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The Future of Middle Level Education—Chicana Maestras and Vignettes

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary case study research centers anticolonial theories and Chicana feminist epistemology (Bernal, 1998) to interrogate the experiences of Chicana maestras during their clinical teaching semester. The experiences of Chicana maestras is often silenced in educational research, especially in the research of prospective middle grades educators. This work seeks to challenge the often-colonizing practices of teaching and research and seeks to serve as a model of the possibilities for research in middle level teacher education. The findings of this research center on the collective power of Chicanas experiencing teaching and learning as a collective through the creation of vignettes. These vignettes highlight the themes of maestras and comunidad, exploring and solidifying identity, thriving colonialism, clinical chingonas, and sharing of knowledge. Each of these themes, and the collective work that went into this research, demonstrate the importance of Chicanas in middle level education.

Keywords: Chicana maestras, middle level education, anticolonial

Introduction

The middle grades are arguably the most important time in the life of a young adolescent. It is the time where they are investigating themselves, becoming more aware of the world around them, while developing who they are as whole people. John Lounsbury (2010) states, “The importance of middle level education can never be overestimated. The future of individuals and, indeed, that of society is largely determined by the nature of the educational experiences of young adolescents during these formative years” (p. 43). Due to the importance of the middle grades, we must engage in research that centers on the preparation of our prospective middle level educators because they have the potential to truly impact society.

This research on the middle grades centers the experiences of Chicana prospective middle level educators. Often the experiences of Chicanas in the classroom are silenced in broader educational research and discourse. Also, less emphasis has been placed on the experiences that Chicanas have as prospective middle level educators. Therefore, it is imperative that we examine the ways that Chicanas experience teacher preparation to gain insight into how we can impact the growth of Chicanas who successfully enter classrooms, from the middle grades through higher education.

Our experiences as Chicana educators teaching and learning in San Antonio, Texas, directly impacts how we understand ourselves, our community, and our classrooms. This research seeks to examine the ways in which Chicanas embody, experience, and teach from an anticolonial lens in the preparation of Chicana middle grades educators. We believe that our experiences provide insight into creating a foundation of challenging colonialism within middle grades teacher preparation, and potentially serve as a model for the preparation of other future educators.

Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

This research demonstrates the necessity for interdisciplinary work in middle level research. Through the lenses of Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) (Bernal, 1998) and anticoloniality, we can conceptualize an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that challenges coloniality while filling in the missing perspectives within middle level education. This work is an example of the possibilities for the future of middle level teacher education that connects Chicana feminist epistemology and anticoloniality as the foundations of teaching and learning.

Chicana feminist epistemology is central to this research. It aims to echo the ways that, “other Chicana scholars address the shortcomings of liberal educational scholarship by embracing a Chicana feminist epistemology that examines Chicanas’ experiences in relation to an entire structure of domination” (Bernal, 1998, p. 558). That structure of domination has its origins in settler colonization. The impact of colonization on Chicanas historically, and in present day, is unique to the Chicana experience in the colonized land that is the United States.

Anticoloniality and the efforts towards challenging colonialism as a framework, “is a theorization of issues, concerns and social practices emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath. However, anti-colonialism uses Indigenous knowledges as an important entry point” (Dei, 2000, p. 117). No institution embodies and perpetuates the colonial in the same way as education, therefore, to unearth the ways in which we navigate those colonial spaces as Chicana educators, we have to understand the ways in which these colonized spaces impact us as individuals. This work necessitates an interdisciplinary lens to uncover the full experience of Chicana prospective middle level educators.

Research Question

This work is part of a larger research study that focuses on middle level pre-service teachers and how they engage in challenging colonialism. The research that is presented here is focused specifically on: What happens when three maestras write vignettes (teaching cases) that embody connections between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching?

This research question exemplifies Merriam’s (1998) idea that “The very questions you raise derive from your view of the world” (p. 49). This question is both personal and political and could have a great impact on our community and how we navigate teaching and learning. This question was answered utilizing qualitative methods as qualitative methods align to the theoretical frameworks that have been created through the combination of Chicana feminist epistemology and anticolonial theories.

Literature Review

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity focuses on the synthesis of ideas across two or more disciplines that creates the ability for new insights into challenges that could not be interrogated sufficiently by any single discipline (Klein, 1990; Moran, 2010). This article centers on what happens when

three maestras write vignettes that embody connections between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching. This research seeks to examine the ways in which middle level teacher education, Chicana feminist epistemologies, and anticoloniality can work together to realize a way of creating and engaging with anticolonial perspectives within middle level teacher education.

Interdisciplinarity As Political

There is no such thing as neutrality in teaching. This sentiment is echoed by Joe Moran (2010) in his discussion of interdisciplinarity that states “Interdisciplinary approaches often draw attention, either implicitly or explicitly, to the fact that what is studied and taught within universities is always a political question” (Moran, 2010, p. 15). Anticolonial work seeks to challenge the colonial idea of neutrality within teaching and learning that only benefits those who have historically held and maintained power within society, as that neutrality is an example of settler moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) that allows for responsibility for colonial systems of marginalization and oppression to be abdicated by those who have benefited from colonization.

Prospective Middle Level Educators

The foundations of middle level education focus on young adolescents being ‘globally competent’ and aware and respectful towards various cultures and traditions, even so far as emphasizing the need for middle level classrooms to prepare students towards engaging in this ‘competence’ (Andrews & Conk, 2012). However, in the focus on universal global competency in our middle level classrooms, we are negating the very local importance of our prospective middle level educators. Our prospective teachers are also an increasingly diverse population, and the educational content and curriculum for preparing them has remained centered in Whiteness (Brown, 2014). Through curriculums that maintain their hold on Eurocentric and “western” ideals of teaching and learning, there is a systemic continuation of middle level teacher preparation maintaining a colonial hold on our middle level classrooms.

This research combines the traits that are meant to be present for all middle level educators. However, it centers the identities of these specific educators as Chicanas. We are utilizing Chicana feminist epistemology as a lens through which to examine the experience of

Chicana educators in their teacher preparation. This lens is in response to the colonial views of teaching a heterogenous population of future educators.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

At the center of the conversation between education and Chicanas is Delgado Bernal's (1998) argument that liberal educational scholarship has failed to truly conceptualize, understand, and address the experiences of Chicanas in the classroom (p. 557). Her arguments are not specific to teacher education, but illuminate the possibilities of utilizing a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) in middle level teacher education. This work situates Chicana feminist epistemology as a theoretical imperative because of the examination and analysis of our own experiences, the borderlands context of South Texas, but also the necessity with highlighting the history of Chicanas as important in order to create an anticolonial model for teacher education.

Chicana feminist epistemology is at the center of this research as "Scholars who have challenged the historical and ideological representations of Chicanas, relocated them to a central position in the research, and asked distinctly Chicana feminist research questions, all important characteristics of Chicana feminist epistemology" (Bernal, 1998, p. 559). We are centering the experiences of three Chicana prospective middle level educators and their experiences during clinical teaching. We are at the forefront of interrogating the ways that our experiences are legitimate knowledge and claiming the power that is created through analyzing our own stories.

Anticolonial

Anticolonialism centers on the idea of challenging colonialism and its historical and modern manifestations in our institutions of power. This work centers on rejecting "colonial-blindness" (Calderón, 2014a) and chooses to interrogate the complexities of the experiences of colonization upon Chicanas during part of their middle level teacher preparation. As such, definitions for key terms utilized in this work are necessary. As a result of a metasynthesis on anticoloniality, anticolonialism is defined as "the awareness of the pervasiveness of colonization in all aspects of our institutions, while simultaneously taking action that challenges and disrupts the colonial norm, modeled after, and honoring, Indigenous communities who have engaged in this work since colonization" (Proffitt, 2020a, p.8). We are cognizant of the specific ancestral

land upon which we are teaching and learning, Yanawana. This land that has been impacted by settler colonization where “nonindigenous people settled permanently on Indigenous land. It includes the creation and continuation of a dominant structure by the silencing of Indigenous peoples and cultures through all aspects of society” (Proffitt, 2020a, p.7). Patrick Wolfe’s (1999) explanation of settler colonization as a “structure, not an event” (p. 2) reinforces the way that we must acknowledge our colonial histories in the efforts towards challenging their institutional impacts on teaching and learning.

This work seeks to use anticolonialism as a collective of maestras, seeking knowledge within our own experiences while recognizing the ways in which colonization has impacted us as individuals, but also the institutions in which we teach and learn.

Methodology

Traditional research and education practices have long since conformed to colonial norms and placed the lens of research upon the “other” for the benefit of the colonizer (Dei & Kempf, 2006). It was important that the ways in which this research project was conducted attempted to embrace anticoloniality in the efforts to align to the research question that makes connections between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching. Therefore, this research has centered the importance of Chicana women in education, working collectively, in the attempts to embody connections between anticolonial perspectives and middle level teaching.

This type of research requires the embracing of a community-oriented space for research and learning, one that engages in an anticolonial praxis and recognizes that “the theories we use and the data analysis strategies we employ are not neutral means; they embody our relations to power through the arenas they center” (Noffke, 2009, p. 7). In seeking to dismantle the colonial research model of researchers and those being researched upon, this project sought to engage in a methodology that honors the work that can be done together, as a collective, to unearth new knowledge about the world and ourselves. This research, and the methodologies it employs, manifested as a place for mujeres to interrogate their experiences in colonized spaces, and provided insight into how this work could be done within greater communities of middle level teacher preparation.

Participants

The research team was made up of three middle level prospective teachers and a course instructor, all co-researchers and co-authors of this article. Antonia, Megan, and Violetta were all in their clinical, or student-teaching semesters. Alexa had previously been their instructor during their Service-Learning in Social Studies Methods 4-8 course. We are all women of Mexican-American descent, in ages ranging from early twenties to thirties. When asked how we choose to identify, we provided responses that ranged from Chicana, Mexican-American, Hispanic, and ChinaLatina. Each woman in this work is at a different place in claiming their identity, however, we will center the identity of Chicana in this work. This work centers on Chicana women's experiences in the classrooms and attempts to engage in,

validating alternative sources of knowledge as appropriate for learning, Chicana feminist epistemologies provide Chicana educators the ability to deconstruct the teacher/student binary common in all levels of schooling and move toward decolonizing [anticolonial] pedagogical models. (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 519)

This desire for deconstructing the teacher/student binary in our work together in the classroom and this research, reinforced the need for this study to utilize a co-researcher model.

As a doctoral fellow, Alexa had the opportunity to conduct her dissertation research with former students, instead of *upon* former students, in the efforts to embody anticoloniality and Chicana feminist epistemology within the content of this research. In doing so, students from the previous semester of the Service-Learning course, who had demonstrated active interest in challenging coloniality in their teaching, Antonia, Megan, and Violetta, were asked if they would be willing to co-research a project that centered on challenging colonialism within their clinical teaching experiences, the larger research study. All participants agreed, and it was decided that a co-researcher model would be utilized to both honor the knowledge and experience of each individual woman to “develop a Chicana feminist epistemology by researching the lives and experiences of Chicanas, and framing their research questions in ways that give voice to these women” (Bernal, 1998, p. 559) but also to reinforce the need to challenge the colonial model of research that is so often done on historically marginalized communities.

Context

All three co-researchers were former students in the Service-Learning in Social Studies Methods for 4-8 course that centered on the possibilities of anticoloniality within middle level social studies classrooms. This course was an introduction to challenging colonialism and its possibilities within education. Students read and engaged in dialectical journals with texts such as Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" (2012), Dolores Calderon's "Anticolonial Methodologies in Education" (2014a) and "Speaking Back to Manifest Destinies" (2014b), as well as George Sefa Dei and Arlo Kempf's "Anti-colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance" (2006) that served as resources for understanding the fundamental theoretical ideas of anticolonial work (Proffitt, 2020b, p. 13). We engaged in daily discussions about the ideas that arose that directly challenged colonial-blindness (Calderón, 2014a) and the ways in which education, as an institution continues to support and perpetuate settler colonial perspectives. At the end of the semester, it was clear that my co-researchers had the desire to engage in this work in their future classrooms and continue learning about the ways in which they could do this work as educators. This project was in the effort to continue the investigation into the anticolonial with one another, through their personal experiences in clinical teaching.

Vignettes

The product of this research includes the writing of vignettes, commonly referred to as teaching cases, that embody the connections between theory and the realities of practice (Shulman & Wilson, 2004) in connection to anticolonial perspectives within the middle level classroom space. These 'cases' are referred to in this research as *vignettes*, as a way of separating these products from the overall case study methodology, but also to honor Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* that utilizes vignettes as a way of telling an entire story, that has had a great impact on us all. Our stories, our vignettes, are truly our life experiences, and afford us the opportunity for us to be the ones who examine our own experiences (Bernal, 1998); an act of claiming our agency and our ability to engage in educational research based upon our own experiences.

Our vignettes are our stories; the stories of our experiences and our transformations. The stories that we hope to pass down to future teacher educators and their students about

the importance of our work. We imagine teacher education utilizing anticolonial perspectives and honoring the stories of its maestras as legitimate and meaningful. "This analysis suggests that knowing teaching is knowing its stories. If story is the knowledgeable base for teaching, then case, as story, is the nucleus rather than simply a medium of the teacher education curriculum" (Carter, 1999, p. 171). Our experiences, our vignettes, are the center of who we are, how we embody anticolonial perspectives, and the ways in which we seek to challenge colonial norms within our teaching and learning spaces.

Group Sessions

This research focused on the collective experience of engaging in group sessions throughout the clinical teaching semester. These meetings, of which there were five in total throughout the semester, allowed for us to come together to discuss the experiences that were taking place during clinical placements. This was a space that was made possible because of the established relationship created during the previous semester by all the co-researchers. It was a place of safety, and vulnerability, where we could come together to discuss our failures and our successes, but also to work together to create solutions.

Data Collection

The data for this article focuses on the vignettes that were written after the conclusion of our group sessions and the clinical teaching semester. These vignettes provide insight into the connection between anticolonial perspectives and middle level prospective teacher education. These vignettes are the very personal experiences of our individual co-researchers, but also of our collective experience together, in a communal space. These vignettes serve as the most important data for the purposes of this text.

Data Analysis

Because this research is only a small part of a larger research study, analysis of the entire data collected for the larger project was still necessary for the analysis of the vignettes. All data analysis was conducted by Alexa. Each group session was recorded and then transcribed by Alexa. Following the transcription process, thematic analysis was utilized to determine themes that appeared in each group session, but also across group sessions. The

themes found in the group sessions were used as a tool for then analyzing the vignettes that were written by Antonia, Megan, and Violetta following the end of our group sessions.

Thematic analysis was then conducted on the written vignettes. The analysis procedures that were previously completed on the group sessions provided insight and further support for the analysis of the group vignettes. It was determined that the key themes emerging from the vignettes were focused on Chicana maestras and comunidad, exploring and solidifying identity, colonialism is thriving, clinical chingonas, and the desire to share the knowledge that they have learned.

Findings

The findings from this research provide insight into the power of writing vignettes and the way that analyzing our own experiences can impact and empower us as Chicana educators. These findings illuminate the answers to our research question: What happens when three maestras write vignettes (teaching cases) that embody connections between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching?

Maestras and Comunidad

One of the most prevalent themes found across vignettes was the impact that this group had in creating a sense of community and support throughout the clinical teaching experience. The transition from course work, which is very communal, to clinical teaching, which is often isolating, was directly impacted by our group sessions: “It was very comforting knowing I was not going through this process alone, but with my fellow students and friends, Violetta and Megan. It was a constant reminder that we were sharing a grand experience,” (Antonia, 2020). Megan echoed Antonia’s sentiments,

Being a part of this group was the support I needed. Clinical teaching could have been an easy job in which I did what I was told and moved on. There would have been no depth to what I was doing and it would have been just a task to check off on the road to graduation. Because of this group, I was able to take away much more than a checkmark. (Megan, 2020)

These sessions created a space for maestras to convene with one another about their daily experiences as clinical teachers and their perspectives about anticoloniality. They were

able to come together to interrogate their shared experiences in colonized spaces, and through this, embody anticolonial perspectives. These sessions also created a community of support, one in which their peers did not have similar access.

These group experiences, built from the relationships we had created during the previous semester, also allowed for this space to be one of vulnerability and safety, The meetings we had really impacted my clinical experience...When we had our meetings, we were able to reflect on our experiences and the ways in which we wished to change for our future classrooms...Having these sessions helped me keep my sanity and made me feel hopeful that several women shared the same views as me and wanted to grow in the same ways. We all shared a similar goal which was to become great educators that challenged colonialism and make our students think critically about the world around them. It was comforting to know that we all had our own hardships and struggles and we all wanted to work through them to become better educators.

(Violetta, 2020)

Violetta's vignette echoed the ways in which she felt as though she had to inhabit a different persona, or assimilate, in order to survive her clinical teaching experience. Her personal experiences in a colonized clinical teaching setting reinforced the contrast between her daily experiences as a clinical teacher, and who she was when attending our group sessions.

Exploring and Solidifying Identity

This collective work and research honored who we are as whole people, but also given the demographics of the teaching profession, created a space where Chicanas can discuss the roles that their identities have in their classrooms. Our first session of our group meetings included the discussion question of, "how do you choose to identify along the lines of gender and ethnicity?" This question was asked in order to gauge the current status of the identity work that had been done by these women, the ways in which colonization might have impacted those identities, and to further reinforce the ideas that our identities as individuals cannot be separated from who we are as teachers.

At the beginning of our sessions, Violetta identified as 'Hispanic' and expressed trepidation in wanting to be identified as 'Mexican' because of her status as a second and third

generation Mexican-American. Throughout our group sessions, she emphasized the way that her relationship with Chicax students impacted her clinical teaching,

This experience impacted my identity as a latinx woman in many ways. I was able to talk about my and my family experiences in my classroom and was able to share with the classroom my poetry and poetry that not only reflected my life but the lives of my students. I never felt like my heritage and culture was celebrated in my school, but in the days were we discussed Chicano poetry I felt we celebrated Chicano/Latino culture while also discussing this struggles and discrimination Chicanos/ Latinos experience. It was eye opening for my students and I were able to share personal and emotional experiences with one another. I felt truly proud in those days of my culture and truly proud of my identity which is not something I can say that I was proud of when I was my students age. This also inspired me to read more Chicax/Latinx materials by women and educate myself further on Chicax/Latinx issues. (Violetta, 2020)

Violetta's experience of further investigating her identity and implementing that investigation into her classroom instruction demonstrates the possibilities that engaging in this work provide for the future of middle level teacher education where our students are actively in the process of investigating who they are and how they see themselves in the world.

Megan began our session as describing herself as "I'm figuring it out," having a mixed background and still very much investigating her identities and the ways in which she claims them. Through this research she felt as though the experience, "deepened my identity as Latinx," (Megan, 2020) and that,

College and more specifically, this experience has deepened my identity of being Latinx and Chinese. I am multicultural and that can help my students who are feeling like I did when I was growing up. Giving them that role model who is a person of color gives me a sense of joy that I wouldn't of known for if it wasn't for this experience. (Megan, 2020)

While both Violetta and Megan were still in the stages of determining how they wished to identify, Antonia was very confident in claiming her identity as Chicana. Notably, Antonia was the only participant who took Mexican American Studies courses during her time as a pre-service educator. Our sessions eventually delved into other identity markers, such as sexuality, and the colonial norms of heteronormativity that permeated the clinical teaching experience.

These conversations led Antonia to more deeply investigate her identity and the ways that it connects to her experiences as an educator,

I knew that in my own clinical teaching experience, I could be comfortable in my identity. I never felt like I was pretending to be someone else. In the matter of other topics, such as our personal lives and how it ties into our careers (specifically gender and sexual orientation), it was never something I considered before our talks.

Afterwards, though, I realized how heavily this impacts our career even though it should not. I took the time to look through this aspect of my life through the critical lens.

Overall, I feel like this experience has strengthened my identity as a Chicana women educator. (Antonia, 2020)

All these women were able to use their clinical teaching experiences, and our group sessions, to further investigate who they are as people, and the impact that has on their experiences as clinical teachers. This investigation into identity and the ways in which we can connect the initial uncertainties in our identities to colonialism, allow this work to embody an anticolonial perspective. We must name and investigate the ways in which colonization has impacted how we see ourselves in society, a unique experience for Chicanas who are from an “indigenous/mestiza-based cultural group” (Bernal, 1998, p. 560-561) and therefore have a very complex relationship to identity.

Colonialism is Thriving

The impetus for this research was the investigation into the connection between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching for Chicana educators. The vignettes highlighted many ways in which colonization in education or the Colonial Model of Education (CME) (Calderón, 2014a) is thriving in our middle schools.

Megan and Violetta experiences were both in the same school, content, and grade for their clinical experiences, and both expressed frustrations with the ways in which the school adhered to a Colonial Model of Education (Calderón, 2014a), but Megan’s approach to this experience was, “to survive.” During our group sessions she expressed a sense of powerlessness within this space and that she felt as though: “I feel like it’s like a, a thin wire and I don’t want to trip it when she’s there” (M. Villa, personal communication, September 20, 2019). While Megan did desire to utilize an anticolonial perspective and challenge colonialism in

her clinical placement, the realities of where she was and the power dynamics involved, limited her abilities with which to do so. These constraints manifested in her vignette making connections to teaching critically: “Teaching them with a critical lens and to be culturally responsive could change the division in San Antonio that is very prominent” (Megan, 2020), but did not include references to coloniality and how it manifests, or is challenged in the classroom. This is indicative of the process of anticolonial work in education, as it is not a one size fits all approach to teaching and learning, but a process that takes time to practice and implement in our classroom spaces.

Violetta’s experience in clinical teaching illuminated the ways in which colonization is prevalent in our schooling, and the ways that it impacts both teachers and students: “I had already seen how some classrooms were conducted and how they did not challenge colonialism in any way, shape, or form but also by doing this, they alienated students of color” (Violetta, 2020). Despite her frustrations during clinical teaching, she utilized our group as a resource for navigating colonial environments, but also for possibilities of challenging those spaces: “I knew being a part of this study would help me navigate my way through this semester and help me find material to challenge colonialism in the classroom I was in,” (Violetta, 2020). Violetta was actively seeking to embody anticolonial perspectives in a very colonized clinical teaching environment.

The challenging of the systemic ways that settler colonization has been embedded in our institutions will not happen instantly, but through consistent and active work by us as educators. Our continued work towards how we can create knowledge collectively, on anticolonial perspectives, pedagogies and practices in our classrooms, can lead towards the middle level education being at the forefront of transformational education practices.

Clinical Chingonas

A large part of our work together was to serve as resources for one another as teachers who were experiencing teaching and learning in colonial environments. To do this work, to embody and utilize anticolonial perspectives, we have to be both confident in who we are, but also in our instruction. We all entered this space knowing that we wanted to teach from an anticolonial lens in our classroom, but the ways in which that would pedagogically manifest was difficult to conceptualize. We are still learning how this work can manifest in our

classroom spaces, but collectively, we have been able grow in our confidence as educators through this process,

It helped me grow as an educator and prepared me on how to teach colonialism in my own classroom as well as have difficult conversations with students on race and identity. These meetings helped shape me into being a culturally responsive teacher... (Violetta, 2020)

We have all been able to better picture the type of teaching that we want to have in our classrooms, but also the ways that we ourselves are able to navigate systems of power,

As a future teacher, I feel confident in navigating the schools I teach at. I know I am capable of taking my students that extra level by questioning systems of power, challenging these ideals, and always looking at our curriculum and other aspects of our education through the critical lens. (Antonia, 2020)

Those feelings of being able to confidently challenge colonial systems of power, stem from a true understanding of anticoloniality and the need for having that perspective in the classroom.

Our sessions together, and the writing of our vignettes, illuminated the growth that we underwent through this process collectively. Each of us has grown in our confidence as educators, but also in our knowledge of the current colonial status of schooling. That knowledge has driven us to critically engage with an anticolonial perspective to work towards creating the educational environments that challenge the colonial norm.

Sharing Our Knowledge

For schooling to truly and systemically challenge colonialism, through utilizing an anticolonial perspective, we must be willing to collaborate with others, share what we've learned, and offer hope for the future. All of us plan to continue this work and our collaborative efforts, inviting others to join us, and learn together: "I knew that being able to share my experiences in challenging colonization in our schools could teach and benefit others, hopefully allowing them to learn from what I myself have learned" (Antonia, 2020).

The creating of vignettes, of stories of our experiences, demonstrates that our stories are the nucleus of teacher education (Carter, 1999, p. 171) and allows for our curriculums to truly be reflective of us as individuals. That personal experience is then centered in our

teaching: “I believe our work was important and essential for Texas education and Texas teachers. I hope that the teachers who have fallen into a rut and have given up on their students read this and realize that teaching can be meaningful and personal” (Violetta, 2020). Violetta utilizes an anticolonial perspective by emphasizing the importance for Texas teacher, engaging with the local colonial history that she has personally experienced. Throughout our group sessions, there was the conversation about the ways in which teachers can get into a ‘rut,’ a place where new learning and investigation into themselves and their practices is not happening. We are all capable of this, but through this group, we hope that we now have a collective of maestras who will continuously work together to make sure that we are embodying anticolonial perspectives through questioning power, and not falling into colonial norms of teaching practices

Implications

This study has sought to fill a gap in the research of middle level teacher preparation. Never have we focused on the experiences of Chicana prospective middle level educators, engaging with anticoloniality and the writing of their own vignettes. This work is powerful, and the ways that we have written and analyzed our own experiences demonstrates the impact that this work can have on the future of education.

Anticolonial Perspectives and Chicana Prospective Middle Level Educators

The voices of Chicanas in the classroom have historically been silenced. However, this work seeks to challenge that silence by highlighting the knowledge that these Chicana prospective middle level teachers have gained from their experiences in classrooms as both teachers and students. Our research gives us the opportunity to engage in Chicana feminist epistemology by giving voice to the importance of our experiences, but also provides a framework for future mujeres in the classroom to continue this work in the future.

Our research question—What happens when three maestras write vignettes (teaching cases) that embody connections between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching?—is answered by our vignettes and our experiences themselves. Our vignettes demonstrate that we build comunidad as maestras, we explore and solidify our identities, we recognize that colonialism is thriving, we become the confident chingonas in the classroom that we were always meant to be, and we desire to share the knowledge of our experiences.

Chicana Maestras and Comunidad

Through this work we created a community of maestras that supported, questioned, and learned from one another. Our experiences reinforced the ways that Chicana feminist epistemology engages in a collective experience towards subverting and ending the colonial hold upon us all and, “that in doing this work we are not alone” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 514). We engaged in this work to create a space together, interrogating coloniality, but also in the hopes that our experiences could lead to similar groups being made across middle level teacher preparation. This research is in the efforts towards future Chicanas working as a collective towards anticolonial realities in our teaching and learning.

Exploring & Solidifying Identity

Exploring who we are as people is integral to being able to analyze one’s own experiences through a vignette. Each of the women in this research entered our collective group with ideas about their identities, and each one further solidified their identity during this research and experiences in clinical teaching. We all, as Chicanas, straddle the lines of both colonized and settler (Pendleton Jiménez, 2006), and must actively seek to better understand that reality. We acknowledge the impact that colonization has had on the formations of our identities, but also seek to continue doing work to uncover that history, to better help our students investigate their own histories and identities.

Colonialism is Thriving

Our experiences in our Service-Learning course, the semester prior to this research, allowed us to work together to investigate anticoloniality and begin to understand anticolonial theory. The creation of working definitions for *anticolonial* and *settler colonization* allowed us to tangibly understand these concepts to discover the ways that they manifest in our society. We were able to use that understanding of colonialism and the role of settler colonization to be critical of the many ways that settler colonization was manifesting in our clinical teaching experiences. Settler colonization’s “structure” (Wolfe, 1999) in our classrooms was highlighted in the curricular and pedagogical practices of our clinical mentors. However, it also impacted the power dynamics that we felt as Chicana educators in these spaces, and the ways that our Chicana students were experiencing schooling. In order to truly reject colonial-blindness

(Calderón, 2014a) and work towards an anticolonial reality, we have to continue to do this work in calling out the ways that colonization is being perpetuated in these spaces.

Clinical Chingonas

Through the experiences in clinical teaching and writing of our vignettes, we have grown in confidence as both women and educators. Our collective experience strengthened our resolve towards wanting to engage in anticolonial work in our classrooms. Our experience is an example of “the manner in which teacher/student or researcher/participant binaries have disassembled- lead[ing] to insights that previous research has not” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 520). We constructed new knowledge from collective experience, highlighting the importance of our experiences as Chicana maestras and opening the door towards further work that centers Chicanas in educational research.

Sharing Our Knowledge

We, as Chicana educators, have emphasized the importance of sharing what we have learned through this experience. This desire to share knowledge reinforces anticolonial and Chicana feminist epistemological perspectives on collective knowledge (Calderón et al., 2012; Dei, 2000). This desire for us all to learn demonstrates the ways in which these vignettes are truly the embodiment of the connection between anticolonial perspectives and middle level clinical teaching. We want other educators to learn from personal experiences of attempting to reject colonial blindness (Calderón, 2014a) and embrace an anticolonial perspective as Chicana middle level prospective teachers.

Middle Level Teacher Educators and Researchers

The investigation into the anticolonial in education requires significant effort, both on the part of students, but also on teacher educators. Teacher educators must have working knowledge of colonialism and the impacts that settler colonialism has had on the institutions of our spaces, most especially that of education. This would require active research into the body of knowledge surrounding colonial and anticolonial studies, as well as the ways in which other disciplines are engaging in challenging colonialism. We, as teacher educators, must actively reject colonial-blindness (Calderón, 2014a) by knowing its historical and present-day implications on all our teaching and learning experiences.

This shift in education is difficult; it requires humility and vulnerability. Pre-service teachers have struggled with challenging colonialism, as have I as a teacher educator, but the struggle is necessary to unpack colonization and its impact on society. We are asking students and teachers to deconstruct their experiences and the ways that they have been taught for their entire lives, and to imagine a type of teaching that almost none of us have previously experienced. This process will not happen overnight; this uncovering of the truths of colonization force us to completely reevaluate what and how we have learned. That unpacking process is difficult, and often painful. However, we all may not be guilty of actively colonizing Indigenous land, but we are all responsible for the ways that we have benefited from that colonization. It is therefore our responsibility to engage in anticolonial work in education, as settlers on Indigenous land, and to begin the work of challenging settler colonization in our teaching and learning.

Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

The interdisciplinary theoretical framework of Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) and anticolonial theories has had a profound impact on conducting and analyzing research with Chicana educators at the forefront. Through this research, we have been able to tangibly document and understand how these maestras have experienced colonized spaces. This work has furthered the argument that CFE is important: “We argue that this is important because it demonstrates that Chicana feminist frameworks in education are unique sources of knowledge as well as valuable contributions to theory, methodology, and pedagogy” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 514). This work and the creation of our vignettes impacts educational theory, methodology, and pedagogy through the investigation of ourselves and our experiences.

Future research must incorporate more disciplines, such as ethnic studies, that has engaged in anticolonial work, through investigating settler colonialism and its impact upon colonized bodies. This effort must be joined with middle level teacher education, Chicana feminist epistemologies, and teacher education, to push all our disciplines towards actively challenging colonialism. Our individual and collective disciplines can work together to challenge settler colonialism in our learning and teaching and realize the anticolonial future that all our students deserve.

Conclusion

John Lounsbury's (2010) quote is a guiding light for middle level educators: "The importance of middle level education can never be overestimated. The future of individuals and, indeed, that of society is largely determined by the nature of the educational experiences of young adolescents during these formative years" (p. 43). In honor of his passing, and the work that we have done together here, we imagine the next phase of middle level education: the importance of Chicanas in middle level education can never be overestimated. The future of individuals and, indeed, that of society is largely determined by the anticolonial educational experiences of middle level educators during their preparation for entering classrooms and realizing an anticolonial future for us all.

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