

AHORA PUEDO RESPIRAR

NOW I CAN BREATHE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
with a Major in Adult, Professional and Community Education  
December 2021

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this hard work and journey to all those who stepped out in front to ensure generations of us would know our roots, our history, our culture, our traditions, and our rituals. It was your forward thinking that brought me here to this exact moment in time. To all Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin Alumni, their families, and friends who have supported this work since 1982, this PhD belongs to you all. You have been deemed the ambassadors and trailblazers of our Mexican American culture for nearly 4 decades and have forged forward to share what you have learned with all the world. To all former and current Board of Directors, it is through your guidance that Teatro has been able to grow and offer so many high quality programs to our community and surrounding communities. Thank you. To our current Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin students, we pass the torch to you to keep illuminating the path for future generations for the next 40 years and beyond. To my parents and Auntie, you saw a need in our community and took action and I am grateful you did. This selfless work has helped thousands of students, parents, and families. I will forever be proud to share this story of teaching, learning, and leading with our community and with all those who want to learn more about the organization. Sulema, thank you for your listening ear throughout all these years. Thank you for that extra push you gave on the days where I was weary and thank you for all the drinks, snacks, and meals you left at the table for me while I worked. It was your love and servant's heart that helped me push through. To my sisters, Christine and Veronica, we had the great fortune of experiencing Teatro on many vast levels that many have not.

We were able to hear our parents and our Auntie plan the phases of Teatro, we danced, we stuffed memos in envelopes, we helped sell tacos for fundraisers, and helped hold up fundraisers signs, we have given back through monetary donations, teaching, leading, and sharing of our knowledge with students at Teatro but also within the walls of the many different schools within Seguin ISD, St. James Catholic School, local preschools, and nursing homes. The De La Rosa sisterhood runs deep and I love you both. To Abram, Sofia, Isaac, Joana, and J, I pass to you *la vela* of knowledge, culture, reflection, and desire to make changes in the world you live in long after I am gone. Do not be afraid of the hard work, it will all be worth it in the end. Last, Grandma in heaven, thank you for all your love and guidance. I know you are smiling down on me and are proud of me. Make sure to strike up the music of *Juan Gabriel* and *Rocio Durcal* for me on graduation day and dance up there with all our *antepasados*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Queridos Antepasados,*

*Un humilde agradecimiento a todos.* A humble thank you to you all. I am who I am today because of your sacrifices and your willingness to do the hard back breaking work to ensure future generations would be successful. Your prayers for generations of us have been heard and we owe our life journey to this exact point to each of you. Our roadmaps may be different but what is tried and true is the foundation you laid for us all. This foundation was built on *la familia*, hard work, dedication, service to others, and how we impact the world in a positive way.

You traversed and navigated many worlds (figuratively and literally), which taught me the power of being resilient, the power of sheer will, and the power of forging forward even when I feel as though I cannot breathe. Because of you all, I can finally breathe, *mis queridos antepasados* you can finally breathe. I know from your teachings, not one time did you take for granted the simple and complex action of breathing. I am sure at times you held your breath to brace for tragedy, you held your breath when welcoming a new life into the family, and even held your breath to endure all life had in store for you. *Ya pueden respirar* and breathe with ease. Your hard and good work is recognized by the unveiling of this community and scholarly work.

This work has been centuries in the making and has manifested in many ways. This work will display the importance of understanding the story and stories of people and their community, organizations within their community, and the education provided

by public pedagogy. It is because of you that I am able to share how an organization that was co-founded and is run by your future generations has affected not only me but also numerous people and generations of *la comunidad*.

*Descansen en paz.* Rest in peace. You have carried the heavy load, you have laid down that load and have propped me up on your strong resilient shoulders so I can shout to the heavens and to future generations ¡*Si Se Puede!*

Con mucho cariño,

*Yvonne M. De La Rosa*

To Dr. Miguel A. Guajardo, Dissertation Chair, thank you for all your time, your words of encouragement, the sharing of knowledge, and all the Zoom meetings we had since March 2020. You have guided me in providing insight into how public pedagogy as it relates to teaching, learning, and leading can record the growth and change within the community.

To my Dissertation Committee, thank you for your time and expertise. Your feedback has been invaluable and one I will carry with me for eternity.

To my research partners, thank you for entrusting me with your stories and sharing space with me during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your resilience, resistance, and perseverance will live on forever and will serve as a beacon of light for future generations.

To all those reading this body of work, those who are on the journey to a higher education degree, or those considering the journey, the long and winding road to a PhD is

full of unexpected twists, turns, ups, and downs. Stay steady, stay faithful, stay true to yourself, and always remember your *antepasados* are at your side. On the long nights and very, very early mornings they sat with me at the table while I worked, whispered words of support, or brushed my neck while they breathed life into me to keep on going. I knew they were there! I could feel them pacing around the table and at times it felt as if they were pensive. At other times they were sitting at the table drinking *cafecito* and laughing with one another keeping me company. At other times they were *vigilando con velas*. Know that every little thing you do they recognize and the hard work will pay off in the end.

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## ABSTRACT

This research explored the struggle and resiliency of a Mexican American community in Central Texas as they attempted to maintain, teach, and celebrate their Mexican American roots, customs, knowledge, and celebrations through community education. The research employed critical ethnography to explore history and its impact on self, organization, and community; it also interrogated agency within racially contentious times. Additionally, this research provides insight into public pedagogy of teaching, learning, and leading as a means to remember and record the growth and change within the local Mexican American community. The community learning exchange theory of change informed this dynamic-critical place-based conceptual framework. The study's framework was a hybrid that included: theory of change, public pedagogy, community cultural wealth, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community education through the arts. The research design was grounded in critical ethnography, social cartography, anthropological life, and history mapping. From the research findings, five tenets of critical consciousness emerged and are presented through community voices (i.e., stories from research partners, *el vestido*, and visual artifacts), giving breath and description to each tenet. The five tenets were (a) critical awareness of self; (b) deficit thinking and resiliency (racism and segregation); (c) organic process of an emerging public pedagogy: teaching, learning, and leading; (d) community education; and (e) cultural pride and sustainability. Implications of the research include growing your own leaders which provides an entry point for Mexican Americans to share the ways in which community

education has and can uplift a community through teaching, learning, and leading. Last, an implication for the resiliency of the Mexican American community reflected that Teatro has been able to crisscross spaces of contention, peace, and harmony. This research invites the reader to breathe together.

## **I. EL MAPA VIAL, ROADMAP**

I want to acknowledge that no one in the last 100 years has experienced conditions such as a pandemic while researching. COVID-19 has emerged as a symbol in this research work. It has unveiled the challenges, racism, inequalities, and inequities in our hometowns, in our states, in our nation, and around the world.

There is definite importance in understanding the stories of people and their communities, organizations within their communities, and the education provided by public pedagogy. I am a product of how an organization's use of public pedagogy, theory of change, community cultural wealth, and culturally relevant pedagogy can influence an individual. Before beginning a discussion of how an organization can influence individuals, it is important to cultivate an understanding of the ecologies of knowing, which include self, organizations, and communities (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). I first share my own personal story along with a poetry piece, followed by the foundation of the cultural arts organization that was the focus of my study, problem statement, statement of purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, rationale and significance, researcher positionality, and organization of the study. Now to breathe air into my personal story so readers have a better understanding about me.

### **Breathe**

For many years, I questioned who I was as a human, what positive impact and contribution I would make to humanity, and if I was doing everything I could to help elevate the Mexican American community. At a young age, I possessed leadership qualities that were well beyond my years. I was a leader in the classroom, within the schools I attended, on the basketball court, on the marching field, in my folklórico class,



in my mariachi group, at church, and at home. I can recall my grandma telling me I had a special ability to unify the family, a deep commitment to my community, and the gift of being able to teach. My grandma knew being an educator and cultural worker was my destiny. She knew the work would be hard but was always there *para apoyarme* (to support me), even after her passing, through the hundreds and hundreds of *consejos* (pieces of advice) she engrained in me while she was on her earthly journey (see Figure 1). Her *consejos* to this day flood my memory and are part of my roadmap.



**Figure 1. Union of Where Life Enters Through the Spirit of the Wind. Papel Picado** from Teatro's Mural inside Teatro's Cultural Arts Center

My grandmother, Victoria P. Betancourt, daughter of Dora and Teodulo Perez, was a devout Catholic who started praying from the minute she woke up, even before placing her feet on the ground. She prayed throughout the day and before she went to sleep. She prayed for generations past and for generations and generations of family members to come. At her core were the values of God first, family, and community. She owned the cafeteria that fed Del Monte plant workers and hired some of the best cooks in town, who happened to be her family and friends. She was fair, helped when help was needed, and never questioned the cards that were dealt to her. She became a widow at the young age of 40 and never remarried. She said, "You only love one man," and did not want her children to be raised by a man who was not their father. She was strong in her

convictions and compassionate toward all. She was quiet yet strong and fully praised the large and small accomplishments of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. My grandma was a storyteller and made sure she shared stories about family that taught us life lessons, that made us laugh, and that gave us hope.

### **¿Quien soy yo? Who am I?**

I am Yvonne Monica De La Rosa.  
I am a granddaughter, daughter, sister, auntie, and friend.  
I am an educator for all who seek knowledge.  
I hail from to the *Purépecha* indigenous people from Monte De San Nicolás, Guanajuato, México.  
My *antepasados* are from *España*, France, *México*, *Tejas*, and the United States of America.  
I am a proud Mexican American living my truth.  
I am a cultural worker and administrator who helps preserve the Mexican American culture.  
I am an educator who seeks to educate the colonizers who tried to erase my native language, my culture, my traditions, my ceremony, my spirituality, my whole entire being.

¡*Yo soy educada!* What does that mean you might be asking yourself?

- I am humble.
- I am generous.
- I am kind.
- I show respect.
- And I give of myself in service to others.

That is the definition from my *antepasados*.

They valued not only formal education and knowledge but also what it truly means to be educated through expressions that highlighted the way the family rears their children.

I am a PhD scholar who will advance the hard work of my ancestors and will continue to solidify the importance of people, place, and communities.

I am a fighter for *justicia*.

I do not back down from conflict, I fight it head on.

I do not settle and I seek to right the wrongs that have plagued *nuestra comunidad*.

I am a storyteller who weaves the teachings of my *antepasados* with the ever changing 21st century.

I am a visionary.

I am a creative.

I am able and willing to do all the hard work.

I am all of the above and more  
BEFORE  
What you assume about me by my looks  
OR  
perceive what you think you know about me.

¡Yo soy Yvonne Monica De La Rosa!

### **Fundacion (Foundation)**

Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin (Teatro) was the brainchild of Vickie and Homero De La Rosa and Maria Guadalupe Betancourt. In their youth in México, Vickie and Maria curated shows that incorporated the arts and people came to watch their shows in the courtyard behind their home. Their brother, José Betancourt, dubbed their shows, “*El Teatro de las Locas*” (Theatre of the Crazy Girls). Decades later, Vickie and Maria were educators in the same school district (Seguin Independent School District [ISD]) and noticed the lack of students’ acceptance of their own Mexican American cultural roots. Maria, who loved her country of México, did not quite understand what had happened in Seguin for this lack of acceptance to occur. Through research, focus groups, church, and their experiences as teachers in the school system, Maria and Vickie learned about the injustices that happened to the Mexican American adults and children in the Seguin community. This information helped solidify their need to incorporate an organization such as Teatro. On July 9, 1982, Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin was incorporated as a non-profit arts organization with its mission being to promote a better understanding of the Mexican American culture through the teaching, study, practice, and performance of the arts. Teatro not only supports the cultivation of the performing arts for children and adults, it provides adult education opportunities through artistic workshops and guest lecturers on various topics; supports and sponsors Hispanic artists who, in turn, serve as artists in education; and provides opportunities for individuals to

develop their artistic talents. These mission-driven activities and goals are instituted to support and strengthen *la comunidad* (the community), build confidence, propagate cultural pride, foster the acceptance of different cultures, and to help *la comunidad* move past the structural inequities placed upon them.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mexican American families have historically been marginalized socially, educationally, and economically as well as devalued as culturally relevant members of the community. Some examples are being asked to stop speaking their first language (Spanish) while at school, having a plot of land in the city where they were “allowed to live,” and also making it difficult for Mexican American owned businesses to stay open due to policy and code changes. The Mexican American community has struggled to maintain its identity as it relates to language, cultural symbols, celebrations, and traditions. As Montejano (1987) stated:

The bonds of culture, language, and common historical experience make the Mexican people of the Southwest a distinct ethnic population. But Mexicans, following the above definition, were also a “race” whenever they were subjected to policies of discrimination or control. (p. 5)

The implications of the colonial struggle related to language, cultural symbols, celebrations, and traditions have caused multiple generations to rupture their relationships to their elderly relatives because of the loss of language and connections. Due to the void of a resilient cultural agent, this cost has social, cultural, and economic implications. I designed this research to help make sense of the implications of this historical dynamic while also exploring the strategies used by those in the Mexican American community to maintain their identity. As stated by Zamora (2000):

Members of mutual aid organizations saw themselves as important members of their communities. They viewed their decision to contribute to the moral uplift

and material advancement of fellow Mexicans as the most responsible and honorable responsibility that anyone could assume. (p. 100)

Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin is a member of a mutual aid organization in the Mexican American community within Seguin and surrounding areas. They have contributed to the moral uplifting of a community through the sharing of culture, traditions, and folklore through the arts.

On July 9, 1982, Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin was formed to help members of a small Central Texas town learn more about their culture and also instill cultural pride among the children and adults of the Mexican American community. It was formed to help promote a better understanding of the Mexican American culture through the teaching, study, practice, and performance of the arts. At the time Teatro was established, there was a visible void of Mexican American pride and cultural understanding in the community. The story that encapsulates the void of Mexican American pride and cultural understanding starts with a local school administrator extending an olive branch toward acknowledging and understanding some of the cultural traditions of his students. His effort was acknowledged but was misinformed.

In the late 1970s, the principal of one of the local Seguin middle schools hosted an event in the gymnasium for *Diez y Seis de Septiembre*. In an attempt to acknowledge, educate, and share cultural pride, he invited a Flamenco group to perform for the students to celebrate México's independence from Spain. However, the principal missed the mark by not fully understanding the historical context of the Mexican celebration and brought a Spanish Flamenco group to perform—students of all races and ethnicities could be seen laughing, making fun, and heckling the dancers.

In addition to the lack of awareness and obvious cultural incompetence, segregation and racism played a role in creating a void in this small, Central Texas town. Through preliminary research and stories from friends' grandparents and parents, it was brought to my attention that the Mexican American community was forced to stop speaking their native language in public, and in school they were ridiculed because of the type of food they brought for lunch (e.g., tacos, tortas, gorditas) and were called names such as spic, beaner, and wetback, to name a few.

### **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

The capacity to think and act critically and creatively about who we are, who we think we are, who others say we are, and how we choose to engage helps to shape our daily existence and the health of the institutions and organizations that work in the service, sustenance, development, and transformation of society (Anzaldúa, 1999; Freire, 2005; Gonzalez, 2001; hooks, 1994). As a reflective practitioner and committed researcher seeking to understand and create sustainable change in the community, it is my responsibility and deliberate choice to study Teatro's development. Through this research, I explored the struggle and resiliency of the Mexican American community in Central Texas as they attempted to maintain, teach, and celebrate their Mexican American roots, customs, knowledge, and celebrations through community education. Through this research, I explored the history; impact on self, organization, and community; and its agency within racially contentious times.

In addition, I aimed to provide insight into public pedagogy as it relates to teaching, learning, and leading as a means to record the growth and change within the community. Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin is the vehicle for cultural sustainability and

helps youth and families engage in a process of identity formation through public pedagogy, as well as community building and development. Though cultural remembrance and sustainability are necessary for future generations to remember and celebrate their ancestors, they are not sufficient when looking at the formations and sustainability of communities that have been historically, culturally, and spiritually colonized. This dissertation journey was not only about documenting what local people have lived, it was also about mapping a public pedagogy that is emancipatory and liberating in thought, culture, and spirit of a community that is trying to survive in a colonial world.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the inquiry and data collection process.

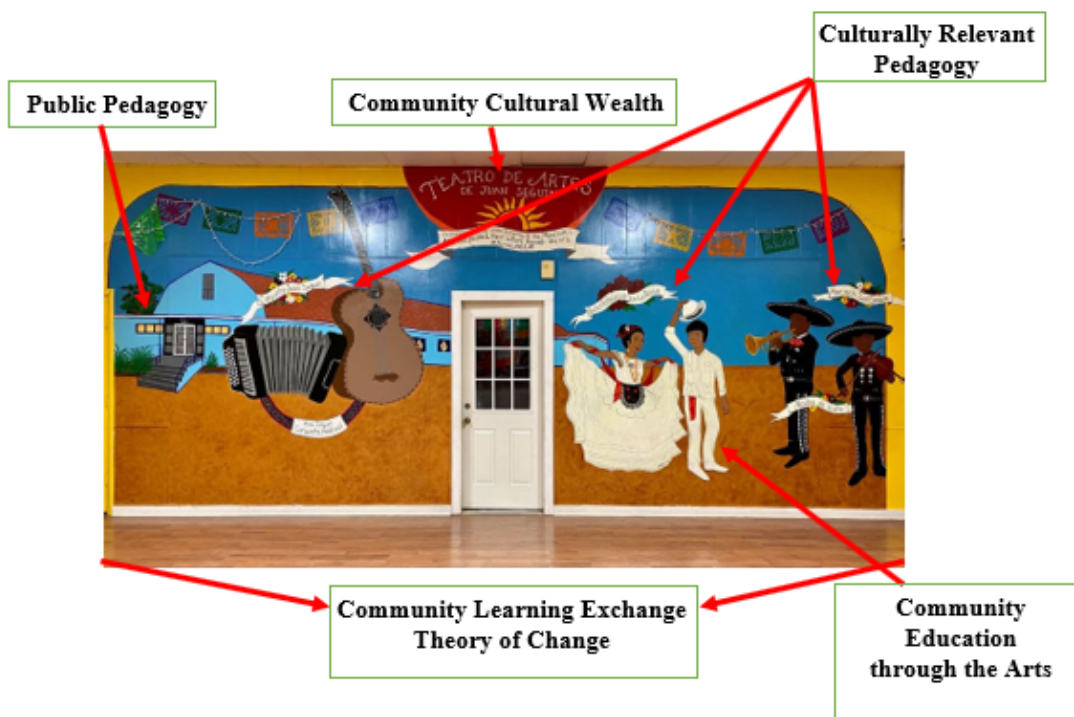
1. How has the history of segregation, assimilation, and (anti)racist practices and conditions shaped the present reality in Seguin, Texas?
2. How have cultural incompetence and a lack of cultural fluency and understanding of the Mexican American people and culture created a void and invitation for a public pedagogy in the Seguin community?
3. How does Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin use community education to address social, political, educational, and institutional change in this Central Texas community?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I selected several theoretical frameworks to inform an emerging conceptual framework to guide the research and that I believe are vital to understanding the work and phenomenon of Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin (see Figure 2). These frameworks

include theory of change, public pedagogy, community cultural wealth, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community education through the arts. No one theory embodied the who, what, when, where, and how of the phenomenon so I generated a hybrid model to better inform my research. To frame and make sense of a multi-layered cultural experience, public pedagogy, politically contentious reality, an epistemology of action, this research, and the emerging stories of *la comunidad*, we have to weave together myriad theories, epistemological paradigms, and ontological realities. *Como las trenzas que hacia mi mami y mi abuela* (like the braids my mom and grandma would make), I took this rhythm from my ancestors and the way they weaved our hair from a wild set of tentacles to a well-organized and aesthetically woven masterpiece that respected its integrity, natural form and generations that came before us, it gave coherence, pride, and presence. This was my goal in constructing a hybrid that best captured the totality of the work into a coherent set of stories that gives context, (re)presented the labor of love to a community, and led to the emergence of a theory of change that can help sustain the work. The goal was to use the voices of the people to best inform their/our story, context, and future.





**Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study.**

### ***Community Learning Exchange (CLE) Theory of Change***

The community learning exchange (CLE) theory of change places value on relationships, assets, and places. Building community through such a theory of change and action anchors the work of the CLE and portends a community-building approach that moves away from community development based on deficit thinking models toward asset-based culturally responsive models (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) stated,

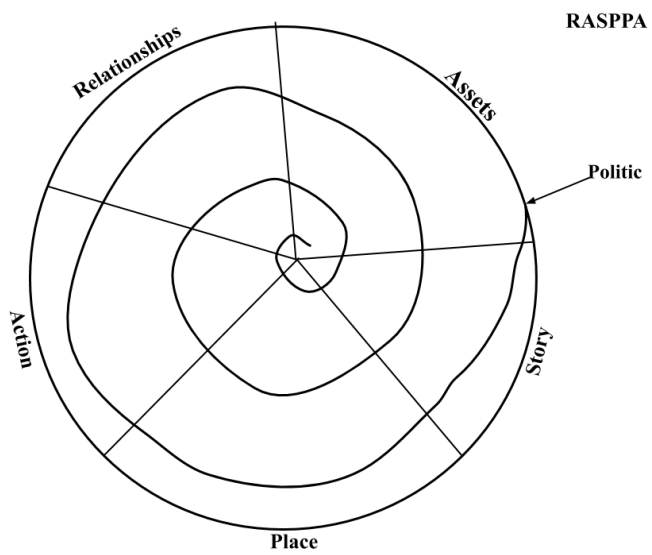
Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents. Household by household, building by building, block by block, the capacity mapmakers will discover a vast and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills, few of which are being mobilized for community-building purposes. (p. 4)

The CLE theory of change weaves a collection of layers that interact with elements that are foundational to both understanding and engaging in the process of community change. Storytelling begets trust, trust begets healthy relationships, healthy relationships beget effective organizations, and effective organizations beget strong communities. Purposeful investment in building relationships is foundational to this work (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33).

The Relationships, Assets, Stories, Place, Politic, and Action (RASPPA) model (see Figure 3) holds the theory of change together. It weaves the fundamental principles of relationships, assets, stories, places, politics, and actions with three ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 36-37). From its inception in 1982, Teatro has been weaving the principles of relationships, assets, stories, places, politics, and actions (see Figures 4 through 6). Without the three ecologies of knowing, Teatro would not be where it is today. When reviewing the ecologies of knowing through tapestry (see Figure 5), I share that the ribbon around my heart represents self love and understanding of my cultural roots and heritage. The bottom of the sleeve represents an opening for my hands to slide through to begin the cultural work not only for myself but for all those who are seeking knowledge and understanding of something bigger than themselves. The ribbon and ruffle around my waist encircles the core of my body, which represents the organization and how it has affected many at the core of their very being. Last, the lace on the bottom of my dress represents the beauty of a community that has been steadfast for the past 39 years in making sure youth, adults, and families had a place to learn more about their culture, roots, customs, and traditions.



**Figure 3. Ecologies of Knowing.**



**Figure 4. RASPP.**

### Ecologies of Knowing through Tapestry



Figure 5. Ecologies of Knowing Through Tapestry.

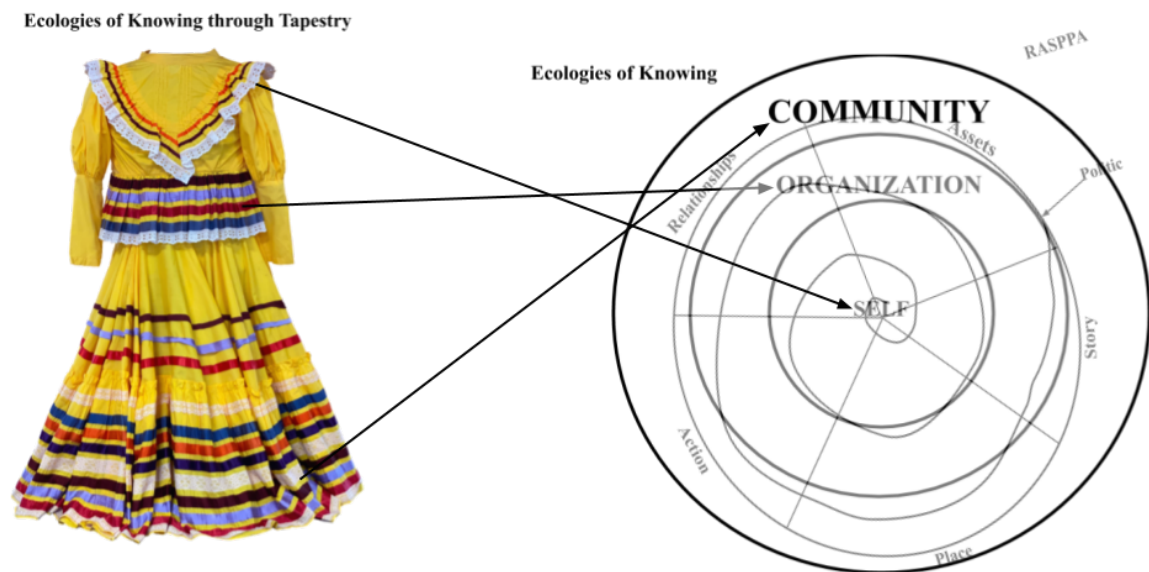


Figure 6. Overlay and Weaving of Ecologies of Knowing and RASPPA.

In 1984, when I was 10 years old, my Ballet folklórico class was learning dances from the State of Jalisco. At the time, Teatro and the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa were

only 2 years old and just starting to build their costume repertoire. In order for us to be able to perform traditional dances from Jalisco, we had to have authentic costuming. *Vestuario* at that time were extremely expensive so several Teatro Board Members took to making the costumes (see Figure 6). My *vestido* (see Figure 5) was made by my mom, Vickie De La Rosa. I can recall going to Hancock Fabrics with her to pick out the color of palencia broad cloth and recall her saying, “This yellow will look very pretty against your golden brown skin.” I remember her carefully picking the color of ribbon that would best fit the dress and I vividly remember her putting each color of ribbon up against the yellow cloth and asking what I thought. As any 10-year-old would, I sometimes said yes and sometimes said no. My mom listened to my responses and I felt as though I too was taking part in the making of my own dress. I can recall watching her sit at the kitchen table for hours making this dress. I remember seeing her make the top and then the skirt. I remember seeing her ever so gently place the lace on the vestido and hearing the slow rhythm of the sewing machine to ensure the lace was sewn on straight. I also recall hearing that same slow sewing machine rhythm as she placed 250 yards of different colored ribbon on the dress.

Once the dress was complete, my mom had me try it on and perform the dance called “La Negra” to see how the faldeo looked. She immediately saw the dress was extremely heavy for my waist to hold and that is when she added suspenders to the skirt. The suspenders crisscrossed behind my back and buttoned to the inside front of the skirt. Those suspenders were a life saver for my waist but also ensured the dress was secure when I would make my spot turns.

Fast forward 36 years, this same exact dress (see Figure 7) has now been passed on to nearly four generations of students. This dress has exchanged hands, exchanged homes, and traversed this community and it still serves its purpose. The purpose of this dress is multilayered—it clothes students in the tapestry of the Mexican American culture; it shows vision, artistry, craftsmanship, perfection, and love; it provides a way to showcase cultural pride; and one of the most important things is it makes the person wearing the dress feel pretty.



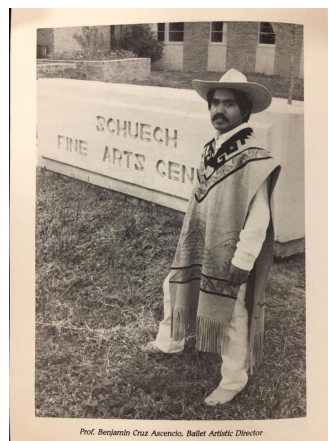
**Figure 7. Yvonne M. De La Rosa in the Jalisco Dress 1984.**

### ***Public Pedagogy***

Public pedagogy is a theoretical construct focusing on various forms and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling practices; in institutions other than schools, such as museums, zoos, libraries, and public parks; in informal educational sites such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces, and the Internet; and in or through figures and sites of activism, including “public intellectuals,” grassroots social activism, and various social movements. Public pedagogy theorizing and research is largely informed by the contributions of cultural studies; accordingly, public pedagogy is concerned with both the socially

reproductive and counterhegemonic dimensions of pedagogical sites that are distinct from formal schooling. (O'Malley et al., 2010, p. 697)

Teatro uses pedagogical practices such as teaching dance and playing musical instruments, lectures, celebrations of Mexican American traditional holidays, and more to address what is missing from formal education. Local public intellectuals (see Figures 8 through 12) and educators are at the forefront of keeping the culture, cultural practices, and traditions alive within *la comunidad*.



**Figure 8. Profesor Benjamin Cruz Ascencio, Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa Artistic Director (Suchitlan, Comala, Colima, Mexico). Teatro Archive.**



**Figure 9. Ballet Folklórico Workshop Teachers (Laredo, TX, Austin, TX, San Antonio, TX). Teatro Archive.**





**Figure 10. Three Generations of Moreno Musicians Come to Teach at Teatro. Teatro Archive.**



**Figure 11. Valerio Longoria Sr. “Genius” of Conjunto Music and Rodolfo Lopez Teach Conjunto Music at Teatro. Teatro Archive.**



**Figure 12. Alphonso Rincón, Historian, Artist, and Public Pedagogue. Teatro Archive.**

### ***Community Cultural Wealth***

Yosso (2005) defined community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (p. 77). Cultural wealth places communities of color as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 106).



Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin values the holders and creators of knowledge who are within their own community and also invites others from outside the community to share their capital to help address and resist racism along with other forms of oppression. Teatro has been grounded in community cultural wealth and will continue to seek capital from within the community.

### ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Culturally relevant pedagogy (coined by Ladson-Billings in 1995) places emphasis on the needs of students from various cultures. Ladson-Billings (1995) specifically defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

A pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order. (p. 160)

Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin uses culturally relevant pedagogy through its teaching of participants of all ages. Teatro emphasizes academic success with all its participants, is grounded in cultural competence, and helps develop its participants to challenge the current status quo of social order.

### **Community Education Through the Arts**

The weaving of community education through adult education, art, and the Mexican American experience is complex. Butterwick and Roy (2016) stated there are adult educators and community activists and artists working in a wide range of settings who promote the use of the arts as ways to communicate individual and collective perspectives and provide opportunities for exchanges in multicultural and pluralistic societies.

Creative and arts-based forms of expression, many believe, are powerful forms of adult learning, engagement, and community building because they engage the imagination (see Figure 13). As Greene (1995) articulated:

Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” . . . imagination . . . permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (p. 3)

A dynamic and vibrant pluralistic democracy involves communicative practices in which the voices of all citizens are included and considered important (see Figure 14). Some groups and individuals, however, who are positioned on the margins (because of structural inequalities) have had a harder time expressing themselves and being heard. The margin, as Donoghue (1983) stated, is also “the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn’t have a place for and mostly seems to suppress” (p. 129). In 1982, in response to the lack of communicative practices in the community where Teatro was established, a void was unveiled and the organization was positioned on the margins.



**Figure 13. Engaging in Learning to Play Mariachi Music at Any Age. Teatro Archive.**



**Figure 14. Author Circle and Reading at Teatro.** Teatro Archive.

### **Rationale and Significance**

The significance of this research is to share with others the ways in which public pedagogy, community cultural wealth, culturally relevant pedagogy, and theory of change can influence a community. This research is important because there is a need to inform citizens, communities, and policymakers of the ways in which change can be enacted using the story of an organization that has been viable for 39 years. The map of this organization can transcend rural and urban organizations and institutions and shed light on the importance of community education through the arts and adult education. This research will affect rural communities and was designed to address the lack of research on these theories in a rural community setting. These communities will not only be influenced through practice; they will see the benefit for years to come.

Culturally relevant teaching is closely linked to K-12 education, and in recent decades, educational research has strongly supported the incorporation of culture and cultural identities into adult learning environments (Rhodes, 2018). A review of literature revealed limited research studies use the full tenets of culturally responsive teaching as their theoretical framework but noted many adult educators espouse the need to create inclusive learning environments and, therefore, seek to understand learners' cultural

identities, as well as their own (Rhodes, 2018, p. 39). Further examination is needed to understand why there is a disconnect between praxis and theory in adult education and community development. Through this research, I hoped to add to the literature surrounding culturally relevant teaching in the domain of adult education. I also looked to share the themes that emerged from participants through critical ethnography and life mapping. The data gathered can be used to better inform culturally relevant teaching and reveal its effect on Mexican American families who have historically been marginalized by the historically privileged education, governance, and decision-making systems and who have been devalued as culturally relevant members of the community. This has the potential to bring into conversation as a potential useful theory for looking at practice.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I am currently the executive director of Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin (Teatro), former program coordinator of Teatro, artistic director of Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa, and founding member of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa and Mariachi Juvenil. I am a proud product of Teatro and all the programming it offered. I have also been an educator in the community in which I reside for over 20 years and have had contact with many of the families that attend Teatro programming. The love of the arts, community, and cultural pride were instilled in me at a young age. I was told of the importance of learning about my culture, taking pride in my heritage, and being an ambassador of the Mexican American culture through ballet folklórico and mariachi. It was through Teatro that I developed a firm foundation of self-awareness, self-understanding, and acceptance of my cultural identity. Teatro was more than a place to dance folklórico or play trumpet in a mariachi. It was a place to participate in the exchange of cultural practices, traditions, and

language; engage in the performing arts; and build leaders who one day would return as instructors, directors, and program coordinators. I represent both the emic (a person who can offer an insider perspective) and the etic (a person who can offer an outsider perspective) of the inquiry. I am an insider who has a stake in the work and its impact both historically and on future generations. As an activist insider, I hold the responsibility to frame difficult questions, but in an authentic, responsive, and respectful manner. This insider's awareness, competence, and relationship with our *antepasados* places the responsibility of generations on my shoulders. It is because of this responsibility that I was committed to being fully transparent in my work and invited witnesses to simultaneously hold this work and responsibility in the collective. The etic gave me an opportunity to make the familiar strange and help make meaning of work that is close to the place, its people, and their cultural nuances. This dynamic will be important in facilitating a public conversation that will lift the work to a public discourse as we work to make it public, collective, and transformational for generations to come. This work is not to be essentialized as simple representation, but it is to be lifted as the identity, the culture, the soul, and *la educacion de la comunidad*.

### **Roadmap to the Work**

Just like the journey of becoming and belonging, this dissertation does not follow a traditional trajectory—the journey of making history was the guide for this dissertation. The APA manual and the science are present, but the stories are more reflective of an alignment of local stories, lived experiences, and emerging knowledge. These stories were informed by practice, documented by social science methods, and explained by theories of struggle, dignity, and identity formation. The non-traditional trajectory was

symbolic, purposeful, and consistent with work that has been informed by residents and their lived experiences. The transition from writing a traditional dissertation is not to be seen as minimizing the importance. It provides a dynamic shift and gives the dissertation an opportunity to enhance the meaning of the work and the ability to be used as a functional tool. It also decolonizes the approach to writing a dissertation and allows the foundation to be set by the work.

As scholars and human beings, we must do more than merely “critique” the injustices that surround us and our work; as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, 100) puts it, “There can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without the decolonizing practice” (see also Sandoval 2000). (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019, p. 36)

Throughout the dissertation, you will encounter multilingualism, which is a decolonizing practice that disrupts norms but also is liberating. Some words in the Spanish language cannot be easily translated into the English language. The transnational feminist methodology provides insight into why the reader will experience multilingualism throughout this dissertation.

Transnational feminist methodology involves integrating the practice of multilingualism. This practice suggests that our linguistic skills can be hampered when in overwhelming monolingual contexts in two critical ways. First, communication can be impaired because we may not fully appreciate what we are missing. Second, our intellectual ideas become restricted to a monolingual audience. Integrating multilingualism into our research design indicates a proactive element of seeking out translators, investing in translating our research into other languages to reach new audiences, and considering non-US and non-English scholarship to inform our analyses. (Falcón, 2016, p. 186)

## I.5 GENEALOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

### **Genealogy of a Community**

I present this genealogy of a community (see Figure 15) to inform the reader about the segregation that took place within the Seguin community through the education system. The education system in this community has caused a great divide among adults and children that is representative of the impact on Mexican American families who have historically been marginalized socially, politically, educationally, and economically as well as devalued as culturally relevant members of the community.



**Figure 15. Stairway to Consciousness.** Building depiction on Teatro's Mural inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.

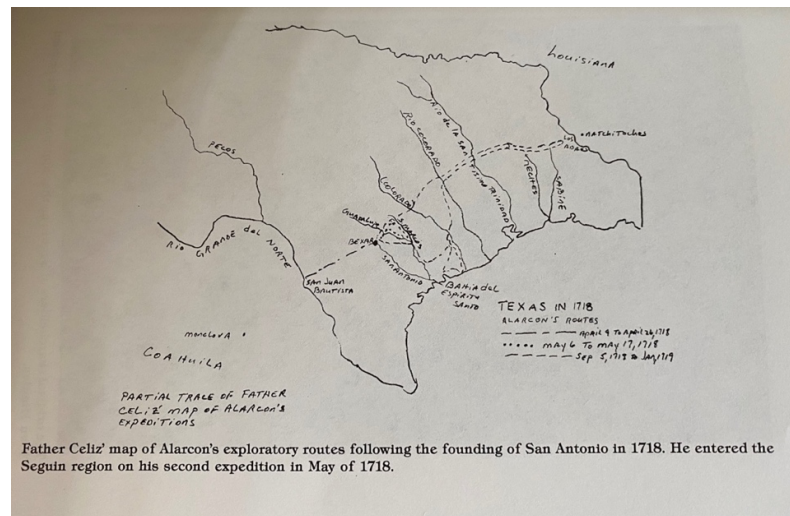
The first recorded evidence of exploration in the Seguin region was in 1718, when Martin de Alarcón, Governor of the State of Coahuila and Texas, founded the Mission of San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) on May 1, 1718, and San Antonio de Bexar Presidio on May 5, 1718. After accomplishing his mission, Alarcón set out on a series of expeditions (see Figure 16) that were all recorded by Father Celiz. The expeditions between April 1718 and January 1719 brought Alarcón to present day Seguin, Belmont,

Kingsbury, Saturn, Fentress, and Martindale (J. Gesick, n.d., para. 3). J. Gesick (n.d.) stated:

Eventually Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo settlements were founded in the area that would become Seguin, where Tonkawa Indians had lived, and by 1833 there were forty land titles in the region. One of the most notable settlements was the ranch of José Antonio Navarro, three miles north of Seguin at a site now on State Highway 123. The next record of settlement in the Seguin region dates from 1831, when Umphries (or Humphries) Branch was awarded a league of land on the northeast bank of the Guadalupe, thirty-eight miles above Gonzales. In 1833 Branch and his family built a cabin, said to be the first Anglo residence on the site of what is now Seguin. On August 12, 1838, thirty-three of the Gonzales Rangers, a volunteer group, joined Joseph S. Martin in laying out a townsite near Walnut Branch; they named the site Walnut Springs. The name was quickly changed in February 1839 to Seguin for Juan N. Seguin. (para. 1)

As history documents, Col. Juan N. Seguin, was a Tejano who fought beside the Anglo settlers and against the brutal Mexican dictator Santa Anna.

During the remaining years of the Republic of Texas, many settlers arrived from the South hoping to establish cotton plantations. Some say the Old South ended here because few plantations, if any, took root west of those built here. An early census showed that some 30 percent of the county's population was African-American slaves. (Seguin Convention & Visitors Bureau, n.d., para. 1).



**Figure 16. Father Celiz' Map of Alarcon's of Exploratory Routes.**



## ***Education in Seguin***

The first public school was chartered in 1849 and the first schoolhouse was built in 1850. “The schoolhouse, formerly known as Guadalupe High School and in the 1980s still used by St. James Catholic Church, was recognized by the state in 1962 as the oldest continuously used school building in Texas” (J. Gesick, n.d., para. 2). This was the school for the Whites. In 1892, Seguin began construction of a multi-story, red brick public school to be attended by White students of all grades; hence a new era of education began. A fire destroyed the original school, and in 1914 another was built on the same site. Later renamed Mary B. Erskine (see Figure 17), the school served students in various grade levels for over a century (E. J. Gesick et al., 1988).



**Figure 17. Mary B. Erskine School.**

It is important to share the following information to begin the unveiling of inequities and inequalities of the education in Seguin in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Yeager (1992) stated:

The superintendent’s annual report for the school year 1909-1910 reviewed conditions at Seguin’s public schools. This report listed two of the three “white” schools owned by the district in “good condition” and one in “bad condition.” The “colored” schools and the two leased schools were regarded as in “fair condition.” Historical evidence from other Texas towns suggests that the school in “bad condition” probably housed the Mexican students. The 1909-1910 annual report also provides the estimated cost of educating a primary white pupil as compared to that of a black pupil. The annual cost for educating a white student totaled \$37.50; a black student cost the city a paltry \$12.50. How “white” funds were distributed between Anglo and Mexican students is unclear, but the assignment of

a single teacher to the Mexican school and the six-month school term available to Mexican American children suggests that it was not an even split. (pp. 24-25)

### ***Black Education in Seguin***

Sponsored by the Second Baptist Church, the first public school for Blacks in Seguin opened in 1871. Through the efforts of the Rev. Leonard Ilsley (1818-1903), and the Rev. William Baton Ball (1840-1923), a frame school was built on this site, and named Abraham Lincoln School. Ball was the first principal. In 1892, the Lincoln School became a part of the Seguin Public School System. The name was changed to Ball High School (see Figure 18) in 1925, and ceased to be separate facility for Blacks in 1966 when the Seguin Public School System was integrated. Texas Sesquicentennial 1836-1986. (Texas Historical Commission, 1986, para. 1)

The integration of the Seguin Public School System in 1966 occurred 12 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came down in 1954. It is also important to note that integration began with Blacks and Mexican Americans before integrating with White counterparts.



**Figure 18 Lincoln-Ball School.** Open Source Photo

In 1884, Guadalupe College (see Figure 19) was established by members of the Guadalupe Baptist Association to educate African Americans located in Seguin. The first official session of Guadalupe College was held in 1887 and the president was J. H. Garnett. On March 28, 1888, the State of Texas granted charter to the institution. The purpose of this school was to awaken educational interest among the Blacks of Texas and to train them to be teachers and religious leaders. Like White institutions of the time, the

college department offered 4 years of classical courses, which led to a bachelor's of arts degree.

The State Department of Education granted Guadalupe College state approval as a senior college on November 17, 1902, and the college operated as such until December 26, 1906, when it was rejected (Brawner, 1980). The standards applied in granting approval are unknown (Brawner, 1980). Between 1906 and 1914, Guadalupe College was in turmoil. It lost endorsements, had declining enrollment, suffered financial crises, and was being sued. After the turmoil, the college moved the facility to the Guadalupe River Farm property. In 1926, Guadalupe College worked its way back to junior college status and credits were accepted in granting teacher certification. In 1929, Guadalupe College was elevated to a standard junior college. On February 9, 1936, Guadalupe College burned down and never fully recovered to being a fully accredited college ever again (Brawner, 1980).



**Figure 19. Guadalupe College.**

### ***Mexican Education in Seguin***

In 1902, the local school board, under the leadership of the city of Seguin, passed a motion to establish a separate school for Mexican children. Juan Seguin School,

opened in 1903, was an early model of a segregated urban school for children of Mexican heritage. Students first met in a home owned by William Greifenstein, whom the Seguin City Council paid monthly for the house's use. In 1906, William Blumberg arranged with the city council to build a school house on North Pecan Street (later East Cedar Street). By 1915, the city began to make efforts to secure a permanent site for the school. In 1916, an independent school district was established and along with this effort, a bond for raising money to purchase a site for the Mexican school was put to vote. Though defeated, a bond the next year was successful, and in 1918, Mexican Public School Ward #2, as it was then known, was built on the corner of Dolle and Medlin Streets [see Figure 20]. Grades one through six attended the school. More classrooms were added to the original one-room structure, and by 1948, the school had several rooms, an office, and an auditorium. Juan Seguin School merged with Lizzie M. Burges School in 1971, before the campus became one school again in 1975. Juan Seguin Elementary School closed in 2010 [see Figure 21]. However, its impact remains felt through the generations of students that attended and its success as an institution where Hispanic students received an education. (Texas Historical Association, 2010, para. 1)

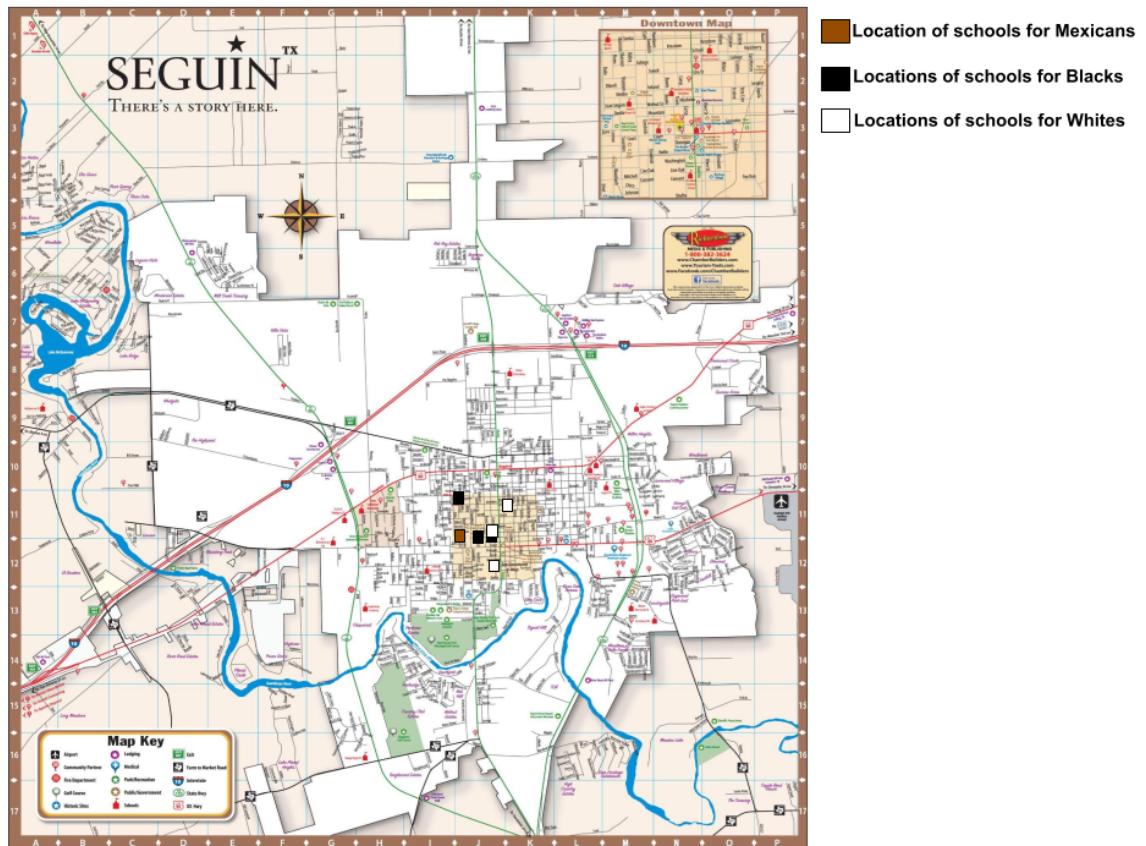


**Figure 20. Juan Seguin School.**





**Figure 21. Modern Juan Seguin Campus.**



**Figure 22. Critical Race Spatial Analysis of Public Schools in Seguin 1849-1966.** City of Seguin Zoomable Map by Richardson Media & Publishing.

The critical race spatial analysis map depicted above is one that chronicles the public schools in Seguin from 1849–1966 (see Figure 22). It shares locations of public schools for Mexicans, Blacks, and Whites. One location (Black and White boxes on top each other) was the site of Guadalupe Female Academy, Guadalupe College, Seguin High School, Joe F. Saegert Junior High, Joe F. Saegert Middle School, and is the present day Mercer-Blumberg Learning Center at Saegert and Disciplinary Alternative School at Saegert. Adult education practice is informed by the geographic spaces in which learning centers are located and in which outreach activities take place (Bohonos & Duff, 2020).

### ***Struggle, Resistance, Resiliency***

As delineated during the time of segregation, Seguin had three different school systems and by no means were they equal. Students in the Black and Mexican schools were not afforded new books, they were given outdated and worn books. They were not afforded brand new gym equipment, they were given deflated balls and broken equipment. They were not afforded new desks, tables, or chairs to sit in to learn, they were given broken ones that needed to be fixed. To this day, community members feel compelled to share their stories about their educational struggles in Seguin to ensure these struggles are not repeated in the present day. These witnesses want their journey documented from struggle, to resistance, to resiliency.

### ***Ontology of Becoming***

#### ***The Journey to Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin***

The journey of establishing Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin (Teatro) is best told in sequential order to lay the foundation for the cultural work, community education, and public pedagogy this institution has been providing for nearly 40 years. Teatro De Artes

De Juan Seguin was established on July 9, 1982, in Seguin, a small rural town in Central Texas, but the journey started long before 1982. The story begins in México, then journeys to Crystal City, Texas, back to México, back to Crystal City, to San Marcos, and then to its final stop, Seguin, TX. The story of becoming for the organization is best told by visionaries of the organization and the families that helped sustain the organization, but most of all the history of a town that helped solidify the need for the community to have an institution such as Teatro.

### ***Conexiones (Connections)***

My familial story begins long before 1893, but that is where I will begin so the reader can walk the journey of becoming. My *abuelita chiquita* (great grandma on my mother's paternal side), Petra Chavez, was born in 1893 in Monte de San Nicolas Guanajuato, México. She was born into the *Purépecha* indigenous people. Martínez-Cortés et al. (2010) stated the:

Purépechas—also known as Tarascos—constituted one of the most important Mesoamerican cultures at the moment of Spanish contact, which came to control a vast area of western México (70,000 km<sup>2</sup>), including the State of Michoacán and part of the states of Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Colima, Querétaro, and México. In point of fact, the Purépechas were one of the few groups that resisted the Aztec expansion prior to the Spanish Conquest (Michelet, 2001). They derived from admixture of different Chichimecas groups, a term referring to nomad hunters from Aridoamerica. According to the Relation and Chronicles of Michoacán, these groups went on pilgrimages the Aztecs and other Native groups from the mythic site, *Chicomoztoc*; they separated to the East and arrived at Michoacán, where they admixed with local Nahuas already settled in Michoacán territory, giving rise the Native group known as pre-Tarascos. (Kirchhoff, 1956). Other sources claim they formed a social organization structured in shorts groups that arrived first at Zácapu and Naranxán in the state of Michoacán ca. 4,000 ybp; they eventually migrated and congregated at Patzcuáro and contiguous Lakes (Jiménez-Moreno, 1948; Schöndube, 1996; Michelet, 1996, 2001). (p. 3)

When Petra Chavez was born, the country of México was on steady foundation as a result of political stability and economic prosperity during the presidential regime of

General Porfirio Diaz (1876–1911). Do not be mistaken, there were still oppressive conditions under his leadership. During General Porfirio Diaz’s presidency (1876–1880), he was instrumental in placating U.S. investors and reestablished relations with European powers. During this time, Diaz and his advisers transformed México by building railroads and schools, and installing overall infrastructure. The beginnings of an oil industry were put into place and he coaxed foreign money into mines and factories (Library of Congress, n.d.).

We continue the journey with the marriage of my maternal great grandparents, Petra Chavez and Francisco Betancourt (see Figure 23). The exact date of the marriage of Petra Chavez and Francisco Betancourt is not known, but through familial citing it is recorded that their marriage occurred before the Mexican Revolution War began (November 20, 1910). In the early years of their marriage, it is recorded that the United States was participating in World War I (July 1914–November 1918). During these years, my great grandparents began to have children. My grandfather, José Betancourt, was one of 17 children and was born in Guanajuato, México, on December 16, 1921. My great grandparents on my maternal side, Dora and Teodulo Perez, were both born in the United States and the date of their marriage is unknown. They had four children and my grandma, Victoria Perez, was born in Pearsall, Texas, on May 4, 1924. My grandfather, José Betancourt, lived the majority of his life in México, whereas my grandma, Victoria Perez (see Figure 24), lived the majority of her life in the United States.





**Figure 23. Petra Chavez and Francisco Betancourt Along With Daughters Consuelo and Refugio.** Betancourt Family Archive.



**Figure 24. José Betancourt and Victoria Perez.** Betancourt Family Archive.

### ***Huir (Flee)***

In 1924, Mexican President Plutarco Elias Calles brought on a fierce anti-clerical ideology to his presidency. During this time, President Calles closed churches and convents, and deported more than 200 foreign priests. An uprising began between the followers of Calles and those who followed the Catholic religion. In July of 1926, the Mexican Episcopate suspended all public worship and began a profound crisis among devout Catholics. The rebellion was led by *Cristeros* from the regions of Guanajuato, Colima, Michoacán, and Jalisco. These soldiers were ill equipped for war, so they used guerilla tactics to fight (Garcia & McKinley, 2004). The massacres that were occurring during this time scared my great grandparents, Petra and Francisco Betancourt, so they moved to Crystal City, Texas, to follow field work and to flee the *Guerra Cristera*. They lived in Crystal City for quite some time and that is when my grandfather, José

Betancourt, and my grandmother, Victoria Perez, met and eloped around 1940. Because they eloped there are no records to solidify an actual date of marriage. Soon after their marriage, my grandparents, José Betancourt and Victoria P. Betancourt, along with Petra Chavez de Betancourt and Francisco, returned to México. On their trip back to México during the crossing of the *puente*, the U.S. government wanted my grandfather to enlist to fight in World War II. During that stop my great grandfather denounced the United States and said, “My son will not fight for this government!” and the United States immediately exiled Francisco and José. Because Victoria Betancourt was a U.S. citizen, she was not exiled from the United States but left willingly to be with her husband. The *cuento* goes that the U.S. government stated directly to Francisco and José that they would never be allowed back into the United States unless they were dead. Years later, this is exactly what happened. José and Victoria’s love and devotion to one another on earth was short lived due in part to José passing away on February 12, 1968, from a massive heart attack. José never stepped back on U.S. soil until his body was brought to Crystal City, Texas, to be buried on February 14, 1968.

Before Victoria and José had children, José prayed intently for a son. Once Victoria found out she was pregnant, José prayed harder for a son. Victoria bore two sons who died—one was stillborn and the other died months after it was born in its sleep. Victoria always shared how it hurt to lose her children. Before the birth of Maria Guadalupe Betancourt, José began to pray intently to the *Virgen Maria* and *Virgen de Guadalupe* for a healthy child. He made a *promesa* to both *Virgens* that if they gave him a healthy child (boy or girl), he would name the child after them. In June of 1944, Maria was born in San Luis Potosi, México, and lived in México for approximately 18 years. In

1947, Victoria came to the United States to give birth to Victoria (Vickie) Betancourt and then returned to México, and in 1949, she came back to the United States to give birth to José Betancourt. These children knew what it was to love two countries and to traverse two countries through language, customs, traditions, and education (see Figure 25).



**Figure 25. José and Victoria Betancourt Family.** Betancourt Family Archive.

### ***Crystal (Crystal) Part I***

What was happening in Crystal City, Texas, during the birth of Victoria Betancourt? Crystal City was housing enemy aliens (i.e., Japanese ancestry and their immediate families) in an internment camp called Crystal City Alien Enemy Detention Facility (Texas Historical Commission, n.d.). It is documented that the first arrivals to the camp on December 12, 1942, were a mixture of German Americans and German enemy aliens. On February 12, 1943, the first Latin American arrived along with Germans who were deported from Costa Rica. On March 17, 1943, the first group of Japanese American internees arrived. The internment camp housed prisoners of war from Axis nations. The camp was an active site until February 27, 1948, which was approximately 30 months after World War II had ended. In 1948, the Crystal City Independent School District purchased 90 acres of the camp. In 1952, the city purchased another portion to establish an airfield. This is important information to know because it shares the story of becoming and belonging.

### ***Patrón de Migración (Migration Pattern)***

Soon after Vickie was born, she began her migration pattern of schooling in Nuevo Laredo and Laredo and then spent summers in Crystal City with her grandparents, Dora and Teodolo Perez. She often shares her memories of her grandparents' house filled with cousins running in and out of the house, screen doors slamming, and lots of food disappearing from the refrigerator because all the cousins would grab whatever they wanted to eat. Once Vickie entered high school, the migration pattern flipped to holidays and summers with her father in México and schooling in Crystal City, Texas. José was a forward thinking Mexican man and knew the education Vickie and her siblings would receive would be far better in the United States than in México. He understood that education was the key to success and to a much better life for his children, his future grandchild, great grandchildren, and beyond. Victoria and José remained married throughout this migration from México to the United States. It was the responsibility of Victoria (who had not been exiled) to maintain the migration pattern for her children. José wanted for all his children to get a good education and he knew that could only happen in the United States. So, he sacrificed and sent his family to live in Crystal City with his in-laws while he stayed back in México with his mother, Petra Chavez, to tend to their businesses and make money for the family.

### ***Cristal (Crystal) Part II***

Living in Crystal City was an eye opening experience for Maria, Vickie, and José. They were looked down upon in the public education system because they were native Spanish speakers, knew very little English, and were coming from México. Maria recalls feeling left out at school because of her language barrier and Vickie recalls being put in

the lowest level classes because the school administrators and teachers thought she was not smart enough to be in the upper-level classes. What those in the U.S. education system did not understand is that having a language barrier did not mean a child's educational level of learning and understanding were compromised. Maria and Vickie both advocated for themselves in order to receive an equitable education. This included waiting for weeks to meet with the principal to ask to be moved to the higher-level classes, and then showing teachers and counselors they were able to obtain good grades in the lower-level classes and keeping those same grades once they were moved to the higher-level classes.

### ***Stories of Equitable Education for All***

Vickie was tired of being in classes that were not challenging and decided to sit in the principal's office every day after school until he would meet with her. The principal's secretary would give her the run around, stating the principal was busy or in a meeting until one day the principal invited Vickie into the office to speak with him. Vickie explained that her cousin Johnny was in all the upper-level classes and she was just as smart as him. She asked to be put in his classes. The principal resisted and eventually said he would give Vickie a chance but she had to maintain high grades on her assignments. He also stated that he would be checking Vickie's weekly progress in the class to ensure Vickie was comprehending what was being taught and that she was able to handle the workload. At that moment, the principal asked for Vickie to give him her current math book and he exchanged it for the upper-level math book. He watched her progress in math and saw how well she was doing and then exchanged her science book for an upper-level science book. This happened for each course until Vickie was placed in all upper-

level classes. This is how she started her educational journey in Crystal City, Texas. Vickie fought for her own equitable education during a time when that was unheard of. Although systemic racism was prevalent, all three Betancourt siblings navigated the system and graduated from high school and then from Southwest Texas State University, University of Texas San Antonio, and Texas Lutheran College (University) with their respective bachelors and master's degrees. Victoria's commitment to José and his wishes for their children lasted a lifetime. As a single parent, she made sure her children had the opportunity to attend college and the university. She knew she and my grandfather had made sacrifices so their children could become highly educated and independent. They both knew the power of education and how it would help future generations of their family succeed and excel. All three siblings became educators and advocates for all children to reach their educational goals.

My father, Homero De La Rosa (see Figure 26), was a native Crystal City resident. He went through the public school education system. What he remembers about his early education was that he went to school at Airport Elementary (location of the internment camps that had been vacated) where all Mexican American children were forced to go because of segregation. One day he was moved to the Grammar School, which was the White elementary school. He never knew why he was moved to the new school but it provided him a solid foundation of learning, gave him the opportunity to excel in education, and gave him a glimpse that he would be able to attend college and even graduate with an accounting degree. Years later as he reflected on his education, he became fully aware that the education he was receiving at Airport Elementary was subpar compared to that of the Grammar School.



**Figure 26. Family Ties Homero & Vickie De La Rosa with Mama Rosa (My Grandmother), Angelita (My Great Grandmother), and my Dad's Brothers (Joe & Israel) and Cousin David. De La Rosa Family Archive.**

Crystal City was not only the birthplace of Homero De La Rosa and Vickie Betancourt (see Figure 27), it was also the birthplace of *La Raza Unida* (see Figure 28). On January 17, 1970, a group of 300 Mexican Americans held a meeting at *Campestre* Hall. Two of the principal organizers were José Angel Gutierrez and Mario Compean, who also helped found MAYO (the Mexican American Youth Organization) in 1967. In January of 1970, the Raza Unida Party filed for party status in Zavala, La Salle, and Dimmit counties. This started an 8-year quest to bring greater economic, social, and political self-determination to Mexican Americans in the state, especially in South Texas, where Mexican Americans had little or no power in many local or county jurisdictions although they were often in the majority (Acosta, n.d.).



**Figure 27. Homero De La Rosa and Victoria Betancourt.** De La Rosa Family Archive.



**Figure 28. José Angel Gutierrez and La Raza Unida.** <https://alchetron.com/Raza-Unida-Party>.

Barrios (2009) explained that in 1969, Mexican Americans were prohibited from speaking Spanish in school. There were no classes or lessons about Mexican history, culture, or literature. The contributions of Mexican Americans were not included in textbooks. The revolt of 1969 came when two Crystal City High School cheerleader positions were vacant, and Chicano students were told they could not fill the vacancies because their quota of one had been met. If that was not enough, the school board also imposed a requirement that any cheerleader candidate had to have at least one parent who graduated from the high school. After that, the Mexican American students cried foul. Students sought help from school administrators and received no help. The students met with the superintendent and he decided a more equitable quota would be the selection of three Anglo and three Mexican American cheerleaders. Upon this decision, Anglo parents protested against the superintendent. The school board nullified the



superintendent's concessions and added that any future student unrest would be met with expulsion. Students then went to address the school board and the board refused to hear the students' demands, which included increased recruitment of Hispanic teachers and counselors, more classes to challenge students and fewer shop and home economic electives, bilingual-bicultural education at the elementary and secondary levels, Mexican American studies classes to reflect the contributions made by Latinos, and the addition of a student representative to the school board. The high school students staged a walkout on December 9, 1969. More students joined each day until there were over 2,000 students walking the picket line. Upon the junior high and elementary students joining their brothers and sisters in solidarity, the Texas Education Agency sent negotiators to end the walkout.

During the walkouts that occurred in Crystal City in late 1969, Maria Guadalupe Betancourt was an educator. She recalls all the brown children walking out of class and a White student telling her to look out her window. She remembers being perplexed about what to do. She recalls thinking, "Do I walk out or do I stay in the classroom with my elementary school children?" She said as an educator she knew the right thing to do was to stay in the classroom with the children who had not walked out. She knew she could not leave the children unattended, so she did not walk out and remained in the classroom. Based on her choice, she was negatively looked upon by certain community members and when she would not record radio ads denouncing the educational inequalities that were happening at the time in Crystal City ISD, she experienced push back. Because she was uncomfortable regarding the push back, she decided to leave Crystal City and find work elsewhere, which ended up being in Seguin ISD.

Homero De La Rosa, Vickie Betancourt De La Rosa, and Maria G. Betancourt (see Figure 29) worked their entire lives to not only do better for themselves (academically, spiritually, artistically, and financially), but to share their do better mindset with their family and familial and non familial generations to follow. They believe in being compassionate, sympathetic, and giving. They choose to see the good in people and embrace the wealth of knowledge people share, whether it be formally or informally. They all understand the power of building and sustaining relationships. They believe in a unified community that can acknowledge past history, work together to not repeat history, and incorporate the many voices of community that will help create a new his/her story. They also know the importance of sharing cultural practices, traditions, language, and the use of art as a vehicle of change. The foundation I was raised upon was not only multifaceted but multilingual. Our understanding of the importance of being multilingual was never shamed, it was praised and was always at the foreground of our being. It was always a part of who we were, who we would become, and how we would raise our own children. Language was as much a part of who we were and was just as important as the unconscious breathing that takes place 24 hours a day.



**Figure 29. Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin Co-Founders Maria G. Betancourt, Vickie Betancourt De La Rosa, and Homero De La Rosa. Teatro Archive.**

## **Conclusion**

Journey stops have been up to this point Chapter I.5 Genealogy of Consciousness which illuminates the genealogy of a community and genealogy of becoming with glimpses into *la familia*, Chapter II Weaving Community Stories and Literature. The stories of my ancestors I met and those I never had the opportunity to meet are included to provide guidance toward understanding how the creation of Teatro was always in the plan. It was in the plan because of the need for our *hermanas y hermanos* (sisters and brothers) to claim stake in the lands that were always theirs. Our *hermanas y hermanos* needed to reclaim their cultural practices and beliefs that had been stripped from them by colonists. Chapter III Collecting Stories: Metodos de Investigacion incorporates collective storymaking to weave together what the literature is saying and what the community is saying. It is also used to make sense of lived experiences and give insight into how lived experiences and the use of a specific values system create the space for teaching and learning, as well as for building organizations and communities (M. A.

Guajardo et al., 2016). Chapter IV La Resistencia: If the Vestido Could Talk includes a methodological review of the myriad methods and strategies that further informed the work. The methodological approaches helped connect the data, and data with the action. The methodological review illuminates *la comunidad* that helped inform the work that birthed this research helped develop and sustain the organizational growth of Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin. It also contains the stories of my research partners with a more intent focus on the collection of the different threads used to weave a tapestry of understanding. This tapestry is presented to actively engage the reader and *la comunidad* is used to teach the reader more about Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin, its impact, and why cultural work is the respirator that breathes life into a community. Chapter V La Resiliencia & Power: Let the Vestido Speak reflects an analysis of the work of Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin within the organization. It illuminates the conditions of the context we live in and thoughts on future work.

## II. WEAVING COMMUNITY STORIES AND LITERATURE

Through this research, I attempted to weave together numerous methods and strategies informing and supporting the research (see Figure 30). The research documents the impact on Mexican American families who have historically been marginalized socially, politically, educationally, and economically as well as devalued as culturally relevant members of the community. Based on what has informed the work surrounding Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin, I present a collection of stories that delineates the development of history of place, the people, and their collective agency. Collective storymaking is informed by relationships, assets, and place (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).



**Figure 30. Weaving and Passing of Stories Through Music and the Arts.** Conjunto musical instruments Accordion and Bajo Sexto on Teatro's Mural inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.

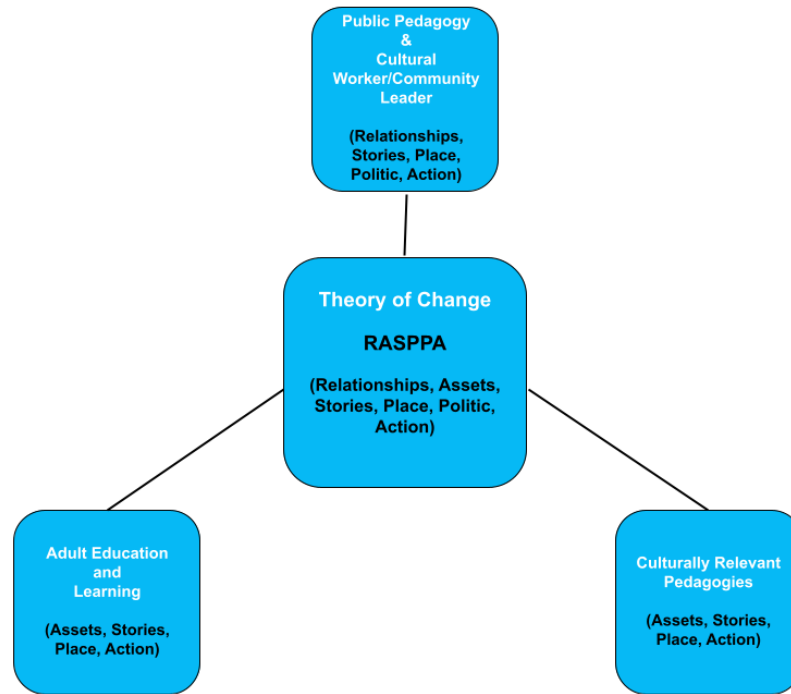
### **Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin**

Teatro is a non-profit cultural arts organization that promotes a better understanding of the Mexican American culture through the teaching, study, practice, and

performance of the arts. Teatro has a 39-year history of using education and the arts as change agents in a small Central Texas town to validate, facilitate, liberate, and empower ethnically diverse students. Through the performing arts, the community has the opportunity to embrace and learn about a culture and people that have historically been marginalized.

As a cultural worker, community leader, and researcher, I have witnessed the impact a cultural arts organization can have when the programming is intentional and public pedagogy is used as the core foundation of teaching and learning. Community-based cultural programming—as multisensorial and embodied—is an important site of adult and cross-generational education precisely because it concerns becoming in difference and unity. It concerns creating *familia* and the challenges of working toward justice (Villenas & Osorio Gill, 2020, p. 192).

An intentional lecture series is part of the programming Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin brings to the community. A recent lecture series was entitled, “Connecting Tejanos with their Past and with their Present,” and the project goals were to ensure Tejanos (Texans of Mexican descent) know their history, roots, and contribution (scholarship, art, and leadership); connect with the contributions through historical context that have been neglected in public education; and work together to document the contributions through oral history and public pedagogy (see Figure 31).



**Figure 31. Conceptual Framework Connections.**

***Connecting Tejanos With the Past and to Their Present***

Through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Humanities Texas, Teatro was able to curate a lecture series in which esteemed scholars and lecturers presented on topics such as “Changing International Borders via the Arts: New World Arts Creation” by Rey Lujan Gaytán; “Tejano: Defining the Mexican Heritage People of Texas” by Dr. Jesus Frank de la Teja; “Emma Tenayuca: Tejana Activist and her Struggle Against Injustice” by Dr. Jennifer Mata; “Hey, Buckaroo (Vaquero)!” by Dr. Guadalupe Gorordo; and “Llorona” Josefa “Chipita” Rodriguez by Debora Kuetzpal Vasquez. This lecture series was intentional programming and used public pedagogy as the core foundation. These lectures were tailored toward adult learners in the hopes of providing education about important Tejano figures and topics that would invoke and wake the spirit of learning through culturally relevant pedagogies.

Through this lecture series, Teatro was able to connect with adult learners in various ways, including face to face, through social media, and, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtually through Zoom. These lectures engaged the community through a call to adventure and through storytelling that weaved what happened in a certain period of time and what could be in the future versus what is now. The lectures always ended with a call to action and meaningful discussion with the adult learners/attendees. A synopsis of each lecture follows to provide a better understanding of the topics.

**Changing International Borders via the Arts: New World Arts Creation.** In this lecture, artist Rey Lujan Gaytán gave a historical account of migration, immigration, and refugee acceptance in the New World Order. This historical account was presented through selected artworks (see Figure 32) available from the public domain and in-depth discussions among the adult learners/attendees.



**Figure 32. Gods of Sun and Moon Save Us.** Lincoln Park, El Paso, Texas.

**Tejano: Defining the Mexican Heritage People of Texas.** Dr. Jesus Francisco de la Teja explained that the use of the term “Tejano” as a way to identify the Mexican heritage population of Texas is a more recent phenomenon than most people think and has yet to receive universal acceptance. This talk included a brief history of how Texans of Mexican descent were identified within Texas society generally from the 1830s



onward, and how the term “Tejano” is finding its way into common usage (see Figures 33 and 34).



**Figure 33. Juan N. Seguin: A Texas Hero.** American Battlefield Trust.



**Figure 34. Some of the Attendees of Tejano: Defining the Mexican Heritage People of Texas.** Teatro Archive.

### **Emma Tenayuca: Tejana Activist and her Struggle Against Injustice.** Dr.

Jennifer Mata shared the story of Emma Tenayuca, who was born in 1916 and became one of San Antonio’s most outspoken and passionate social justice organizers. She is most noted for the 1938 Pecan Sheller’s Strike (see Figures 35 and 36) in which she fervently led members of Mexican American communities in San Antonio in the fight for equal pay and fair treatment. This lecture places an emphasis on why Tejana/Chicana history is important to the larger historical narrative.



**Figure 35. Emma Tenayuca.** [www.themujerista.com](http://www.themujerista.com).



**Figure 36. Attendees of Emma Tenayuca: Tejana Activist and her Struggle Against Injustice.** Teatro Archive.

**Hey, Buckaroo (Vaquero)!.** From the lens of a contemporary Tejana y *maestra*, Guadalupe Gorordo, PhD, explored the origins and use of many words that began with the first Tejanos and are now part of our history, traditions, arts, and culture (see Figure 37). These are words that define us as Tejanos and describe some of the early experiences lived in *Tejas* (Texas). Tejanos influence and frame Texas life today—its food, its iconic longhorns and mustangs, the names of well-known cities and rivers, and the lexicon born in the cowboy adventure. So deeply ingrained is the Tejano culture and traditions that we

often fail to see them in our own lives. Words are much more than strokes that convey a message. Words have a smell and a taste. Words can be played. Their lyrics speak.



**Figure 37. Hey, Buckaroo (Vaquero) Lecture Invite.** Yvonne M. De La Rosa.

**“Llorona” Josefa “Chipita” Rodriguez.** Debora Kuetzpal Vasquez told the story of Chipita Rodriguez as the adult learners/attendees all painted a tracing of a beautiful gnarled tree by the Nueces River with a ghostlike image of a woman superposed on the tree and the river. As they painted the canvas, Vasquez shared glimpses of Chipita’s tragic story. Chipita moved with her father, Patricio Rodriguez, to San Patricio de Hibernia, Texas. After her father’s death, she furnished travelers with meals on the porch of her lean-to shack. On Friday, November 13, 1863, Chipita was the first woman in Texas to be hung unjustly based on circumstantial evidence (see Figure 38).



**Figure 38. Chipita Rodriguez Hanging.** Texas State Historical Association.

### **Community Learning Exchange Theory of Change**

The community learning exchange (CLE) theory of change places value on relationships, assets, and places. Building community through such a theory of change and action anchors the work of the CLE and portends a community-building approach that moves away from community development based on deficit thinking models (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32). When moving away from deficit thinking and shifting the mindset to focusing more on assets, strengths, and solutions, then there is hope (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 32-33).

The RASPPA model (see Figure 4) holds the theory of change together. It weaves the fundamental principles of relationships, assets, stories, places, politics, and actions with three ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 36-37; see Figures 3 through 6). From its inception in 1982, Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin has been weaving the principles of relationships, assets, stories, places, politics, and actions. Without the three ecologies of knowing, Teatro would not be where it is today.

## ***Relationships***

The importance of relationships is at the center of thinking on change. Just about everything related to CLE is predicated on the need to invest on building healthy relationships. Without the investment, it is difficult to build trust. Likewise, without trust, it is difficult to build relationships (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33).

As stated by M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016), storytelling begets trust, trust begets healthy relationships, healthy relationships beget effective organizations, and effective organizations beget strong communities.

## ***Assets***

Assets include people within the community and organizations that can offer their gifts to help build up a community.

Community leadership teaches us that identifying and building assets is important to understanding and building community. Assets-based development moves us away from deficit-based development that typically crushes the spirit of community. Others involved in human development have observed and commented that when we focus on problems and deficiencies, the problems and deficiencies become larger. (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 33-34)

When identifying assets, it is important to build on the strengths of the individuals and communities, which, in turn, builds trust and opens the door for all people to work together.

## ***Stories***

It is inherent that individuals seek to understand one another through stories. There is a discipline to this kind of leadership and community development process that requires individuals to find and nurture their own stories. The CLE process encourages everyone to know their individual, organizational, and community story (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

### ***Place***

Place is important because each community has unique strengths, assets, and gifts, along with the stories that exemplify and illustrate these concepts. Places also have distinct histories and dynamics that need to be understood if efforts to change them are to be successful and just. The understanding of the histories and dynamics of a place is a process worth learning about itself, and that process can only be learned and the skills that support that learning only developed from the real contexts of real places. (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35)

### ***Politic***

Politic is a relational process focused on acting for the betterment of the self, the organization, and the community. Doing the public good is the ethical proposition that guides the workings of the CLE. Politic embodies a kinetic quality, more than potential energy (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

### ***Action***

A theory of change needs a catalytic quality. Principles that are static and remain in the abstract satisfy the meaning of theory, but a theory in action requires that relationships, assets, stories, and place have movement (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

### **Public Pedagogy**

Public pedagogy is a theoretical construct focusing on various forms and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling practices; in institutions other than schools, such as museums, zoos, libraries, and public parks; in informal educational sites such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces, and the internet; and in or through figures and sites of activism, including “public intellectuals,” grassroots social activism, and various social movements. Public pedagogy theorizing and research is largely informed by the contributions of cultural studies; accordingly, public pedagogy is concerned with both the socially reproductive and counterhegemonic dimensions of pedagogical sites that are distinct from formal schooling. (O’Malley et al., 2010, p. 697)

Tavin and Erdman (2015) argued that public pedagogy is created by citizens with the public interest in mind and not imposed by outside forces such as governmental



agencies when they stated. “One way to recognize public pedagogy is through the common sense idea that business and corporations, as opposed to the State, are responsible for the public good” (p. 2).

We extend these thoughts to include the public, an individual or group of people interested in the common good, disrupting space, and focusing on educational practices outside of the traditional schooling environment. And looked at through a social justice lens, teaching and learning in these settings can be viewed as activist work, focusing on that which is culturally and socially relevant. (Hochtritt et al., 2018, p. 288)

Public performances and art making can be used as counternarratives to fight oppressive constraints. Bishop (2012) stated there is great power in participatory art, and by extension public pedagogical acts, because participatory art aims to restore and realize a communal, collective space of shared social engagement. This public involvement is a common goal for community-based art organizations. Even though many non-profits do not use the term “public pedagogy” to advertise their activities or overtly state they are invoking notions of social justice, they can, and often do, question the dominant hegemonic forces and encourage community participants to voice their ideas. Non-profits and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) internationally have become the third sector in the democratic system (i.e., they are the civil society that keeps vigilance on the public and project sectors). At times, they are the soul of a nation/community or institution.

Although public pedagogy is well documented as a construct with a focus on education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling practices, it never addresses by name rural cultural arts centers as institutions. Rural cultural arts centers as institutions need to be added to the theory.

Furthermore, the institutions named in this theory are hegemonic in nature, and include museums, zoos, libraries, and public parks, as well as informal educational sites

such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces, and the internet. Sandlin et al. (2011) stated, as conceptualized by much of the public pedagogy literature, adults are not the fully autonomous, agentic beings of traditional adult development and learning literature but are shaped or constructed by the media and popular cultures within which adults live and by the cultural institutions with which they interact.

Pedagogical practices such as teaching dance, playing musical instruments that are historically used for certain cultural genres of music, lectures, celebrations of Mexican American traditional holidays, and more are used to address the history of people, community, culture, and traditions that are missing from formal education. Local public intellectuals and educators are at the forefront of keeping the culture, cultural practices, and traditions alive within *la comunidad* through community education. Teatro has made great strides and can add a unique voice to public pedagogy that can contribute to the literature from an activist and community change perspective.

Lacking is the documentation of rural cultural arts organizations and the impact of public pedagogy in community cultural education. Focusing on and incorporating the impact community cultural education can have in public pedagogy will add to public pedagogy and will invoke more inclusivity. It will also weave agency, identity formation, and race relations.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

As stated in the introduction, Teatro was formed by two career educators. Using their funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) in the field of education, they ensured all programming was culturally relevant and grounded in culturally



responsive teaching. They encouraged participants to engage in the praxis of community learning.

The influence of culture in the classroom or learning environment is a foundation of multicultural education (Banks, 2006; Bennett, 2001). Educators must remember that adult learners bring their own lived experience of funds of knowledge when they enter the learning environment. As described by Guy (2009):

Adult learners bring to the learning environment a range of experiences grounded in communicative and interaction strategies. Given the cultural basis of these strategies, they may or may not serve learners well depending on the way in which the educational activity itself is framed. (p. 10)

Culturally responsive teaching is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of approaches, such as culturally relevant, culturally sensitive, culturally congruent, and culturally contextualized pedagogies (Gay, 2010). It is believed to be more appealing and meaningful to learners from non-dominant backgrounds than are traditional pedagogies. An additional tenet is that culturally responsive teaching helps minority students learn more easily and deeply than traditional, non-culturally-situated learning environments (Gay, 2010, 2013; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). According to Gay (2013), there are five major premises underlying all culturally responsive approaches:

- Culture is at the basis of all human interaction, including the learning process.
- There is a compelling need to change negative and deficit-based explanations for unequal academic achievement levels.
- Educators must overcome significant challenges to implementing culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms.
- The core tenets of culturally responsive teaching are inherently congruent with U.S. democratic ideals.

- Culturally responsive teaching must be situated within effective teaching theory.

Thus, culturally responsive teaching

validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success. It is anchored on four foundational pillars of practice – teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse context in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies. (Gay, 2010, p. 44)

Educators have to be at the forefront of making sure they provide culturally responsive teaching to the adults who walk into their learning spaces. It is not just about inclusivity, it is about looking at culturally responsive teaching as an equity pedagogy (Banks, 2006) that encompasses a variety of approaches such as culturally relevant, culturally sensitive, culturally congruent, and culturally contextualized pedagogies (Gay, 2000, p. 29). This type of teaching or facilitating places the students' culture at the center of the learning and growing process.

Cultural workers and educators have the opportunity to stop the disempowerment of students and put into motion strategies that will stop the backward movement. Teatro's practice is to address the symbolic violence and inequitably inherent within the traditional colonial practices and existing hegemonic structure of traditional curricula, uninterrogated narratives, and institutional dogma that have emerged in common practices. It is their responsibility to find solutions that will thrust the learners in a positive emancipatory manner that sets them free socially and politically. Cultural workers and educators can make a difference in the lives of students by honoring, recognizing, and incorporating the abilities of students individually into the way they

teach. Cultural workers and educators are change agents and should use that to their advantage. Gay (2010) stated the following:

Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. It is contingent on . . . seeing cultural differences as assets; creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued; using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students; challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression; being change agents for social justice and academic equity; mediating power imbalances in classrooms based on race, culture, ethnicity, and class; and accepting cultural responsiveness as endemic to educational effectiveness in all areas of learning for students from all ethnic groups. (p. 31)

Although culturally relevant teaching is closely linked to K-12 education, there is limited research using the full tenets of culturally responsive teaching in adult education. Further examination is needed to understand why there is a disconnect between praxis and theory in adult education and community development. Through this research, I hoped to add to the literature surrounding culturally relevant teaching in the domain of adult education. I also looked to share the themes that emerged from participants through critical ethnography and life mapping. The data gathered can be used to better inform culturally relevant teaching and reveal its effect on Mexican American families who have historically been marginalized by the historically privileged education, governance, and decision-making systems and who have been devalued as culturally relevant members of the community.

### ***Adult Education and Teaching***

Culturally responsive teaching encompasses an equity-based approach that places learners' cultures at the core of the learning process and uses the "cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse

students” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Culturally responsive teaching is distinguished by its emphasis on validating, facilitating, liberating, and empowering minority learners by “cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (Gay, 2000, p. 44).

Much research has been done on culturally responsive teaching in the K-12 domain and due to the development of the framework by Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009), there is the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching in the adult learning environment. This framework is grounded in four elements that are said to enhance minority students’ motivation.

**Establishing Inclusion.** Norms and practices are used to create a learning environment in which there is mutual respect and connectedness among students and teachers.

**Developing Attitude.** Some adult learners have experienced learning that is not tailored to their learning styles and have not been inclusive of their suggestions. In order to develop a positive attitude toward learning it is stated,

With an awareness and expectation that learning will be consistently relevant and volitional, we offer two norms that help learners develop a positive attitude toward learning. These norms create an awareness and an expectation that within the educational community, learning will include their suggestions and relate to what they view as important based on their experience. (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 137)

**Enhancing Meaning.** Making the learning process meaningful and pleasant and not only focusing on academic objectives. Teachers will encourage “deep reflection and critical inquiry that address relevant, real-world issues in an action-orientated manner” (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 195). Some culturally responsive practices include

the use of role-playing, simulations, and games to approximate the authentic use of the academic objectives.

**Engendering Competence.** Culturally responsive teaching increases the intrinsic motivation of students of non-dominant cultural groups. The use of authentic and reflective student self-assessments is essential to engendering competence and is associated with using student-invented dialogues, focused reflections, and journals.

### ***Multicultural Awareness***

It is crucial for educators to use critical multicultural awareness skills to objectively examine their own cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions (Aceves & Orozco, 2014). When educators understand their own culture and engage in critical reflection, they can gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the history, values, and lifestyles of students of other cultures. This is important because it is inevitable that educators will be teaching students of many different cultures. Multicultural awareness provides teachers with the skills to gain greater self-awareness, greater awareness of others, and better interpersonal skills; it also helps teachers to more effectively challenge stereotypes and prejudices (Banks, 2004).

### **Implications**

In its present state, adult education omits the needs of Hispanics as a group with its own sociocultural and political needs, assets, and agency. Dr. Manuel Pastor, University of South California Distinguished Professor of Sociology and American Studies and Demographer, stated Latinos will one day be the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Pastor, 2015) and adult educators and policymakers alike must acknowledge the political, cultural, and language issues that affect this group. This

will give way to a proactive and deliberate process to include the contributions, assets, epistemologies, and agency of our work within the Mexican American community.

Another notable implication is a deficit in research involving non-profit cultural arts organizations and community cultural wealth. The deficit in research surrounding this topic needs to be addressed. It is also important to amplify that there is limited literature on the implications of the arts in community development. In completing a degree in adult education, there was little to no evidence in my coursework. I will continue to consult with mentors in finding and creating this emerging research. Findings from this study can be shared with the world and furthermore expand the knowledge surrounding the topics of public pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching.

## **Conclusion**

Practitioners, facilitators, cultural workers, community leaders, and educators have a duty to provide culturally responsive teaching. What this means for adult educators is that we have to create a safe space for our learners to share their funds of knowledge and their cultural backgrounds and bring them to the foreground of their learning. By using culturally responsive teaching and community cultural wealth, we can be the change agents for the next generation of adult learners. This commitment will provide practitioners, facilitators, cultural workers, community leaders, and educators with an outlet and an opportunity to learn more about our learners within their community work. When educators take the time to embrace the many student cultures in their learning environment, students are more apt to want to learn and are less resistant to learning.

### III. COLLECTING STORIES: METODOS DE INVESTIGACION

Through a critical ethnographic approach, I used anthropological life and history mapping to unearth the stories and actions of a cultural arts organization, Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin. I documented the history of racism in a small central Texas town through the stories of Mexican American families that have historically been marginalized through the education system as well as devalued as culturally relevant members of the community. The lack of understanding and acceptance of the Mexican American culture (see Figure 39) was evident within the Anglo and African American communities, as well as in the Mexican American community. This lack of understanding and acceptance of the Mexican American culture is at the core of understanding the importance of community education through public pedagogy.



**Figure 39. Learning of Mexican American Culture Through Ballet Folklórico.** Ballet Folklórico Dancers on Teatro's Mural inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.

In response to the lack of an accepted and articulated school curriculum, a culture of openness, and an intercultural approach to community building, the Mexican American community has struggled to maintain its identity as it relates to language, cultural symbols, celebration, and traditions. The implications of the colonial struggle

related to language, cultural symbols, celebrations, and traditions have caused multiple generations to rupture their relationship to their elderly relatives because of the loss of language and connections. Due to the void of a resilient cultural agent, this cost has social, cultural, and economic implications. I designed this research to help make sense of the implications of this historical dynamic while also exploring the strategies used by those in the Mexican American community to maintain their identity.

I provide insight into the anatomy of critical consciousness as it relates to teaching, learning, and leading and that contributed to Teatro's growth and act of resistance of change within my community. Not only did the community resist, but through community cultural wealth, Teatro's co-founders sought out specific community members who could use their array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts to address and resist racism and other forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005).

### **Living a Dynamic-Critical Research Design**

My research was grounded in critical ethnography in which I used anthropological life and history mapping. This method and data collection strategies opened the door for the participants to share their stories and also intertwined the nuances within their stories to better inform my own ontology and development. We use the story form and the story forms us (Lewis, 2009, p. 22).

As an emerging critical ethnographer deeply embedded within the study, my own story, knowledge sets, and other influences that have shaped my own self-awareness and experiences remained present throughout this research.

Each one of us knows that who we meet always has a unique story [storia]. And this is true even if we meet them for the first time without knowing their story at all. Moreover, we are all familiar with the narrative work of memory, which, in a



totally involuntary way, continues to tell us our own personal story. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 33)

The intertwining of the stories was intended to give the reader a peering look.

### ***Critical Ethnography***

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility on the part of the researcher to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain.

The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they could be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. (Madison, 2005, p. 5)

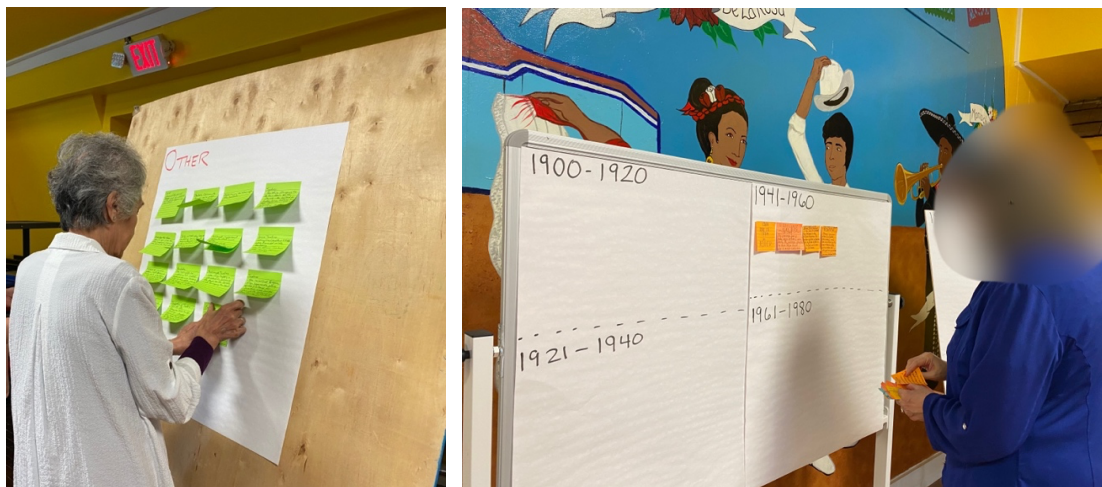
Therefore, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from “what is” to “what could be” (Carspecken, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; Noblit et al., 2004; Thomas, 1993). I share a value orientation where social inequities concern me, and I work toward positive social change. I share the concern about basic issues and struggles related to the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency (Carspecken, 1996).

### ***Social Cartography***

Social cartography as a space juxtaposition suggests an opening of dialogue among diverse social players, including those individuals and cultural clusters who want their “mininarratives” included in the social discourse. The social cartography discourse style has the potential to demonstrate the attributes, capacities, development, and perceptions of people and cultures operating within the social milieu (Paulston, 1996). Maps begin as the property of their creator as they contain some part of that person’s knowledge and understanding of the social system. As mental constructions representing

either the physical world or the ideologies of cultures, maps can be characterized as what Baudrillard's translator described as "art and life." Foss and Pefanis (1990) noted Baudrillard found that art and life shape the system of objects, that a purely descriptive system "carve(s) out a truth" (p. 13).

Social cartography enabled depth in understanding the mininarratives of each participant (see Figure 40) and how their own knowledge and understanding have and continue to influence their lives. The maps created by each participant chart a course relative to their own experiences and their ecologies of knowing.



**Figure 40. Creators of Social Cartography Map. Researcher Archive.**

### **Setting**

I conducted my research at the Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin Cultural Arts Center. The center was once a Catholic church that became the church hall. When the congregation of that church was ready to build a new church hall, the hall was offered to the local League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) chapter. The chapter accepted the gift of the hall but had to pay to move the building to its current location. The building was cut into three pieces and moved one mile to the plot of land where it would find its final resting place. This cultural arts center is located on the northwest side

of a small town in central Texas. The cultural arts center rests in the center of *Mexico Chico* (Little Mexico) and the land it sits on is historic, in part because it is where the Mexican American people were allowed to gather and hold their *Diez y Seis de Septiembre Fiestas Patrias*, the coronation of their *Reynas* (Queens) for the different fiestas, and *Cinco de Mayo* and other social gatherings in the early to mid 1900s. The historic *plataforma* (platform; see Figure 41) where they held their dances and gathered as *la comunidad* is still intact in this location.



**Figure 41. Historic Plataforma.** Researcher Archive.

I chose the research site because of its rich historical presence, not only the land but also the building and the organizational history. The cultural arts organization is a staple in the community and its contributions are well-documented throughout its existence in the community for 39 years. The center (see Figure 42) provides programming that includes performance art, adult education lecture series, poetry/prose readings, culinary experiences, traditional lectures, and events that revolve around holidays such as *Dia De Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) and *Las Posadas*

(commemoration of the journey Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a safe refuge where Mary could give birth to the baby Jesus), to name a few.



**Figure 42. Front of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.** Researcher Archive.

This Mexican American cultural arts organization intersected with the community through the arts to navigate politics and ensure *la comunidad* had a safe place and space to teach, study, and learn more about the Mexican American culture.

### **Observables, Research Partners, and Emerging Stories**

Based on the specific population and deliberate efforts to research Teatro, I used purposive sampling in this study. The accessible populations were the following:

- Cultural arts organization co-founders
- Current and former board members
- Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa founding members' parents
- Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa founding members who are now adults
- Mariachi Juan Seguin founding members and alumni
- Grandparents who bring their grandchildren to programming
- Parents who are currently actively involved in the organization's programming

- Juan Seguin School teachers and former alumni

I reviewed symbols such as board meeting minutes, recital program books, and program rosters to identify willing participants for the community *pláticas* (conversations), ethnographic interviews, and anthropological life maps. Some partners were interviewed inside the cultural arts center, other partners were interviewed via Zoom because of their current location throughout the state or nation or restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the elder research partners were interviewed inside their homes. These individuals were chosen to be interviewed because of their history and affiliation with the organization as well as their affiliation within the Seguin community as historical writers, students/teachers of Juan Seguin School, and knowledge holders of the segregation that marginalized generations of Mexican American people in this community.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Through the use of different mediums, I created a thick description that can be used to interpret the participants' complex cultural situations.

A thick description . . . does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

### ***Community Pláticas (Community Talks)***

I used community *plática* as a tool for collecting data; some data sets come as stories, as *cuentos*, or other narrative forms. Because gathering *pláticas* requires a level of relationship building, I entered the community in a way that honored community

members' stories rather than through the classic approach of moving into a community to extract information (F. J. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 161). Valle (1982) underscored the importance of la *plática* as a "relationship building component" that "reinforces mutuality and reciprocity" (p. 116).

which includes some sort of discussion of how the interviewer has been linked to the interviewee. Usually this includes discussion of a mutual contact. The process continues with an *amistad* interview, made up of the "proper" interview and informal "conversation byplay" that takes place before "getting down to business" (Valle and Mendoza 1978, p. 25). The informal portion may include verbal and non-verbal culturally sanctioned modes of communication and sharing of information not especially relevant to the interview protocol. Finally, la *despedida* [the goodbye] incorporates a display of appreciation by both parties and may also include additional conversation of a more personal characteristic, sharing of family and home relics by the interviewee, and sharing of gifts. (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 103)

Community *pláticas* consisted of guided conversations that followed along the themes of Guadalupe County's history, Seguin's history, former and current board members, alumni and educators of Juan Seguin School, and race equalities/inequalities. I audiotaped and recorded these community *pláticas* via Zoom due to one of the research partners living in another city 3 hours away. In response to cultural and general limitations of interview research methodologies, Valle and Mendoza (1978) identified la *plática* as a more culturally appropriate form of engaging with the Latin@ population. Valle and Mendoza identified la *plática* as a "friendly, intimate and mutualistic manner" (p. 33) of engaging in dialogue.

The community *plática* was held in person and via Zoom (see Figure 43). Research partners entered Teatro's Cultural Arts Center one by one where they were welcomed with an aroma of *café* and *pan dulce*. I invited the research partners to pour themselves a coffee or water, or get a piece of *pan dulce* before we began. The research partners who were in person exchanged hellos and also caught up about family and latest



happenings. One partner joined via Zoom while two partners were inside Teatro's Cultural Arts Center. All research partners had the opportunity to speak to each other before the interview began. Some partners had not seen each other in over 30 years. I read all research partners the consent form information verbatim and asked them if they had any questions before we began. If research partners were part of the *plática* via Zoom, they were asked to verbally consent that they did or did not want to be interviewed for the research.



**Figure 43. Community Plática Space.** Researcher Archive.

Before the community *plática* began, I shared some rules of engagement of the flow of responses in order to have everyone heard. The *plática* began with research partners eager to share their stories and experiences. They were also eager to articulate how far personally and professionally each had come despite the deficit education they received, in comparison to what they witnessed as an asset-based public pedagogy practiced by Teatro (see Figure 44).



**Figure 44. Juan Seguin “La Juana” Graduates. Researcher Archive.**

### *Ethnographic Interviews*

Critical ethnographic interviews were semi-structured and lasted 50 minutes. The interviews were audiotaped and recorded via Zoom due to some of the participants living in other cities. The ethnographic interviews included six questions that guided the conversation and a second set of questions as follow-up to the primary interview questions. The second set of interviews were also audiotaped and recorded via Zoom and used to member check previous interviews. The fundamental purpose of a research interview is to listen attentively to what respondents have to say in order to acquire more knowledge about the study topic (Kvale, 1996).

I welcomed the research partners at the door of Teatro’s Cultural Arts Center upon their arrival. It is customary in our culture to hug and kiss on the cheek but due to the pandemic, a fist bump, air hug, and a smile from behind the mask is how I greeted the



research partners. While walking to the mural room (see Figure 45) where the interview took place, we discussed the latest happenings in our respective families, shared progress at our jobs, or reminisced about their times attending programming in Teatro. I offered each participant a beverage before the interview began. The offering of a beverage is customary in the Mexican American culture as a show of gratitude for sharing their time, their knowledge, and for allowing me to capture their story for the dissertation.

If I was in a research partner's home, the location of the interview was determined by the research partner. While in the home of the research partner, I was offered beverages or a *antojito*. This was not expected but it is customary to welcome people into your home and offer a beverage or food while visiting. As I set up the recording equipment, the research partners and I discussed the latest happenings in our respective families, shared information about our jobs or about retired life, and reminisced about their time being part of Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin.

If researcher partners were on Zoom, I warmly greeted them, asked how they were doing, asked about their family, and shared information about jobs and reminisced about their time participating in Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin programming.

All research partners were read the consent form information verbatim and asked if they had any questions before we began. If research partners were being interviewed via Zoom, they were asked to verbally consent that they did or did not want to be interviewed for the research.



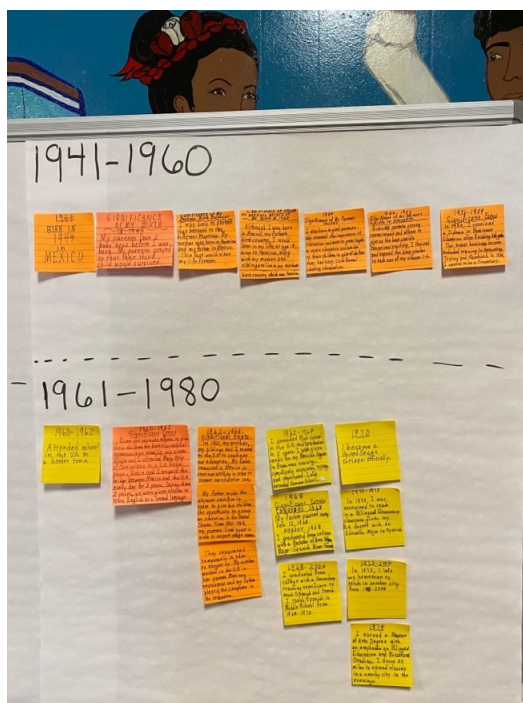
**Figure 45. Ethnographic Interview Space in Mural Room. Research Archive.**

### *Anthropological Life Maps*

Anthropological life maps are used to capture significant events that are critical to a person's own development and shed light on their axiology, ontology, and epistemology. This is acute in showcasing the personal and professional experiences that have shaped who I am as well as those that have shaped my partners. It is important to understand the interdependence and interconnectedness of our universe and all of us who reside within, which prepares the whole of our being to respond to the well-being of all (Nhat Hahn, 1975; Senge et al., 2004).

Research partners were invited to write on Post-it Notes any significant events that were critical in their own development (see Figure 46). They placed the Post-it Notes on the timeline that was provided inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center. I sat and observed the research partner placing the Post-it Notes and memoed their body language and verbal comments as each was placed on the boards.

If research partners joined interview or *plática* via Zoom, we reviewed my memoing after the interview. I read through the memos and the research partners dictated to me which comments they wanted an asterisk by to delineate importance. Those asterisks were important to capture their development.



**Figure 46. Anthropological Life Map Example.** Researcher Archive.

### ***Symbols***

I collected symbols related to the cultural arts organization by attaining access to archives housed in the Teatro Cultural Arts Center. These symbols provided information such as names, places, and spaces where Teatro has been visible and information about students who participated in the inception of this organization. Symbols included, but were not limited to:

- VHS tapes of recitals
- DVD video recordings of recitals

- Recital program books to attain names of former members
- Newspaper articles that hold the history of the organization
- Photos that articulate the places the organization's programming has been performed throughout Texas and other states
- Board meeting minutes to gather information about board members and programming
- Paperwork of the acquisition of the former Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church that the cultural arts organization now calls home

### **Data Management**

I maintained confidentiality by asking participants to choose a pseudonym prior to participating in the interviews and community pláticas. If participants did not want to provide a pseudonym, they either gave me permission to assign one or allowed me to use their birth name. Zoom and audio recordings, along with transcripts, were kept on a password-protected computer and housed on a Texas State University secured server. After 3 years, all data will be destroyed.

### **COVID-19**

In light of the recent events revolving around the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, I collected data in multiple ways. Ethnographic interviews occurred face-to-face in accordance with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), via a one-on-one secured Zoom session, or for the elders the interviews were conducted in their homes observing all CDC and Texas State University protocols.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred through reviewing audio or Zoom recordings, rereading the transcripts, and engaging in coding and code structure. Participants were kept abreast of the analysis and synthesis of all findings and were invited to provide critical feedback on their “completeness, accuracy, fairness and perceived validity” (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

Data analysis was breathed by the observables of relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action. To explain this thoroughly, I used the intricacies of a Jalisco Folklórico dress (see Figure 47), those who make the dresses, and those who display them.



**Figure 47. Custom Made Jalisco Dress by Vickie De La Rosa.** Researcher Archive.

### *Politic*

To sew a *vestido de Jalisco* (traditional dress from the State of Jalisco) takes vision, artistry, craftsmanship, perfection, and love. This is the standard the seamstresses have set for themselves. The dress consists of two full circles of material and is adorned with at least 250 yards of bright colorful ribbon and white eyelet lace. The precision of ribbon and lace placement can be seen on the chest, the waist, and the wrists and ankles. The dress is made of material that is sturdy enough to withstand the heavy weight of 250

yards of ribbon and lace, years and years of *faldeo* (skirt work the dancers use to showcase the dress), and holds the key to much more than the beauty that can be observed.

### ***Assets***

Teatro's Cultural Arts Center is the gathering place for seamstresses (see Figure 48), both women and men, who show up with sewing bags in hand, snacks and drinks, and smiles on their faces. They bring to Teatro their artistry and vision of creating culturally appropriate *vestuario* (costumes) for generations of students to wear from the many states and regions of Mexico.



**Figure 48. Elder Seamstress Showing Teatro Parents How to Sew. Teatro Archive.**

### ***Relationships***

This is not just a day of sewing, it is a day to build new relationships, foster current relationships, and nurture decades long relationships. It is a day of gathering of young and old alike to share time, space, and place with one another. This day provides an opportunity for seasoned seamstresses to teach emerging seamstresses the tips and tricks of their trade. It is a day of bonding.



## *Stories*

The thread that stitches this dress together is the holder of knowledge and stories of *la comunidad*. As the seamstresses sit in their sewing areas, they begin to exchange stories of their *antepasados*, *cuentos* they were told that shed light on life lessons, and *chistes* that cause the room to erupt in laughter. This is the fabric that binds the Mexican American people.

## *Action*

The seamstresses know that at the end of the sewing journey their fine work will be on display for all to see. The dress will be worn, used, and displayed by many students for years to come. It will be worn at many different performances that will propagate the Mexican American culture and illuminate places such as central park gatherings, weddings, quinceañeras, school show-and-tell, talent shows, corporate events, the State of Texas Capitol Rotunda (see Figure 49), and backyard barbeques, to name a few. It is much more than a dress—it is the tapestry of a people.



**Figure 49. Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa Performing in the State of Texas Capitol Rotunda. Teatro Archive.**

## **Credibility**

### ***Field Notes***

I kept detailed observations and field notes within the Teatro Cultural Arts Center for auto-ethnographic and ethnographic purposes. I shared the experiences I encountered with at least one or more of my participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) asserted:

Fieldnotes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data. (p. 119)

### ***Member Check***

Through follow-up meetings, I returned the interview transcripts to the participants to ensure accuracy of the data. I focused on confirmation, modification, and verification of the interview transcripts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended engaging in member checking as a means of enhancing rigor in qualitative research, proposing that credibility is inherent in the accurate descriptions or interpretations of phenomena.

### ***Trustworthiness***

I entrusted witnesses from my community and family as points of relational accountability. They were my wisdom council and ensured the accuracy of the research and storytelling.



#### IV. LA RESISTENCIA: IF THE *VESTIDO* COULD TALK

In this qualitative study, I explored the struggle and resiliency of a Mexican American community in Central Texas as they attempted to maintain, teach, and celebrate their Mexican American roots, customs, knowledge, and rituals through community education. Through this research, I explored the history; impact on self, organization, and community; and its agency within racially contentious times. In addition, I aimed to provide insight into the anatomy of critical consciousness as it relates to the teaching, learning, and leading (see Figure 50) that contributed to Teatro's growth and acts of resistance within my community. As the community resists traditional assimilation, we turn to our community cultural wealth—Teatro's co-founders sought out specific community members who could use their array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts to address and resist racism and other forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005).



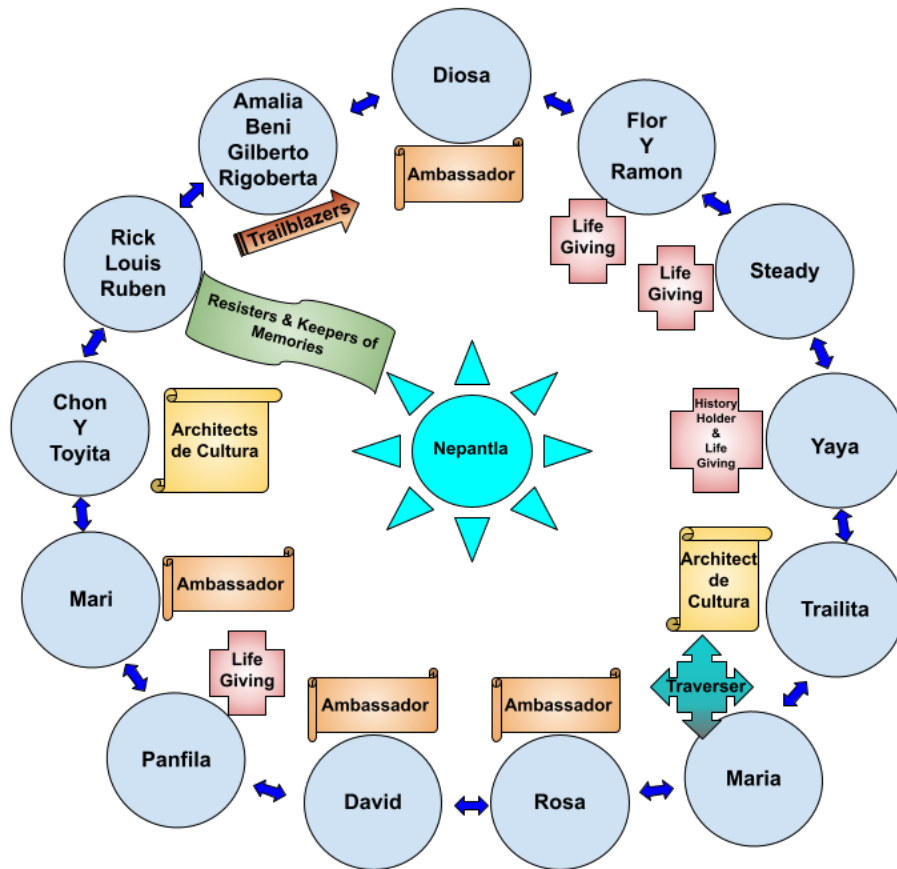
**Figure 50. La Resistencia Through Public Pedagogy and Art.** Mariachi Musicians on Teatro's Mural inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.

### **Weaving of Stories (aka Data Collection)**

Through circle (see Figure 51), I share the names of research partners and the importance of their stories. According to M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016),

Circle draws on longtime rituals of cultures and communities that provide space to open up fresh possibilities for connections, collaboration, and understanding. Circle can hold the tensions and the emotions that contribute to healing and can support people to use collective energy to take action. The process is not about changing others but acts as an invitation to change one's relationship with oneself, to one's organization, and to the wider community. The result is the development of strong relationships, trust, and the ability to work together to advance social justice in communities. (p. 32)

My selected research partners are members of *la comunidad* and are shown through circle in Figure 51. They had the courage and *confianza* to disrupt and reappropriate the power dynamic by sitting in the room to be interviewed. Through the act of sitting in the room, the witnesses and elders disrupted the well trained and schooled power brokers.



**Figure 51. Research Partner Circle.**

As shown in Figure 51, my research partners included the following:

- one founding member of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa;
- one set of parents who enrolled their child into the program in the late 1980s;
- one Mariachi Juan Seguin alumni who brought her three children to learn ballet folklórico;
- one elected co-founding Teatro Board of Director;
- one co-founder of Teatro, founding member of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa who became a Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa instructor, and artist in education in the local ISD;

- one current Teatro Board of Director and mother of a Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa and Conjunto Juan Seguin alumni;
- one Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa alumni, Mariachi Juvenil alumni, and artist in education in the local ISD;
- one Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa mother who enrolled three of her eight children and currently has three grandchildren enrolled;
- two married co-founders of Teatro,
  - all three of their children were part of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa,
  - one child was also a founding member of the Mariachi Juvenil, and
  - three grandchildren have been members of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa;
- one Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa alumni and former board member who, in turn, brought their child to participate in Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa;
- one Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa and Mariachi Juan Seguin alumni who, in turn, brought their child to participate in the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa and Mariachi Juan Seguin;
- three alumni of the Juan Seguin School “*La Juana*”; and
- four Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa alumni who became artistic directors for Teatro. Three of the four have children and all three have brought their children to be part of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa.

I collected data for this research in two ways. The first form through ethnographic interviews. I carefully selected interview research partners based on their experiences and engagement with Teatro, their ability to self reflect, and their participation in the public

pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy, all the while engaging in community education through the arts. The second form was through community *plática*. I selected *plática* research partners because of their affiliation to the Juan Seguin School and experiences they had attending segregated public education at the Juan Seguin School.

### **Making Sense of the Collective Stories (aka Data Analysis)**

Data analysis was integral in helping the tenets of consciousness unfold in the most organic way possible. During the interviews and community *plática*, I kept detailed memoing notes about research partners' body language, the different inflection points in their words or phrases, and specifically memoed and highlighted when a research partner would say something to the effect of "this is very important." Some of the body language witnessed included open arm position to closed arm position, shifting body weight while sitting in chair, leaning forward toward the researcher, tapping of toes, and grabbing for a drink of water before they answered a question that may have made them uncomfortable but had courage to answer. After each partner interview I created an analytic memo that enabled me to create a mini-analysis of what I was learning during the interview and *plática*, as well as after. Research partners also participated in an exercise where they wrote on different size Post-it Notes responses that were important to them and that they wanted me to capture. These Post-it Notes were placed in their respective year chronology on butcher paper that was housed on easels throughout the building. This exercise began the creation of a historical timeline. Along with memoing, I voice recorded each interview, transcribed the interview while checking memoing notes, and listened once more to recording while copying important phrases and stories into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet indicated who was speaking and key symbols and

words, along with annotating the story. Key tenets began to emerge and were color coded to help identify the patterns more easily. I replicated this process of data analysis for Interview 1 and Interview 2 of each research partner, as well as throughout the *plática*.

### **Construction of Knowledge and an Emerging Consciousness (aka Findings)**

I present the research findings through a dialogical approach guided by the study's conceptual framework of the CLE theory of change and the literature review highlighting public pedagogy, community cultural wealth, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community education through the arts. The RASPPA model (see Figure 4) represents the core elements of the theory of change in a dynamic way. It weaves the fundamental principles of relationships, assets, stories, places, politics, and actions with the three ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 36-37).

The stories and experiences each research partner shared were similar in content and context. In the findings, I present the five tenets that emerged and have chosen specific stories from the research partners to give breath to each tenet. The five tenets were:

- Critical awareness of self
- Deficit thinking and resiliency (Racism and segregation)
- Organic process of an emerging public pedagogy: Teaching, learning, and leading
- Community education
- Cultural pride and sustainability

Through the interviews and *plática*, I gathered the stories that captured, informed, and supported the tenets. I welcomed research partners into Teatro's Cultural Arts Center for face-to-face interviews (see Figure 52) and *pláticas*. Research partners were also welcomed via Zoom if they were unable to be interviewed face-to-face. I conducted several interviews with elders inside their residences. Through these interviews and *pláticas*, "the dress" (*vestido*) was present to witness the stories, feelings, and emotions that were being expressed, along with capturing all the teaching and learning that had taken place outside and inside these four walls (see Figure 53). I use the voice of the *vestido* to share with the reader the stories of each research partner.



**Figure 52. Ethnographic Interview and Anthropological Life Map Space.** Researcher Archive.



**Figure 53. Photo Story Map.** Photos from Teatro Archive Collage artistically created by Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa and Conjunto Juan Seguin Alumni, Alejandro Luis Guerra.

## Weaving of Emerging Stories

### *Opening*

Thank you for accepting my invitation to be a research partner for the Ahora Puedo Respirar Now I Can Breathe research project. It is nice of you to give of your time, share your experiences and stories with me today. These interviews will be focused on the life of you, the research partner, as well as, focus on the struggle and resiliency of the Mexican American community in this Central Texas town as we attempted to maintain, teach, and celebrate their Mexican American roots, customs, knowledge and rituals through community education. Questions will be disseminated through a one-on-one interview inside Teatro's Cultural Arts Center or via Zoom. Are you ready to begin? (Yvonne)

Below you will see the unfolding and unveiling of the tenets through the research partners' words, reflections, and stories.

### *Critical Awareness of Self*

Through eyelet lace, I have witnessed transformations of the young and young at heart who have worn me and of those who have participated in the intentional



programming of Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin. It is through their own words that I bring reflections of the unfolding of critical awareness of self. (Vestido)

Through the following reflections, you will get to witness the power of self-awareness that the research partners shared.

I was a middle school teacher and I was very excited and had been working with my principal to bring an assembly that addressed the Hispanic culture and something that would appeal to the Mexican American children. So one day my principal came in and he said, “I got you one Toyita.” He had contracted with some sort of dance company out of Spain, mind you, not Mexico but Spain, which talked to his lack of knowledge of Mexican American culture, but I was still thrilled. You have the castanets, the footwork, and the beautiful costumes. We came to the assembly with approximately 800 kids and the dancers were awesome, their castanets were synchronized, their footwork was synchronized and I was mesmerized with it and loved it. It took me back to my childhood. Then I snapped out of it. When I started to look around there was no celebration from the Hispanic kids, but they were nervously giggling, they were timid and didn’t really know how to take it. They were embarrassed of what was going on. That moment not only snapped me out of who I was as a person, and the passing down of the Mexican American traditions, it made me question, “What was I going to do to make the change?” I not only recognized my personal voice but also wanted a plan of action. At that time, I did not have the Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin in mind, but I knew I was going to work on something to make a difference in this community. Teatro has filled the void in culture but we have not filled all of it. We really have done a good job of reaching out to many individuals from different cultures but first and foremost, we made a difference and created a sustainable community amongst the Hispanics and Mexican Americans in Seguin. (Toyita)

I like seeing the kids themselves, the other dancers, how they progress and how it makes them more sure of themselves. It helps their self esteem and being a teacher, I’m all about seeing kids grow. I think it makes them feel proud to be a Mexican and I think that’s very important [see Figure 55]. In my own life I was who I was. I wasn’t a Mexican. I wasn’t a White. I was just me. Whereas these kids [see Figure 54] are like I’m a Mexican and I’m proud of it. I didn’t feel proud being a Mexican. I was just a Mexican because I was. When my kids were dancing before the recitals, I would ask, “Are you nervous?” I was a nervous wreck. Anytime I had to talk to anybody. I was a nervous wreck. Are you nervous? No, mom. When they make a presentation, it doesn’t matter to whom or in front of whom, “Are you nervous?” No. I say Teatro helped a lot with that. I feel Teatro has opened the doors for a lot of kids. For me, Teatro helped me be creative. It helped me to think of other ways to make the kids shine and to make the kids feel like important. We did the parade of different costumes for the teachers who were near this town. The parade was my idea and every kid had a different costume. I felt like let’s show the community what we’ve got. For the

20th Annual Recital the parents danced to *Bidi Bidi Bom Bom* in different costumes, that was me, that was my idea. I decided that, hey kids are always dancing, parents should get up there and dance. We all performed and it was fun and I taught them how to dance. I also learned that I could be a leader because I am not. I knew the ropes, I knew the routine, I knew everything. So I could be a leader and lead the new parents through lots of things. I took leadership in doing fundraisers, doing garage sales at Teatro, and organizing dinners. And again, I was the expert, parents thought I was the expert because I had been around for 20 years. So I could stand in front of parents, talk to them and be a leader. (Steady)



**Figure 54. Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa Dancers Dressed in Norte Vestuario.** Teatro Archive.

In the 2010 my son was asked to participate in a fashion show. I signed out a costume for him, got him dressed up, and brought him in. We had a plataforma here in the mural room and he was dressed in a Norte costume. He had his hands in his pockets and he was strutting. He had his little hat on, turning like a *modelo* [see Figure 55]. I was really excited because he was not embarrassed, he could do things independently, fiercely, strongly, with pride and that made me very, very happy. He was dressed in a costume that our elders were made fun of when they dressed in it early on and he was strutting it up and having a good time. He looked good, he knew it, and it made me happy. (Maria)



**Figure 55. Conjunto Accordion Student and Modelo.** Teatro Archive.

At some point, I had to get over the fact that I was ashamed to perform in Mexican clothing, because the people thought it was weird. I think I learned to be resilient, to overcome and this has served me, trust me when I tell you it has served me throughout my entire adulthood. I could be resilient, I could rise above it, I could still enjoy myself, and sometimes it was hard. But I think that that's one of the things that I learned about myself with Teatro, how to be a performer and also how to overcome bad things. (Diosa)

I learned a lot more than dancing, I have learned skills that have carried on in me which are: discipline, confident, passion, and so many things. Learning to work in different groups, collaborations and Teatro helped me to learn all the skills. (Amalia)

I learned self-confidence. Self-esteem being worked up. Being able to stand up and talk in front of crowds, perform in front of crowds. All those little intangibles that go with being able to perform and mainly self-confidence. (Gilberto)

I learned that I was more than a misunderstood student in my school, which is really important because I felt really out of place in my school. To have a place where I didn't feel out of place and where I felt valued, and where I felt valued enough that people put work into me. And people put time into me to tell me that I was worth something, to tell me that I did have skills, to tell me that I did have a lot of potential, and that I still have a lot of potential. The people that I grew up with that were my elders, that were looking at me as a student, I can now consider

them peers, and still are my peers and my elders whom still to this day tell me, that I'm on the right track. They share with me still on ways I can grow, share that I'm on my way, and that I am doing a good job of being on my way to those things. As an adult, I'm still receiving that from this organization. Now, in my current role, where I'm largely creating a ballet folklórico program, even just the lessons about my own self worth, about my own level of confidence in my abilities to do whatever it is I choose to do. Teatro had a hand in that. So the idea that I'm now creating a ballet folklórico program from scratch, I draw from that confidence that I was able to gain from the support I got from a place like Teatro. So I'm still using that every single day. (Beni)

Teatro's cultural programming is public pedagogy and is a place of learning that has had transformative potential. These spaces and places of learning are akin to nepantla, which Anzaldúa and Keeting (2000) explained is a "Nahuatl term meaning 'el lugar entre medio,' el lugar entre medio de todos los lugares, the space in-between" (p. 238). For Anzaldúa and Keeting, this in-between and liminal space between worlds where identities and experiences overlap is itself a process of creativity, change, and transformation that involves the relational self and the nepantlera's work of bridging and coalition (Villenas & Osorio Gil, 2020, p. 179).

### ***The Tension Between Deficit Thinking and Resiliency***

Although Yvonne never really liked all the colors of the ribbon on me, she particularly did not like the brown ribbon. She questioned why it was even used if it was not as vibrant as the other colors. Little did Yvonne know, the brown ribbon was beautiful against my bright yellow cloth that clothed her. At the tender age of 10 years old, she did not fully understand the racism and segregation that were prevalent in the community in which she lived, she only knew she would have to work longer and harder than everyone else. She was taught that through it all she would prevail and resiliency was part of her DNA. (Vestido)

Through the reflections below, you will witness what some of the researcher partners also experienced and how they persevered. These stories also capture how the brown ribbon came alive. Note that I interviewed Flor and Ramon together, so their quotes are presented as one unit.

Big change for me when I was growing up was my education because I moved school districts and moved from Seguin to Navarro. That was really challenging and was maybe the hardest change for me in growing up. It was just a culture shock. I grew up in Seguin ISD and transferred to Navarro ISD when I was in high school. I feel like it definitely felt very segregated and I became a minority in the school district. I was one of just a handful of Hispanic students. It was majority Caucasian, and maybe one or two African American students. At some point I felt like and whether it was intentional or not, but I kind of felt like I ran into some of the racist situations. I constantly had to prove myself to teachers versus, just being accepted as a kid that was smart and Hispanic. Sometimes it felt like it was a supernatural power that I had, being smart and Hispanic, because it didn't feel like it was accepted. I was very bright, taking advanced courses, and I did fine, academically. Extracurricular, I was involved but socially, that I think, was probably the most challenging because here I was, a Hispanic student coming into a predominantly White high school. It kind of threw them for a loop because I was smart and that was, surprising. I also was involved in so many things, I have a lot of skills. Throughout high school, I think I became more confident. (Amalia)

Back then, in those days, I couldn't help to feel my Hispanic heritage made me feel bad and kind of left out. If you were in a classroom with a bunch of other people that were not Hispanic, they wouldn't help you as much. I don't know if it was my name. I just can't help but feel that way. But I got through it, we had to. (Ramon)

We were both the only ones that graduated high school from our families. (Flor)

Back then and in our times there was racism in between schools. You had to learn how to live with that. You learned to live with it because it was there. I remember going to high school, my first year, I got told to go home because my hair was too long. They told me I couldn't go to school until I cut my hair. I couldn't afford a haircut. How could I tell my mother I needed some money to cut my hair. It's one of those times that really makes a person very angry. There were a lot of incidents that happened here in Texas, South Texas and here in Seguin. (Ramon)

I was in the desegregation. So I was one of those students that went to almost every school because they were trying to divide the students up in certain ways. I lived all my life in Track Heights, so it wasn't that I was moving. I started at Erskine then went to Juan Seguin and to Weinert. Then they were desegregated middle schools so I ended up at Ball for seventh grade and Saegert for eighth grade then high school. In high school I chose to go the office education way and I kept my grades up. I went to the counselor's office to ask about scholarships and I remember my counselor, Aubrey Marshall telling me, oh you don't need to fill any of those out, you're gonna get married. You don't have to go to school. (Flor)

The one thing my parents did talk about a lot was "when you go to school, you're going to need to work hard, but you're going to need to work 10 times harder, because you're Hispanic. Most people, not everybody, are going to think that

you're going to fail, not be able to make it or not be smart enough." I've heard them tell my daughter that and I teach her as well to always conduct herself in a respectful manner, because she reflects her family. I did qualify for gifted and talented when I was at Weinert Elementary school, probably around first or second grade. I was excited because my other friends had gotten in too. But my mom didn't want me to go and I didn't understand, but my mom said no. As an adult, I've asked her, "Why didn't you want me to go?" She said, "I knew that you were going to be the only Hispanic child from Weinert. Going over there." They pulled us from school and bussed us. The majority came from Weinert and Weinert was predominantly White. They bussed you to Sue Smith and they called the whole program, "Apollo." It turns out, she knew I'd be the only Hispanic and didn't want that much pressure on me as a young child. I ended up and was still in the same classes with these kids. In junior high, I started taking gifted and talented classes and in high school I think I had a few. When I got older in junior high, I really learned I needed to work harder, even harder than I ever had because that's where you started to see that segregation or the separation of kids. They posed it as, these kids can handle this type of academic heavy load and higher thinking and these kids can't, they are just in the regular classes. I was told "that's not the class you want to be in, you want to be in the high class." Now looking back those kids in the higher class were all White. (Mari)

In my time growing up, my introduction that I got to segregation was that Juan Seguin was for Latin Americans, Ball and Briesemeister were for colored people, and then Mary B. Erskine and Saegert were for White people. In fifth grade I was in Mary B. and then sixth grade I went to Saegert for 2 months and then I dropped out. We needed to help my dad, I wouldn't use the word disabled because he had a lot of pride. He still worked after he hurt his leg to help support the rest of the family because the boys went off to war. My oldest two boys [brothers] served in two wars. Whoever was up to driving and working, they dropped out of school, and grabbed a job. All my children graduated from high school except for my oldest son, because everyone thought he was a slow learner, but we found out he had dyslexia. He told me he did not want to finish school and asked me to sign him out. I said no because I did not want him to blame me for not letting him finish. He learned a trade of mechanic and got married and moved to North Carolina. He went to work for a big company and they saw his skill and 7 years later sent him to school to become an engineer. He earned his high school diploma and went to engineering school and is an engineer. (Panfila)

I can speak to several of my family, friends, and close family members who have been discouraged from taking positions of power here, based on the color of their skin, namely being told that they wouldn't receive votes based on the color of their skin. So that's a pretty racist practice. Other experiences with segregation indirectly, in my positions here in the community as staff of a nonprofit organization that works with several families, I've definitely heard throughout my life, about the schools that were segregated here in Seguin, known as the Juan Seguin School. It was clearly the Mexican school. So by way of me knowing that school exists, that's kind of an indirect experience I have with segregation in

Seguin is knowing that knowledge of that place, and knowing that not just across the Latino population, but that there were segregated schools for the Black community as well. And so by virtue of knowing those things, and because of my age, I can say that I have a lot of indirect experience based on the knowledge that I've acquired about that fact. (Beni)

Through the words of the research partners, the tension between deficit thinking and resiliency were ever present. The resiliency of the research partners was a trait that had been passed down and continued to be passed down to children, grandchildren, students, and families alike.

### ***Organic Process of an Emerging Public Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Leading***

I am made of 65% polyester and 35% cotton. I am smooth to the touch and best suited for clothing, religious apparel, dress shirts, and bed sheets. Nowhere was it ever posted that I was a cloth that would teach a community about the Mexican American culture and its history. I have been woven into the fabric of a community's learning that has transcended 39 years and counting. (Vestido)

Read below how the organic process of teaching and learning was experienced by some of the research partners.

I learned what we were supposed to learn, which was in the history books, which was whitewashed, and not the reality and not the truth of what actually happened. It wasn't accurate historical facts. I learned a lot of history from my family through *pláticas* with my great aunts, my Mami, and Papi. My great aunt marched with a Cesar Chavez. My Tia Enedina was a migrant farm worker in California and didn't have much of an education. But she marched with Cesar Chavez to better things for the farm workers. There is a picture that we have within our family where she is in the back holding up her picket signs and her little *banderita* with Cesar Chavez in front of her [see Figure 56]. (Maria)



**Figure 56. Cesar Chavez With Tia Enedina in Background Carrying Her Banderita.** Margarita Losoya Zepeda Family Archives.

I also remember learning that my great great grandfather fought with the Mexican military. In the long hallway of my grandmother's house there is a photo of my great great grandfather who fought with Pancho Villa and my great grandfather who fought with the Mexican military. They fought for separate sides, but were both Mexicanos [see Figure 57]. (Maria)



**Figure 57. Great, Great Grandfather and Great Grandfather Who Fought on Separate Sides.** Margarita Losoya Zepeda Family Archives.

In my education, the only time you ever heard of Mexico was in the learning of U.S. history and that's just the glossed over version of what makes America look good. I think there's a huge void especially us being so close to Mexico and the true reality of everything that went down and doesn't get reflected in the U.S. history books and the teaching tools. I've only learned in the past 20 years a lot of



what really happened and not the version put together for the Alamo movie. There's a huge void of all the information, we should be able to understand both sides of what was going on so that you can understand why some of the things are the way they are now. (David)

What I learned in school was, we should be cheering for the Alamo, even though that was being stolen. That Mexican people were bad because they were part of the revolution. The Mexican tropes that you read about in school, that are false, like literally false that's what I learned. So I learned to cheer for White people killing Mexican people when they were the ones taking from us because that's what you learned at school. Because we are in Texas, they definitely didn't want to teach us. There was no Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, there was no information about *La Raza Unida* which is now taught in colleges. I think had I learned about them in high school or junior high, I probably wouldn't have felt so alone as a person of color, and to have some pride in my heritage. I do recall learning about *La Raza Unida* from local historian, farmer, and Casablanca Revue editor, Alphonso Rincón. After he shared what he knew about *La Raza Unida*, I then went to ask my mom about it and she told me her story. (Diosa)

My dad's mother came from Mexico. Her brother carried her on his shoulders across the Rio Grande set her on the United States side and went back to Mexico because he had to care for his family. We have a lot of that culture that we still carry on even though she's gone. She had a big *capilla* in the backyard with life-size Jesus and St. Michael's statue and she had pews. Every year, way back when she was alive she would have a big *nacimiento* set up to do the Rosario on Christmas Eve. We would all [family] meet there. The *nacimiento* took over four tables and so the learning about the *nacimiento* and Rosario came with her. I don't really remember learning anything in school, except for things like sometimes the *Diez y Seis*. In high school, I was part of National Hispanic Institute, and I did prepare a speech and I researched about Cesar Chavez. I learned about him and his fight for better pay for the farmworkers. (Rosa)

I learned about *Cinco de Mayo* by reading books from the library, I did not learn about that in school. No I didn't learn anything in school, we only had world history and American history and none of them mentioned the Mexicans. I remember Santa Anna and the Alamo but it was always our fault and we came and invaded them when it was the other way around. We used to go to the *Diez y Seis de Septiembre* and see the queens and princesses and they had a carnival and food. It was a lot of fun. But then I started growing up and reading more about our culture and Mexico. Current City Hall is where the library used to be and it had books all over. When I was about 8 or 9 years old and mommy would take me so I could get books, I liked history. I wanted books on history and archeology. The librarian, an old White lady, told my mom, "She doesn't need books like that she's gonna get married and pregnant." How did she know what I was gonna be? So I always enjoyed history and I read a lot on history Mexico, mostly on Mexico, different regions in Mexico. (Yaya)

Research partners were eager to share that what they learned while in formal schooling was not what they were learning at home among their families and their elders. They expressed taking their own learning into their own hands when it came to seeking factual historical knowledge.

### ***Community Education***

The gathering of the seamstresses who make Mexican folklore *vestuario* for Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa dancers has always been my favorite thing to witness. They gather together to share stories full of laughter and sometimes sorrow, they teach one another about different stitching techniques and which one works best for each kind of fabric, and they give life *consejos* to one another while sewing. It is a gathering of minds, spirits, and souls and this gathering place allows them to share the knowledge that will help thrust one another forward. This space is a community space, a safe place, and a place to learn. (Vestido)

Through the words and phrases provided by the research partners, you can deduce what they are learning and the impact it has had.

I asked my mother why did she start Teatro and she said, “Because I wanted to make sure that all of our children understood their culture.” The second thing that stuck in my head is the story that is part of my storytelling when I talk to people who don’t know my mother and don’t even know Seguin or where I come. She said, “It is a place where I can speak and all the parents can speak and organize, to make change in our community. It’s the one place where we can feel safe to do so because we’re amongst our people. Our children are dancing and we’re waiting there, just *platicando* and talking about the issues of the day and how we might move forward.” For Teatro to be able to utilize the art education that they’re doing at the cultural arts center, to be able to organize amongst the parents to talk about who needs help, what they should be doing. I will tell you, when I was there, and even now, when I visit, that is how I see Teatro, not only is it providing arts education for the children, and political education for the children, it is also providing that to parents. It’s all the way through. I think that’s how Teatro has been in existence for 39 years. I think so many people even myself included, are changed in such a pivotal and core ways that we took that with us wherever we ended up. It just didn’t stay in Seguin. The fact that I am telling you this 30 years later means it’s still in me. This is how I built my friendship circles and my businesses around this idea and Teatro is more than just a business. It’s more than just a cultural arts center. It’s about engaging, teaching, and normalizing doing business in a way that centers community and relationships while still being business minded. (Diosa)

I believe we build community. The first time that we had the very first recital, I mean, it was a family affair. We were dancing, some dances from Norte Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon. The *charreadas* in Mexico, was everything that Tejanos were doing before Texas became part of the U.S. So the parents [dads] were bringing decorations for the stage such as *monturas*, bales of hay, and the moms were in the back putting on the kids' makeup. When they opened up the curtains and the first set of kids came to the stage, my mind took me back to that middle school setting, when los *Españolas* were dancing. I looked around, I wanted to see the parents' reactions and the reactions were priceless. I still remember some of those parents' reaction in the pride for their kids to be on stage, then the pride that the kids had, the confidence that was built in them, because they were able to stand before a crowd [see Figure 58]. It's not easy for a lot of adults to get on stage and here all of sudden you get kids on stage, they are part of a group, they stay synchronized in what their dancing and we are asking them to smile along the way. Oh, and the *gritos* they were asked to perform which they were not used to and some are still not used to doing that to show *el gusto* that comes from our people. It was a priceless thing for me to see that and to say, "What a difference!" Oh, yes, and I guess those folks that were saying it's not up to the schools to build up the culture and the history, thank you! We understood what you were saying and we the parents and community did it. Teatro will continue because the community upholds it. Our board of directors will come and go, our staff will come and go, but the heart is very dear, because the heart is what upholds Teatro. I want to share that it's not always the Hispanic community that upholds Teatro, you have African American and White people who have been along with us because they have the gusto and because they see that when we better each other, we live in a better community and country. (Toyita)



**Figure 58. First Ballet Folklórico Recital.** Teatro Archive.

I had the most wonderful experience with Teatro because I connected with my Mexican roots here in the United States. Especially after Teatro was founded and *Profesor Cruz* from Mexico [see Figure 59] was my teacher, that meant the world to me to have a Mexican folklórico dance teacher. I also got to reconnect with my Mexican roots. The circumstances that I found in the schools when I began

teaching was there was nothing of substance ever discussed or presented and/or exposed students to their own culture. When I helped co-found, I thought to myself, this is a great project. It is going to help students. Through Teatro students who are in the school district are more aware of their cultural background roots. That happened because Teatro provided a special teacher to go into the classrooms to teach dancing, in addition to the cultural programs presented by teachers and this special teacher went into the schools during the day. There were some schools that wanted to have a special program once a year. I was asked by Teatro if I wanted to teach dancing in the schools, as an artist in education, and I taught for several years. We presented *Cinco de Mayo* programs to students and parents and this was in addition to going into the classrooms to teach dancing. (Trailita)



**Figure 59. Profesor Benjamin Cruz Ascencio. Teatro Archive.**

Teatro has done a lot. I'm going to tell you the people that are running it, which are family oriented have education and know how to push it. If you don't have an education, all you have to have is the wisdom to explain it. Even if you don't have the correct words, that person who sat in front of you will absorb it and catch it. It all comes to unity. Teatro teaches and shares and that's very important. (Panfila)

My first experience with Teatro was reading it in the newspaper. I actually started with Teatro after a meeting with YaYa. YaYa talked about Teatro and also at the same time my daughter saw the ballet folklórico dancing and said, "I want to do that." (Flor)

During that same time our daughter was a member of the Girl Scouts and she [Flor] was an awesome Girl Scout leader. (Ramon)

She [daughter] had just started in her first year of ballet folklórico and back in that time Teatro had fundraisers but we didn't have that many at the time to purchase costumes. Hence parents had to make the costumes, like your yellow Jalisco dress and our daughter's in purple. So for International Taste for the Girl Scouts we chose Mexico, so our daughter wore her costume. (Flor)

There was a photographer from the newspaper that wanted to take her picture so she just started dancing like she knew already how to dance. (Ramon)

All the girls in the troop either wore a Mexican dress or a top from Mexico and then we handed out food to everyone. (Flor)

I've learned so much about myself, about my culture, about my work ethic, and about my abilities through Teatro. Based on my self knowledge that Teatro helped facilitate, I am always looking forward to perpetuating that onto students. Simply put, I know what it has done for me. I want to be a part of continuing to do those types of things for other students as well. In terms of what cultural practices and/or understanding of the Mexican American people did I learn about in school? Well, I didn't learn about them in school, it was a place like Teatro where I learned. So to be sure that the base continues to be covered for students now going through school, I want to be a part of that facilitation. I want to make sure that we can take a child who's not receiving the same types of information and knowledge that I wasn't getting when I was in school and put them in a place like Teatro, and engage them with the programming, like what we do here at Teatro. This will ensure the base gets covered and to make sure Teatro doesn't lose a step, that Teatro doesn't lose a generation of kids that are going to need this too. (Beni)

Research partners shared the impact community education through Teatro provided and how it affected them. They shared reconnecting with their Mexican roots, and being able to speak and organize to make change in their community. They also expressed how Teatro teaches and shares its knowledge with all.

### ***Cultural Pride and Sustainability***

Every little girl who has worn me has learned about the traditional dances and historical information from the State of Jalisco. This also goes for all of my *comadres* and *compadres* that you will find in the *vestuario* room. All the costumes for almost every region in Mexico tell a story to those who wear them and to those who witness the performances. That is one of the many tasks of a costume. We also instill cultural pride and through our teachings sustain our history and keep our culture alive. (Vestido)

What do the research partners have to say about cultural pride and sustainability?

Read below for their comments.

One summer I went to witness the ending ceremony of Teatro's Summer Agroecology and Arts Camp. When I arrived the children were circled up and were sharing about the experiences they had during camp. I felt proud that the kids are learning about their culture. It's amazing that if you teach the kids, they

will learn their traditions. Being the volunteer treasurer for 38 years at Teatro, I have always been in charge of the books and making sure the organization was fiscally sound. That day when I listened to the kids, I turned to my wife and told her, "It just makes it all worthwhile." (Chon)

It was hard work. I wanted the community to have their dance like other communities have and introduce children to our culture and our dance. I would research and read up on the costumes and Toyita did the business side. I would make sure that the costumes were the right costumes for each dance and region. We went to Mexico one year and bought back costumes. We got a grant so Vickie, Homer, Joe, and I and one Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa parent went with us and we paid her way. It was really hard because we didn't know anything in Mexico City, but we found a lot of places. Miguelito's store is where we bought shoes. We bought a lot of costumes from the store El Farajon. My niece began dancing with another company and I met Profesor "Profe" Benjamin Cruz Ascencio. I brought Profe to Seguin. I asked him if he would come and teach our kids or give a little seminar in the summer. He went back home [Suchitlan Comala Colima, Mexico] and then I picked him up in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico and he stayed with me for 2 to 3 weeks. A bunch of kids came from New Braunfels, I don't know where else but we had a big crowd and he taught them a bunch of dances in one week. Then he stayed on as a teacher for the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa. (Yaya)

My deep cultural connections to Mexico by birth inspired me to become a founder for Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin. I always longed to have the Mexican American culture shine in the United States of America and become a part of the American culture. I am talking about the mainstream. I was very upset emotionally when I was a teacher. I would walk down the halls and would see many decorations down the hall and not one single decoration addressed the Mexican American culture. I was upset emotionally because of the lack of knowledge about our culture by school staff, teachers and principals. I felt like our culture was totally ignored. When the bilingual program started and the state began to pour money into the school districts this changed and at that particular moment Teatro was founded. I went along with the other co-founders because of the cultural connection that I had to Mexico and knowing that Teatro was going to promote our culture. That was important to me, even though I was scared because I have never committed to a cause as big as that. I am glad that I did because I have seen the many blessings that Teatro De Artes brought not only to me as a dancer for 7 years which was the greatest experience of my life. I became a Mexican folklore dancer and that was the greatest thrill of my life. I found a home in Teatro, a place where I belonged where I felt recognized as a human being with my Mexican roots. I felt ecstatic and blessed that I was part of this project called Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin. (Trailita)

I think Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin and the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa which I was involved in really helped create a sense of pride within myself and of my culture. Teatro taught me that at an early age. I wasn't shy to get up on stage

even though I wasn't talking, I was up there dancing, showing how proud I was of my culture and was sharing with others. Part of showing leadership doesn't always have to be taking over a room, standing and talking at those you lead. Leadership comes in different forms and I think that's one of the things the Ballet Folklórico taught me. Leadership can be silent and expressed through actions. Leadership is about having a sense of pride, sharing that pride with those you lead, and helping others without looking for accolades and being the example. I think Teatro is doing an amazing job with our kids as the programs have grown. I went to college at Baylor University, I brought a piece of that cultural connection with me to Waco and where I created a group that is still active, Ballet Folklórico Las Estrellas de Waco. I was very proud to bring cultural awareness to that community. I'm proud to say that I did that. I am proud to know a lot of Mexican folklore dances, I am proud to have come back to Seguin to have mentored some of our current artistic directors and work again at Teatro. (Rigoberta)

Of course joining the Teatro allowed me to participate and learn even more about the dance and the art. When I wanted to do it, dance Ballet Folklórico, I just thought "oh that's beautiful, I want to do that." But as I started learning and realizing what I was doing through ballet folklórico I figured this is big, this is something way bigger and older than I ever thought it was and all comes from Mexico. I learned the why and learned each region had a reason they performed certain steps. There was a story being told in each dance and the way they wore their costumes. That had a big impact on my knowledge of Mexican American culture. It helped me take more pride and made me realize I'm from this and I'm sharing this with you. Yes, you think it's so cute and so pretty but, for those 3 minutes I captivated you with my culture. Whether you like it or not, I'm sharing this with you and bringing my culture into your life. (Mari)

When we started Teatro, and me being inside the schools and being amongst the business world, people were saying, well, it's not people, I mean, White people were saying, "Well, it's not our responsibility to teach you about the culture." Well, sometimes my answers were, "Well, it is your responsibility to teach us about the history. We are part of the fabric of this country." But you're right, when it comes culture, maybe the homes, the parents are going to need to be working outside the school to become involved in giving our kids the culture. But, it was still the responsibility of the school to teach history. With that in mind, we began Teatro not as program oriented, even though the programs we offered such as Ballet Folklórico the goal was engaging the Moms and Dads and their children. We are also open and inviting and encouraging the parents. During practices we set a very inviting table with chairs where parents would sit. Then the parents got to know each other, they got to talk to one another. Parents also had the opportunity to know some of the people running Teatro and they were the board of directors. At the very early stages many of our board of directors would sit around the table conversing with them. So very pointed we were engaging the community. So 39 years later we still have that table either in the back or front room so that the kids are participating in the cultural activity learning either ballet, mariachi or Conjunto music and are always being able to see their parents close



by communication with others and building community. So it has been the families of Seguin, it has been that community that has uplifted Teatro and supported Teatro. We have paid employees, we have a board of directors who chart the course of what will happen yearly at the June workshop, but it's the parents, they are the nucleus of our organization. They keep coming back, they come back with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren [see Figure 60]. Teatro moves on because of the will of the people, the community, and the friendships that we have built around the citizens of Seguin [see Figure 61]. (Toyita)



**Figure 60. Three Generations of Teatro De Artes Witnesses.** Teatro Archive.



**Figure 61. Camacho Cousins Who All Danced With the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa.** Camacho Family Archive.



Teatro has been able to instill cultural pride through its teachings to all. The sharing of a deeper knowledge of one's culture is at the core of why students walk away with pride. The secrets to the sustainability of Teatro are the relationships it has built and fostered over the past 39 years, actions it has taken to ensure all have access to the knowledge they are seeking, and the stories it has curated on its own but also as a holder of stories from la comunida. Last, it is a place they can call home that provides learning opportunities for all and has a warm and welcoming environment.

It is important to note that there was a spiritual and religious connection to Teatro's Cultural Arts Center (formerly known as the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and Hall on Krezdorn Street before it was moved). Numerous research partners shared they were of the Catholic faith. They also shared their recollections of getting married or of their siblings getting married in the building. Others shared they attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic School and received the holy sacraments of reconciliation, holy communion, and confirmation inside the building. Others shared they attended catechism, quineañeras, and Teatro-sponsored events (see Figure 62) in that same building before it was moved and became Teatro's Cultural Arts Center. This building has served as a place of worship and healing, a place to teach and learn, a place to share resources among community, a place of cultural sustainability, and much more.



**Figure 62. Ballet Folklórico IRBAC From Cuernavaca, Mexico Performed Inside Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Hall, 1983. Teatro Archive.**

## Conclusion

Critical consciousness is prevalent within the space of teaching, learning, and leading and has contributed to Teatro's growth and act of resistance of change within the community based on my study's results. It was through the deliberate teachings of Teatro that youth and adults were able to reclaim, maintain, and celebrate their Mexican American roots, customs, knowledge, and celebrations through community education. Teatro provided a space to learn that was emancipatory and liberating in thought, culture, and in spirit for a community that was trying to survive in a colonial world. Through the leadership of "public intellectuals," Teatro created a public pedagogy that used practices such as teaching dance, regional dance information, the playing of musical instruments, lectures, celebrations of Mexican American traditional holidays, and more to address what was missing from formal education.

Theory of change was at the forefront of how this community used a community-building approach that moved away from community development based on deficit thinking models (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32) and placed value in relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action.

### ***Relationships***

Healthy relationships were built in the community and with families to beget an effective organization and strong communities. These relationships were built at church, through focus groups, and through community building within the Teatro organization.

### ***Assets***

Teatro's leaders made it a point to look at its own assets from within the community to give of their gifts to help build up the community. Some of those assets included dance instructors, bilingual, history, and mathematic teachers, along with musical directors and local historians, to name a few.

### ***Stories***

Stories of struggle and resilience were captured and individuals were encouraged to engage in a deeper dive of their own story. They were also invited to learn more about the organization's story as well as the community's story. The learning of stories brings about reflection, inquiry, and understanding.

### ***Places***

Through its nomadic movement from place to place until 1997 when it gained a permanent home (see Figure 63), Teatro was always considered a place that exemplified unique strengths, assets, and gifts that gave back to the community. When Teatro's leaders signed the purchase documents in 1997, histories of the building and land began

to emerge from families and the community at large that began to gather at different events. These stories have been shared with at least two generations of youth and adults and will continue to be shared with future generations.



**Figure 63. Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Hall When it was First Moved From Krezdorn to W. New Braunfels St. Teatro Archive.**

### *Politic*

Teatro's leaders and community members sought to do public good for the betterment of self, the organization, and the community. The community was at a crossroads and fought to reclaim, maintain, and celebrate their Mexican American roots (see Figure 64). It is through the desire and will of self, organization, and community that Teatro continues to deliver mission-based programming.



**Figure 64. Seguin Gazette Newspaper Article About Celebration of Song and Dance.**

## Action

With relationships, assets, stories, and place moving in unison, action is in continuous motion. It took a small group to set the wheels in motion and the community has sustained (see Figure 65) the movement for 39 years. Action is an observable that cannot be denied.

The results of the study placed a focus on how public pedagogy traversed throughout the stories and experiences of research partners. It was through “public intellectuals” that grassroots activism and a social movement were born and would educate generations of youth and adults. The common good brought together the public, individuals, and groups from *la comunidad* to disrupt space and focus on educational

practices outside of the traditional schooling environment. This can be viewed as activist work with a focus on that which is culturally and socially relevant and responsive.



**Figure 65. Community Sustained.** Teatro Archive.

Based on the conclusions derived from the information provided from my research partners, in the final chapter I present implications, make recommendations, illuminate the conditions of the context in which we live, and provide thoughts on future work.

## V. LA RESILIENCIA & POWER: LET THE *VESTIDO* SPEAK<sup>1</sup>

I want to articulate that the COVID-19 pandemic has stopped neither our growth nor our development. This research has traversed through the conditions of the day and the last few years. The pandemic has opened up space for nurturing one another through showing grace, mercy, and seeking understanding. It has also opened up a reimagining of what the future can be. During this pandemic, numerous families came out to do the work with me. As the researcher, I was responsible for ensuring a safe and healthy environment was afforded to each research partner and took all necessary precautions for this work to be completed. The research partners were committed and did not let fear keep them in their homes or keep me out of their homes. The statement that my research partners personified by their willingness to be interviewed or join in on a community *plática* was the following—they wanted to celebrate this work by sharing their stories and they became vulnerable in more ways than one. They also came to expect that I would take care of them in this process the way they have taken care of our stories, histories, pain, resistance, and resiliency.

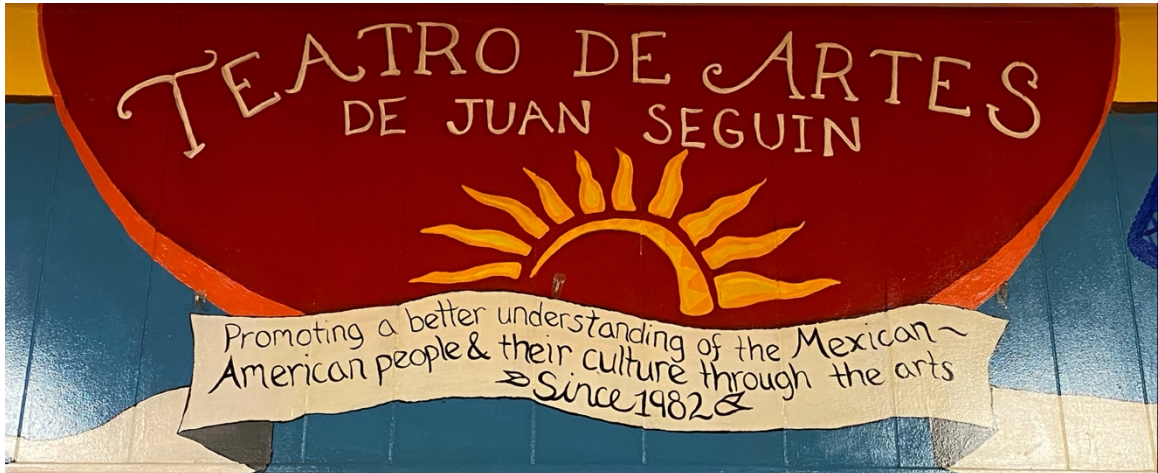
Qualitative research and critical ethnography in particular creates an opportunity for academicians and common people alike to put forth the stories of people, culture, and communities (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002, p. 283). In this qualitative study, the research partners and I explored the struggle and resiliency of the Mexican American community in Central Texas as they attempted to maintain, teach, and celebrate their Mexican

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<sup>1</sup> This is symbolic as the *vestido* becomes the witness through time, metaphoric for the role of women in the work, and epistemology as a collective-dialogical process emerges between *el vestido* and the researchers, *el vestido* and the place and *el vestido* and the emerging politic.



American roots, customs, knowledge, and celebrations through community engagement and education. Through this research, I explored the history; impact on self, organization, and community; and its agency within racially contentious times. In addition, I provided insight into public pedagogy as it relates to teaching, learning, and leading as a means to record the growth and change within the community (see Figure 66).



**Figure 66. Weaver of Lived Experiences, Stories, and Dreams That Emerged From This Community.** Teatro's logo and mission on Teatro's Mural inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.

Three main questions guided the inquiry and data collection:

1. How has the history of segregation, assimilation, and (anti)racist practices and conditions shaped the present reality in Seguin, Texas?
2. How have cultural incompetence and a lack of cultural fluency and understanding of the Mexican American people and culture created a void and invitation for a public pedagogy in the Seguin community?
3. How does Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin use community education to address social, political, educational, and institutional change in this Central Texas community?



The inquiry process I engaged in with my research partners has affected the core of my very being. I remained in constant conversation with my community of elders, family, friends, and colleagues to ensure I stayed true to my native ways of collecting symbols and presenting my findings. I experienced an inner struggle of questioning whether I should have been writing and collecting data in the way required of me or whether I should give into my organic and more natural instinct of inquiry of collecting symbols and documenting through photovoice. Photovoice is a form of participatory action research and through photos and images I was able to capture and those given to me by my research partners, I was able to provide insight into another dimension of my research. Images and photographs encompass almost all aspects of everyday life, in personal spaces and workspaces (Aboulkacem & Haas, 2018; Kember & Zylinska, 2012; Pink, 2013). Pink (2013) stated photographs are inextricably linked to multiple identities, personal stories, popular cultures, social norms, and the political climate. To share these stories, Becker (1974) explained how photography is important in chronicling society and further described how a camera is a machine that captures and disseminates information like a typewriter. In this final chapter, I will continue to let the stories and photos illustrate the study's significance. This strategy is not intended to introduce new concepts to the research, but to weave the loose ends of the social fabric in a coherent and meaningful way. I use the dress, *el vestido*, as a co-narrator.

We will traverse back into Chapter I, El Mapa Vial, Roadmap, and stitch implications for (a) teaching, learning, and leading; (b) resiliency of the Mexican American community to maintain, teach, celebrate their roots, customs, knowledge, and celebrations through community education; (c) history, impact on self, organization, and

community; and (d) future research within these implications and elements of the fabric that supports concluding thoughts.

All will align with the conceptual framework that synchronizes with the implications I present. The framework encompasses analysis and findings reached during different stages of inquiry and their impact on critical consciousness, understanding of history, and impact on self, organization, and community. I use stories and photos provided by the research partners to ground each implication and the resiliency of a community.

### **Implications for Teaching, Learning, and Leading**

I learned about my culture from my family, my community and Teatro. I was a member of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa and Mariachi Juvenil when I was younger. In 1992 my Dad started a Mariachi and I joined. We played together until 2002. When I was in college, I worked closely with Teatro by teaching ballet folklórico in the Seguin ISD elementary schools as an artist in residency. I recall my students at Jefferson Elementary were invited to perform at the MASBA [Mexican American School Board Association] conference in San Antonio. Teatro was sharing how we can take culture into the schools and share the culture with all the students and not a specific subsector of children. I also got to lead these same students through a performance during the day for the entire school and another performance in the evening for their parents. (Rosa)

Through my own experiences with Teatro, we (researcher and *vestido*) share these same stories with my research partners. We have been artists in residency at several elementary schools where we shared our knowledge of culture, folklórico dancing, and historical knowledge of the dances. We shared this information with students, educators, families, and community. We led them to similar performances for their school communities as well as for their families and friends. The full circle from student, to educator, to leader influenced our self-awareness and helped with growth individually and within our community. It provided an insight far beyond what is seen as a student, as it affords the opportunity to make connections intrinsically and extrinsically. Teatro has

created a space of vibrancy, a space for identity formation, remembering and reclaiming of our indigenous ways (see Figure 67), our culture, roots, customs, and language.



**Figure 67. Reclaiming of Our Indigenous Ways. Teatro Archive.**

An implication of the research is the importance of growing your own leaders. When growing your own leaders, you are able to teach and pass down culture, cultural art forms, and factual historical information from one generation to the next. This will create a ribbon-like flow of endless information that can be passed down for decades to come. It will also help facilitate a cultural connection to the *antepasados* and their ways of knowing, showing, and growing. It is important to share that the passing down of culture, cultural art forms, and factual historical information (see Figure 68) is beneficial to all and not one single race, gender, or creed. Implications have provided an entry point for Mexican Americans to share the ways in which community education has and can uplift a community through teaching, learning, and leading. This breath can lead future

generations toward a new way to approach educating adults in formal and non-formal educational spaces.



**Figure 68. Passing Down of Culture and Factual Historical Information.** Teatro Archive.

It is through community cultural wealth, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community education through the arts that these implications can be enacted into theory and practice. Local indigenous knowledge and local leaders provide a community informed methodology along with sharing of values. Valuing holders and creators of knowledge within your own community and also inviting others from outside the community to share their capital can help address and resist racism along with other forms of oppression. According to McKnight & Block (2010),

An abundant community is not organized the system way—there is no interest in consistency, uniformity, and replaceable parts. Abundance is about the variety of gifts and what is most personal and idiosyncratic to families and neighborhoods. A competent community, one that takes advantage of its abundance, admits the realities of the human condition and the truth of the decay, restoration, and growth processes that are a part of every living system. Variety, uniqueness, and appreciation for the one-of-a-kind are its essence. (p. 65)

When creating a space for a culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, you can envision a place of student academic success. This success will be grounded in cultural competence whether at the developing or maintaining stage. It will also help develop a critical consciousness where they (students of all ages) will challenge the status quo of social order. Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin's co-founders were able to infuse some of their values and work into the dogma so they could impact, disrupt, and provide a different level of awareness. These public intellectuals wanted to ensure youth and families were actively engaged in learning about their culture, roots, and traditions and also engaging with the world around them educationally, socially, and politically (see Figure 69).



**Figure 69. Educators and Staff Who Taught During the Seguin ISD Ball Early Childhood Pre-K Hispanic Heritage Month Field Trips to Teatro's Cultural Arts Center.** Teatro Archive.

Research partners who were parents enrolled their children to engage in the learning of Mexican American culture and traditions while the parents were also learning by engaging with other Teatro members, the Board of Directors, and educators. The research partners who were children from 1982 through the early 2000s and engaged in the programming articulated as adults the impact it had on them socially, emotionally, and educationally. Some were unaware when they were children the impact Teatro would have on them until much later in their adolescence and adulthood. The naming of the

theoretical frameworks under which the co-founders, students, parents, community, and Board of Directors were engaged in organically was named when I began exploring and engaging through academia.

### **Implications for Resiliency of the Mexican American Community**

I remember things but I try not to hold things against people. Simply stated, I was taught that you need to treat people the way you want to be treated. Not that I forget those things, I'm just trying to make things better for the young ones, they are our future. (Flor)

This philosophy has been passed down for generations. It is through the fundamental knowledge of dealing with humanity that Teatro has been able to crisscross territories of contention and peace and harmony. In the last 39 years, Teatro has engaged thousands of youth and adult participants through public pedagogy. It has also embodied the CLE theory of change values of relationships, assets, stories, place, politics, and action. Through the stories shared by the research partners, the following emerged and gives context to the research.

Relationships is one of the major tenets that Teatro has lived by and magnifies. This organization is about building, fostering, and continually cultivating relationships with families, the community, local area businesses, the city, county, state, and national entities. It is a symbiotic process that has benefited all individuals involved. Teatro looks at ways to build relationships with its students through its programming, cultivate them, and build them to be leaders. Below are stories from the research partners that reflect their experiences.

My son was fully engaged in the programming and the high caliber of programming. He was part of the Conjunto program and the Ballet program. He was given the opportunity to be a Ballet Folklórico intern and after he graduated from high school he was offered a Ballet Folklórico assistant instructor position. He attends the local university and teaches folklórico on Monday evenings at

Teatro. We have built lasting relationships within the organization, with families, and within the community.

Teatro has raised me as a room mom (someone who helps with classes, snacks, gets them downstairs for their performance at the recital, and helps makes connections with families within the class), then as a board member and now as Teatro Board President. (Maria)

Assets in community were identified through *pláticas*, focus groups, and parties.

This was no easy feat due to the negative impact that could fall on the shoulders of some of the families within the community.

From the very day I saw the Spanish dancers at the middle school and the kids' reactions, I had a goal and the goal was to build unity here at Teatro. I have been part of Teatro since before its formal inception. I along with others took 2 to 3 years to gather thoughts and ideas. I would have parties in people's homes, they would open up their home. There was a core group of families that would meet and would discuss how we were going to politically, culturally, and economically build the system within the community to be able to move forward and create the change within the community. (Toyita)

Teatro brought in numerous dance instructors from different parts of Mexico to engage with the Ballet Folklórico dancers and with their families. These instructors were integral in sharing their knowledge of different dances from different states and regions in Mexico. They brought in an authentic landscape of culture, performing arts and stage presence techniques that students have talked about for decades. These instructors were directly brought into this community by locals who knew of these individuals and their expertise. (Toyita)

Stories reflected the struggle and resiliency of the Mexican American community in Seguin as they attempted to maintain, teach, and celebrate their Mexican American roots, customs, knowledge, and celebrations through community education. It was through the stories of segregation and racism experienced by my research partners that the unveiling began about what happened in the Seguin community. This is a *herida abierta* (open wound) that is filled with pain, anger, and sadness. It is a *herida* that only community can heal and rehabilitate. Part of the healing process can and has come through cultural rehabilitation which has set the wheels in motion to move forward.



Juan Seguin School [see Figure 70] only went to the sixth grade level for two reasons: Kids who graduated from Juan Seguin did not need further education because they were going to work in the fields. The other reason was the people who founded the school said we are going to have them go to the sixth grade because they're not smart enough to go beyond. We remember the corporal punishments in Seguin. Corporal punishment was a big thing especially if you were Mexican or African American. (Ruben)

I remember not allowing us to go into restaurants, having to go through the back and having to ring the doorbell to be served. (Louis)

We are all proud graduates of Juan Seguin or as we call it, "La Juana." (Rick)



**Figure 70. Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa Dancing at the Texas Historical Marker Unveiling at the Juan Seguin School. Teatro Archive.**

These *testimonios* came from my community *plática* research partners who have experienced struggles but have also persevered. One of the research partners is a prominent insurance agent and a champion for education in Seguin. He has served on the school board, he was the school board president for a number of years, and he was a recent recipient of the MASBA Gold Molcajete Award for service to education and the organization. Another research partner is a retired Assistant U.S. Attorney and prosecuted public corruption, cartels, money laundering, human trafficking, and criminal civil rights cases. He is now Bureau Chief for the Special Crimes in Harris County. The other



community *plática* research partner is a retired U.S. Navy and Special Agent with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (see Figure 71).



**Figure 71. Proud Juan Seguin Graduates and Community Plática Research Partners.** Open Sourced Photos and Peña Family Archive.

Place is wherever Teatro called home and where the young and young at heart felt safe. Research partners shared their memories of place.

Teatro did not have money to rent a place. Families would come to my home, they would sit outside in their lawn chairs and on the paved back patio we would dance. (Toyita)

I remember Teatro holding classes at the Gazebo outside the Coliseum. (Diosa)

In the 1980s, Texas Lutheran College President, Dr. Oestrich, opened the doors to TLC and no longer did we have to practice on the back patio or at the Coliseum. He gave us a home at the Mexican American Student Center with *Profesor* Juan Rodriguez (one of the greatest activist at the college and one of Teatro's first elected Board Members) and Teatro had its first office space and practice space. (Toyita)

My first experience was practicing at the building on Mountain Street, the old fire station. I remember walking up some stairs to get to the loft for practice and I just remember loving it. (David)

This building where Teatro is now was going to be torn down that is what Father Jerry told me in the kitchen at our breakfast for the *Guadalupanas*. I said, "No you cannot tear it down. Teatro was renting and Teatro does not have a home." Teatro was being bumped around from building to building and if we wanted Teatro to stay we needed to do something about it. (Panfila)

According to my findings and through the stories of my research partners, place is where community gathers. Place is a safe space. Place has a distinct history such as the history of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center and the grounds on which it resides.

Politic was at the foundation of why Teatro was birthed. There was a want by *la comunidad* to better self, better the community, better the organization, and to teach youth as well as adults about the Mexican American culture, history, traditions, and rituals. The findings support that *la comunidad* wanted to engage their children and themselves in learning and keeping the culture, cultural practices, and traditions alive in *la comunidad* of Seguin, as seen in the following quotes.

We started with the Ballet Folklórico [see Figure 72] and politically, I felt in my heart, not communicating to anyone, that would not be something that would threaten the livelihood of families. Its music and dancing and people of other ethnic groups viewed it as a dance group. What those people did not understand was the Ballet Folklórico was a family unit. We were teaching kids structure, parents were sitting at the table watching their kids and enjoying their kids learning. Parents created their own steering committees and they began to fundraise to purchase costumes. Many of us would meet, bring our sewing machines, and we would make the costumes and build community. Lots of topics came up while we were talking, like we're in a single member district in the city, are there any Hispanic, Mexican Americans in the community that you think could run for office. (Toyita)

Through cultural programming families were able to reimagine a better community for themselves and for their extended families. They became involved within the community and some even thrust themselves into the political arena whether it be running for a city, local, and/or school board seat. (Toyita)



**Figure 72. Early Performance of the Ballet Folklórico De La Rosa in the One Seguin Art Gallery. Teatro Archive.**

Action was a piece of the Teatro puzzle that was always in motion. Teatro created layers to the organization so that throughout its life it could expand from performing arts programming, to humanities programming, to culinary programming, to agriculture programming, to name a few. Where the community sees a need, Teatro looks to fulfill the void in the community.

As co-founders we were very smart in calling the organization Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin, reason being Teatro is the umbrella and it encompasses many, many programs. (Toyita)

What I learned about myself is being around people that have other ideas and culture and me being able to express it to my kids and encourage them to take part in it, which is very important. (Panfila)

I think the biggest thing for me is my culture and being who I am. It's a huge part of me and with the things I try to accomplish whether it's as a mother or just an individual. Teaching folklórico is a huge part because I want to share that with the community and making that cultural connection for the students. I love that we've done a little more focus on teaching about the region, the state, what it means and why we are doing certain steps because it makes more of a connection with the students. (Amalia)

## History and Impact on Self and Organization

The impact on self has further stretched my imagination and feelings when it comes to this research. Through this research, I took a deeper dive to understand more about the history of place, space, and time. I was able to speak to research partners who had direct connections to the land on which Teatro resides and who got to experience in their youth the *Diez Y Seis de Septiembre* celebrations. These same research partners experienced place as a church, church hall, and now Teatro's Cultural Arts Center. The spaces in which Teatro has resided also came with vibrant recollections from research partners, which, in turn, allowed me to reflect on the many places Teatro called home and my own emotions when walking into those spaces. Research partners were at the core of helping me, the researcher, understand the contentious times they experienced throughout their lifetimes in Seguin and positive experiences they shared through the opportunities Teatro provided them and their families. The information the research partners shared helped me understand the intricacies of the *trenzas* that were guiding me to do this work.

The historical information that was passed down to me came directly from elders who knew of the happenings inside of Teatro's Cultural Arts Center before it was a center. I heard first hand knowledge of the history of the land, and elders made it a point to share with me their struggles and their resiliency. Since I began as Teatro's program coordinator over 26 years ago, community elders, historians, and lifelong community members have always made it a point to share with me any historical information they knew, their experiences, and encounters they had with those who walked this land way before I did. It was as if they already knew I was destined to be a public pedagogue or, in our culture, a holder of history, knowledge, and a storyteller who would pass down the

stories to future generations. And now I find myself as a weaver of these lived experiences, stories, and dreams that emerged from this community. I never took a single conversation for granted because it woke my spirit to what happened in our community and to *la comunidad*, how *la comunidad* was able to change the trajectory of thought, education, and change a community's perspective of the Mexican American people toward acceptance of the people who did not look like them and spoke two languages, Spanish and English.

Teatro baptized me and raised me, it was my teacher, it was my companion on journeys when I felt alone, and it gave me the tools to be a leader. Teatro and *la comunidad* laid in my path all the tools I needed to lead this organization. Teatro prepared me for changing the trajectory of programming, it put the elders in my path who would guide me through decision making, and along the way has offered me the opportunity to be around like-minded individuals who see the value in the history of our community, who became a part of Teatro's fabric as a guide for the organization and *la comunidad*, and who placed trust in my collective decision making to launch Teatro into a new phase. Trust has been bestowed upon me by the families, the community members, and the co-founders who hold Teatro near and dear to their hearts. Trust is the highest honor anyone or any organization can bestow upon someone and I am fully aware that it is through my hard work and relationship building that this was possible. It is an honor and privilege to carry the lamp of trust, history, knowledge, and cultural sustainability for a community who spent the last 39 years creating, building, and sustaining it.

The pandemic has caused strife in our community, has caused fear, and has negatively and financially affected our families and yet they still found a way to engage

in programming. Even when they could not pay the tuition and/or fees, we highly encouraged the families and especially the children to stay involved with their programs. It gave them a sense of normalcy and allowed for directors to stay engaged with their students even on the simple level of checking to see how they were physically and emotionally doing. They engaged in programming from their phones or other mobile devices, attended masked rehearsals and recitals outside on the historic Plataforma Hidalgo, and not once did I experience scrutiny from staff, families, dancers, or musicians about all the COVID-19 protocols in place. Everyone knew we were working with the highest safety precautions to ensure all stayed safe and healthy so programming could continue. In times of need, the community, past and current Teatro board members, staff, and alumni bonded together to get food into homes of our most vulnerable families. It was an innate reaction to bond together as one big family to take care of our greater family. This has been at the core of the teachings of Teatro for almost 4 decades. It is what we do, it is who we are, and it will forever be the stitching that holds the fabric, ribbons, and lace together to make a beautiful symbol of unity, shared teachings, and reclaiming of a language, cultural symbols, celebrations, and traditions.

### **Final Thoughts and Future Research**

The research on non-profit cultural arts organizations' teaching of *la comunidad* through public pedagogy is deficient. The deficit in research surrounding this topic needs to be addressed and it is in the plan to continue the work to address the deficit through an assets-based approach. It is important to state that Teatro does not follow a basic structure of a non-profit which is divided into three functional areas-governance, programs, and administration. Teatro follows a structure that is grounded in being committed to people,

operates in *confianza*, values, actions, and feeds the soul. It is also important to amplify that there is limited literature on the implications of the power of Mexican American cultural arts in community development and community education. Findings from this research have uncovered that community development incorporating theory of change, community cultural wealth, culturally relevant teaching, and pedagogy, along with community education through the arts, has positively affected families, which then affects an entire community. Last, if educational institutions are unable to do the work of educating the whole person, Teatro has documented a successful way of working within the education system to address what is not addressed in the TEKS or policies set in place by those in power.

Through this research, the findings have informed next steps, which are a combination of the following:

- Infusing the research on the CLE theory of change and public pedagogy into existing institutions such as civic engagement institutions, institutions of education, and private sector institutions that want to be connected and embrace the Latino community
- Addressing policy work

Future research will encompass the three ecologies of knowing, which include the micro analysis of individuals, meso analysis of organizations, and macro analysis of global politic to include a more comprehensive portrayal of *Latinidad* in Texas and public schools. It is important for children to understand the place where they come from, which also ignites a spark in parents to want to learn more. This is a way to rehabilitate historiography that has been pushed which has been very exclusive and racist. It has

excluded a community's memory. Future research can also employ the use of Convivencia Testimonial (CvT) Methodology. This methodology will allow for the researcher and participants to co-construct knowledge instead of only the researcher holding the power of producer (Quintero & Pena, 2021).

Portions of my findings also articulated the hurt *la comunidad* has endured. The hurt was mostly articulated in educational institutions within the community. The research partners shared that because of their race they had to prove themselves to teachers versus just being accepted as smart and Hispanic. One research partner shared her experience of going to the school counselor and wanting to learn more about scholarships and the counselor dismissed her and said, "oh you don't need to fill any of those out, you're gonna get married. You don't have to go to school." Through my community *plática*, the research partners they shared that school only went to the sixth grade for students of Juan Seguin because of the deficit thinking of administrators, educators, and the community that boxed in those children. Other *plática* research partners shared their experiences of corporal punishment and witnessing their classmates being punished unjustly.

Through the articulated findings revolving around hurt, a cultural healing has emerged as a way to help heal trauma of generations of Mexican Americans in this community. This trauma was also inflicted by the dominant community toward Mexican Americans. To heal from this trauma, it was my hope that this research can serve as the talking piece that is brought to the circle of healing among all communities and provide a path toward acknowledging the pain that was inflicted, a path to reconciliation, and a path to move forward for the good of all communities.



## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A

#### Key Terms

In order to better understand the terms used in this research, the following definitions are provided:

Abuelita Chiquita: Little Grandma.

Amistad: Friend.

Antepasados: Ancestors.

Anthropological life history/map: A qualitative data collection method used to identify salient events or periods in a person's life and to explore factors such as biological, cultural, social, and psychosocial (Mandelbaum, 1973; Wolcott, 2008)

Antojitos: Appetizers or little snack foods.

Apoyarme: Support me.

Ballet Folklórico: Mexican folklore dances performed by children and adults, men and women.

Beaner: Derogatory slang for Mexicans or people of Mexican descent.

Café: Coffee

Campestre Hall: Country Hall that was open to the community to celebrate weddings and quinceañeras, hold meetings, and for use for other events.

Chistes: joke or funny story.

Cinco de Mayo: Commemoration of the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla.

Confianza: trust and confidence.

Conjunto: Texas “roots” music that dates back to the end of the 19th century. It is a fusion of German and Mexican immigrant cultures in South Texas. This music is popular among working class Mexican American Texans. The music of Conjunto is passed down from generation to generation orally and there is no written music.

Consejos: Advice.

Comadre: Godmother.

Compadre: Godfather.

Critical ethnography: A research method used by critical researchers “[attempting] to move beyond the objectifying and imperialist gaze associated with the Western anthropological tradition (which fixes the image of the so-called informant from the colonizing perspective of the knowing subject)” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 324).

Cuento: Spanish word for story.

Despedida: Saying goodbye.

Día de los Muertos: Day of the Dead celebration of life of those who passed on.

Diez y Seis de Septiembre: 16th of September. México’s independence day from Spain.

El Gusto: sharing pleasure in what is seeing or hearing

El Teatro de la Locas: Theatre of the crazy girls.

Españolas: Spaniards.

Fiestas Patrias: Patriotic holiday in Mexico and also commemorated in the United States, the anniversary of Mexican Independence from Spain.

Gorditas: Mexican cuisine that is a pastry made with masa and stuffed with meat, cheese, and other fillings.

Gritos: loud scream to share enthusiasm and approval.

Herida Abierta: Open wound.

Hermanas y hermanos: Sisters and brothers, relational and figurative.

Hispanic: of, relating to, or being a person of Latin American descent and especially of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin living in the United States.

Historical mapping: A method “that represents the historical events, facts or numerical data that occurred or existed in a certain space during a period or a time span as a form of ‘map’ or ‘figure’, after having collected them under a given phenomenon or topic” (Win, 2014, p. 60).

Juvenil: Juvenile.

La comunidad: The community.

La Familia: The family.

La Juana: slang name for Juan Seguin School.

La Negra: A famous ballet folklórico dance from the State of Jalisco.

Las Posadas: Religious festival celebrated in México and some parts of the United States between December 16 and 24. It commemorates the journey Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of refuge so Mary could give birth to baby Jesus.

La Raza Unida: Former Hispanic political party centered on Chicano nationalism.

Mariachi: A person who plays a musical instrument (guitar, guitarron, vihuela, violin, trumpet, harp) in a group.

Masa: Dough made from corn flour.

Metodos de Investigacion: Methods of investigation.

México Chico: Little México.

Modelo: Model.

Pan Dulce: Sweet bread.

Plataforma: Platform made of concrete on the historical land where the Mexican American community of Seguin would gather from the 1930s to 1960s.

Plática: An expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation (F. J. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

Platicando: Discussion.

Profesor: Professor.

Puente: Border Bridge.

Purépecha: One of the most important Mesoamerican cultures at the time of Spanish contact.

Promesa: An act of promise.

Reynas: Female Royal Court.

Spic: Derogatory term for a Spanish-speaking person from Central or South America or the Caribbean.

Tacos: Traditional Mexican dish consisting of small hand-sized corn or flour tortillas with filling.

Teatro De Artes De Juan Seguin: A non-profit arts organization that is deemed a 501(c)3 entity in the State of Texas. The organization is located in Seguin, Texas.

Testimonios: Testimonies.

Trenza: Braid.

Tortas: Culinary dish that includes a flatbread or cake with filling.

Vestido: Dress.

Vestuario: Traditional costumes.

Virgen Maria: Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus.

Virgen de Guadalupe: Catholic title of the Blessed Virgin Mary associated with a series of five Marian apparitions.

Wetback: Derogatory term used in the United States to refer to foreign nationals residing in the United States, most commonly Mexicans.

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