-based development by focusing on assets, strengths, and solutions, which then creates hope. When focused on the community assets and gifts, community members can identify their own gifts and inspire people to work together. This fosters a spiritual quality to the work (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

### ***Stories***

A curiosity runs through the CLE work. A common question in CLEs is “What is your story.” M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated, “The role of story is both constructive and

deconstructive. Participants are invited and challenged to tell their stories, and to examine and decode origins and content” (p. 34). Stories that are owned become valuable resources and can be re-framed, re-told, and re-shaped to best support empowerment, agency, and dreams (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34).

### ***Place***

Each community has unique strengths, assets, and gifts along with stories that provide information about their community. “Places also have distinct histories and dynamics that need to be understood if efforts to change them are to be successful and just” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35). Understanding the histories and dynamics of a place is a process. The process is authentic only when developed from real context of real community (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

### ***Politic***

Behavior is about relational processes focused on acting for the betterment of the self, organization, and the community, not in self-interest (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

### ***Action***

A theory of action requires that relationships, assets, stories, and place have movement. In order for stories to have legs or action, “they must inspire, motivate, and move citizens to act toward the public good” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

Part of the worldview that has been expressed thus far has a theoretical foundation referred to as the theory of change. RASPPA gives a foundation and legs to the pedagogy of change theory, thereby giving a landscape, language, power, and politic within a context.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review was intended to set the context for a dynamic engagement process that supports my commitment as an activist researcher and a pedagogy that is committed to living a transformative life. This review began with historical challenges including a deficit approach to fill an opportunity gap for Latinos that has been prevalent in our public-school systems. In order for critical transformation to occur, a radical theoretical framework for initiating change must be explored and accepted as a way of life for our communities. This is a framework that invites us to reflect and make sense of our lived experiences by dissecting what we have experienced, have been forced or blindly convinced of, or subjected to from community members. Stories presented by the three Latina educators and a historiography shared by additional community members are filtered through the ecologies of knowing, which include the self, organization, and community, to move us from storytelling and then radically reframe our reaction to our experiences, moving us from hardships to assets and leading to storymaking. Participating in this way of knowing will help people build relationships and collectively discover their assets and gifts, uplifting communities to be deeply committed to stimulating change for the good.

### III. TESTIMONIOS, PLÁTICAS, AND MAKING MEANING OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

#### Conceptual Framework

*La noria* my father built with his family when he was 13 years ties this work together in my mind; indeed, it serves as a conceptual framework guiding this autoethnographic study (see Figure 12). This imagery brings the tensions and celebrations to life within this text. There were constant reminders of the danger if we dared get under the barrier or boundary of *la noria*. The symbol represents dangerous spaces. These spaces are not always bad, yet many times they are uncomfortable and disruptive to the status quo. My graduate work invited me to reflect on the story behind *la noria*, causing a sparked interest that moved me to return and take a closer look at *la noria*. This *inquietude*<sup>23</sup> created a rebirthed interest and prompted my dad to invite me beyond the barrier. As I entered the prohibited area now as an adult and made my way under the barrier to take a closer look at *la noria*, still functional 60 years later, I could not help but feel like a stranger as I entered an unknown space even though my dad was on the inside excitedly explaining the mechanics of *la noria*. Much like the theoretical framework guiding this study, CLEs, we invite the stranger. At times participants enter an unfamiliar space that is unknown and certainly filled with hesitation and reservations. The hosting members of the CLE are there to welcome all and begin building relationships the moment participants cross that boundary. The foundation of *la noria* is made of carefully and purposefully placed bricks, much like the axioms of CLE. The CLE foundation is created in the ways we learn as leadership and action, engaged in conversations and

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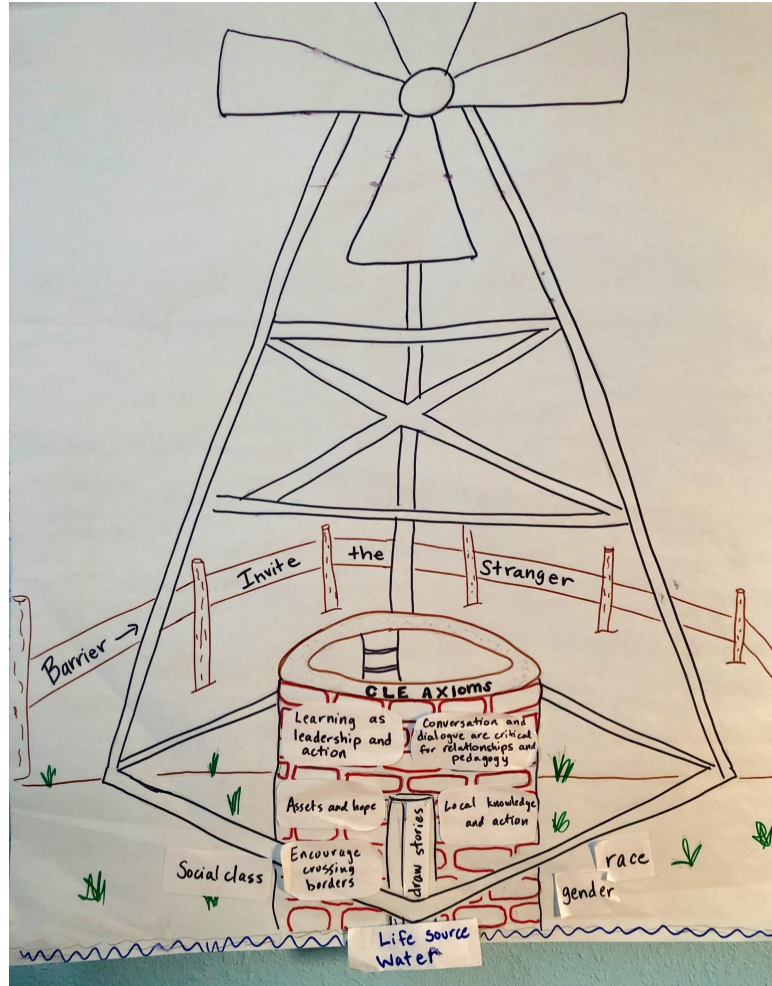
<sup>23</sup> Spanish translation: restlessness.

dialogue that are critical for relationships and pedagogy that value the local knowledge and provoke action, encouraged by crossing borders, and built on assets and hope. The foundation of *la noria* at my grandmother's house was carefully built, each brick<sup>24</sup> being placed building *la noria* with one layer above the next, in the same way foundations to relationships are built with each interaction. As we engage in *pláticas* and *testimonios*, we dig deep through mud, which represents the messiness of life, including race, gender, and social class, to reach the life source of water. The water has to be drawn and pumped up to the surface just as we dig deep to draw out stories of lived experiences. As we make sense of the stories through the ecologies of knowing of self, organization, and community, they begin to nourish all living things just as all living things are nourished by water and we then move from storytelling to storymaking. Figure 12 shows the visual representation of *La Noria* as the conceptual framework.

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<sup>24</sup> The bricks used for *la noria* were built at the local Brick and Tile factory, made by the hands of the local citizens that Apa led to unionize.





**Figure 12. Visual Representation of La Noria as the Conceptual Framework (Diagram drawn by Frank Torres, the author's partner, and Sara Torres, 2021).**

## Overview

In my 16 years of teaching in public schools, I have noticed a certain ideology that seems to be prevalent in conversations with teachers as to why they chose teaching as a profession—people cite a desire to make a difference in the future, the fact that they love children, or perhaps a desire to save the world. After spending a few days in the teacher's lounge, however, the above statements become far and few between and are replaced with constant complaints about struggling students' lack of attention and hard-fought efforts that still result in failing classroom work and failing standardized exams. Another conversation that seems to take place surrounds how parents with struggling

students seem to lack commitment and avoid parent–teacher conferences. The overwhelming and countless demands each teacher faces and the nonstop complaints of administrators and school leaders also become topics of discussion in the teacher’s lounge. Although this is not the case for all educators, in my experience the half hour lunch time is used by teachers as a space to vent and release tension as well as to seek validation from colleagues.

I based this research on the experiences of three intergenerational Latina certified public-school teachers in a Texas rural community as shared through stories and *pláticas*. I systematically collected these stories by oral history, observations, written reflections, and a review of primary archival data. I triangulated the inquiry by interviewing witnesses in our lives who have experienced our work, our transformation, and our impact on the community and its institutions. This study reflects how we as three Latina public-school teachers all in the same family perceive our life’s work and how these experiences have affected our teaching practices, the decisions we made in the classroom, and how we have been able to respond to challenges in both positive and challenging ways. The stories dive into the conditions of the educational environments we have experienced, our educational politic that advocated for change, the anatomy of our critical consciousness, and what good citizenry looks and feels like in our South Texas rural community.

### **Research Questions**

1. What has enabled three Latinas in the same family to strive for education and higher learning?
2. What does an educational politic that is transformational look like?

3. What are the conditions of educational environments experienced by three Latina teachers in a South Texas community?
4. What does the anatomy of critical consciousness and good citizenry look like and feel like in this South Texas community?
5. What systems of support, beliefs, and actions enable the achievement of a family's hopes and dreams to come to life?
6. What are the stories when the historically observed become the observers?

### **Research Collection Tools and Strategies**

I used historical documents and a timeline to make connections to experiences shared by the participants. I used an organic approach to analyze journal entries, autobiographical maps, *testimonios*, *pláticas*, and storymaking to answer the question of: What can we learn from three intergenerational Latinas who have chosen public education, not only as a career but as a way of life? I documented our experiences teaching, learning, and living during a pandemic and conducted the study within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) safety guidelines that included social distancing, wearing masks with community members, and groups not to exceed six people for each *plática*. Meeting outdoors for *pláticas* was preferred.

My work as a Texas certified public-school educator for 16 years, interwoven with my mother's 25 years in public schools as well as my daughter's 3 years, which included a COVID pandemic year as a certified teacher, in the same rural school I attended as a child, provides insight into 6 decades of Texas public-school education through the intergenerational experiences of three Latinas.

## Site and Participant Selection

In this study, I honor the power of place and the wisdom of people through aligning the data and the observables I collected. Stories are critically grounded in the ontological blind spots of a systemic narrative of the White initiations such as the example below in the writing by Ochoa (2019) of the history of Sabinal, Texas. Ochoa is a Latino last name but Latinos are missing from the narrative. Participants in this autoethnographic study included my mother, myself, and my daughter and *testimonios* of community members who have witnessed our work as learners and *maestras*.

## History of Sabinal, Texas

Ochoa (2019), in the *Handbook of Texas* online, wrote the following about Sabinal:

Sabinal, originally known as Hammer's Station, is on U.S. Highway 90 and the Southern Pacific Railroad, twenty miles northeast of Uvalde in east central Uvalde County. The first settler at the site was Thomas B. Hammer, who established a stage stop there on the east bank of the Sabinal River in 1854.

In 1856 Camp Sabinal was established on the riverbank opposite Hammer's Station, to protect people and commerce on the road from San Antonio to El Paso and to protect the settlers from hostile Indians and outlaws. Nevertheless, Thomas Hammer was killed by bandits in 1857. By the time of the Civil War Sabinal was on the mail route and wagon trail from San Antonio to Mexico. In 1874 pioneer merchant Louis M. Peters built a successful general store. Soon after the railroad arrived in Sabinal in 1881, Peters moved the store to a site east of the river that eventually became part of the center of town. With the coming of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1881 the rest of the community was moved to its present site. Angora goats imported from Turkey were brought into the Sabinal area in 1881.

By 1884 Sabinal had an estimated population of 150, a public school, two churches, and a hotel; local ranchers were shipping wool, livestock, and hides, and Peters was serving as postmaster. By 1893 two hotels, the Mitchell House and the Sabinal Hotel, were serving a growing number of visitors to the city. Corn, cotton, oats, and sugarcane were cultivated on farms around the community, many of which utilized the "aer-motor water well windmill" available at John T. Wilson's lumberyard to irrigate their crops. Uvalde County school records in 1900 showed 156 students in three schools in Sabinal. In 1906 Sabinal had a

population of 500 and was surrounded by 1,500 acres of cultivated land. The town was incorporated that year, and W. D. Heard served as mayor soon thereafter. In the same year the Sabinal Telephone Company was granted a franchise, the city water and fire departments were organized, and the cotton gins operating in the area reached the substantial number of six. Sabinal Christian College was founded in 1907 by members of the Church of Christ.

By 1911 Sabinal was a commercial and agricultural center; an estimated 35,000 acres was under cultivation in the area, and as many as five general stores supplied an estimated population of 2,500. The cotton industry was burgeoning, and local stock raisers were producing thousands of hogs, cattle, sheep, and goats. In 1914 Sabinal had a population of 2,000, who supported Baptist, Catholic, Christian, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, a high school and a grade school, an ice plant, two banks, three cotton gins, and a weekly newspaper called the *Sentinel*, started by publisher Harold Baldwin in 1890. Poor patronage, inadequate financial backing, and crop failures led to the closing of Sabinal Christian College on May 15, 1917. A new high school was constructed near the center of town in 1925, when Sabinal had an estimated population of 1,458. In 1935 ranchers in the Sabinal area principally raised cattle, sheep, and goats; they produced thousands of pounds of wool and mohair annually. Area farmers raised oats, corn, sorghum grains, and cotton. The town population that year was approximately 1,600. A school for Hispanics had recently been completed. Sometime in the 1940s the Trio Independent School District was annexed to the Sabinal Independent School District. In 1949 other nearby rural schools were consolidated with the Sabinal district. In 1950 citizens approved a \$225,000 bond issue to pay for a new high school and elementary school. The old high school was renovated to accommodate all of the community's elementary students, who had previously attended three separate schools. In 1955 Sabinal had an estimated population of 2,300; in 1975 the number of residents was estimated at 1,570. By 1974 thirty-three of the schoolteachers in Sabinal had college degrees; seven had master's degrees. The high school and an elementary school built in 1970 had a combined enrollment of 636; many students arrived at school on five buses that covered the 356 square miles of the school district daily. By 1990 the ranching and farming community had an estimated population of 1,584 and was billed to tourists as the gateway to recreational and retirement opportunities in the Sabinal and Frio canyons. Churches serving the community in 1990 included the First Baptist, Trinity Baptist, St. Patrick's Catholic, Central Christian, Church of Christ, and Sabinal United Methodist. (para. 1-3)

Figure 13 shows an image of the Trio Independent School District located 8 miles from Sabinal, Texas. This school was annexed with the Sabinal ISD in the 1940s.



**Figure 13. Trio Independent School District (Photo courtesy Stephen & Elizabeth Taylor, 2006; <http://www.texasescapes.com/TexasHillCountryTowns/Trio-Texas.htm>).**

The following story is an example of the response to the ontological blind spots that currently exist and give voice to the local *maestra* and schooling experience that bring lived experience to life.

This place, Sabinal, is a small rural southwest town with a history of segregation, farming, and religious life—the town is filled with churches. This is where the first-generation participant, my mother, spent most of her career teaching and I received formal K-12 education. This rural Texas town has enough students in each grade level to fill two classrooms.

My educational experiences in Sabinal led me to grow up believing one classroom was for the “smart” kids and I was in the “other” classroom all through elementary school. Societal experiences like this shaped how I make sense of schooling in ways that move me to create a better learning community for my students.

My mother shared an experience from the time she was a teacher at Sabinal Elementary. She was one of two teachers in the same grade level. She attempted to build a relationship with the teacher who was also teaching the same grade level by saying hello every morning in the hope that they would have a conversation about planning. The other teacher would ignore my mother and would not acknowledge her. This continued daily for the first semester until my mother tired of saying good morning without getting a response and stopped saying hello. One day at the end of the second semester, the teacher said “Good morning” to my mother while walking down the hallway. This experience reflects how it has taken some White educators longer than others to accept that people of color have the capability to earn a college degree and become teachers themselves. It is in these stories that I realize how strong my mother, myself, and my daughter are to not only occupy these spaces but thrive in the everyday challenges.

Today, my daughter, who grew up in a somewhat rural and urban environment, chose to work at Sabinal Elementary, the same rural school I attended as a child. In her first year of teaching, she faced a classroom full of students who had not been taught by a certified teacher in Grades 3 and 4. She taught Grade 5, and only one of the students in the grade level passed the STAAR exam the previous year in Grade 4. She had daily interactions with students whose low self-esteem did not allow room for believing they had a chance to be successful—in this case, they did not believe in their ability to pass STAAR, the standardized state exam of Texas. Figure 14 is a photograph of Maria Garcia on the left, Sara Torres in the center, and Isabel Torres on the right exploring Hawaii after the SACNAS Conference in 2019. This was the first trip all three had the opportunity to travel together.





**Figure 14. Maria Garcia, Sara Torres, and Isabel Torres Exploring Hawaii After SACNAS Conference 2019 (Photograph taken by Polynesian Cultural Center employee).**

The participants in this study represent three intergeneration Latinas from the same family mentioned above. All three of us share common places where we have attended school or worked in Southwest Texas.

### **Data Collection Procedures and Strategies**

I used an oral history approach to gather personal reflections of events, their causes, and effects from three intergenerational participants through *testimonios*. I chose this strategy for collecting observables because it aligns with a lens that will report the stories of women using feminist interpretations (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013).

Other data collection instruments consisted of *pláticas*, a nonthreatening way to respect and value all members of the group through “an intellectual dialogue” (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). As F. Guajardo and Guajardo (2013) appropriately stated,



“We tap *plática* as a chief modality for our work, because it makes sense to us culturally, politically, ontologically, and epistemologically. It is the root of how we work and live our lives” (p. 160). Participants contributed to this conversation by sharing experiences with each other in the form of stories, similar to DeWalt and DeWalt’s (2011) participant observation. “The goal of the technique is for the researcher to participate in naturally unfolding events, and to observe them as carefully and as objectively as possible” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 137).

I followed the designed protocols, but if a natural follow-up question surfaced, I asked it to keep the organic flow of the *plática*/interview. I also took research field notes. I first sat in the data and gave myself enough time to look for emerging curiosities between *pláticas*. I planned on using NVivo, a tool for analysis, to compare the two forms of data analysis.

In this research, I used *testimonio* as a methodology for qualitative inquiry (Fuentes & Pérez, 2016). Rooted in oral history and human rights struggles, *testimonio* is purposeful storytelling grounded in praxis used to expose and disrupt histories that are otherwise subsumed (Cruz, 2012). *Testimonios* challenge traditional paradigms in education research and expand Chicana/Latinas’ way of knowing, expressing, and experiencing the world (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). The process of *testimonios* involves at least two individuals strong enough to be vulnerable in sharing and reliving their experiences. This process can be painful but necessary and part of the healing and recognition of shared humanity and perseverance. This process moves participants from “individual narratives within a larger collective experience simultaneously marked by oppression, agency, and resistance” (Fuentes & Pérez, 2016, p. 7).

Story is another way I intended to transfer the skill set of story from a personal and private process to a public skill set and capacity to act for the public good. According to F. Guajardo and Guajardo (2010), story is to be viewed as a complex and organic process that is at the core of human activity. The social context in which the story is rooted needs to be understood as well as understanding that story is a product of human agency informed by cultural dynamics such as local ecology and history. Finally, I used historical documents to help make sense of some of the events.

### **Storytelling to Storymaking**

#### ***Storytelling***

Storytelling is dynamic process in which people are able to express themselves. Stories, according to Denman (1991), are lenses through which we view and review all of human experience. Gay (2010) stated stories are also a powerful means for people to establish bridges across other factors that separate them, penetrate barriers to understanding, and create kindred feelings. Stories entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more of what we are. In *Tell Me a Story*, author Roger C. Schank (1990) wrote that our views evolve and although our story changes over time, storytelling is necessary to construct new thoughts, meaning new ideas depend on old ones.

F. Guajardo and Guajardo (2010) stated stories have been used as “an instrument for narrative inquiry and others use story to celebrate, commemorate, romanticize, or struggle with issues” (p. 93). F. Guajardo and Guajardo used story as “a tool for change,” much like Myles Horton, founder of Highlander Folk School used it. Myles Horton described an organic three-stage process in his autobiography (Horton et al., 1990): (a)

tell stories to set the context, develop the character, and build the ideas; (b) ask questions about the story, and exercise the critical eye/“I”; and (c) build an action that grows out of the storytelling process. Sense is made out of storytelling in public by asking questions about stories and developing action plans in response to stories.

F. Guajardo and Guajardo (2010) created a metaphor to help visualize the anatomy of a story. First, the core message and the questions that emerge from the story are elements that come from the navel. “The navel represents the core of the human anatomy, as the central component that feeds and balances the story” (p. 94). Next is the heart. The heart of the story is typically its meaning, just like the human heart gives the body ultimate meaning. Then the “mind is the center of all analytical thinking” (p. 95). This is where the critical analysis is formed. Following are the hands. “The hands massage and help mold values, ideas, and rhythm of the story” (p. 95). The legs of the story represent longevity, affecting others beyond the storyteller as the story is one that lives and moves (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). “A story with legs will move people to action, provokes new questions, and helps identify the work that is connected to the story” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 95).

### ***Storymaking***

Some stories shared in a CLE are those we have learned from family, friends, and community members (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE stirs up multiple realities because of the different contexts and stories that shape the reality. The process through which participants share, analyze, and retell their stories happens when CLE participants are led in making sense of the lived experiences. One-on-one conversations, *pláticas*, triads, and travel or transition times are when the intentional conversations happen. M.

Guajardo et al. (2016) explained the process requires us to look at what is present, to examine values, to look at gaps in the work and in the stories, and “to reflect on how stories can be reframed to yield different impacts” (p. 69). We then can re-author ourselves, and we change organizations and transform our communities.

Journal entries by all three participants provided thoughts during vulnerable times and I was privileged to read through times of difficulty, celebrations, and times that were private to the world. Anecdotal notes supplied observations of parent–teacher conferences and teaching in the classroom.

### **Data Analysis**

Ethnography is the work of describing a culture with the goal being to understand another way of life from the native point of view (Spradley, 1979). An ethnographic approach to conducting a study is an open-ended approach in which observers identify areas of concern (Wallace, 2000). Autoethnography places the self of the researcher within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997, 2017). Reed-Danahay (2009) noted it is more productive to see autoethnography as lying at the intersection of insider and outsider perspectives. “Autoethnography reflects a view of ethnography as both a reflexive and collaborative enterprise, in which life experiences of the anthropologies and their relationships with others ‘in the field’ should be interrogated and explored” (Reed-Danahay, 2017, p. 145). I relate the most to Gloria Anzaldúa (1980) in *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, where she proclaimed the reality of women of color writers in the following excerpt:

My dear *hermanas*, the dangers we face as women writers of color are not the same as those of white women though we have many in common. We don’t have as much to lose—we never had any privileges. I wanted to call the dangers “obstacles” but that would be kind of lying. We can’t *transcend* the dangers, can’t

rise above them. We must go through them and hope we won't have to repeat the performance. (p. 165)

Data analysis of this research involved finding balance within the three central ecologies of knowing, which are self, organizations, and communities. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated these three ecologies organize thinking and learning experiences from the micro to the meso to the macro levels, or spheres, in which we experience life. These ecologies are bordered by boundaries that are permeable and leave room for exchange and play but serve their purpose when making meaning of our engagements before, during, and after events. These ecologies are not isolated; in fact, they spiral upward and downward, weaving within a developmental process. These experiences inform our schema.

My mother and daughter agreed to be co-researchers. By establishing gracious space, no person's stories are more important than those of another. Data collection instruments consisted of *testimonios* and *pláticas* with my mother, daughter, and community members as well as a timeline. According to Cruz (2012), *testimonio* allows for communities from the inception, co-creation, production, and exposition of authentic stories. *Testimonios* provide a way to analyze and interpret individual stories as part of a collective experience and offer healing from a space that honors a new world of possibilities outside of the dominant (Fuentes & Perez, 2016).

Participants contributed through conversations by sharing experiences with each other in the form of stories. *Pláticas* were audio recorded for later transcription. Transcriptions were initially analyzed for themes that emerged organically. I also took anecdotal notes to record actions not captured by the audio recording.

In making sense of the ecologies of knowing, I began with the self, which is the basis of the world of knowing in which a constant balance or tension exists between the I and the we. This is not to say that this is binary, but a space that is I and we at the same time, creating a third space. This enables a space to filter information and make good decisions for the self and whatever space that self occupies. For this to be accomplished, we must be in rhythm with multiple ecologies (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). The organization is the meso frame and it is important that as educators we know that social collectives such as families, schools, and churches become the mediating entities between the self and the larger society. The macro level, our communities, influences our daily lives. Knowing the flow of forces and where the power is located in our lives and communities informs our work and action plan. This understanding gives me hope for change in our community. I analyzed the stories through the axioms of CLE and through the anatomy of a story. Figures 15, 16, and 17 show the organizational chart I filtered each story through as themes emerged through the ecologies of knowing.

	Axioms of CLE work				
	Learning as leadership & action	Conversation & dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy	Local knowledge & action	Encourage crossing borders	Assets & hope
Anatomy of a story					
Heart					
Navel					
Hands					
Legs					

**Figure 15. Organizational Chart to Filter Emerging Themes Through Ecology of Self.**

	Axioms of CLE work				
	Learning as leadership & action	Conversation & dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy	Local knowledge & action	Encourage crossing borders	Assets & hope
Anatomy of a story					
Heart					
Navel					
Hands					
Legs					

**Figure 16. Organizational Chart to Filter Emerging Themes Through Ecology of Organization.**

	Axioms of CLE work				
	Learning as leadership & action	Conversation & dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy	Local knowledge & action	Encourage crossing borders	Assets & hope
Anatomy of a story					
Heart					
Navel					
Hands					
Legs					

**Figure 17. Organizational Chart to Filter Emerging Themes Through Ecology of Community.**

I planned to enter the data into NVivo for analysis to compare the two forms of data analysis; however, I quickly found the data were too nuanced for NVivo to pick up the complexity of the multiple layers of the stories shared and meaning making process. Through a systematic process of transcribing the data, reliving the data 100% without distractions by listening to the recordings and reading along the numbered copy of the transcript, I took three different colored highlighter pens and began to color code the data according to the ecologies of knowing. I studied the data to find themes and found evidence of common conditions of educational environments and educational politic that advocates for change. I moved into the theoretical framework and used the CLE axioms, the ecologies of knowing, and the theory of change and what emerged from this process were powerful narratives. I studied the data to find themes within the stories.

Finally, I analyzed artifacts of any institutions that had the potential to give insight into the organizations in which the three participants attended school or worked.



These organizations are a link to the participants and how they make sense of their experiences.

### **Challenges and Possibilities**

I have experienced this robust work saturated with cultural wealth that considering limitations is a deficit approach to this study. All of my instincts led me to possibilities rather than limitations. However, in conversation with my team, the dynamics of my relationship with my daughter and what she may have been experiencing in having *pláticas* with me about her teaching experiences could have presented some challenges. My daughter knows my teaching experiences and I needed to consider that she may not have wanted to share all of her experiences because she may have thought that if she shared the more difficult experiences in teaching, I would be disappointed.

The participants and I had relationships prior to the collection of the data. This relationship building is helpful with the dependability and the trustworthiness of the data or histories and stories collected. Creating a timeline of historiographies is another strategy I used to help paint the picture of and better understand our educational history. To help with gaining trust, I collected data in the comfort of participants' own spaces, whether that was in my mom's kitchen, the backyard, or my daughter's classroom a time that was most convenient and comfortable.

Another strategy that helps with trustworthiness is to be authentic when sharing and honoring the stories in *plática*. Sitting in a circle takes away some of the power one person may have and helps create gracious space. Taking away the authority of the researcher and placing them on the same level as the participants encourages participants to open up and speak in a valid, dependable, and trustworthy way. As I shared authentic

stories, the other participants felt comfortable and did their best to also share stories that were accurate and true to their lived realities.

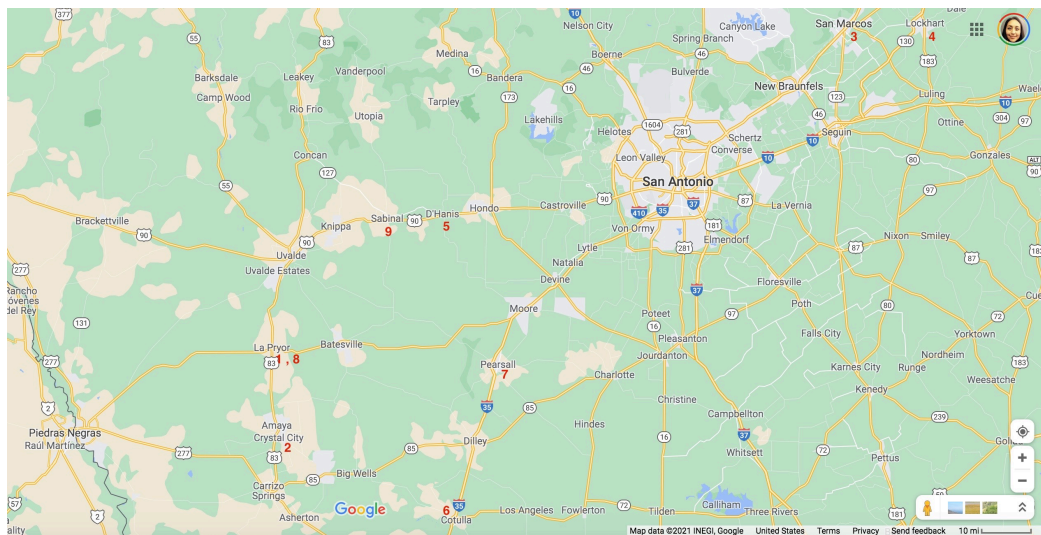
#### **IV. PORTRAITS OF RESEARCH PARTNERS AND HOME**

This autoethnographic study included myself, my mother, Maria Garcia, and my daughter Isabel Torres as research partners. I use the term research partners because the word participants would indicate I simply retrieved information from them. In this study, our goal was to connect, understand, and become story makers by sharing our interactions and making sense of our lived experiences from the micro to the macro through over 60 years of navigating through Texas public-school systems.

In this chapter, although you have been introduced to my research partners by name and their familial connection, you will get to know my research partners, their adversities, their passions, and their loves through story. Some of these stories have been passed down from past generations and others have been informed and constructed from published writings, reflections, and journal entries authored by my research partners. This work takes three individual voices and interweaves them into one voice. The maps in Figures 18 and 19 are marked with significant places where the stories are birthed.



**Figure 18. State of Texas Map, Google Maps, 2021.**



**Figure 19. Map of Significant Town Locations Highlighted in the Following Stories, Google Maps, 2021.**

Key:

- 1- La Pryor, Texas, Maria Guadalupe Garcia born November 25, 1949
- 2- Crystal City, Texas, Maria Guadalupe Garcia moved with her mom, 1956
- 3- San Marcos, Texas, Maria Guadalupe Garcia moved after marriage, 1971; Isabel Briana born August 31, 1996
- 4- Lockhart, Texas, Sara Lisa Garcia-Torres born October 4, 1972
- 5- D'Hanis, Texas, Familia Garcia relocates December 1972
- 6- Cotulla, Texas, Familia Garcia relocates following Bernardo Garcia's career in Child Protective Services
- 7- Pearsall, Texas, Familia Garcia relocates following Bernardo Garcia's career
- 8- La Pryor, Texas, Familia Garcia relocates to follow Bernardo Garcia's career
- 9- Sabinal, Texas, Familia Garcia relocates to be closer to paternal grandfather facing health problems

## Portraits of Research Partners

Maria Guadalupe Garcia was born in La Pryor, the biggest little town in Texas, on November 25, 1949, to Sara Aguirre and Federico Ortiz. The local doctor, Dr. King, went to the house and delivered a very tiny, pink, wrinkled looking little rat of a baby. When mom's aunt went to visit mom as a baby for the first time, she paused and said, "¿Sara, que fuiste a tener?"<sup>25</sup> With tears intermingled with smiles and moments of laughter, Mom shared this story along with other childhood memories, like her mother teaching her to dance, how her mom sewed clothes for her two sisters and herself, and the short road trips to the grocery store.

My maternal grandmother Sara Aguirre was in her early 20s when she met and married a widower twice her age, my grandfather, Federico Ortiz, a butcher and fruit man by trade. Federico had become a widower 10 years prior. Shortly after his first wife, Margarita, gave birth to their second child, a baby girl they named Araminda, Margarita lay in her bed dying. She held the hand of Federico's sister, Concepcion (Tia Concha), and in her last dying breath said, "son tuyos, te los doy"<sup>26</sup>. My maternal grandfather supported two families, a son and a daughter who were being raised by his sister and his second wife, my grandmother Sara Aguirre and their three girls. They lived 7 years together in a tiny house caddy corner to Tia Concha's house.

During a time when women were expected to get married, have children, and stay home to care for their husband and children, my grandmother was ahead of her time. She had great strength mentally and physically and had the courage to do what was best for

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<sup>25</sup> Spanish translation: What did you go have?

<sup>26</sup> Spanish translation: I give them to you, they are yours.

her own self-preservation. Although an unpopular decision for most women to make in the mid- to late-1950s, my grandmother left my grandfather and started a new life with her three girls. Figure 20 is a photograph of my maternal grandmother, Sara Aguirre, in 1944 when she was 19 years old, shortly before she met and married my paternal grandfather, Federico Ortiz.



**Figure 20. Photograph of Sara Aguirre 1944, 19 Years Old.**

My maternal grandmother, Sara Aguirre, went to work as a migrant worker and left her three girls in her own mother's care in Crystal City, Texas, for months at a time. As the girls grew a little older, she took them with her as she continued migrant work in New Mexico. During this period of time, Mom would collect and retain many good memories of going to school in New Mexico such as the time her first-grade teacher

showed her affection and nurtured her when she braided her hair and talked to her about her interests. Mom, along with her sisters and friends, played school daily. My mom loved to play the role of the teacher. Migrant work, however, was not easy and the mother–daughter quartet made several trips between Crystal City, Texas, and New Mexico, making it difficult to feel stability. On one of their trips back to Crystal City, Texas, my mother and her sisters were left for the last time at their maternal grandmother’s house and Sara Aguirre went out of state for work. A few weeks later, my grandfather, Federico, received word that his daughters were not getting the best care away from their mother. He drove 30 miles to where my mom and her sisters were staying and picked up his daughters. At the age of 9 years old, my mother returned to her hometown of La Pryor, Texas, to live with her Daddy and Tia Concha.

When my maternal grandmother, Sara, returned home, she was informed that the girls had been taken by their father, Federico. My grandmother, as fearless as she was, made a trip to La Pryor during school hours and found Mom’s classroom. Mom was 9 years old and in the second grade when her mother called her out of class. Mom was so happy to see her mother and requested a nickel to buy candy on her way home from school. Her mother pulled out a dollar bill and asked, “¿Mamita, te vienes conmigo?”<sup>27</sup> It pained my mom to the core and she cried out loud when she told her mother that she would not go with her. Mom has described this decision as the worst pain she has ever felt. She loved her mother so much it hurt her not to be with her mother but something inside her even at the tender age of 9 years old could not deny the stability she felt living with her dad. After my mother denied her mother’s request to go with her, my

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<sup>27</sup> Spanish translation: My little girl, will you come with me?

grandmother asked Mom to take her to her sister's classroom. Mom led the way to her older sister's classroom and her sister was asked her the same question. Mom and her sisters chose to live with their dad. Figure 21 is a yearbook photo of Maria Ortiz in the second grade shortly before her mother returned looking for her.



**Figure 21. Maria Ortiz, Second Grade School La Pryor Bulldogs 1959 Yearbook.**

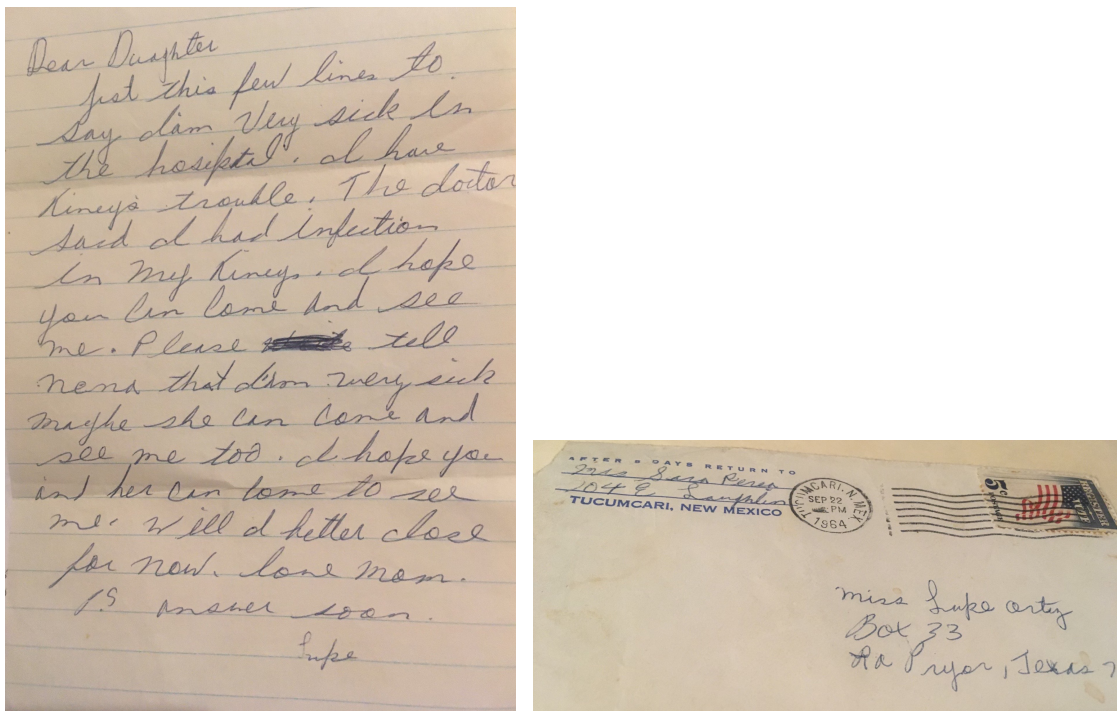
My mom and her sisters never left my grandmother's thoughts, and nor did she leave theirs. Although my grandmother did not read or write, 5 years later as she lay on her death bed, she dictated a letter to a neighbor and had it mailed to Mom. In the letter, Mom was informed of her mother's dire health. A few days after receiving the letter, Mom and her sisters started the journey with relatives to Tucumcari, New Mexico, to see their mom one last time. Sara Aguirre tragically died as they used to say *de un dolor*<sup>28</sup> when Mom was 14 years old on the morning of their evening arrival. In Figure 22, there are two photographs of the letter and envelope Sara Aguirre mailed Mom in 1964 informing of her failing health and requesting a visit. Figure 23 is a photograph of Maria Guadalupe Garcia as an adult in 2005 on a visit to her childhood home in Cuervo, New Mexico where she lived with her mother and sisters. In Figure 24, Maria Guadalupe

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<sup>28</sup> Spanish translation for from a pain.



Garcia and my brother Guillermo Garcia in 2005 pose in front of the one-room school house where she attended in the first grade.



**Figure 22. Letter Dictated by Sara Aguirre, Mailed to Maria Guadalupe Garcia, 1964.**



**Figure 23. Maria Guadalupe Garcia, 2005, Visited Childhood Home in Cuervo, New Mexico When She Lived With Her Mother and Sisters for 1 Year.**



**Figure 24. Maria Guadalupe Garcia and Guillermo Garcia, 2005, Visited One Room School House in New Mexico Where Maria Attended School in the First Grade.**

In her father's home, Mom followed many rules and was expected to do well in school. My mother's older half-sister, Araminda, set a good example by completing college and got a master's degree in counseling. Araminda, or Aunt Minda as I called her, not only served as a role model but often took on the role of a mentor. She took the time to talk to Mom about college and college entrance requirements. Mom graduated from La Pryor High School in 1968 and began school at Southwest Texas Junior College. All of

Mom's experiences led her to grow strong roots with family morals and values, including excelling in school.

On the last week of the semester of my mom's freshman year at Southwest Texas Junior College and on the last day my dad would be on campus, they met in the library. One conversation is all it took for Dad to return to school the following day. They were married in 1972 and started a family while both pursued their degrees at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

As Dad completed his degree, they decided to move back home to D'Hanis, Texas. Mom was 22 years old and transplanted well into Dad's family from the start. She shared the value of education, morals, and ethics of hard work, generosity, and the importance of community through a social justice lens. Mom was in her senior year of college and sacrificed her own academic goals for the good of the family when she left school and stayed home to care for her children. She gave birth to four children: myself, my sister who did not survive being born prematurely, and two brothers. Figure 25 is a photograph of Araminda Ortiz Kone, Maria Guadalupe Garcia, Sara Garcia-Torres, Federico Ortiz, and Concepcion Ortiz at home in 1973 shortly after my birth. In Figure 26, Maria Guadalupe Garcia is pictured with Sara L. Torres, Bernardo Garcia, Jr., and Guillermo Garcia at Araminda Ortiz Kone's home in 1979



**Figure 25. Photograph of Araminda Ortiz Kone (Left), Maria Guadalupe Garcia (Left-Center Holding Infant), Sara Garcia-Torres (Infant), Federico Ortiz (Center-Right), Concepcion Ortiz (Tia Concha-Right), 1973.**

The following is an excerpt from Mom's autobiographical journal of her first teaching experience:

I started going to Southwest Texas Junior College in the fall of 1969. Two years later I graduated with an Associates of Arts degree in 1971. That fall I was admitted to Southwest Texas State University which is now Texas State.

I attended that university for about a year and a half and left when I was a senior. It was not until 1977 that I resumed my studies after getting married and starting my family. Since I lived in La Pryor, Texas it was convenient to attend Sul Ross University Extension Center in Uvalde, Texas. I graduated with a B.A. degree in 1979 and started teaching 5th grade in Uvalde taking the place for a teacher who left un-expectantly in February of 1980.

My first experience was with about twenty-four students. I willingly took the job that I had dreamed of since I was a child. Growing up we'd play school. I loved taking turns being the teacher. We'd use a stick and pretend it was a yard stick as a pointer or invisible chalkboard. I taught all subjects that year to the 5th grade. I particularly loved teaching Language Arts. I was quite prepared for that subject since I'd taken an advanced English [class] at Southwest Texas State

University where the sentences we diagrammed were pretty complicated. The other subjects I taught, I would put in the time and prepare ahead of time.

I tried my best to make sure every student understood the lesson taught. I provided one on one instruction, collaborated group work, whole class instruction using the overhead projector and other teacher resources. Computers were not available back then. We did everything manually. I also made sure I had parent involvement.

At that time, I had a student with special needs that was very destructive to other student's belongings. He was very impulsive and overly active. One time, as we were coming into the classroom from lunch he expectantly got out of line and went down the aisle between the row of desks and got a hold of a belt that was on a desk. In a flash he picked it up, stretched the metal part and destroyed it. I must have had a lot of patience. I didn't scream or yell at him. I handled the incident in a calm and orderly manner without putting him down.

As the school year went on, I worked with that student and reached out to his mom in a positive way. Having her support was important. Whenever he behaved and did well, I would send home a little note acknowledging how well he'd done and how proud I was of him. It wasn't easy to work with him because he wanted to be in control and manipulate every situation.

One school policy that I strongly disagreed with was the use of corporal punishment. The teachers had to do the spanking because the female principal did not do it herself. On one occasion, one of my fifth graders got into trouble and the principal told me I had to spank the child in front of her right outside our classroom in the hallway. I reluctantly spanked the child once and she quickly ordered me to spank him harder. I didn't return the following school year. I stayed home and took care of my youngest child, Guillermo who was four years old.





**Figure 26. Maria Guadalupe Garcia Pictured at Her Sister Araminda's House. Author Sara Garcia-Torres (Left-Back), Bernardo Garcia, Jr. (Right), and Guillermo Garcia (Left-Front) in 1979.**

When I got ready to go back to work two years later, I couldn't apply at my home district because my husband was on the school board. He served two more consecutive terms from 1983 to May of 1989. I worked from 1983-1988 in neighboring school districts and earned my master's degree in guidance and counseling. I applied in my hometown in 1989 and was able to get a teaching job. I worked teaching third grade. Sabinal had two teachers working as a team for each grade level. I discovered the teacher that was supposed to work with me didn't want to communicate with me. I tried being friendly with my so-called partner. The Anglo aide was the communication tool between the two of us. We managed to complete our lesson plans in this manner. Around Christmas time I saw this teacher in the teachers' lounge and asked about her son, if he was coming home for the holidays. I got a rude answer like which son? I have two. All that year I was miserable and would cry when I got home because no matter how hard I tried, nothing would work. One day I decided to put an end to it. I focused on myself and my job. By about April, this teacher said hi to me as we passed each other in the hallway. I thought *se va acabar el mundo*<sup>28</sup>. I had no idea where this change was coming from.

The following year I asked to be moved to fourth grade. I had a good year and taught fourth grade for several years. It was still two teachers per grade level, but sometimes we had an increase in students and we had three teachers on the team. There were many good experiences in this grade level. I earned my ESL endorsement and had students coming from Mexico. Many times, students didn't

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<sup>28</sup> Spanish translation: The world is going to end.

know a word of English. It was a challenging job trying to teach students English and stay on top with the 4th grade TEKS [Texas standards]. I also felt a tremendous responsibility not only to teach and make sure they mastered the objectives for the year, but also to exhibit respect for everyone. One time one of my students made fun of another child who was wearing tattered tennis shoes. I quickly put an end to it in a calm way by talking to the little girl who was making fun of the child with tattered tennis shoe and explained that in this classroom we don't make fun of anyone.

During this time, all teachers in Texas were confronted with the new TECAT exam that we all had to pass or else we'd lose our jobs. If doctors, lawyers and other professionals had taken an exit test, teachers needed to take one too. We quickly made plans to take turns and meet all our homes to study for this test. Most of us passed it. The result said pass or fail. None of us paid the extra \$20.00 to get the exact score. We were just relieved to have passed.

One summer I went to the office to look at my class list. I noticed that a white parent had removed her child from my homeroom list. It hurt my feelings so much because I felt that the parent perhaps didn't think I was a good teacher. Since there were only two teachers per grade level I still taught him reading because we were team teaching. She taught Math. Interestingly enough I was elated because the child passed the state exam for Reading but did not pass the Math with the White teacher. I felt so relieved that my students had passed.

### **Sara Lisa Garcia-Torres**

I was born in Lockhart, Texas, on October 4, 1972. Mom and Dad were students at Southwest Texas University and brought me to San Marcos where they lived in a small student apartment on campus reserved for married students. After 2 months, Dad graduated and my parents moved back home to D'Hanis, Texas, into a house right next to my grandparents' house. We moved a couple of times as we followed Dad's career when he worked with Child Protective Services, first to Cotulla, Texas, then Pearsall, Texas, and then to La Pryor, Texas. By the time I was 5 years old, my dad requested to be transferred to Uvalde, Texas, so we could be closer to my paternal grandfather who had developed health issues. I started kindergarten in Sabinal when I was 5 years old in 1977. Figure 27 is a photograph of Bernardo Garcia, Guadalupe Garcia, and Sara Torres as an

infant in December of 1972 after Dad's graduation from Southwest Texas University. We had just moved back to D'Hanis, Texas.



**Figure 27. Photograph of Bernardo and Guadalupe Garcia, Sara Torres Pictured as an Infant, December of 1972 Just After Dad's Graduation From Southwest Texas University.**

My kindergarten teacher would smile every day and read us stories. She had a distinct friendly voice and I could hear her laughter as I played on the playground. She never shouted or raised her voice in the classroom. By the time I was in second grade, I would look forward to seeing and playing with the same friends year after year. By the third grade, however, I understood that there were two classes, a smart class and the other class, and I was in the other class. Every year I wondered which class I would be placed in. There was very little movement of students between classes and we only saw the kids from the smart class on the playground all through elementary school. In Figure 28, I am pictured in my third-grade class photo. I am standing in the front row to the right of the teacher. Figure 29 is my third-grade school portrait when I became aware of the other.





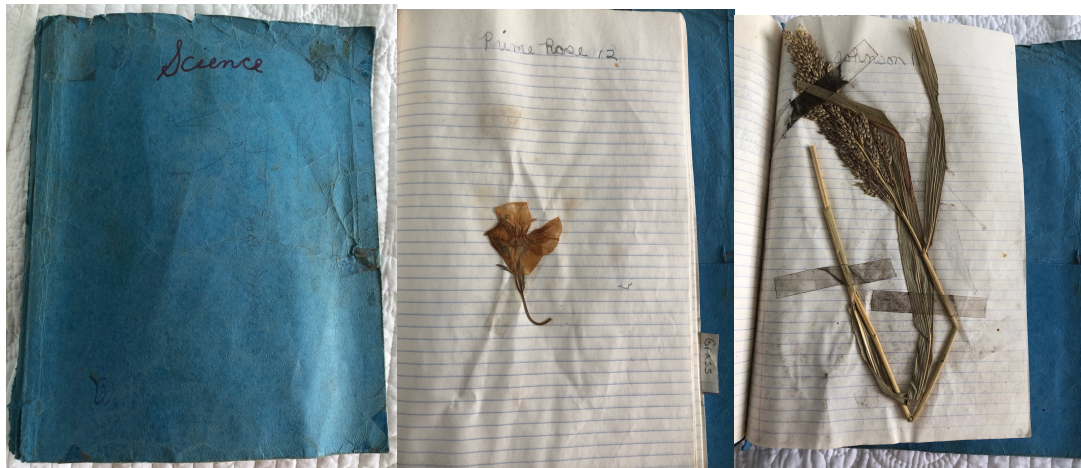
**Figure 28. Author Pictured Front Row-Right Next to Teacher, 1981-1982 Third-Grade Class Photo.**



**Figure 29. Author, Sara Garcia-Torres Third-Grade Class Photo.**

In the Spring of 1985, our principal took all the students from both sixth-grade classes together and left the classroom teachers behind at school. This was the first academic activity where both classes were together in one group. He took us on a several field trips to learn about the native plants in our community. He would lead walks around

the school and we followed like ducklings. He would make frequent stops and cut a sample wild flower, shrub, or a tree leaf and tell us about the plant specimen as he held it up for us to see. We would wait for his signal and then we would collect a sample and add it to our journal with adhesive tape. He also loaded us up on a school bus and drove us to the outskirts of town where we searched for plant samples. My principal finished off the tour at his ranch where he showed us his beehives and harvested honey for us to taste. I experienced much anticipation and had great interest in returning to school hoping he would take us out again. This activity validated the familial knowledge I had from spending time with my grandparents growing vegetables in their fields. I had spent every waking minute outside exploring with my aunts, uncles, and brothers before starting school and in the summers. Being outside in nature was my safe space where I thrived as a human being. Figure 30 shows the native plant journal and samples of specimens I collected in the Spring of 1985 in the sixth grade.



**Figure 30. Author's Sixth-Grade Science Plant Journal, Spring 1984.**

As I grew older and moved up to junior high, social groups were long established by the friends we had made in our elementary classes. I had not been invited to any sleepovers, birthday parties, or shopping sprees by students in the smart class. Most girls

from the smart class wore designer clothes whereas my mom sewed all of my clothes. Girls were beginning to wear make-up and in band class I overheard them talking about rock bands and boys they had crushes on. I spent all of my extra time in D'Hanis at my paternal grandparents' house climbing trees, gardening, and playing basketball with my uncles.

One day at school, the girls' coach lined us all up on the track and told us we would be running four times around the track and the first seven girls who crossed the finish line would be chosen to represent Sabinal in the district junior high cross-country meet. She started us off with "on your marks, get set, go!" I was one of the first seven girls to cross the finish line. The coach handed me a permission slip for my parents to sign and directed me to return it the next day before leaving for the meet.

When I handed my parents the permission slip, we had no idea what cross country was or that it was a spectator sport. My parents dropped me off at the school and told me they would pick me up. They reminded me of the phone code we created by using the pay phone at my school where my parents instructed us to place a collect call but then hang up after the first ring. My brothers and I would do this as a signal to get picked up from school. This way we would not be charged a collect call and did not need to have a quarter every time we needed to call to get picked up. At that district cross country meet, I won first place. One of the parents of a girl from the smart class had gone to the cross country meet and approached me right after the race. In her excitement, she congratulated me, asked if my parents had attended, and continued to praise me, saying "you did so good." I said no and she replied "well they are going to be so proud of you." I was stunned because this was the first time a White person was acknowledging something I

did as amazing. I stood there speechless and uncomfortable as she asked me if I was happy. The space in which I found acceptance at times but mostly tolerated throughout my junior high and high school days was on the court and on the field excelling in sports. Figure 31 is a photograph of a track meet where I participated in 1986 showing my success on the track.



**Figure 31. Author Running a Track Event, 1985.**

### **Isabel Briana Torres**

Isabel Briana Torres was born on August 31, 1996, at 1:11 p.m. in San Marcos, Texas. I was caught on tape making an announcement that my family was complete because holding Isabel in my arms felt so complete. Isabel arrived in this world complying. Although her due date was September 3, she decided to come into this world on Labor Day weekend to give us an extra day to be released from the hospital, which



would not require her dad to take the day off from work. Figure 32 is a photograph of Isabel Torres as an infant in 1997. She loved exploring the outdoors and spent many hours creating.



**Figure 32. Isabel Torres Loved Exploring the Outdoors, 1997.**

Isabel grew up in San Marcos, Texas. As a child, Isabel loved to draw, paint, explore the outdoors, build clubhouses with bricks or old pieces of wood, read, and styled her long hair. When Isabel was about 8 years old, we took a family trip to the Half-Priced book store. As we walked into the store, she abruptly held her dad back, stood there with her little nostrils flared and a smile from ear to ear, took a deep breath in, exhaled, and said, “Dad, you smell that?” He asked, “What?” “The smell of books” sighed Isabel as she exhaled. Figure 33 shows Isabel with her sister Felina on their fort as they created art using paint and a brush.



**Figure 33. Isabel Creating Art on a Kid Fort, 1999 (Family photo).**

Isabel viewed the world through all her senses. She appreciated and celebrated the natural beauty around her. She was a creative and curious child. A couple of weeks before Isabel turned 4 years old, her dad and I were busy getting a classroom ready for the new school year. Her grandparents had come to care for Isabel and her siblings and took the children fishing. At the end of the day, we sat down to eat dinner. Isabel's grandfather began telling the story of how Isabel had caught her first fish. I expressed disappointment in having missed the big event and wished out loud I could have been a witness to her big catch. As Isabel's grandfather began to tell the story and described every detail, Isabel quietly left the table without saying a word. By the time her grandfather finished the story, Isabel walked up to me and said, "Here Mommy, I made you my fish so that you can see it too, see the mouth opens." She had designed and created a three-dimensional head allowing the mouth of the paper fish to open and close with some notebook paper, scissors, and masking tape. I was amazed that Isabel, who was nearly 4 years old, was so creative but even more impressed by her intuition to share

a visual to help those around her understand, and more importantly her desire to help people feel included in that special event. Figure 34 shows Isabel riding her bike at her grandparents' house in 1999, which was a typical activity during holidays and summers.



**Figure 34. Isabel Riding Her Bike at Her Grandparent's House, 1999 (Family photo).**

Holidays and summers for Isabel and her siblings were spent at their grandparents' house in Sabinal, Texas. Isabel and her siblings rode their bikes; played in the tree house; went to Cypress City Day, a small community fair with vendors including art, food, and children's toys held at the Sabinal city park; and experienced Texas small town living where everyone knows everyone. People waved to each other as they drove past each other on Center Street and exchanged stories about their grown children, grandchildren, or the latest town news as they checked for mail at the post office. Figure 35 is a photograph of Isabel with her siblings and their grandparents in Sabinal, Texas, in the Spring of 2000 where they spent most summers and holidays. In Figure 36, Isabel enjoys her time in the garden as she picks tomatoes during Spring Break 2000.





**Figure 35. Isabel and Her Siblings at Their Grandparents' House in Sabinal, 2000 (Family photo).**



**Figure 36. Isabel Enjoying the Garden in Sabinal at Her Grandparents' House, 2000 (Family photo).**

Isabel attended elementary, middle, and junior high school at San Marcos CISD schools in Texas and graduated from San Marcos High School at the age of 17 years old in May of 2014. She went on and attended Texas State University. She graduated in May of 2018 and was certified as a generalist teacher for Grades 4–8 at the age of 21 years old. She immediately applied to school districts in the surrounding San Marcos area and



in Sabinal, Texas. She bore the responsibility of repaying school loans. With familial support, Isabel was able to repay all of her school loan debt in 2 years. Figure 37 is a portrait celebrating Isabel's graduation from Texas State University in 2018. In Figure 38, fifth-grade students leave messages on the board on the last day of school in 2019. Figure 39 is a photograph of art and messages students have gifted Isabel in the last few years. We share these gifts almost as badges of honor.



**Figure 37. Isabel Graduated From Texas State University, 2018.**

The following is an excerpt from Isabel's autobiographical journal of her first teaching experience:

I remember smiling from ear to ear when the principal called me saying I got the job. It was summer of 2018 and I had filled out job applications to three different school districts. The school that called me back was located in a small town. The

same town I had spent most summers living at my grandparent's house. Those were some of my favorite memories. In a way, I was going back home.

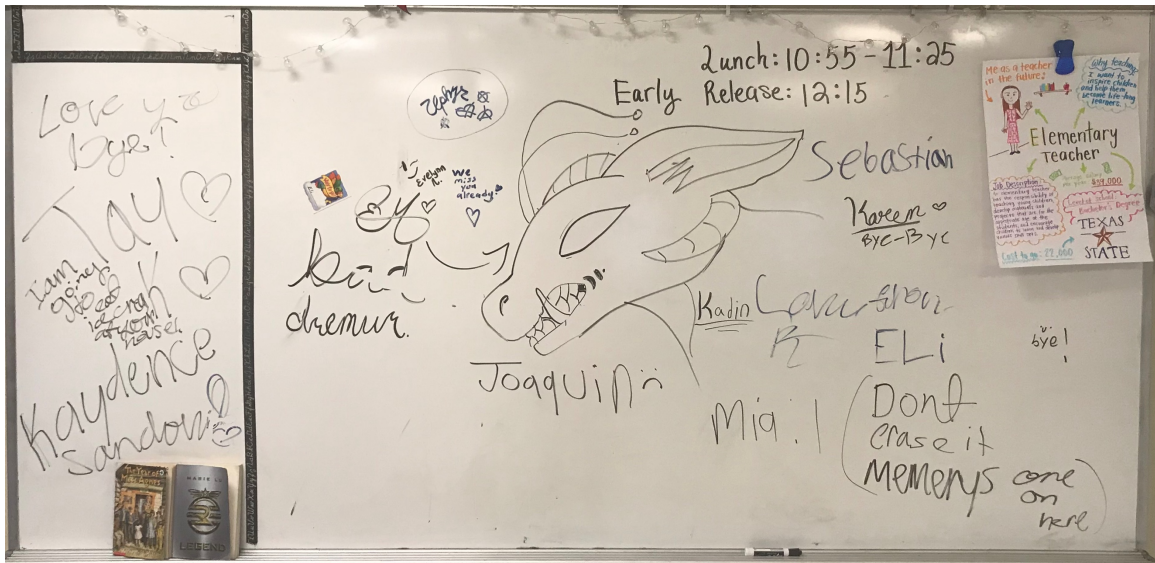
I taught fifth grade math and science my first year at Sabinal elementary school. One of my students made a comment the first day of school that pretty much summed up my personal feelings about how I viewed myself as a teacher. "How are you even a math teacher?" she complained. That night I cried. Like many teachers, I cried a lot during my first year.

By the second half of the first year, the principal that had hired me was moving schools. He was replaced by an interim principal. This man was tall, old, white and had piercing blue eyes. The kids feared him and I secretly feared him too. I was constantly drowning from the flood of work that never ended. I received an email from the new interim principal that the stack of papers on the floor needed to be moved. I thought he was just being nice when he had a shelf moved into my classroom. I would stay at the school until 10:00 PM some nights trying to keep the work from coming home. But the work did come home most days. And if I didn't bring school work home then I would carry the weight of the never-ending stress. It infected my mind. I told myself one day maybe I just won't wake up.

Recess was a time where my students and I put the weight of school aside and just had fun. We'd talk, braid each other's hair and play games. The interim principal put a quick stop to all of that. I wasn't there to be their friend he reminded me. My kids felt noticed, comfortable and happy at recess. I didn't know how to tell him [the principal] that this was one of the best times to build student relationships. I stayed quiet.

STAAR [State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness] testing is always a stressful time of the year. My first principal was let go because our scores were not where the superintendent wanted them to be. It was our first year in IR [Improvement Required labeled by the Texas Education Agency]. The stakes were high and everyone was on edge the first day of testing. I was missing a test booklet for a student. I taped a red sheet to my door signaling for help. "I thought you already took care of this!" the interim principal shouted as he stormed out of my classroom. My students looked at me in shock. I felt my eyes stinging as I held back tears. I checked the list the week before but a student was missing from my class roster without me or the counselor noticing. Five minutes later the situation was sorted. Four years later, I still feel a lump at the back of my throat when I think of that mistake.

When my fifth grade students took their STAAR math test as fourth graders in 2018, only 14% passed. When the same students tested again in 2019, 66.67% passed. For some students, that was the first time they had ever passed a STAAR test. The superintendent publicly congratulated the fifth grade team at the closing ceremony that year. The elementary school was out of IR. I should have felt happier but I didn't.



**Figure 38. End of the Year Messages From Isabel Torres' Fifth-Grade Class 2019 (Photo taken by Isabel Torres).**

It was the small moments when I felt the happiest. Moments when my students gave me pictures they drew, flowers they picked during recess, or when they finally understood a once difficult math concept. Moments when they email short messages saying I miss you four years later. Those are the moments I feel most happy. The moments that keep me moving.



**Figure 39. Artwork Students Gifted to Isabel Torres, 2018 (Photo taken by Felina Torres).**

The following is an entry from Isabel's journal as she was beginning her second year of teaching:

August 13th, 2019

Today we had convocation with the superintendent...it was long but informative. During the meeting, he recognized the 5th grade teachers for success with last year's STAAR scores. I remember the long hours that went into preparing lessons and getting materials ready and I feel happy that many students passed (some for the first time in their elementary history). I attribute much of that success toward the help I received from the math interventionist. She was a mentor for me and excellent small group interventionist for our kids. I saw her today amongst the rest of the district staff and I look forward to working with her this year. I also believe that building relationships with my students helped in the classroom because they were much more willing to work for a teacher they liked and respected than for someone that they disliked. Now that Jumpstart has begun, I get to see some of my old fifth grade students. I was touched when they walked over to hug me and greet me during lunch. There are moments like these when I remember why I went into teaching. What matters to me is not amazing STAAR results, it is about connecting with students so that there is a willingness to learn and courage to always remain curious. That is how we turn students into life-long learners.

## V. LOVE, STRUGGLES, AND RESILIENCY–THE FORMULA FOR GOOD TEACHING

In this chapter, I first visit the methods and rhythm I used to collect data, then describe the systematic way I organized and analyzed the data in a collaborative way. Then I move into storymaking as I interweave three individual voices into a collective through the ecologies of knowing. Finally, I share lessons learned through each ecology addressing the research questions.

Using guiding questions for all three *pláticas* (see Appendix F), I used the CLE axioms as a foundation to dig deep into the stories to navigate through the process or messiness of making sense of our lived experiences. During the proposal defense, one of the committee members expressed curiosity about what the data analysis would look and sound like with research partners rather than participants. At the time, I was not sure how to respond as I had not found research that would clearly paint that picture for me. After going through the process, I took my time to collect all of the data. I recorded and transcribed each *plática* before diving into the next. I sat in the data for a few days and then debriefed and organized thoughts with my research partners and my mentor, which helped inform the next *plática* and allowed for follow-up questions or modifications to the original list of questions. The level of reflection from the research partners was extensive as each one of us wrote in our journals, including Felina. She is my second born daughter who had joined us initially as a data collection assistant and emerged as a witness as she could not help but to add her thoughts as she requested to comfort her grandmother after our first *plática*. Figure 40 is a photo of Maria Guadalupe, Sara, and Isabel sharing their artifacts sitting around the kitchen table during our third *plática*.

Subsequently, she moved to a research partner as she sat and wrote reflections after each *plática*, including the following:

Felina's Plática Reflection 6/26/21

The antique ceiling fans circulated a cool summer breeze throughout my Grandmother's small, crowded kitchen. My Grandmother, Mother, and sister sat at the end of the kitchen table. For 70 years, this crowded, wooden table constantly carried a variety of objects—my Grandparent's mail, my Uncle's pre-ordered car parts, snacks that my cousins and I loved to eat during late night movies, pan, leftover ketchup packets from fast-food restaurants, and toothpicks. From its old age, the antique table creaked with any movements my Mother made as she gave instructions for their second *plática*. I wondered if the table could hear my Mother's clear and facilitating voice, predicting that today, it would carry reflections from my Grandmother, Mother, and sister's 50 years of collected teaching experience. While the table encouraged us with its cheers of creaking, I waited for the first speaker to introduce their artifacts.

My sister began introducing her artifacts which were contained in a decorated cardboard box that read, "Find Joy in the Journey." When she opened the box, colorful student letters made from construction paper and pictures doodled on college-ruled notebook paper greeted us. My Grandmother and Mother's faces filled with recognition and displayed an emotion of happiness that only teachers knew. It is interesting how quickly one witnesses the connection that a group of people share, a connection that strengthens over conversation and forms into an allegiance of change to community. It grows with tears, which I saw after my Grandmother shared her artifacts—a rusting, golden apple and a figurine of clay people holding hands in a circle. As she passed around her artifacts, she began telling the story about a student who she met years later. The student had framed a portrait of flowers my Grandmother's personally painted for her, causing my Mom's eyes to grow red with tears. She cried alongside my Grandmother because they knew the importance of building relationships with students. As the display of artifacts continued, I could only imagine what emotions the three teachers sitting at the kitchen table shared from this connection.

These emotions became palpable as they answered questions about their purpose as teachers, what an ideal teacher looks like, and how they negotiate the stories of students. The responsibility, grief, and hope circulated throughout the kitchen as the antique ceiling fans continued to whirl above us. The waves of cool air and heavy emotion flipped the pages from my Grandmother's reflection journal forward, reinforced my Mother's voice as she held the talking piece, and ran through my listening sister's unwashed hair, cradling a face deep in thought. I felt the emotions and plea for change float around me and immediately began to think about my future position as a professor. With these challenging thoughts, I could hear the creaking kitchen table reminding me of the moments I had just witnessed.





**Figure 40. Maria Guadalupe, Isabel, and Sara Sharing Artifacts Around the Kitchen Table, Second *Plática*, 2021 (Photo taken by Felina Torres).**

Each *plática* was recorded and transcribed. I relived each *plática* as I re-listened to the recording and read along to the transcripts to be 100% focused without distractions. I followed up with any curiosities that may have been sparked after each research partner responded to the scheduled questions. We made adjustments to areas that needed attention such as Isabel's concern with not knowing what artifacts she would share on the *plática* centered around community. We planned a DigiHunt, an activity where teams work together to answer questions and find representations of each question and capture them through photography (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This activity enables participants to gain understanding of local context and local ecology, which is critical to the CLE in an exploratory and collaborative way (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). I then entered the data into NVivo but it did not take long to realize the data were too nuanced, complex, and layered for a software program to pick up on connections that were being made across

ecologies and CLE axioms. I had to go old school. I took all of the transcripts and added numbered lines. I then took three different colored highlighters and began to highlight emerging themes. I noticed cross pollination from the three different ecologies. I filtered the data through a matrix that included the storymaking elements and the ecologies. I invited the three research partners to participate in a member check through *plática* and shared what I saw as emerging themes. Isabel responded that she appreciated my perspective but she did not 100% agree. She went on to share her perspective, which caused me to rethink the next steps. Instead of me writing the entire narrative, we co-wrote the stories by using triangulation of journal entries, reflections, and historical data. Then we moved into the theoretical framework in which we combined the axioms, ecologies of knowing, and the theory of change into three layers of analysis. The narratives that emerged were powerful as we moved from storytelling to storymaking through lessons learned. To be clear, I am responsible for this research but epistemologically and in the spirit of co-construction of the accurate lived experiences, I did my very best to be inclusive and followed a respectful and dignified systematic process, valuing each research partner's perspective and honoring each story. This work cannot be done in isolation or individually. The power of this work comes from working in community and unifying our voices to share a collected single sound in harmony, all in sync, three voices into a collective one sending a clearer and stronger message.

Growing up I had been taught to never go beyond the barrier of *la noria* (see Figure 5) outside my grandparents' house in D'Hanis, Texas. The barrier had been put in place to keep us safe, to keep children from falling into *la noria*. In Fall of 2018, when I was 46 years old, my father invited me to literally cross the barrier built around *la noria*



to take a closer look at the mechanics of *la noria* after I became curious in the story of why *la noria* was built. To begin the *pláticas*, my research partners and myself had to cross the barrier figuratively as we followed the conceptual framework and invited each other into a gracious space as strangers. Schools can also act as *la noria*, dangerous at times and filled with tensions yet we need *la noria* to reach the water to sustain life. Just as there are rules to keep us safe around *la noria* so there are rules needed to keep teachers safe from falling in and drowning. Teachers also require support and gracious space in schools if we are to maximize the possibilities that are embedded in our own unfinishedness. In the conceptual framework, the CLE axioms formed the foundation of *la noria*. We too embraced the CLE axioms as a *way of life* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23) as we used them to build the foundation of our understanding through storytelling, *pláticas*, and *testimonios* to dig deep through the messiness of life such as social class, race, and gender to reframe, reimagine, and reach a new life source, water.

To help us focus and leave all of our responsibilities and roles, we rented a small cottage in Rockport, Texas, an unfamiliar place for all of us. Mom, Isabel, myself, and Felina, who joined us as a data collector through taking photographs, loaded up our car with a few bags, a few groceries, drinks, and many snacks. We set maps to our new destination and began our journey.

As we began the 3.5-hour drive and got further away from Sabinal, we shared stories we had never shared before. Stories like the one Mom shared describing what it was like growing up in La Pryor. She grew up right next door to her cousin who shared the exact name as she did—Lupita Ortiz—and shared the same mailing address. The two Lupitas were very different in appearance. Mom was fair skinned, short, and very thin,

and hence was given the nickname Lupita *la chiquita*<sup>29</sup>. Her cousin was tall, had a brown skin tone, and was full figured, and hence was given the nickname Lupita *la grande*<sup>30</sup>. One day Mom and her friend Viola were walking home from school and a car pulled up next to them. They turned and saw the driver was a young man dressed up in his Army uniform. He had served in the Vietnam War and had been Viola's pen pal. During the war, every high school student was assigned a soldier as a pen pal and they would correspond by letter. While on leave this soldier had come to look for Viola to meet her in person. He invited the girls to go to the corner store for a soda pop. The girls agreed, and as they sipped on soda, Mom was intrigued with all the medals displayed on the young man's uniform. Her curiosity led her to ask questions about each medal and how it was earned. As the young soldier responded with stories of how he earned each medal hanging on his coat, Viola, who was shy, sat there, listened, and did not make too much conversation. When they finished their sodas, the soldier dropped off the girls a few blocks from their home as the girls requested. The soldier returned to serve his country and the girls returned to their school girl days.

A few months later, my maternal grandfather made a grand entrance into their home exclaiming, “¡Llego una carta para Lupita!<sup>31</sup>” Mom, puzzled, took the letter, looked at the sender's name without recognition, and replied with, “It's not mine, it must be for Lupita *la grande*.” The letter was passed on to Lupita *la grande* and she began to exchange letters with the soldier. Months went by and then another package arrived. This time it was not a letter, it was a parcel, a silk Asian dress that was made for a small petite

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<sup>29</sup> *la chiquita* Spanish translation: the small one.

<sup>30</sup> *la grande* Spanish translation: the big one.

<sup>31</sup> Spanish translation: A letter arrived for Lupita!

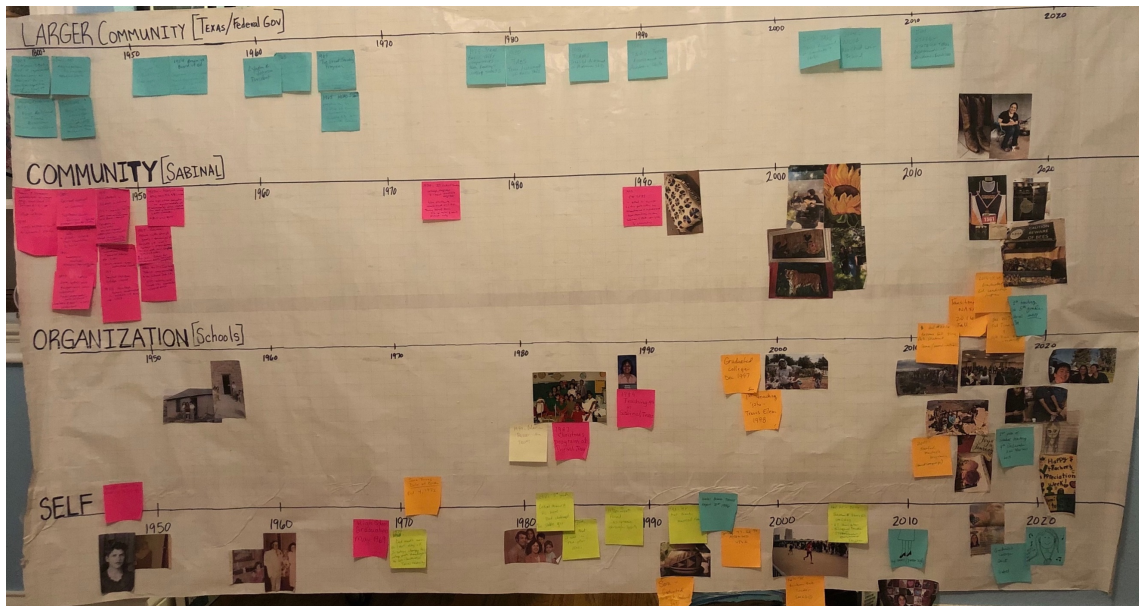
woman. Right at that moment, Mom realized the dress was meant for her! All those times Lupita *la grande* wrote letters to the soldier, he must have thought he was corresponding with the tiny girl he had met months before. As Mom shared this story, we were all on the edge of our seats and roaring with gasps and laughter. We realized Mom was a girl before she was a wife, mother, and grandmother. For the entire trip, we set aside the labels of grandmother, mother, and daughter to get to know each other as four individual women. In Figure 41, Isabel Torres shows off one of her artifacts during the first *plática* as Sara Torres and Maria Guadalupe Garcia listen in June, 2021.



**Figure 41. Isabel Torres (Left), Sara Torres (Center), and Maria Garcia (Right) Share Artifacts to Begin the First *Plática*, June, 2021 (Photo taken by Felina Torres).**

Once we arrived at our destination, we spent the first day and evening in conversation and playing games. The following day, we began with a morning walk, and then began our *plática* with three artifacts each that we had agreed to bring and shared the meaning of each item. We each created and entered this gracious space vulnerable, faithful, open-minded, and dignified. As we shared the artifacts with each other, we were

able to identify similarities but more importantly began to see each other not as grandmother, mother, and daughter rather three women learning from each other. We shared our artifacts and added a picture of them to our timeline. Figure 42 is an image of our timeline featuring CLE ecologies of knowing and our artifacts collected.



**Figure 42. Timeline Featuring CLE Ecologies of Knowing and Artifacts, 2021 (Photo taken by Sara Torres).**

Using guiding questions for all three *pláticas*, we used the CLE axioms as a foundation, which allowed us to dig deep into the stories to take us through the process or messiness of making sense of our lived experiences. Through shared *testimonios* and triangulating with journal entries and historical documents, we saw that there were common threads all shared throughout yet now we were beginning to reframe what should be acceptable and not acceptable for families, students, and their teachers.

### **Research Questions Centered Around Self**

1. What has enabled three Latinas in the same family to strive for education and higher learning?

2. What does the anatomy of critical consciousness and good citizenry look like and feel like in this South Texas community?

### ***Storymaking of Self and Becoming***

Maria Guadalupe Garcia, like her mother, was a woman ahead of her time. Although time with her mother was short, Mom experienced positive interactions that involved my maternal grandmother's skills and talents such as singing, sewing, and dancing. She also experienced a mother's love expressed through the ultimate sacrifice having left them with their father upon request. What I saw growing up under Mom and Dad's roof was that Mom was *siempre fiel*<sup>32</sup>. Mom stayed in the background supporting my dad and her children through sewing clothes, cooking meals, registering people to vote, and advocating for us behind the scenes. From the blue suit she sewed for dad when he was hired for his first professional job to sitting in the bleachers taking stats at my basketball games, Mom made sure she armed us with what we needed to be successful. She bathed and fed foster children in transition when the foster care home was closed and then would sleep with the lights on in the room with them when they were afraid to go to sleep. She participated in block walks and registered people to vote when Dad was running for school board. She got up early to cook breakfast tacos and make sandwiches for to-go lunches when we would go on road trips. Mom was also the keeper of all important items and the hub at every event we attended. She had wind breaker jackets and hoodie sweatshirts draped over her arm every weekend from 1986–1995. Her purse was stuffed with our personal belongings. Whatever we needed or requested, Mom knew where we kept it or would find it for us. She followed Dad and her children, then

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<sup>32</sup> Spanish translation: always faithful.

supported and served us through her unconditional sacrifice. Growing up was never about what Mom wanted or “we are doing this because your Mom needs this.” Growing up, decisions were always made by Dad for the good of the family as a whole, which most times included my paternal grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Mom faced many challenges in her professional career but never complained. She adjusted, and took the hostile working environment for the sake of the children she served. Even after retirement, Mom volunteered her expertise and trained a group of teachers in guided reading and helped them set up a guided reading library. Mom found purpose in serving her family, community, and God.

Having Mom as a role model helped me to do the same. I married at 21 years of age and followed my husband to his hometown and had four children by the time I was 27 years old. I earned a degree in 1997 and walked the stage 1 week after my third child, Felina, was born. I followed my husband and we both got jobs teaching at the same school. Like my mom, I worked a short time and then stayed home 2 years to care for my children before returning to teach in 2001. For 16 years, I worked as a classroom public-school teacher and dedicated many hours faithfully serving my community. I stayed long hours working in my classroom. I spent weekends organizing school events and preparing for the week ahead. When time allowed I did my best to cook special meals, helped tidy our home, and sacrificed time and money so my children could participate in violin lessons, karate lessons, soccer games, and basketball games.

As my children grew, I found myself holding sweat pants at cross country meets and my purse would be stuffed with everyone else’s belongings. In 2012, I was an established teacher with 12 years of experience. I was comfortable as a Gifted and

Talented (GT) facilitator. My school district's leaders made the decision to consolidate and assign each GT facilitator two campuses. Although I had seniority in the position and was one of two bilingual facilitators, I was bumped out by teachers who had more years in the district. This was one of those bureaucratic decisions made by the school district leaders where people in charge were afraid or too lazy to have any critical thoughts in decision making. I transitioned to teach STEM enrichment classes at my campus. I got busy creating opportunities for my students. I coordinated chess tournaments, science fairs, family engineering nights, a school recycling program, after school clubs, and a school garden with help from community members. I never hesitated to jump into a big project because I knew that when I needed it, I had the support of my family, which included a couple of colleagues, my husband, mom, dad, brothers, and four strong and talented children.

In late Spring of 2013, there was a disruption to my well-oiled, mostly silo work machine. The GT teacher assigned to my campus decided she wanted to stay on a single campus and took an intervention position at her home campus. Then I was offered the GT facilitator position back. I could not have predicted how critical and instrumental my decision to not accept the job would be for my future development and learning. In the Fall of 2013, because I did not take the job, they hired a new GT facilitator. The new young GT facilitator came by my classroom once and introduced herself as Yvette Cantu and began asking many questions. Her questions directed at me were first centered around self, then probed about my role at the school. She was curious and wanted to hear my story. Her questions at district meetings were directed to leadership. She asked about student demographics and whether the new curriculum and programming selected were

vetted. She modeled critical thinking to us. Soon her frequent visits became daily visits and we talked about family, students, community, school issues, and how I had navigated for so many years.

By the Spring of 2014, she invited and encouraged me to consider applying to the master's program at Texas State University. I hesitated because with one child in college and two in high school and one in middle school, funds were tight and time was even tighter. At her insistence, I attended an informational meeting after school but very quickly decided it would not be an option for me because I knew that although the school district was investing in us by paying for half the school tuition and books, I still had to come up with the other half, which calculated to thousands by the end of the program. I thanked the professor and school administrator who presented, excused myself, and went home. The next day, Yvette was back in my classroom and told me I was exactly what the program needed. She would know as she had been through that leadership program and now was in the PhD program, she cheerfully informed me. According to Yvette, I was the type of teacher who not only talked the talk but walked the walk. I expressed interest but vulnerably shared my financial responsibilities, and with two teacher salaries, grad school was not an option. With a big smile and positivity, Yvette began to educate me and mentor me on financial aid and assured me there would be grants and scholarships to help ease the financial burden. With a few clicks on the computer keyboard she quickly helped me set up a FASFA account and showed me the Texas State University website where I could apply for scholarships. I was amazed by the financial assistance available for people like me. I was accepted to graduate school and began in the Summer of 2014.



After the end of my first summer session, my professor, Dr. Miguel Guajardo presented me with a second invitation. If the opportunity presented itself he said, he would like for me to go all the way. I quickly responded with, “Oh I plan to finish this program,” to his reply of “yes you will finish this program, but I’m talking about a PhD” (personal conversation, Summer 2014). I was stunned and excited at the same time. This was the first time an educator thought I was smart and talented enough for a degree like a PhD. With deliberate action from my new community members, I had financial support, I had mentorship through daily interactions with Yvette, I had support at home with my husband who picked up the slack with meals, house chores, and homework with the kids, and I had a whole cheering squad that included my immediate family. This disruption in my life changed the course of my future. In 2016, after finishing my master’s degree in education leadership, I began the PhD program in school improvement at Texas State University and accepted a job as a contractor to allow myself the time and energy to transition to a full-time graduate student. Leaving my teaching job after 16 years was one of the toughest decisions I ever made but in order to grow and give more to my community I had to leave the classroom. I left knowing I was committed to returning to serve much stronger and wiser. For a year, I served as a STEM coordinator for the LBJ STEM Education and Research Development at Texas State University where I was able to plan and run a year-round out of school program. This allowed me to focus on my classwork during the day and work with my community in the afternoons and weekends.

In 2019, I was invited to take a job in California as an education specialist at NASA Ames Research Center. My family had well-established roots in Texas, leaving me to relocate on my own. My children were grown and graduate work as well as

professional work created opportunities for travel, which prepared me to branch out. I traveled back and forth every few weeks from Texas to California, working through loneliness to eventually feeling a sort of emancipation. I no longer had to ask permission from anyone to live my life the way I wanted. I did not have to ask if anyone was hungry or ask what time people had to get picked up. I ate when I got hungry, I washed clothes once a week, and I watched documentaries to my heart's content. I became a seasoned traveler and would travel to different states to present at events and conferences. My family began to visit me in California. On one of those visits Mom flew to California to see me and she was surprised and complimented my ability to easily make my way around a big city in a different state with so much independence.

In 2016, the same year I began my transformation in the school improvement PhD program, Isabel, just a couple of months shy of her 20th birthday, began to experience many firsts and was beginning her own journey to independence and hope for her future. She was awarded the Gilman Scholarship to pay for a study abroad program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. This enabled her to travel and study in Peru. Figure 43 is a photograph of Isabel at the airport just prior to boarding the plane to travel to Peru. The following excerpt is a portion of her blog posted on the Gilman Global Experience website:

By Isabel in Peru, June 8, 2016, 407 PM

**Departure and Initial Adjustments**

Greetings from Lima, Peru! My name is Isabel Torres and I am an undergraduate student majoring in Education at Texas State University. Before leaving for my study abroad program, I made sure to do some research about my host country and pack any necessities that I needed to take. Being prepared left me feeling more confident and positive about the upcoming month in Peru. My excitement and confidence, however, soon disappeared the day of my departure. I had never been on an airplane before or set foot in an airport. After saying goodbye to my family, I found myself standing alone tightly clutching my carry-on like a security

blanket and looking somewhat like an abandoned puppy. My nervousness soon turned into frustration once I realized that my family had dropped me off six hours before my flight even departed. What was I supposed to do now? Why hadn't my parents taken the time to at least feed me lunch? Feeling slightly betrayed, I found a convenience store and paid for an overpriced coffee and power bar and called that lunch. Despite everything, those six hours made me realize how much I depended on my family to get through everyday tasks. Reflecting about my experience now, I am beginning to understand that I still have a lot to learn before I can officially call myself an adult. Although those six hours seemed like an eternity, they did eventually pass and I soon found myself aboard the plane ready to journey the additional six and a half hours to Lima, Peru.



**Figure 43. Photograph of Isabel Torres at the Houston International Airport, 2016**  
(Photo published on Gilman Global Experience website:  
<https://gilmanprogram.wordpress.com/category/isabel-in-peru/>).

I stepped out of the plane around 10:50 PM and into an airport similar to the one I left in the United States. The only difference was everything was written in Spanish. Walking through the airport to the security checkpoints, I remember feeling beyond excited to experience a new Spanish culture that was different from my own Mexican heritage. Smiling, I handed over my passport and other official documents to the security inspector. Everything seemed to be in order, but

before I could take one step to leave he quickly stopped me, saying “Cuántos días se quedará en el Perú?” My mind froze and began to whirl at the security inspector’s comment. I smiled even bigger, wondering if he was just trying to make polite conversation or if he needed me to say something back in order to stamp my passport. I guess I looked pretty stupid because he soon caught on to my confusion and began to speak broken English. That was the first time I actually felt embarrassed for not knowing Spanish. Although I seemed to fit in by appearance, my lack of knowing fluent Spanish hindered me from communicating with those around me. Throughout this week, I have been experiencing similar situations anytime I order food, take public transportation, or go shopping. What really surprised me was how much I was actually being bothered by it. In certain moments, I have even wished that I looked more like a typical foreigner from the United States so that others would be more understanding. After reviewing the stages of culture shock, I found that I was making my way through stage one—being super happy and excited—rather quickly and plunging forward into stages two and three where differences lead to frustration and helplessness.

This experience led to more travel and self-discovery for Isabel. She had experienced another way of loving without marriage at a young age and starting a family. She followed her own passion and interests. Her worldview expanded as she made sense of global issues of education, race, economics, and community as she grew into womanhood. Isabel invited us to reframe our understanding of love and what it looks like to be brave.

By Isabel in Peru, July 6, 2016, 2:44 PM

**How Studying Abroad Changed Me**

Dozens of smiling faces came rushing towards us with open arms. As my own arms opened, so did my mind, and soon after, my heart. A whole minute had passed and the children were still hugging us as if we were their long lost loved ones.

How do people change? By being inspired. By knowledge and experiences. By love.

As a future educator, being able to witness my dream career lived out before my eyes is incredibly inspirational. I feel motivated now more than ever to teach English to children in underdeveloped countries. In addition, I have a newfound desire to learn my native Spanish language and a greater appreciation for my own Mexican heritage.

Living in Peru has also helped me become a more independent person. Although I still rely on others for some things, I can now proudly state that I can

cook food for myself, take public transportation by myself, go grocery shopping, and complete other adult tasks. Additionally, I am better at problem solving when presented with a difficult or stressful situation and I have become even more open-minded than ever before. Furthermore, I am more aware of my surroundings and can ask for directions and find different places. For the first time ever, I actually feel like the young adult that everyone around me sees.

Reviewing my experience as a whole, studying abroad has given me a new perspective of how to view the world I live in. Before, my world was centered around me and the people that I interacted with. A successful life was one in which I landed a secure job, had a beautiful home, and became married with a family. Now, I see the world and all the people in it. I appreciate the life I have and know that I can live without all the luxuries and material things. I am blessed to have a roof over my head, nutritious food to eat, and a safe community to live in. To me, a successful life is one that involves helping people in need and inspiring them to follow their dreams.

As my month here in Peru comes to an end, I look forward to sharing my study abroad experience with others and using the knowledge and skills I have learned back home in the United States. Until my next adventure, ciao!

A lesson that emerged from the data was that my mom was the matriarch. She did not have to tell me do this and that, she modeled what a humble servant looks and acts like. She did not have to be in the spotlight to shine. She is full of talent and is not afraid to share her talents, whether it is through putting others before her, sharing her talent as an artist, protecting children, or volunteering her time in different spaces. She was the ideal public servant as a mother, as a teacher, and as a community person. How could we not follow this model? My mother was engaged in what Freire (1998) described as “right thinking” (p. 39). Mom was engaged in what Freire, in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, referred to as words incarnated in example, meaning “those engaged in right thinking know only too well that words not given body (made flesh) have little or no value. Right thinking is right doing” (Freire, 1998, p. 39). We were set up from the beginning to become the women she modeled and become teachers! It was in the cards even if we thought this

might not be the best for our children. Teaching continues to be a noble profession in our minds, practices, and visions of a new world.

### **Research Questions Centered Around Organization**

3. What does an educational politic that is transformational look like?
4. What are the conditions of educational environments experienced by three Latina teachers in a South Texas community?

### ***Storymaking in Organization***

When Isabel got the call that she had landed the job in Sabinal, Texas, I was happy for her. All of her hard work was going to finally pay off and she would have the opportunity to share all of her global experiences and expertise with children from my hometown. She was homegrown and learned from her grandmother and myself what sacrifice a teaching career would require. She was well-prepared having graduated from Texas State University, an institution known for having an outstanding education department. Then the realization that there was a deep-rooted history of inequity, racial tension that my mother and I had experienced quickly moved me to a feeling of reservation. Still, I had built life-long relationships in Sabinal schools and my mind went immediately to that sixth-grade science field trip and I imagined how Isabel could make a difference if she happened to face similar conditions. After all, it had been 25 years since Mom and I had been in Sabinal schools. I was hopeful that time, access to resources and technology, and a diverse group of administrators that has gone in and out had changed Sabinal schools for the better. Figure 44 shows Isabel at the door of her classroom just before her first year of teaching began.



**Figure 44. Isabel Standing at Her Classroom Door After Setting Up Her First Year of Teaching, 2018 (Photo taken by Sara Torres).**

Some things, however, we have found are systemic problems. Placing teachers in situations they not prepared to take on is something that all experienced. Conditions in public schools of not having enough time, lack of resources, teaching to the test, and corporal punishment still fester like an *herida abierta* (Anzaldúa, 1987), an open wound. We each had memories that forced us into compromising spaces such as the time mom had to de-escalate traumatic events caused by an emotionally disturbed student in her first year of teaching. I did my best to teach a very specific need such as the deaf-ed students without formal training and Isabel experienced being moved to a grade level she was not certified to teach. Why would the system set us up to do this to ourselves, our students, and our community? Where is the trust, faith, and dignity we had committed to as teachers and public people? The following is from Isabel's journal entry September, 2021:

Six weeks into my fourth year of teaching was the first time I ever felt like a first year teacher all over again. I feel lost, hopeless, overworked, stressed, exhausted and overall just unhappy. This year, I was assigned to a second grade classroom with zero qualifications. I have a 4-8 Generalist certification with three years of classroom experience teaching fourth and fifth grade math and science. The majority of my students are categorized as beginning readers and scored below the national average in reading and math according to the new data program our school is implementing. Next door, the other second grade teacher was given the academically higher class. "It was the luck of the draw" she told me one day during recess.

The challenge I face is not having the knowledge or experience of how to teach a child to read. I have five non-readers. I am learning as I go but the work involved is massive. I walk into the school every day an hour early and leave two to three hours after everyone has left. I take work home every weekend and I hate it. I carry a constant umbrella of stress over my head and it is wearing me out slowly. "Don't stress" says the kinder teacher. "Just remember that you're only responsible for one year of their growth." I love when people tell me not to stress. I don't know what they expect me to say back. Thanks! Now I don't feel stressed anymore.

I had a break down last week on Wednesday. I cried in front of my colleagues and assistant principal. It's funny how people start to listen only after you cry. I wish I was stronger and more confident. I wish people could understand how much I care about my kids and how much I still want to quit all at the same time. I am drowning. As I cleared snot from my nose and wiped the tears from my eyes, I listened to the assistant principal ask, "How can we help you?" in an overly high cheerful voice.

Teaching is a unique profession that can be described best as an oxymoron. We start our careers as student teachers and end as wise fools. We are the most genuine fake people you will ever meet. Our classrooms of controlled chaos are filled with little angelic devils that we absolutely love to death. We are people that can start a conversation by saying, "I graded papers until 2am yesterday" and end with "but I love my job."

I am a teacher. Listen to my quiet roar.

A lesson that emerged from the data was that through her genealogy, Isabel was set up in a positive way by my mother and myself to become a teacher. Isabel entered the teaching profession at a further stage of pedagogical preparation, world travels, and global awareness than her grandmother or her mother. Isabel entered the profession of teaching in what Freire said is a capacity to be critical stage (Freire, 1998). This



continuity “happens when ingenuous curiosity, while remaining curious, becomes capable of self-criticism” (Freire, 1998, p. 37). The reasons we went into teaching included to serve our community, to build relationships, to create safe spaces for learning, to nurture, and to love. There is a misalignment with what we modeled for Isabel and the reality of teaching in public schools, which is that the systems in schools do not reciprocate with the same love. Deficit thinking in teaching is a designed process for manufacturing inequalities and keeping certain teachers, kids, and families where they are or thinking they need to be.

### **Research Questions Centered Around Community**

5. What systems of support, beliefs, and actions enable the achievement of a family’s hopes and dreams to come to life?
6. What are the stories when the historically observed become the observers?

### ***Storymaking in Community***

As we collected the data and moved through the research and prepared for the next *plática*, Isabel shared a concern that she did not really know what she would share for the next one because she did not get out into the community very much. She had attended a couple of football games at the request of her students but had not had time to explore Sabinal. She had lived in Sabinal for 3.5 years and expressed her only connection to the community at large was through meeting some of the parents of the students in her class. Intuitively, Isabel’s reality prompted us to make a modification to our data collection methods and strategies, and we added a DigiHunt (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) to begin our third *plática*. This activity enables participants to gain an understanding of local context and local ecology, which is critical to the CLE in an exploratory and

collaborative way (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). In Figure 45, Maria Guadalupe, Isabel, and Sara discover the Sabinal Public Library during their DigiHunt on their last *plática* as they explored the community of Sabinal, Texas.



**Figure 45. Maria (Left), Isabel (Center), and Sara (Right) Discovering the Sabinal Public Library, 2021 (Photo taken by Felina Torres).**

We spent the morning driving by the first two houses my parents rented when I was a child. We drove the route I would walk to school every morning. As we parked the car and got out, we walked and found all of the community assets of downtown Sabinal, including the court house, the only medical provider, a bank, several churches, a couple of restaurants, and a few antique shops. One community asset that stood out was the Sabinal Public Library. The library was closed on the weekends due to lack of interest. Mom was the only one who had knowledge of its existence because she had taken a quilting class there years before but had not realized they had renovated and changed the set up inside. The large windows allowed us to see the antique decorative ceiling tiles, wooden floors, a few computers, and the many books on the selves. We read all the flyers posted on the glass double doors that contained information on knitting club, crocheting, and a coding class. We ended our DigiHunt at *la noria* located at my paternal

grandmother's house and invited Isabel to get a closer look at the mechanics of *la noria* and shared the story of how it was created.

Returning to our *plática* around the kitchen table, we all chimed in excitedly on the possibilities of using the public library as a classroom teacher, as a NASA education specialist, and as a retired educator. Isabel was motivated and thought of adding *cafecito*<sup>33</sup> which, in her opinion, would create the perfect learning environment.

That evening, after a long day of conducting research, I suggested we go get flavored shaved ice. I remembered Rhianna's Shaved Ice & More stand as selling the yummiest icy sweet treats that always seemed to hit the spot on a hot afternoon or warm summer evening. This was certainly the hub of Sabinal as families lined up and waited for each shaved ice treat to be assembled to perfection. Rhianna, the daughter of a classmate of mine, was working the stand to save money for college. Rhianna's mom introduced me as her classmate who had moved to San Marcos, Texas, and was now in a postgraduate program and working in California at NASA. As her mother and I caught up, Rhianna assembled one icy treat after another for customers who stood in line and chatted, laughed, and excitedly chose a flavor off the menu. When it was my turn, I made my way to the window and ordered my icy treat. Rhianna had one question for me, "How long did it take you?" she asked. I replied with "I'm sorry? How long did it take me?" Rhianna said, "Yes, how long did it take you to get to where you are?" (Personal conversation, Summer 2019). We had begun a continuous *plática* that centers around goals and dreams. Now a year and a half later, as I stood in line for my favorite icy, I asked community members what they knew about the Sabinal Public Library. One

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<sup>33</sup> Spanish translation: coffee.

community member mentioned they did all their printing there. Another community member confirmed that the library existed but everything a person needs to know can be found on Google using a cell phone, thereby eliminating the need to visit the public library. In Figure 46, Sara, Sofia, and Maria Guadalupe pose with their icy treats they bought at Rhianna's Shaved Ice & More right after having conversations with community members in July 2021.



**Figure 46. Sara (Left), Sofia (Center), and Maria (Right) at Rhianna's Shaved Ice & More, 2021 (Photograph taken by Rhianna Lopez, owner and operator of business, for social posting).**

Lessons that emerged from the data are that community members, specifically young people like Rhianna, are watching and listening. We need to create healthy spaces

as young people from the community work to make their hopes and dreams come true. As a full-time student and entrepreneur with great ideas, these ideas should have been birthed from school but they were not. On the contrary, Rhianna has succeeded despite her school experience. Rhianna was fortunate to have a family that supported her brilliance. Another emerging lesson is that something is very wrong when a young teacher like Isabel, who lived in Sabinal for over 3 years, could not share her gifts or talents with her community because she was the first one at work and the last one to leave. The problem is not that Isabel was ill prepared, as she graduated with honors from a university well known for its teacher preparation program. The emerging problem is that Isabel is so overwhelmed by the structure and business of school that she does not have time to share her gifts with the rest of the community as a public person and citizen in the community. Additionally, the business the school provides is perpetual by never responding to the root issues, but persistently moving them forward or putting people in compromising situations where they need to work more to catch up. This is what happened to Mom when she was not prepared but had to respond to the violence of a special education student in her classroom, and what happened to me when I took over the responsibility of teaching deaf students as the first-year teacher by default because I could not say no and not because I was prepared. Leaders who make up the institution are consistently setting teachers up to do work they have not been prepared to do, much less have the skills needed to teach the children in their classes.

Community spaces like the public library that are not used need to be rehabilitated to become the hub of activity in the community. What does the community of Sabinal need to see in that library to draw them in? How can we intervene and be deliberate about

connecting the public school to the public library? How are these two not working hand in hand and heart to heart? I submit myself to question as Freire described in the *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), without research there is no teaching. Like Freire,

We teach because we search, we question and submit ourselves to questioning. We will research because we noticed and therefore intervene. In intervening, we educate and educate ourselves. We do research as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what we discover. (p. 35)

Our commitment in this work in the ecology of self is to continue to raise future teachers who are empathetic, loving, caring, and emboldened and who operate in a different consciousness. Teachers who operate in a consciousness that is respectful, generous, committed to creating a safe space for learning authentically and to be brave. At the ecology of organization, we are committed to reframe the work of teachers and the systems needed to enable them to do their work in schools, including teaching, learning, and leading in school based dynamic-critical pedagogies. These pedagogies include those of the CLE and *la noria* in my grandfather's backyard. This *noria* keeps giving because the family tends to it and its local ecology. We need to provide the same attention to our teachers, students, and schools. At the ecology of community, we need to invite teachers as public citizens to act, move, and build in community and development and demand the dignity the profession and the teachers themselves need as we build a democracy that was promised by the architects of the constitution in this country.

## **Summary**

After systematically conducting the data analysis, I presented the emerging themes to my research partners and invited them to collectively think through the emerging themes. Isabel appreciated my perspective but flipped it and troubled me ontologically by moving and vacillating between the ecologies of self, the organization,

and the community. It would have been easier to paint a picture of love, commitment, and success as we have all experienced because there is much joy and fulfillment as we collect the badges of honor in the form of art drawings, emails, hugs, and revisits from students. I made a commitment to storymaking and that meant accurately amplifying the voices of all the members of our research team. The two people who are at the top of the pedestal for me are Mom as my mentor and Isabel, who is my inspiration. The profession has not always been a happy one. How do we reconcile this when we have this commitment to community? There has to be something that emerges from this work that is grounded in imagination, inspiration, and hope.

## VI. LA NORIA IS LIFE

This autoethnographic study captured the conditions of education through an intergenerational perspective spanning 66 years in public schools in Texas. We captured what each of us have navigated and negotiated in our pedagogical space and documented a level of insight that contributes to the ecologies of self, organization, and community (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). We journeyed through *pláticas*, *testimonios*, and storytelling and filtered through the anatomy of story and the CLE axioms that led to storymaking. The following stories are truths that have been revealed.

### **Tending *La Noria***

There is a profound responsibility in keeping *la noria*. *La noria* that is not tended to properly can provide contaminated water, causing health issues and corrosion to pipes. Our school system operates the same way. If we do not wake up and tend to our school systems, they become contaminated and unsafe. I proposed three narratives throughout the *pláticas* of this study that were confirmed as we completed this study. The first is that the school system is in trouble. By in trouble I mean that what we experienced is not an isolated case, especially Isabel who out of the three is currently in the classroom teaching today. She is the smartest and most prepared of the three of us because she learned from us, we shared knowledge and resources with her, and she came in with many talents including an expanded worldview that grew from being a world traveler. We have had conversations about Latina women who have experienced similar systematic conditions and have left the profession. Once people find out you are a teacher the first question is, “How is that going?” Followed by, “How do you like it?” Then, “Yeah, I know someone who tried it and did not like it, left, and now is working at \_\_\_\_\_” (you fill in the



*blank*; personal conversations, Fall 2021). The second is that educators, leaders, and community partners need to revisit our values and processes if we are to produce functional citizens. This includes all characters in the story referring to children, their families, and teachers. Mental health for students and teachers is a serious issue that we tend to shy away from talking about. Why? Why do we need to break down crying in public before administration starts to listen? When Isabel was asked to take on a lower grade, she reminded her administration of the grade levels she was certified to teach and was reassured that it would not be a problem. She was praised by her administration who told her she had some of the best lesson plans in the school and that they needed a teacher who could help figure out what was happening in that grade level because many students were being moved on to the next grade level not having the reading skills to be considered to be on grade level. Isabel did not complain or push back on anything her administration asked her to comply with. Just recently Isabel was informed that she has to be certified to teach the grade level she currently is in and has until the end of the school year to take the exam and complete the Reading Academy program that is a recent state requirement. The Reading Academy program was implemented a year ago in Sabinal, the training was done during school hours, and experts from the TEA were brought in for support. This year, teachers have to complete it on their own time without the extra support. The third is that conditions and priorities are *revolvidos*<sup>34</sup>. The findings in this study and decisions made are not aligned with happiness and raising healthy kids. There is something terribly wrong when providing water in a cup after recess is considered spoiling children or when directing a young energetic teacher not to play with children on

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<sup>34</sup> Spanish translation: all mixed up.

the playground because it will spoil them and teachers are not to be there to be friends with their students. We do not see the different impacts, conditions, or causes—either we do not see it or do not want to see it. We need to reframe and make systems or make systemic disruption. Isabel, my mother, and I are not the issues. This is a systemic issue in that we all have been asked to take on jobs we are not certified or trained to do. We can do them because we know how to learn but the added burden of this disruption is all consuming and disruptive in all aspects of life, including the classroom. We all have spent long hours without compensation. If you want to grow professionally and grow in a good qualitative way, you have to leave the job. This certainly begs the question of what kind of inspiration is that? Figure 47 is a photo of the new addition to the Sabinal Elementary School building, indicating things have progressed in some ways.



**Figure 47. Sabinal Elementary, 2021 (Photograph taken by Felina Torres).**

### **Drawing Life From La Noria**

There are three narratives that emerged from this study. The first is that Mom is the matriarch. I have always been a daddy's girl since the day I was brought home from the hospital. Before car seats existed, I laid in my mother's arms as Dad slowly and carefully drove us home, parked the car, and then ran around the car, opened the door, took me into his arms, and left my mom to make her own way up the flight of stairs leading into the small apartment, where my mom found him cuddling with me. My dad and I have had a special bond throughout the seasons of my life as I held him up on a pedestal. What has emerged from this study is that I am also a mommy's girl. Mom made sure to tell me the story of how much my Dad loved me from the moment they brought me home. I realized that Mom has been *La Noria*, providing nourishment all my life. She is the voice that advocated and was not shy to speak up and lead efforts in campaigning, participated in community events, and was our advocate when we faced injustices at

school. Mom role modeled what a committed, loving, caring, and effective community teacher looks like, sounds like, feels like, and acts like as a public-school and community teacher. I had not seen or heard the full impact Mom made with students, their families, and in her community until we began *pláticas* and she shared her biographical journal and artifacts with us filled with stories of her teaching experiences. I was also reminded when I went to pick up tacos at Nora's on a trip to Sabinal. As I pulled up to the drive-up window, the owner asked for a name for the order, I said Lupe she asked again and looked into the car and when she saw Mom in the passenger seat and said, "Oh, Ms. Garcia, *nosotros la conocemos como*<sup>35</sup> Ms. Garcia." I found out Mom had taught one of the restaurant owner's children. The respect for her as a teacher was immediate. Mom was the original skilled, talented, caring, high achiever as she navigated through spaces that were unwelcoming and she still persisted and was successful as *la maestro del barrio*<sup>36</sup>. My mother was the family's teacher!

### **Digging Deeper**

The next two emerging themes will require further research to fully be confirmed. The first is that Isabel does not know what a skilled, knowledgeable, and talented teacher she really is. The institution is so good at testing the humanity that Isabel is questioning her own commitment and her own expertise. It angers and saddens me at the same time when I think of the students who need expert certified teachers to teach them at their particular grade level and at the same time the many hours and amount of money Isabel has invested in preparing for each grade level she has taught without compensation for

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<sup>35</sup> Spanish translation: we know her as Ms. Garcia.

<sup>36</sup> Spanish translation: the neighborhood teacher.

the extra time worked, resources, and materials she has invested. Isabel made the comment, “I feel like I was set up to fail” followed up with, “I’m beginning to think they don’t want me to teach in Sabinal. I think they really want me to leave.” The fact that a teacher with so much talent, love, and commitment is feeling this way is devastating to our profession. The system is not reciprocating the same love to Isabel. Isabel came home just about every weekend with her bags filled with a school computer and papers to grade. We, a room full of educators, have sat around our kitchen table listening to her stories from week to week. Some were endearing and made us laugh, and others made us angry as we saw how Isabel was being used and swallowed up. Figure 48 is Isabel’s bulletin board inspired by imagining *cafecito* in the Sabinal Public Library during our DigiHunt during our third *plática* held in July of 2021.



**Figure 48. Isabel’s Bulletin Board Inspired by Imagining Cafecito in the Sabinal Public Library, 2021 (Photograph taken by Isabel Torres).**

The next theme is that we need to use community assets. I knew there was something special about the community of Sabinal but I could not name it. I even trusted the community so much that we sent our youngest son to finish high school there when

he encountered serious unhealthy conditions in his own high school. There is something special about the community of Sabinal. It is filled with people who are willing to share their talents and skills even after years of not being connected. As an education specialist at NASA, I was privileged when I picked up the phone and called my principal, Gerry Shudde, and asked him to be our subject matter expert on bees as my undergraduate students in California created a bee habitat in the NASA maker space. There are so many possibilities waiting for fruition at the Sabinal Public Library. The space is underutilized and has so much potential to become the hub of the city.

### **Commitments and Recommendations at the Ecology of Self**

Mom has so many gifts to share. As an artist and former bilingual teacher, she could start an art club at the public library centered around culture and identity formation. This could be a space for children to explore their community and history through art. I have made the commitment to offer STEM sessions featuring hands-on activities for families at the Sabinal Public Library. I will plan for students in a way that they can see themselves working at NASA or STEM-based professions in the future. Isabel needs to think strategically and make decisions on her next steps. She plans to take a mental break for a school year. She needs to find the people she wants to study with and take what she has learned and use the good as inspiration and the learning moments as inspiration to advocate for healthier learning spaces. She will continue to visit her grandparents, friends she has made, and return for homecoming so she can stay connected to former students.

### **Insights and Recommendations at the Ecology of Organization**

Teacher preparation programs need to develop future teachers to have a strong understanding of self. Preservice teachers need to know what ethics, morals, and

convictions they hold on to, where they come from, and how they engage them in practice. Preparation programs must prepare preservice teachers for what they will be facing in school systems and provide tools and coping mechanisms to publicly push back on the system with dignity and purpose. Forming partnerships between universities and public schools using CLE pedagogies (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) would give preservice teachers the opportunity to work with students in public spaces in authentic and meaningful ways. These interactions will build relationships through power in people and place and connect people across race, gender, class, and time.

Principals do not set teachers up to fail when they appropriately place teachers according to certifications, provide training, and match the skills and needs of their school community. Healthy community learning environments for teachers and families are created when social-emotional and mental health are tended to and teachers are even provided with a mentor teacher from the school or community.

### **Recommendations at the Ecology of Community**

As a community, we need to bring community assets like the library to be the nucleus of the brain of the whole community. We need to conduct a micro equity audit at the library and create an assets map. This will enable us to create meaningful, authentic, and relevant knowledge in our community that is transformational. The public school and the public library should be working hand in hand and heart to heart. In order for this to happen, we need to rehabilitate the two spaces by taking the assets map and interweaving the assets to build a real powerful narrative of assets in identity formation and family support, and redefine what commitment looks like, feels like, and sounds like to youth and families. Figure 49 shows Maria Guadalupe, Isabel, and Sara finding joy in the



middle of a rain storm during the DigiHunt. Figure 50 is a photograph that shows Isabel taking a closer look at *la noria* during the DigiHunt.



**Figure 49. Maria Guadalupe (Left), Isabel (Center), and Sara (Right) Finding Joy in the Middle of a Rain Storm During the DigiHunt, 2021 (Photograph taken by Felina Torres).**



**Figure 50. Isabel Taking a Closer Look at La Noria, 2021 (Photograph taken by Felina Torres).**



### *La Noria de Sueños y Esperanzas*<sup>37</sup>

In connecting the conceptual framework of *la noria* to the research, the relationships and conditions seem to align. It seems a complicated construct like *la noria* originates from bad conditions but the will of the people enables them to prevail. *La noria* is constructed with organic matter, tools, and people; a system is put in place to protect people from falling in or throwing trash down *la noria* as to not contaminate the water. These guiding posts, parameters, and safety mechanisms have been informed by the love for family and the ecosystems surrounding *la noria*. It is this local knowledge that has allowed *la noria* to maintain multiple generations of families with water to sustain their needs. The same axiom and theory apply to public schools. Even in the midst of a storm there is hope and joy as the photo in Figure 49 shows the three research partners laughing in a rainstorm during the DigiHunt (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). There is hope for good teaching that comes from good systems. Good systems are necessary to sustain community. We need to ensure the systems we build in schools produce life and do not stifle it. Just as *la noria* provides water to sustain life so must our schools. As educators, we need to keep checks and balances with our morals, ethics, and beliefs and remember that we are working with human beings for the public good. Therefore, we need to stop dehumanizing our profession. What we know is that the storymaking continues and will continue for as long as time exists. I do believe there is hope for the future as long as we keep pushing back on school systems in dignified ways. Maybe my granddaughter Sofia can fix what we have not been able to but I, my research partners,

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<sup>37</sup> La Noria de Sueños y Esperanzas: Spanish translation of The wishing well of hopes and dreams.

and my community are not willing to kick this can to the next generations. It is with this commitment and love to our children and grandchildren that we do this work in schools and community. *¡Si se puede!*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> ¡Si se puede! Spanish translation for Yes, we can do this!

## **APPENDIX SECTION**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **Key Terms**

- Ambiguity- importance of tolerance of ambiguity. “In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101).
- Critical consciousness- the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to take action (Freire, 1998).
- Cultural wealth- the collection of assets recognized that helps to define the culture of a region or group (Yosso, 2005).
- Plática- an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiring, storytelling, and storymaking that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation. Pláticas are meaningful conversations (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 88).
- Storymaking- the process of making sense of our lived experiences and re-authoring them with others (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 88).
- Storytelling- a way of engaging people by adding an emotional component but also evoking our hard-wired predisposition to process the information faster and more holistically (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 66-73).
- Testimonio- “challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363).

## APPENDIX B

### TEA Academic Report 2016- Demographics

#### TEA Academic Report of 2016-2-17- Demographics

District Name: SABINAL ISD  
County Name: UVALDE  
District Number: 232902

#### Texas Academic Performance Report 2016-17 District Profile

Student Information	District		State	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Total Students:	502	100.0%	5,343,834	100.0%
Students by Grade:				
Early Childhood Education	0	0.0%	13,821	0.3%
Pre-Kindergarten	17	3.4%	223,833	4.2%
Kindergarten	32	6.4%	371,682	7.0%
Grade 1	22	4.4%	395,568	7.4%
Grade 2	33	6.6%	408,582	7.6%
Grade 3	36	7.2%	412,581	7.7%
Grade 4	29	5.8%	410,882	7.7%
Grade 5	36	7.2%	400,016	7.5%
Grade 6	29	5.8%	398,017	7.4%
Grade 7	37	7.4%	396,001	7.4%
Grade 8	42	8.4%	392,231	7.3%
Grade 9	45	9.0%	431,486	8.1%
Grade 10	51	10.2%	395,057	7.4%
Grade 11	57	11.4%	363,655	6.8%
Grade 12	36	7.2%	330,422	6.2%
Ethnic Distribution:				
African American	2	0.4%	673,291	12.6%
Hispanic	386	76.9%	2,802,180	52.4%
White	108	21.5%	1,499,559	28.1%
American Indian	2	0.4%	20,701	0.4%
Asian	0	0.0%	224,834	4.2%
Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	7,687	0.1%
Two or More Races	4	0.8%	115,582	2.2%
Economically Disadvantaged	333	66.3%	3,155,117	59.0%
Non-Educationally Disadvantaged	169	33.7%	2,188,717	41.0%
English Language Learners (ELL)	25	5.0%	1,010,168	18.9%
Students w/ Disciplinary Placements (2015-2016)	3	0.5%	74,803	1.4%
At-Risk	69	13.7%	2,685,789	50.3%
Students with Disabilities by Type of Primary Disability:				
Total Students with Disabilities	58		467,611	
By Type of Primary Disability				
Students with Intellectual Disabilities	25	43.1%	207,935	44.5%
Students with Physical Disabilities	12	20.7%	102,283	21.9%
Students with Autism	**	**	58,444	12.5%
Students with Behavioral Disabilities	11	19.0%	93,082	19.9%
Students with Non-Categorical Early Childhood	*	*	5,867	1.3%

## APPENDIX C

### Story Matrix

### Analyzing stories through the axioms of CLE and through the anatomy of a story Matrix

Stories of Self

	Axioms of CLE work				
	<i>Plática on Self</i>				
	Learning as leadership & action	Conversation & dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy	Local knowledge & action	Encourage crossing borders	Assets & hope
Anatomy of a story					
Heart Meaning to the story	Re-authoring ourselves as agents of advocacy for students and social justice				Being selfless, love for family, strong women
Navel Central component that feeds and balances the story				Courage to speak up-Song	
Hands Massage and help mold values, ideas, and rhythm of the story			Commitment, dedication, generosity		
Legs Represent longevity,		Building Relationships with students			

impacting others		on the playground- “they keep coming back”			
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### Stories of Organization

	Axioms of CLE work <i>Plática</i> on Organization				
	Learning as leadership & action	Conversation & dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy	Local knowledge & action	Encourage crossing borders	Assets & hope
Anatomy of a story					
Heart Meaning to the story			Nurture, Respect		Caring & Love
Navel Central component that feeds and balances the story		Creating safe space for students			
Hands Massage and help mold values, ideas, and rhythm of the story	Authentic Learning				
Legs Represent longevity, impacting others				Building Community	

## Stories of Community

	Axioms of CLE work <i>Plática on Community</i>				
	Learning as leadership & action	Conversation & dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy	Local knowledge & action	Encourage crossing borders	Assets & hope
Anatomy of a story					
Heart Meaning to the story				Building relationships builds community	
Navel Central component that feeds and balances the story			Young people are watching and listening		
Hands Massage and help mold values, ideas, and rhythm of the story	No time No resources Corporal Punishment				
Legs Represent longevity, impacting others					Community assets/Library

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent



#### INFORMED CONSENT

**Study Title:** They Don't Like Me, They Tolerate Me: *Tres Maestras* Narrate the Public School Experience in a Rural Texas Community

**Principal Investigator:** Sara L. Garcia-Torres

**Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:** Miguel A. Guajardo, PhD

**Email:** slt95@txstate.edu

**Phone:** (512) 667-8943

**Email:** maguajardo@txstate.edu

**Phone:**

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

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about the education conditions of an intergenerational perspective spanning 66 years in public schools in a rural Southwest Texas town. The information gathered will be used to plot-critical events on a timeline and analyze stories through the ecologies of knowing, self, organizations, and communities the anatomy of a story. I am asking you to participate because your stories and worldview are essential to understanding an intergenerational perspective of a Latina educator in a rural Southwest Texas town.

#### PROCEDURES

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

- Three *pláticas* focused on the three ecologies of knowing, self, organization, and community
- Plotting critical educational and life events on a historical timeline
- Share journal entries and reflections of experiences as educators

You will complete the first *plática* over a weekend while staying at an Airbnb to provide a neutral public place. The *plática* will be between 45 min -1 hour and focus on self, discussing our lived experiences as women. The second *plática* will take place in a predetermined mutual family members kitchen taking 45 min-1 hour with a focus on lived experiences as educators in Texas public schools. The third *plática* will take place at a public place in Sabinal, Texas. The duration of the *plática* will be between 45 min -1 hour. The *plática* will focus on our lived community stories. Each session will be documented by taking photographs, audiotaped, and transcribed to make sure *pláticas* are documented accurately.





## RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

In traveling together to the first *plática* location there may be unforeseeable road hazards that are out of my control. In the event that some of the survey or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Texas State University student, you may contact the University Health Services for counseling services at list (512) 245-2208 or email [counselingcenter@txstate.edu](mailto:counselingcenter@txstate.edu). Services are free to registered students although the number of sessions allowed may be limited. The following list includes providers who are available on a sliding fee schedule should the need arise for research partners/participants who are not students. Uvalde County: Uvalde County Mental Health, [hillcountry.org](http://hillcountry.org), Phone: (830) 278-2501, Location: 328 Crystal City Hwy, Uvalde, TX 78801. Medina County Community Mental, Phone: (830) 426-4362, Location: 728 18<sup>th</sup> St, Hondo, TX 78861; Bexar County Counseling Services, Website: [bexarcounycounseling.com](http://bexarcounycounseling.com), Phone: (210)838-3470, Location 4243 E Piedras Dr Suite 226, San Antonio, TX 78228.

Participating in this Texas State research study may involve increased risk of exposure to easily transmitted infectious diseases due to in-person interactions with the research team. The study team will follow local regulations and institutional policies, including use of personal protective equipment (PPE), environment hygiene and social distancing guidelines according government regulations and policies in effect. If you have any questions or concerns, please discuss them with your research team.

## BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide will contribute to a better understanding of Latina *maestras'* (educators) lived experiences as students, teachers, and community members of a small rural Texas town. This study will help provide a face to the literature of identity formation, provide a worldview of the struggles and celebrations as educators, and situate the community of epistemology and traditional research in communities that are seldom visited as viable and important lived experiences. This study will allow community members to see themselves within a more global context and at specific periods time. This research will help improve perspectives of the Mexican American student, teacher, and community member.

## 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 members of the research team 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.

Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

## PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will receive a complimentary stay at a relaxing Airbnb as well as complimentary meals on days of all three *páticas*. You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

IRB approved application # 7822



Page 2 of 4

**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 volunteer 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, Sara Garcia-Torres : (512) 667-8943 or [slt95@txstate.edu](mailto:slt95@txstate.edu).

This project 7822 was approved by the Texas State IRB on June 16, 2021. 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](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - ([meg201@txstate.edu](mailto: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 \_\_\_\_\_

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**Printed Name** of Study Participant

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**Signature** of Study Participant

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**Date**

---

**Signature** of Person Obtaining Consent

---

**Date**



## APPENDIX E

### IRB Approval



In future correspondence please refer to 7822

June 15, 2021

Sara Torres  
Texas State University  
601 University Dr.  
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Sara:

Your application titled, 'Public School Experience in a Rural Texas Community- An auto-ethnographic study.' was reviewed by the Texas State University IRB and approved. It was determined there are: (1) research procedures consistent with a sound research design and they did not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk. (2) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (3) selection of subjects are equitable; and (4) the purposes of the research and the research setting are amenable to subjects' welfare and produced desired outcomes; indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and participation is clearly voluntary.

In addition, the IRB found you will orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (4) The compensation for participants is all meals provided during the plática sessions. The first plática will take place at an Airbnb and transportation, room and board will be provided for participants.

**This project and IRB SOP are approved at the Exempt Review Level  
In person face to face research activities are authorized**

**Check the IRB website frequently for guidance on how to protect participants. It is the expectation that all researchers follow current federal and state guidelines. Requirements to have an approved IRB protocol and an approved SOP are in place prior to implementing in person research with human subjects.**

2. An amendment should be submitted in Kuali if there are changes to a SOP. The institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments, please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subject's review, your application, and this approval are maintained in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

Report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. Notify the IRB of any unanticipated events, serious adverse events, and breach of confidentiality within 3 days.

Sincerely,

Monica Gonzales  
IRB Compliance Specialist  
Research Integrity and Compliance  
Texas State University

CC: Dr. Miguel Guajardo

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS  
601 University Drive | JCK #489 | San Marcos, Texas 78666-4616  
Phone: 512.245.2314 | fax: 512.245.3847 | WWW.TXSTATE.EDU

*This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University-San Marcos, a member of The Texas State University System.*

## APPENDIX F

### Protocol for *Pláticas*

*Pláticas* are a nonthreatening way to respect and value all members of the group, “an intellectual dialogue” (Guajaro & Guajardo, 2007). The *plática* will engage two participants/research partners who are my mother, my daughter, and myself. A total of three *pláticas* will take place in three different public locations. All *pláticas* will be documented through audio recordings and through collection of photographs.

The first *plática* centers around the self is intended to help us move from our familial relationship to help get to know each other as independent women. Research partners will be asked to bring three photographs or artifacts that best represents who they are as women.

- Begin by filling in a timeline with events and life experiences that focus on who we are as women
- Share and plot photographs on the timeline
- During the *plática*, the researcher and research partners/participants will answer the following questions:
  - What makes you happy?
  - What is your purpose?
  - Describe a time when you felt the most powerful.
  - What is your job?
  - When did you decide to be a teacher?
  - Why do or did you decide to teach?

In preparation for the second *plática* that centers around organizations, research partners/participants will be asked to begin to reflect on their careers as teachers. They will share three photographs or artifacts that best reflects the career they currently have, had or aspire to have.

The second *plática* will focus on organizations and our experiences within them.

- Begin with filling the timeline with significant events in our teaching careers
- Share and plot photographs on the timeline
- During the *plática*, the researcher and research partners/participants will answer the following questions:
  - Where was your first teaching job?
  - What is your purpose as a teacher?
  - What does the ideal teacher look like and sound like to you?
  - How do you negotiate the stories of children you teach or have taught?

In preparation for our third and final *plática* that will center around community, research partners/participants will be asked to begin to reflect on the community, experiences in the community, and community assets. Research partners/participants will be asked to reflect on life in the community. They will share photographs or artifacts that reflect the relationships built with community members and / or assets and share stories in learning about their community.

The third *plática* will focus on communities and our lived experiences within the community.

- Begin with filling the timeline with community assets and significant relationships built
- Share and plot photographs on the timeline
- During the *plática*, the researcher and research partners/participants will answer the following questions:
  - What are experiences within the community that have been a major influenced your interaction with students?
  - What are some experiences that have helped utilize community assets?
  - How have you connected with the community?
  - How are some ways that you feel the community can actively contribute to students' school experiences?

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