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Mexican American Studies in Pre-K-12 Texas Schools

Guest Editors

Sylvia Mendoza Aviña

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Lilliana Patricia Saldaña

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Editors

Patricia Sánchez

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Antonio J. Camacho

AMAE, Inc.

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Sacramento State

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The University of Texas at San Antonio

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Editors' Message

Let the record show that we continue to live, write, and research in a pandemic-filled world. We have now entered Year 2 of trying to exist with COVID-19 all around us. Our two guest editors of this invited issue, Dr. Lilliana P. Saldaña and Dr. Sylvia Mendoza Aviña, have not let us down and assembled a great team of colleagues to produce this highly anticipated collection, Mexican American Studies in Pre-K-12 Texas Schools. This is the first time in the online history of the AMAE Journal that we cover ethnic studies' teaching, specifically Mexican American studies (MAS). What an honor to have educators from various regions of the state of Texas contribute their knowledge and experiences during this time period; contributors of this invited issue share their expertise and insight on how they built and continue to sustain MAS at their respective institutions. The articles in this collection give us inspiration and "aire" during a time we have had such limited amounts of both: their experiences lay the groundwork for others (faculty, students, parents, community members) who want to begin, grow, or expand a MAS program in their educational sphere. Gracias to all for these efforts!

Juntos logramos más,

Patricia Sánchez, Co-Editor

Antonio Camacho, Co-Editor

INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Mendoza Aviña

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Lilliana Patricia Saldaña

The University of Texas at San Antonio

This special issue centers the historic and continued grassroots organizing by Chicana/o/x communities in Texas, specifically related to education. While there is growing scholarship on the movements for Mexican American Studies (MAS) in schools focusing on California and Arizona, less attention has been paid to the organizing done in Texas. Because of its history as a white supremacist and conservative state, activists in the MAS movement in Texas, many of whom are centered in this special issue, have created innovative strategies to build the kind of liberatory education our community has been envisioning and demanding for centuries. This special issue showcases a network of scholar activists across Texas, many of whom have organized and testified in front of the State Board of Education, alongside each other, at the Texas capitol, or who have strategized together at the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies Tejas Foco conferences. Through their scholarship, they offer what approaches they have used to sustain and build Mexican American Studies at their respective institutions and in educational spaces. This special issue centers these strategies and approaches, documents these histories of activism, leaving a blueprint for future generations of MAS students, scholars, educators, researchers, and supporters.

The special issue begins with UTSA MAS program director and scholar activist Dr. Lilliana P. Saldaña. The MAS program at UTSA was originally collaboratively built by multiple faculty and was eventually sustained and co-lead by now retired Drs. Josie Méndez-Negrete and Marie “Keta” Miranda. Before retiring, Miranda had the foresight to envision and build a MAS Teachers’ Academy as a way to prepare future educators to teach MAS in schools, and thus, develop a pipeline of students from secondary schools into higher education. Dr. Saldaña currently co-directs the UTSA MAS program and MAS Teachers’ Academy with Dr. Gloria Vásquez Gonzáles. Through retrospective memory, organizational notes, expert testimonies,

and photos, Saldaña's powerful essay documents the development of the MAS Pre-K-12 movement in San Antonio and across Texas, showcasing the collective organizing efforts of parents, students, teachers, scholars, and community workers invested in creating liberatory education for Chicana/o/x communities. Further, she identifies this movement as one of epistemic justice, particularly in the face of a history of coloniality within this region.

Focusing on the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, Dras. Maritza de la Trinidad, Stephanie Alvarez, Joy Esquierdo, and Dr. Francisco Guajardo outline the development of their professional development program titled, *Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley*, which prepares K-12 social studies teachers in South Texas to teach MAS. The authors share their process of applying for federal funding to support this innovative program, as well as the objectives and structure of the program that utilizes culturally relevant pedagogies, contextual interaction theory, and a place-based framework to center students and develop critical literacies. *Historias Americanas* speaks to the importance of integrating MAS in the professional development of social studies teachers across Pre-K-12 grades, particularly in the South Texas region where the majority of school-age children and youth are of Mexican descent.

Similarly, Josue Puente and Dr. Stephanie Alvarez document contemporary efforts in the Rio Grande Valley to grow MAS in public schools. Their article, "Texas Resistance: Mexican American Studies and the Fight Against Whiteness and White Supremacy in K-12 at the Turn of the 21st Century," chronicles various mobilizing efforts across the state to support public school teachers, from grant funded university projects like *Historias Americanas* (of which the second author is a part of), to university-teacher-community collaborations like the MAS Teachers' Academy, and student-led community efforts such as The Grand Narrative. Their article focuses on one particular grant funded project—the Social Studies Through Authentic Relevant Content (SSTARC) project, which provides K-5th grade teachers with opportunities to engage in self-reflexive, anti-racist perspectives as teachers learn local and regional Mexican American history. Their work points to the importance of cultivating these professional development spaces that actively resist white supremacy. While there is some overlap in the work of each of these spaces, Puente and Alvarez's article reminds us that working across our respective spaces is critical in a state that continues to reinforce white supremacy in education.

Dr. Nicolas García's and Anthony Gonzales' article, "Cinco Dedos: A Mexican American Studies framework," describes a conceptual framework developed by the second author and Keli Rosa Cabunoc to assist educators in creating a multidisciplinary curriculum that addresses the needs of students enrolled in the State Board of Education approved MAS high school elective course. Their five-pronged approach is rooted in a Community Cultural Wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) that 1) centers the knowledge and cultural production of Chicanas/x/os in curriculum development; 2) promotes an interdisciplinary approach to teaching MAS; 3) engages students through art and expressive culture; 4) takes a student-centered philosophy that honors the knowledge students bring to the classroom; 5) and cultivates community involvement as part of students' personal and social development.

Dr. Elizabeth D. Rivas, who is also affiliated with the MAS Teachers' Academy, shares her research on social studies teachers in Texas who are up against an institutionalized master narrative embedded within public institutions. Inspired by her experiences as a social studies teacher for twelve years, curriculum coach, and scholar in a district that is majority Mexican American, Rivas reflects on a memory of one of her students asking her, "Where were the Mexicans?"—a question that points to students' awareness of the pervasive invisibility of Mexican Americans in the curriculum. Through a socio-transformative constructivist framework, Rivas investigates how Latina social studies teachers in her district disrupt parameters set forth by local school districts, board members, and the Texas Education Agency. Rivas' essay is instructive as she emphasizes the need for educators to disrupt master narratives in the social studies curriculum, either by covertly teaching unwritten and unofficial histories of communities of color in social studies or teaching ethnic studies courses like MAS, which center the perspectives of Mexican Americans. As she notes, teachers' pedagogies and how they respond to restrictive policies will impact students and their communities.

In "The future of middle school education-Chicana maestras and vignettes," Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt, Antonia Alderete, Megan Villa, and Violetta Villarreal offer an interdisciplinary research framework that weaves anticolonial theory and Chicana feminist epistemology in middle level teacher education. As the authors note, the experiences of Chicana teachers are often silenced in educational research. This is more so the case of Chicana middle level schoolteachers. The authors—Alexa Proffitt, who served as instructor with pre-service teachers—and clinical teachers—Alderete, Villa, and Villarreal—worked together, first in a

Service Learning in Social Studies course with a strong emphasis in anticolonial theory, and then in a clinical teaching course. Having created a community of trust, the maestras wrote and shared vignettes that highlight a number of themes that were critical to their growth as Chicana maestras. Through this anticolonial methodology, Chicana maestras interrogated what they were learning in colonized spaces and unearthed new knowledge critical to dismantling coloniality in middle level classrooms. Their collective knowledge is relevant to this special issue on MAS in K-12 Texas schools as the authors shed new conocimientos on the importance of anti-colonial research approaches and Chicana feminist epistemologies in teacher education, and the possibilities of subverting colonial ways of thinking and being through collective learning in clinical teaching. These epistemic spaces are critical more than ever in teacher education programs that are preparing future educators to challenge settler colonial and white supremacist laws like HB 3979 and SB 3, the latter which will have greater repercussions for students in public schools.

This special issue also includes two book reviews. Kristel A. Orta-Puente offers an excellent review of Philis M. Barragán-Goetz's most recently published book, *Reading, writing, and revolution: Escuelitas and the emergence of a Mexican American identity in Texas* (2020). Puente-Orta outlines the book's historiographical narrative of *escuelitas*—community-organized and funded schools that emerged at the turn of the century as a response against the cultural and linguistic assimilationist practices of U.S. public schooling. *Escuelitas* served as a form of cultural resistance against the segregated Mexican school system and cultivated children's ethnic identity through culturally responsive curriculum that parallels what Mexican American studies teachers do in their classrooms today.

Alpha Martínez-Suárez reviews *The Undocumented Americans*, a National Book Award Finalist written by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, one of the first undocumented immigrants to graduate from Harvard. Martínez-Suarez's review reminds us of the divergent yet connected plight of undocumented communities and the importance of learning about and understanding their experiences from these communities directly. In her review, Martínez-Suarez asks us to sit with the intimate realities undocumented communities encounter in K-12 schools, higher education, and within elderly populations, however in a way that does not diminish these communities to sound bites or tragic stories. Cornejo Villavicencio makes clear the necessity of undocumented communities sharing their own stories, as opposed to being written about in

ways that deny them nuance and a full sense of humanity. These are themes that are central to the Mexican American Studies movement, and Martínez-Suarez's review is a reminder of the importance of communities representing themselves and the existence of intersecting oppressions within our communities.

We want to express our gratitude to the contributors of this special issue for their activism, labor, and commitment to the movement, and for documenting and sharing their expertise here, especially in the midst of a global pandemic. We also want to acknowledge the fact that so many other voices and actors are a part of this movement, too many to possibly include here. We look forward to the movement for Mexican American Studies continuing to grow and creating more opportunities to share and document our histories and knowledges from multiple perspectives. We are grateful to the lead editors of the *Association for Mexican American Educators* journal, Drs. Patricia Sánchez and Lucila Ek, and managing editor, Christian Fallas Escobar, for his superb editorial guidance. Thank you for creating this opportunity to document the movement for Mexican American Studies in Pre-K-12 Texas schools.

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The Struggle for Mexican American Studies in Texas K-12 Public Schools: A Movement for Epistemic Justice through Creation/Resistance

Lilliana Patricia Saldaña

University of Texas at San Antonio

Abstract

This article traces how Mexican American Studies (MAS) scholar activists led and supported a statewide movement for MAS in Texas. As a Xicana feminist scholar activist, Saldaña draws from her retrospective memory and personal archive of organizational notes, movement documents, personal testimonies before the State Board of Education, and photos, to document her journey within this epistemic justice movement. In doing so, she narrates the processes of creation/resistance that led to change in a state that has historically excluded Black, Brown, and Indigenous histories from school curricula. As a scholar activist involved in various parts of this movement, Saldaña also examines the various interconnected layers of this movement—from local efforts in San Antonio, where she teaches, to statewide organizing—to chronicle the institutional and grassroots processes that led to this historic victory in Texas.

Keywords: Mexican American Studies, epistemic justice, creation/resistance, Texas K-12 education, scholar activism

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During the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of Mexican American students throughout the U.S. Southwest walked out of their schools in protest of the educational oppression they experienced at the hands of racist and classist schools that had, for generations, perpetuated the marginality and exclusion of Mexican Americans in society. In 1968 in East Los Angeles, 15,000 students walked out of their schools to protest the high push out/drop out and tracking rate of Brown students into vocational programs—a pattern that was pervasive across Mexican American schools in the United States (Berta-Avila, Tijerina, & Figueroa, 2011). They also protested the “no Spanish” school policies that punished students for speaking Spanish on campus and demanded better facilities and academic programs that would prepare them to go to college rather than funneling them into the military or low-wage and low-status employment. In San Antonio, 3,000 students from Edgewood Independent School District (ISD) also walked out to protest the systemic inequities they experienced, including the dilapidated buildings that were symptomatic of the inequitable school finance system in Texas that impacted poor and working-class Mexican students and communities in one of the most segregated cities in the United States (Poggio, 2015).

Students at Lanier High School (San Antonio ISD) also organized school walkouts. While the Lanier High School walkout never materialized, students demanded the right to speak Spanish at school and called for the implementation of courses on Mexican American history and culture to counter the assimilationist and whitewashed curricula forced on Mexican American youth. Their calls for what we now call Chicana/x/o Studies or in Texas, Mexican American Studies, as it is now widely recognized, reflects the community’s resistance to colonial schooling and their calls for epistemic justice in schools. In Texas, it would take 50 years after the Chicano Civil Rights Movement before Mexican American children and youth would have access to MAS in K-12 schools.

As a MAS scholar, I recognize that this struggle for epistemic justice—the right to our knowledge in the face of white supremacy and U.S. settler schooling—is not a new movement. It’s a movement that is at least 500 years old and is rooted in Indigenous resistance to the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being. Within the context of U.S. public schooling, it’s a movement that has roots in the *Escuelitas* or little schools of the early 1900s

which were a community response to segregated schooling, racial discrimination, language oppression and the imposition of a white supremacist curriculum (Barragán Goetz, 2020). The contemporary struggle for MAS in public schools also builds on the political activism of Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s that called for the creation of what we now call MAS or Chicana/x/o Studies (Berta-Avila, Revilla, & Figueroa, 2011).

It is important to note that the contemporary struggle for MAS in Texas K-12 public schools (a movement which is still very much on-going seven years after the initial organizing) did not happen overnight. Students, parents, teachers, scholars, and civil rights organizations mobilized within and across generational, language, ideological, and class differences in support of MAS in public schools. This movement also has relied on the intellectual, institutional, and organizing wisdom of senior scholars in our community—many who advocated for educational rights during the Chicano Movement and who have made significant contributions to the field of MAS in academia.

When I became involved in this movement, I was relatively new to the professoriate; I had only been a MAS professor for four years and was not tenured. As a Xicana feminist activist/pedagogue, I wanted to make sure I was not inserting myself in this space, but supporting the movement by learning from those who had been fighting for Chicana/x/o Studies since its inception. As such, I spent a lot of my initial time in this movement listening, observing, and advocating from my positionality as a “new” activist in the movement.

As a Xicana feminist activist rooted in my community’s historical legacy of activism and social change, and as one of the MAS scholar-activist-educators on the frontlines of this movement, I document and examine the various parts of this epistemic justice movement. I specifically examine the ways in which the community of MAS scholars, with support of parents, students, State Board of Education allies, and Mexican American civil rights organizations (like LULAC, G.I. Forum, MALDEF) came together to mobilize for MAS—from our collective call before the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE), to organizing political and movement spaces like the Statewide Summit on MAS organized by NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee. I also document and reflect on the ways in which MAS scholars responded to the community’s fight for epistemic justice building spaces like the MAS Teachers’ Academy in San

Antonio which offers K-12 teachers with the curricular, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical support to teach MAS within a community of praxis. As one of the MAS scholars in this movement, I draw from my retrospective memory, organizational notes, copies of my expert testimonies before the State Board of Education, and photos at rallies and press conferences, which all form part of a personal and collective archive of this movement. Within the tradition of Xicana feminist methodologies (Delgado Bernal, 1999), I weave my retrospective memory and embodied knowledge to narrate the movement's collective struggles and victories, and the lessons I've learned from being a part of various interconnected spaces within this movement. First, I begin with a theoretical discussion on what I mean by epistemic justice and why the MAS K-12 movement in Texas is an epistemic justice movement that relied on a creation/resistance approach, to borrow from Roberto Rodriguez' (2016) concept. This is significant given that Texas has and continues to be an anti-Mexican (and anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-queer) state despite the glaring demographics and political shifts in the state.

The MAS K-12 as a Movement for Epistemic Justice: Fighting Against Epistemic Racism

In Texas, the struggle for Mexican American Studies as a decolonial epistemic movement is rooted in a century-long fight for educational rights in a state that has perpetuated patterns of cultural violence and epistemic erasure in Mexican American schools (San Miguel, 1999; Valencia, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). I draw from Miranda Fricker's (2009) concept of epistemic justice, a concept that originated in the field of social epistemology. Epistemic justice has to do with the arrangement of knowledge in society. Epistemic justice is also concerned with the distribution of knowledge—who knows what and who is allowed to know what—which has implications for what is taught and learned in schools. From a decolonial perspective, epistemic justice cannot be separated from centuries old processes of coloniality in the form of epistemic racism and white supremacy inside and outside institutions of teaching/learning. As such, I situate the contemporary movement for MAS in K-12 schools as an epistemic justice movement in which the community of MAS scholars and allies mobilized for the creation of a curriculum that would provide students with access to Mexican American history and culture.

Epistemic justice also implores the “right for one’s view to be taken seriously if, for instance, one is an expert on the matter in question, or is testifying from direct experience, or if one makes a valid argument” (Kotzee, 2014, p. 344). Epistemic justice is also evidenced when members of oppressed communities fight against methodologies of denial, silencing, and in case of the MAS movement, re-naming by members of the dominant group. In sum, epistemic justice questions the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being as well as the mode of producing knowledge that perpetuates these asymmetrical relations of power.

The Banning of Mexican American Studies in Arizona

The banning of MAS in Arizona in 2010 spurred a nationwide movement for MAS, particularly in the Southwest. Proponents of Arizona’s SB 2281 claimed that MAS promoted the overthrow of the U.S. government and promoted solidarity among students, rather than individualism. Right-wing conservatives also claimed that MAS promoted resentment towards white people (a very similar argument was made in Texas with the passage of HB 3979, the “anti-Critical Race Theory” law which was signed by Gov. Abbott in June 2021). The ban on ethnic studies in Arizona was clearly anti-Mexican since only MAS was banned (this was the same year that SB 1070, the “Show me your papers” bill that legalized racial profiling, went into effect, as well).

Mounting evidence showed that MAS courses contributed to students’ academic achievement, even in non-MAS courses (Cabrera et al, 2014). In other words, there was no pedagogical basis for the ban. It was a racially motivated law to keep Brown youth from questioning Eurocentric narratives and the systems of privilege and oppression that have historically benefited whites. Given the demographic changes in the Southwest where K-12 schools are now majority Brown, these laws were intended to subvert the community’s power to dismantle white supremacy by policing and banning knowledge.

MAS/Chicano Studies in Higher Education: From Grassroots Mobilizing to Institutionalization

Chicano Studies programs were born out of students who claimed a Chicana and Chicano political identity and consciousness in their activism. During the 1960s, Chicano youth

in California drafted El Plan de Santa Barbara—both a political manifesto and blueprint—that demanded a paradigm shift in higher education—from the hiring of Chicano faculty, administrative leadership, and counselors to the creation of dedicated research centers and Chicano Studies programs. In California, the University of California Los Angeles and California State University were the first universities to offer Chicano Studies in 1969. In Texas, community activists and students mobilized at the local level and across the state to create grassroots educational spaces that would be accessible to youth. Activist-educators like Aurelio Montemayor—who is a part of the MAS Teachers' Academy today—for example, co-founded Colegio Jacinto Treviño—a Chicano college created out of the mobilizing efforts of the Mexican American Youth Organization—and co-founded Lincoln-Juarez University (Cantú, 2016). While these grassroots universities did not survive after the movement, a few institutions of higher education began to create Chicano Studies programs and offer undergraduate degrees, often with little institutional support.

In San Antonio, my home institution implemented its MAS program in 1993, almost 20 years after Chicano Studies had been institutionalized in colleges and universities in California and other Southwest states. Community colleges in San Antonio began to offer MAS related courses as early as the 1980s. However, it was not until 2004, through the approval of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, that community colleges in the state were allowed to offer Associate of Arts degrees in MAS (Alamo Colleges, 2013).

It would take almost 50 years since the Chicano Movement for MAS to reach K-12 schools through movement building and organizing, largely through NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 committee and within our local MAS professional/academic organizations, with the support of students, educators, civil rights organizations, and allies. We mobilized even when our own programs in higher education had little institutional support to survive (much less thrive) and when faculty had scarce resources to build visionary and decolonial spaces like the MAS Teachers' Academy.

MAS in K-12 Schools in Texas

The contemporary struggle for MAS in Texas K-12 schools reflects the community's historic struggles for a humanizing education that dignifies Mexican American people past and

present. Debates relating to epistemology—whose histories should be taught—are significant in Texas as it is the United States’s second most populous state with a majority student of color population. At least 52% of school age children are classified as Hispanic; this is much higher in cities like San Antonio where close to 70% of the city is of Mexican descent (Every Texan, 2016).

The idea of proposing a MAS high school elective course emerged out of National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas Foco (regional chapter) meetings in 2013. While I was not a part of these initial conversations, it was evident that this would be an epistemic battle in a State Board with an overwhelming conservative majority that did not reflect the demographic and political reality of the state. In 2014, a group of NACCS Tejas Foco scholars, including Trinidad Gonzalez, Christopher Carmona, Emilio Zamora, Angela Valenzuela, Juan Tejeda, and Marie “Keta” Miranda began to organize a campaign for MAS at the SBOE. The battle for a MAS elective course would take four years to materialize. Conservative members (10 out of 15 SBOE members were Republican) did not think Mexicans needed a stand-alone course. Mexicans were still seen as an interest group as opposed to a colonized group with ancestral connections to this continent.

The Creation of a Special Topics Course in MAS

Given the conservative politics of the board, in 2014, SBOE member Ruben Cortez (D) introduced a strategy to get MAS into Texas K-12 public schools. While the NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee had advocated for a stand-alone course, a mostly conservative board supported a special topics course that would be open to other area studies—a move that we saw as a victory for Ethnic Studies and Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in the state. In April 2014, the SBOE took a vote for this special-topics course and drafted “Proclamation 2016,” which would request that publishers submit textbooks for MAS and other ethnic studies like African American, Native American, and Asian American Studies. The SBOE also voted to allow individual districts to offer these special topics courses, making the special topics course optional rather than mandatory as part of a high school degree requirement. While this was not the course, nor the direction that MAS scholars had been advocating for,

we saw this compromise as a huge victory since this was the first time that any kind of ethnic studies course had been approved by the Texas SBOE (and any state board of education in the United States for that matter). It was the first step in advancing MAS in K-12 schools and it opened the doors for other ethnic studies fields. As such, it was a collective victory for communities of color in a state that continues to uphold white supremacist policies and anti-Brown nativist rhetoric. The battles for epistemic justice did not end with this victory in 2014; our resistance continued well into 2018 and continues today with the passing of House Bill 3979 and Senate Bill 3 (an extension of HB 3979), which limits the teaching of racism, settler colonialism and slavery in social studies curricula, and House Bills like 2497, also called the 1836 Project, which propose that educators teach a whitewashed Texas history.

Building a MAS Community at the Local Level: Somos MAS

I first became involved with Somos MAS—a local network of Mexican American Studies professors at community colleges and four-year universities—in San Antonio about eight years ago (Somos MAS has since then expanded to include K-12 MAS educators). The founding members of this organization—Juan Tejeda, Teresita Aguilar, and Marie “Keta” Miranda—all served as program directors of MAS programs at Palo Alto College, Our Lady of the Lake University, and the University of Texas at San Antonio, respectively, where I currently serve as MAS faculty and director/coordinator of the MAS program. They were also active members of NACCS Tejas Foco—the regional chapter of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (See Figure 1).

As a collective of MAS scholars in San Antonio, we would meet once a month to discuss curricula, course transfer plans, and educational policies from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that directly impacted MAS. We also raised scholarship monies to send students to NACCS Tejas Foco every year, supported the creation of dual-credit MAS courses for high school and community college credit, and worked across our institutions to strengthen the visibility of MAS programs. In essence, we cultivated institutional solidarities that we were able to activate and sustain in our statewide campaign for MAS in K-12 schools. Moreover, as scholars in the field of Chicana/x/o Studies, we continued to build transformative intellectual spaces and bridged academia with social justice movements in the community.

Figure 1.

Somos MAS



From left to right: Jose Castillo (University of Texas at San Antonio MAS student), Soledad Nuñez (UTSA MAS student), Rita Urquijo Ruiz (Trinity University professor), Lilliana P. Saldaña (UTSA professor), Maria “Keta” Miranda (UTSA professor), Deborah Vasquez (OLLU professor), and Juan Tejeda (Palo Alto College professor) at the MLK Jr. March, January 27, 2014.

Bridging Local with Statewide Advocacy

A few months after the SBOE approved of the special topics in MAS, I joined my colleagues from Somos MAS to advocate for MAS at the local level. It was time to get MAS into our schools. In October 2014, San Antonio SBOE representative, Marisa Perez Diaz, hosted a meeting at Texas Educational Region 20 and invited district representatives and regional school board members to discuss the possibility of integrating Mexican American Studies in K-12 classrooms. All the MAS advocates from San Antonio—Juan Tejeda, Marie “Keta” Mirada, June Pedraza, Cynthia Cortez, and Pedro Rodriguez—were in attendance. Emilio Zamora, MAS advocate and History professor from the University of Texas at Austin, drove to San Antonio to support our efforts. Before our meeting, I had reached out to Nolan Cabrera at the University of Arizona at the recommendation of Roberto Rodriguez, who had been writing extensively on the banning of MAS in Arizona. He knew that Cabrera and his colleagues had just published a study on the effects of MAS on student achievement in the *American Educational*

Research Journal. Cabrera graciously shared a copy of their manuscript, which I then shared with school leaders at this gathering (Cabrera et. al., 2014). Our goal was to encourage instructional coordinators, principals, and superintendents to support the MAS Special Topics course at their campuses (See Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Somos MAS Region 20 Meeting



From left to right: Two unidentified school leaders, Emilio Zamora (UT-Austin) and members of Somos MAS—June Pedraza (Northwest Vista College), Pedro Rodriguez (community advocate), Cynthia Cortez (St. Phillip’s College), Lilliana P. Saldaña (University of Texas at San Antonio), Juan Tejeda (Palo Alto College), Marie “Keta” Miranda (University of Texas at San Antonio)--and Rubina Pantoja (Harlandale ISD) and two other unidentified school leaders from local school districts, October 31, 2014.

This ground-breaking research was important to growing the MAS movement in Texas as it demonstrated that MAS classes improved student achievement as measured by standardized test scores and graduation rates. It also demonstrated that the more MAS classes students took, the greater the likelihood of success. While only a handful of school leaders attended this city-wide meeting, we remained committed to this epistemic justice movement

and continued to mobilize at the local and statewide level through Somos MAS, NACCS Tejas Foco, and other professional and academic spaces. It was during these months that my colleague Marie “Keta” Miranda founded the MAS Teacher’s Academy—a scholar-teacher led summer institute for social studies teachers interested in teaching the newly approved MAS Special Topics course.

As a new member of Somos MAS, I spent a lot of time listening in at the meetings and learning from my colleagues, most of whom were activists during the Chicano Movement and who continue to advocate for Brown communities through their research and advocacy today. As scholars, they bridged their institutional knowledge, leadership, and grassroots activism to sustain MAS programs in higher education, oftentimes with little to no resources despite our programs’ transformative impact. It was at these meetings that I learned to draw from our communities’ rich legacy of mutuality, solidarity, and political praxis to advocate for the existence of our programs in Hispanic Serving Institutions and cities like San Antonio, an overwhelming majority Mexican American city. These solidarities would prove critical in the movement for MAS in K-12 schools, particularly as we made a case for why a state like Texas needed MAS and Ethnic Studies. These solidarities continue to be critical today as we fight against epistemically repressive and white supremacist educational policies like HB 3979 and SB 3.

“Reject the Text” Campaign: Mobilizing against Epistemic Racism

When the SBOE voted to approve of the Special Topics in Mexican American Studies in 2014, it voted for an elective class without adopting any curricular standards. This became a problem once textbook writers submitted books for adoption through Proclamation 2016. In spring 2016, Cynthia Dunbar, former member of the SBOE and an outspoken ultra-conservative, submitted the first textbook for adoption. As soon as the book was made available for public view, members of NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 committee immediately expressed their concerns regarding the racist arguments presented in the book and began to mobilize with other groups to oppose the adoption of this book.

My full integration in the statewide movement took place during the summer months of 2016. Celina Moreno, who served as attorney for MALDEF at the time, invited me to join the Responsible Ethnic Studies Textbooks (REST) Coalition. She knew I had been active with the local Somos MAS group and wanted to see more women of color scholars in this organizing space. Over the next few months, members of NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee, LULAC, the G.I. Forum, and the Mexican American School Board Association—civil rights organizations that have historically fought against school segregation, anti-Mexican racial discrimination, and inequitable school funding in Texas—and the Texas Freedom Network—strategized against the adoption of this racist book and mobilized our communities to join the “Reject the Text” campaign. Members of the coalition wrote op-eds, organized press rallies, studied political profiles, and drafted arguments in preparation for the November SBOE hearing. This would be the first of many consecutive mobilizations we would organize until 2018.

During these months, SBOE Ruben Cortez formed an Ad Hoc Committee of MAS scholars (historians, anthropologists, public policy, education scholars, and teachers) to produce an expert review of the book: “Ad Hoc Committee Report on Proposed Social Studies Topic Textbook *Mexican American Heritage*” (2016). The committee found that the textbook was riddled with more than 140 factual, interpretive, and omission errors. Some of the excerpts that the coalition protested included:

- In a discussion on the Chicano movement: “Chicanos, on the other hand, adopted a revolutionary narrative that opposed Western civilization and wanted to destroy this society.” (p. 415-416)
- “Stereotypically, Mexicans were viewed as lazy compared to European or American workers.” (p. 248)
- In a discussion on Mexican workers: “[M]exican laborers were not reared to put in a full day’s work so vigorously. There was a cultural attitude of ‘*mañana*,’ or ‘tomorrow,’ when it came to high-gear production. It was also traditional to skip work on Mondays, and drinking on the job could be a problem. The result was that Mexican laborers were seen as inferior and kept in low-paying, unskilled jobs that

did not provide a pathway upward.” (p. 248)

- On immigration: “Illegal immigration has since caused a number of economic and security problems in the United States over which people are divided on how to solve. Poverty, non-assimilation, drugs, crime, and exploitation are among some of these problems.” (p. 428)
- In a section on “The Cold War”: “College youth attempted to force their campuses to provide *indigenismo*-oriented curriculum, Spanish-speaking faculty, and scholarships for poor and illegal students...During the Cold War, as the United States fought Communism worldwide, these kinds of separatist and supremacy doctrines were concerning. While solidarity with one’s heritage was understood, Mexican pride at the expense of American culture did not seem productive” (p. 470).
- In a section titled “The Latino and American Identity”: “Pressure exists that those of Mexican origin are not ‘Mexican enough’ or do not have enough sympathy and respect for their roots if they venture beyond the Spanish-speaking world. This belief, along with the idea that Latin culture must be held up as superior and separate from American culture, holds many back today (p. 473).

As a coalition, we argued that this book did not meet the basic standards for use in any Mexican American Studies classroom. On the contrary, it reproduced racial stereotypes and perpetuated false narratives about Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities and used dehumanizing language to describe our communities (for example, the use of the term “illegal” which is not a term MAS scholars use to describe any human being). Moreover, very little in the book actually related to Mexican American people. In a 500-page book, only a few pages focused on civil and labor rights issues. A large chunk focused on Mexican history (e.g. wars of independence, the Mexican Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Cold War). The book also referenced Latin American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende as Mexican American writers, and claimed tango and salsa were popular genres in Mexican American communities. In sum, the book was not only inaccurate, poorly written and conceptualized, it was blatantly racist.

Before the hearing, the “Reject the Text” coalition organized a press rally at the Texas Education Agency headquarters before offering public testimony at the State Board of Education. Public testimonies lasted more than three hours with more than three dozen scholars and activists speaking against the book. I remember being incredibly nervous as I had never participated as a speaker at a press rally or testified before a SBOE. The coalition had also circulated a petition against the adoption of the book. Close to 15,000 people across the state signed the petition to support the coalition. After much mobilizing and national attention on this book, the SBOE took a unanimous vote to reject the book which was a great victory. But it took months of mobilizing and organizing to get the SBOE to reject a racist textbook for a MAS class the MAS community fought so hard to get. In the meantime, the board submitted another call for textbooks. We would continue to fight against the spiritual violence and epistemic racism before the SBOE (this was the first of many public rallies at the SBOE), while creating political and pedagogical spaces to build MAS in K-12 Texas schools (See Figure 3).

Figure 3.

“Reject the Text” rally



SBOE member Marisa Perez Diaz at the “Reject the Text” press rally organized by the Responsible Ethnic Studies Textbook (REST) Coalition, September 16, 2016.

Building MAS through Creation/Resistance

While we were mobilizing against this racist textbook, we also organized the first Annual Statewide Summit on MAS in K-12 Schools through NACCS Tejas Foco—the largest statewide meeting on MAS in public schools. Our goal was to connect parents, teachers, policymakers, students, scholars, and advocates throughout the state to develop a strategic plan for implementing MAS in Texas schools. The simultaneous processes of resisting (mobilizing against) epistemic racism and creating (mobilizing for) MAS reflects what MAS scholar Roberto Rodriguez calls “creation/resistance” (2012, 2014). Rodriguez’s concept is significant in this discussion as resisting (reacting against) and creating are both equally important strategies for humanization and social justice. Rodriguez’s concept is also significant as it reminds me that we cannot expend all of our energies resisting, even though we do not have the privilege of ignoring these reprehensible policies and practices. We must continue to create, dream, celebrate, connect, and build the pedagogical and political spaces that will contribute to our communities’ wellbeing. This part of creation/resistance is, needless to say, more challenging to do under repressive regimes that inflict spiritual violence through epistemically racist policies in our public schools.

The NACCS Tejas Foco Statewide Summit on MAS played an important role in building the statewide movement MAS in K-12 schools. For the first four years, Somos MAS in San Antonio served as the site coordinating committee for the Annual Summit (we did hold the summit virtually during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021). Our collective goal as an organization was to support teachers and schools in implementing MAS across all grade levels, content areas, and program models like dual-language education. Below are key developments that took place at every summit:

2016

- Close to 300 teachers, parents, and advocates drove from across the state to attend this inaugural summit at San Antonio College.

- We addressed plans to fight against the adoption of the *Mexican American Heritage* textbook and held various sessions on political and legislative strategies, curriculum development for K-12, and growing support for MAS.
- We also collected data on what individual teachers were doing to teach MAS and developed a plan to increase the number of classes across the state. Teachers also shared resources they were using to create their individual MAS curricula since there were not state standards.

2017

- Dr. Marie “Keta” Miranda, MAS Program Coordinator at UTSA, organized the summit with Somos MAS and the MAS K-12 Committee. More than 200 educators and advocates from across the state gathered at the UTSA Downtown Campus in June.
- We continued to meet in various groups to identify teachers’ and parents’ concerns around teaching MAS and establish goals to move MAS forward.

2018

- Close to 300 educators, administrators, parents, and students gathered at Northwest Vista College to identify institutional barriers, establish priorities, and develop a plan of action to establish MAS in K-12 schools and in the broader community. Dr. Sandra Garza, MAS Coordinator at Northwest Vista College, coordinated the summit with support of Somos MAS and the MAS K-12 Committee.
- The summit partnered with an annual symposium I organized every summer: “Decolonial Epistemologies Symposium: Pedagogies of Liberation in Chicana and Chicano Communities,” held at the UTSA Downtown Campus. It is also important to note that during this time, I also served as an invited MAS faculty at the MAS Teacher’s Academy which took place the week leading to the Statewide Summit.

2019

- The summit was organized by MAS professor Aimee Villarreal, member of Somos MAS and NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee. Close to 200 advocates gathered at Our Lady of the Lake University.

- Sessions focused on best practices for adoption and curriculum development.
- The NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee drafted a resolution to encourage school districts to commit resources necessary to implement MAS courses.
- We added a new Bilingual Education session centered on integrating MAS content into the curriculum at the elementary and middle school level.
- We also added a Higher Education Committee.

2020

- We held our annual statewide summit virtually in Fall 2020, rather than the summer.
- We launched our “Now is the time for MAS!” campaign and invited Congressman Joaquin Castro and Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia, as well as Representatives Rafael Anchia, Mary Gonzalez, and Christina Morales. Rep. Morales would file HB 1504, an ethnic studies bill at the state legislation.

The “Protest the Name Change” Campaign

As we built this mobilizing, organizing, and political space, NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 committee continued to fight for a MAS social studies elective course, with curricular standards that came from the community of scholars. A few months after the SBOE voted against the adoption of the *Mexican American Heritage* textbook, NACCS Tejas Foco wrote a public statement to SBOE member Ruben Cortez outlining all the schools that offered MAS—more than 300 in the state, and more than 100 MAS dual credit courses. Given the increase of students taking MAS (as special topics courses or under the innovative course under the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the geographic diversity where courses were being offered, we pressed for a MAS course and offered our expertise to create MAS TEKS standards. In our letter, we stated: “The current lack of an official TEKS [curricular state standards] for the state is preventing the course from being offered as an elective option across the state as most schools do not have the resources to develop their curriculum. Also, the lack of a recognized course does not provide an incentive for publishers to create a textbook. Despite the lack of a SBOE approved course and textbook the desire to offer a MAS course is only growing.”

As early as November 2017, we began to press for curricular standards in the absence of a worthy textbook (publishers were not likely going to write a book unless there were standards). In colloquial terms, the SBOE had put the “cart before the horse” when it called for a textbook without curricular standards to guide the writing of the textbook. To make matters worse, the first book submitted had been written by non-experts in the field with no knowledge of MAS. So, members of NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee began to build on the standards created by the Houston ISD MAS Innovative course.

In February 2018, the MAS K-12 Committee held a meeting at the NACCS Tejas Foco conference held at Texas Lutheran University and strategized for the SBOE’s historic vote, which took place on April 10. We specifically discussed our online petition, the media campaign, legislative strategy, state board of education strategy, and formed a planning committee for the MAS demonstration in Austin on April 10th. We also crafted a resolution that organizations could support that called on the SBOE to adopt TEKS standards. We argued that TEKS standards would provide curricular coherence to MAS teachers across the state and would encourage districts to adopt MAS at their campuses.

Finally, on April 13, 2018, the Texas SBOE approved TEKS standards for MAS. This was the first time in Texas and U.S. history that a state board had approved a MAS course (it also opened the pathway for the approval of other ethnic studies courses like African American Studies and Native American Studies). However, the SBOE dimmed this victory when the majority Republican board voted to change the name of the course from “Mexican American Studies” to “Ethnic studies: An Overview of Americans of Mexican descent.” As an organization, we protested this racist proposal and demanded that the SBOE change the name of the course to reflect the name of the field which was recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the counterpart to the Texas SBOE. This unexpected name change was a racist attack on the field and on our community (in the four years we had been organizing for MAS, no one had ever expressed concern with the name of the course)—one that called for the committee to launch yet another statewide campaign for epistemic justice.

One of the main arguments we presented before the SBOE was that using the MAS designation would allow us to align MAS curriculum across the educational pipeline; it would

also grant the courses the necessary transferability from the high schools to the community colleges and universities. We also made the argument that changing the name of the course was ahistorical and misleading. The term Mexican American was not divisive or biased, nor did it suggest a hyphenated (or unassimilable) condition. In our collective statement, we noted: “Mexican American has been the most popular English-language self-referent since at least the middle 1800s and the typical way to refer to Mexican-origin persons. It affirms an American identity and national allegiance at the same time that it claims a Mexican ancestry. In that sense, the term is no different from other groups, such as African Americans, Italian Americans, and Native Americans. Lastly, the use of Mexican is meant to expand on, and not detract from, the meaning of American. The remark by board member Bradley, that to adopt Mexican American Studies is to accept the idea that ‘hyphenated Americans’ do not accept and embrace an American identity, is preposterous, misleading and divisive” (NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee, 2018).

We also argued that names are important, and that Mexican Americans have the inalienable right to name themselves, the field of study our community created out of student activism, and courses that reflected the methodological, epistemological and theoretical frameworks in the field. In defense of our field, we argued that MAS reflects the communities we serve given that Mexican American students comprise 52% of the almost 5.4 million students in Texas schools Pre-K-12 schools. In cities like San Antonio, close to 70% of school age children are of Mexican descent. We also expressed that the name change singled out Mexican American Studies, and in doing so, the SBOE had created a “glaring inconsistency with the other courses included in the vote: Native American Studies, African American Studies, Latino Studies and Asian/Pacific Islander Studies.” Furthermore, we argued that the word “Overview” in the proposed title of this course called “for a cursory treatment and not an in-depth examination of the subject, in contradiction with the broad purpose and content of this course” (MAS K-12 Committee, 2018).

As experts in the field, we also protested the use of “Americans of Mexican Descent” as this was “not a term that most Mexican Americans or Chicanxs identify with and is a throwback to the 1950s Jim Crow era of segregation when Black and Brown children and youth

were denigrated for their race and ethnicity in Texas schools” (MAS K-12 SBOE Public Testimony). We also made the case that Mexican Americans, as Indigenous people to this continent and ethnic/racial minorities in what is today the United States, have the right to self-identification. This right to name oneself at the individual and collective level is protected by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples, specifically the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, inspired by provision of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The right to name ourselves and to name courses in an academic field of study created by Brown scholars in our own community is an epistemic justice issue—one that we collectively fought for in the creation of this historic movement.

The SBOE’s decision to misname this MAS course represented another obstacle in our movement for MAS—a reflection of the epistemic racism and spiritual violence we continuously had to fight against over the course of this movement. In preparation for the SBOE’s public hearing on the name change in June 2018, NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 committee members Juan Tejeda, Christopher Carmona (Committee Chair), Angela Valenzuela, Emilio Zamora, and other members of the group drafted a press release in May. We agreed to change our tactic from an “academic approach” of trying to convince the board to change the name of the course based on a number of arguments to a more direct political plan that named the epistemic racism we were confronting. The NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee’s press release questioned the SBOE’s decision:

In light of the naming actions of the TXSBOE: What motivated you to change the name of an entire people? Is it true, as board member Bradley stated to the press, that the TXSBOE would never have approved the MAS course if they had not changed the name? Or is it the case that you wish to discipline Mexican Americans into denying their self-referent and accepting your understanding of who they are?

Given your decision on African American Studies, Native American Studies and Asian and Pacific Islanders Studies courses, why did you single out Mexican American Studies with a different course title? Does this constitute outright discrimination or unconscious bias? Do not all students in Texas public schools deserve to know and understand the

contributions of Mexican Americans to American history without needless political obstructions? (NACCS Tejas MAS K-12 Committee, 2018)

We had a couple weeks to organize our protests and rallies, draft letters to SBOE members, and write op-eds, and educate the community on the importance of electing SBOE leaders who would advocate for Mexican Americans in a state where more than half of school age children are of Mexican heritage.

Through community mobilization, we were able to pressure the SBOE to restore the name of the course to align with the field of study. Immediately following this victory, we mobilized another campaign to press the SBOE to approve state curricular standards—standards reviewed and written by scholars in the field (at no charge to the state). We continued to re-iterate the academic outcomes of students in MAS and Ethnic Studies courses, as demonstrated by the body of research, including higher graduation rates, higher rates of retention, higher grades and overall academic engagement. We also made the case that MAS was already being offered at many high schools across the state and that standards would provide curricular coherence and give publishers standards to develop quality textbooks and instructional materials which would then encourage more districts to implement MAS at their campuses. We also counted on the support of statewide organizations like the Mexican American School Board Association (MASBA), which adopted a resolution in support of TEKS standards for the MAS course. We made our recommendations on June 15th on the day the SBOE voted on the name change and made additional curricular standards, including: (1) more representation of Texas Indigenous people's history to allow students to analyze processes of colonization and its continued impact upon people and the environment; (2) an equitable representation of women throughout the course and their roles in the political, social, cultural, and economic development of Texas and the United States; and (3) room for local histories to reflect community struggles, experiences, and contributions. The committee made additional recommendations in September 2018 (See Figure 4).

Figure 4.

“Protest the Name Change” poster

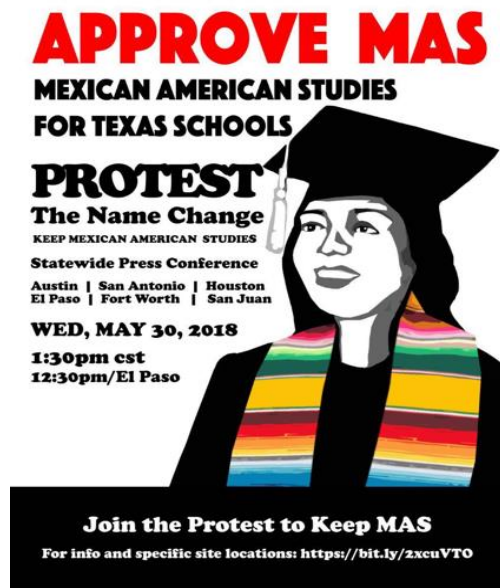


Image created by Ernesto Cuevas, Jr. This poster was created to promote our statewide press conference in preparation for the June 12, 2019 SBOE hearing on the name of the course. The SBOE voted to approve the name of the course to Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies on June 15th.

The MAS Teachers' Academy: Building MAS in the Classroom

In 2015, following the SBOE's approval of the Special Topics in MAS course, my colleague Dr. Marie “Keta” Miranda created the MAS Teachers' Academy to support social studies teachers who would be teaching this course for the first time. The MAS academy was and continues to part of the creation/resistance in this decolonial epistemic justice movement.

I joined the MAS Teachers' Academy in 2018, in the midst of fighting against the epistemic racism and obstacles presented by the majority conservative SBOE. As one of the members of the planning team, I worked with Dr. Marie “Keta” Miranda, graduate students, and school leaders like Dr. Elizabeth Rivas who served as a social studies instructional coach at Harlandale ISD (she had worked with Dr. Miranda since the founding of the academy in 2015). Rivas' invaluable experience as a curriculum coach and her expertise as a scholar helped create a space that bridged MAS methodological, analytic, and epistemological frameworks in the field, with a decolonial application of content through social studies pedagogies.

It became clear that the academy had little institutional support from the university—just enough funding to cover food (for one of the five days), a Graduate Assistant, and some supplies for teachers to use during the week. The University's Institute of Texan Cultures (ITC) also hosted us during the week and provided participants with a tour of Los Tejanos exhibit and the archives. As an underfunded academy, we provided the intellectual, pedagogical, curricular, and organizational labor pro bono, for months leading up to the academy, and continued afterwards once the one-week institute ended to plan ahead for the next year. Even though we did not have much institutional funding, we continued to grow the academy once curricular standards were adopted. This support was significant since a majority of the teachers then and now do not have a MAS or Ethnic Studies background in their undergraduate education or teacher preparation.

We also extended the academy in summer 2018 to offer additional professional development workshops for MAS teachers in fall and spring semesters. With the collaboration of Andres Lopez, who had joined the academy as a participant and then joined the academy as part of the planning committee, we began to offer teacher-led workshops for K-12 teachers. He also connected us with Aurelio Montemayor and other members of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) who became invaluable partners in growing the academy and the movement for MAS in K-12 schools. Montemayor, who was a MAS advocate during the Chicano Movement (and one of the co-founders of the “Curso de la Raza” movement and one of the co-founders of Jacinto Treviño College), brought a liberatory vision and Freirian approach to the epistemic work we were doing. The MAS Teachers' Academy fall and spring professional development workshops would provide teachers with a space to lead pedagogical and curriculum sessions and where they would share resources through the creation of a “Community of Practice.” Our first Fall workshop in October 2018 was a complete success; close to 100 teachers, parents, and students attended. This would be the first time we would also invite MAS high school students to share their testimonios of what they were learning and how MAS created intergenerational spaces of teaching/learning that stretched beyond the classroom.

In 2019, Dr. Miranda retired and asked that Dr. Gloria Gonzalez, a former doctoral student who knew the logistics and history of the academy, and I co-direct the academy. Even though Miranda had retired from UTSA, she worked with Gonzalez and me to submit a grant to Humanities Texas (we had worked on other grants but had not been funded despite positive reviews). This would be our first grant funded academy and would help fund at least half of the expenses. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we held the 2020 academy virtually over Zoom. Close to 60 teachers participated, many who were going to teach MAS for the first time in San Antonio, including six teachers from North East ISD who were going to teach MAS at every high school campus in the district. Many other teachers joined from Dallas/Fort Worth, Austin, the Rio Grande Valley, and El Paso.

As a co-director of the academy, I worked with Gloria Gonzalez, Aurelio Montemayor, Elizabeth Rivas, and MAS teachers—Anita Cisneros, Araceli Manriquez, and Lucero Saldaña (MAS activists and products of our undergraduate MAS program)—and MAS advocates like Josie Garcia, as well as Olga Estrada, who had been serving as the academy's Graduate Assistant—to continue building the academy into a community-powered space lead by MAS scholars, teachers, and community advocates. Many in the academy have been products of MAS in higher education (taught by professors who were activists in the Chicano Movement) and had been a part of the MAS movement in San Antonio and at the statewide level, working closely with NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Pre-K-12 Committee and Somos MAS. It was an intergenerational space that nurtured a MAS teacher identity and consciousness. One of the ideas that I have continuously stressed is that MAS is not only about introducing teachers to foundational content in the field. While MAS content is important given that a majority of MAS teachers have never had access to MAS in their undergraduate education, teacher education, or professional development, the academy is also committed to cultivating teachers' pedagogies of resistance—pedagogies rooted in the discipline's political, epistemological, ontological, and decolonial methodologies. In other words, the academy has cultivated a paradigm shift in what and how teachers teach/learn and engage with their communities of praxis. Teachers also come to understand that the academy is not a typical professional development space; it's a culturally rooted space of critical self-reflection, teacher identity development, and movement building

where solidarities are nurtured and decolonial epistemic work is sustained with and across our communities of praxis (See Figure 5).

Figure 5.

2021 MAS Teachers' Academy digital flyer



Digital flyer for the 2021 one-week MAS Teachers' Academy. Image created by Linda Monsivais.

Conclusion

As a Mexican American Studies scholar-activist rooted in my community's legacy of educational activism, I examine the various parts of the contemporary MAS K-12 movement in Texas, with attention to the interconnected parts of this epistemic justice movement. Drawing from Rodriguez's concept of creation/resistance, I examine the ways in which the MAS scholar community--with support of students, civil rights organizations, and community allies--came together to mobilize for MAS in K-12 public education and create new epistemic spaces in the process. Within the tradition of Xicana feminist methodologies, I weave my retrospective memory and embodied knowledge to narrate our challenges, victories, and lessons learned in a state that continues to inflict epistemic violence through racist policies like House Bill 3979 and Senate Bill 3.

With the exception of Angela Valenzuela's (2019) analysis of MAS and the historic struggles to decolonize official knowledge in Texas and Arizona, much of the history on the contemporary movement for MAS in Texas K-12 schools has yet to be documented. While schools now offer MAS and other ethnic studies courses, the Texas public education system faces new challenges like Senate Bill 3 (formerly House Bill 3979) which aims to silence any discussions about racial oppression, and the 1836 Project which aims to enforce a white-washed curricula rooted in Texas exceptionalism, myth making and white supremacy. I'm reminded that we must continue to fight against these reprehensible policies, but most importantly, we must continue to build new solidarities within and across our communities of praxis and create new spaces that will nurture our community's struggles for humanization and epistemic justice.

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Historias Americanas: Implementing Mexican American Studies in K-12 Social Studies Curriculum in the Rio Grande Valley

Maritza De La Trinidad

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Stephanie Alvarez

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Joy Esquierdo

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Francisco Guajardo

Museum of South Texas History

Abstract

This essay contributes to the growing literature on Mexican American Studies in K-12 within the broader field of Ethnic Studies. While most of the literature on the movement for Ethnic Studies within Texas and across the nation mainly focuses on the impact of Ethnic Studies courses on students' academic success, this essay highlights a professional development program for K-12 social studies teachers in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas entitled *Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley*, funded by a federal grant. This essay provides an overview of *Historias Americanas*, the objectives and structure of the program, and the ways in which the program contributes to the discourse on Mexican American Studies in K-12. It also describes the frameworks that form the crux of the professional development process: place-based education and culturally relevant pedagogical frameworks.

Keywords: Mexican American Studies in K-12 Social Studies, Mexican American history in K-12, Culturally Relevant Education, Place-Based Education, Ethnic Studies in K-12, Teacher Professional Development, Rio Grande Valley

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Introduction

This essay introduces readers to an initiative entitled *Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley* (Historias Americanas), a professional development program for K-12 social studies teachers from the two largest school districts in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) of South Texas. The program provides teachers with opportunities to acquire a level of expertise in the history, culture, and geography of the region using place-based education and culturally relevant pedagogical frameworks. The objective is to provide teachers with content on Mexican American history to enhance the social studies curriculum and with pedagogical tools to provide students with culturally relevant experiences. This essay provides an overview of Historias Americanas, how it was conceptualized, and how it facilitates the integration of Mexican American Studies (MAS) content in K-12 classrooms.

Background of the Historias Americanas Professional Development Program

In the summer of 2017, 12 faculty members from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) engaged in a 10-day personal and professional development venture in Mexico City. Working under the banner of UTRGV's B3 Institute (bilingual, bicultural, biliterate)—an initiative that counted among its core components (1) the Center for Mexican American Studies, (2) the Center for Bilingual Studies, and (3) the Translation and Interpreting Office—faculty members represented multiple disciplines. One faculty member was from the Department of Organization and School Leadership, four represented Mexican American Studies (MAS), one was from Creative Writing, two were from the University College, one was from Bilingual and Literacy Studies, one was from Psychology, one was from Biology, and one was from Spanish. All the faculty had a background in MAS, were MAS faculty affiliates, and are well-published in MAS-related fields. Other participants included two recent graduates of the graduate program in MAS, the program coordinator for the Center for Mexican American Studies and Center for Bilingual Studies and some family members.¹

The curriculum for the experience included selected readings, reflective writing workshops, day-long excursions that included visiting museums and historical sites, climbing pyramids of ancient Mexican ruins, and taking long walks in historic places around Mexico City.

¹ All of the faculty selected for this trip are Latinx with eight being Mexican American, one being Mexican, one being Cuban American, one being Nicaraguan, and another being Guatemalan.

Participants shared cultural and socio-historical experiences in a part of the world where each faculty member could be inspired by the historical and cultural weight of the place. Faculty members took extensive notes on each site visit and read selected texts that guided daily dialogues. Each dialogue brought together content shaped by the experience of the day and by the readings. During the daily dialogue sessions, participants used the *plática* modality as a source of inquiry, critical self-reflection, and community building (de la Torre, 2008; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013; Saavedra & Esquierdo, 2019; Fierros & Bernal, 2016; Durán, Carruba-Rogel & Solis, 2020). The *plática* modality was used because it is a culturally specific expressive form akin to a family dialogue around the kitchen table and was guided by inquiry and aligned to both the selected reading and the tactile/cultural experience of the day. As a form of inquiry and dialogue, *plática* prompted conversations and grounded discussions in culturally relevant ways. This methodological approach culturalizes the dialogical form by framing the discourse and centering it on Mexican and Mexican American socio-historical and cultural forms (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

Being in Mexico City allowed the group to reflect on the history, heritage, culture, and languages of Mexico that transformed participants. It also allowed the faculty to discuss, reflect, and write about the ways in which they wanted to expand their work in Mexican American Studies and move it forward in higher education and in communities. The impact was palpable: personally, professionally, and as a collective. The faculty members made several commitments to each other: (1) faculty would work together to fortify UTRGV's B3 mission to promote bilingualism, biculturalism and biliteracy through curricular, research, and programmatic functions aligned with the history and experiences of Mexican American students that comprise 90% of the student body; (2) the team would continue to build the community of faculty and staff by generating personal and professional development opportunities; and (3) faculty would engage in resource development functions to secure grants and other resources to deepen the collective work.

Upon returning to South Texas, four of the faculty participants in the Mexico City venture wrote a grant proposal for an American History and Civics Education National Activities grant. The purpose of this grant program is to improve the teaching and learning of American history in K-12. The proposal called for a program to engage selected local public-school districts in a professional development process for social studies and history teachers to

enhance their curriculum. The grant writing team, led by two of the authors of this essay, wrote the proposal amid a movement in Texas to integrate a high school Mexican American Studies course as a humanities elective. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) was in the process of approving the course as well as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the course. In discussions to frame the proposal, the authors saw the opportunity to create a program that reflected the history, culture, and language of the students, teachers, families, and communities in the Rio Grande Valley—the vast majority of whom are Mexican American—and to integrate Mexican American Studies in K-12 social studies and history curricula. The authors thus named the program *Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley* and submitted it to the U.S. Department of Education award competition.

The program promised to provide teacher professional development experiences to 70 K-12 social studies and history teachers from the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District (ECISD) and Brownsville Independent School District (BISD) on the history, culture, and geography of the Rio Grande Valley through a Mexican American Studies lens and by using principles from place-based education (Smith, 2002; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2004) and culturally relevant pedagogical frameworks (Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2014). Place-based teaching and learning provides a framework from which to create innovative pedagogical and curricular workshops based on up-to-date research and practices for teacher development that places students lived experiences, sociohistorical context, and community realities at the center of the instructional process (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Smith & Sobel, 2010). *Historias Americanas* employs place-based education to deepen the connections between location and learning by encouraging teachers to create a classroom that integrates place, culture, and language and encourages students to draw on their existing funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005) and their families' and communities' cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Culturally relevant pedagogies such as *plática*, oral histories, community-based research, and digital storytelling are applied in ways that are specific to the students and communities. The university won a 3-year grant in September 2018 in the amount of \$2,014,557.00 to implement *Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley*.

This essay is authored by four of the faculty participants in the professional development venture in Mexico City, including two who authored the grant proposal. Maritza De La Trinidad

is a historian of the Mexican American educational experience and faculty in the Mexican American Studies program; Francisco Guajardo is a historian whose tenure resided in the Department of School and Community Leadership; Joy Esquierdo is a bilingual education teacher/scholar and faculty in the Bilingual and Literacy Studies and Director of the Center for Bilingual Studies; and Stephanie Alvarez is an Ethnic Studies scholar and faculty in the Mexican American Studies Program and Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies. The four have been in close professional and personal partnerships for the better part of the past decade, and each plays a key role in the implementation of *Historias Americanas*.

Context of the Grant

Located in deep South Texas along the Texas-Mexico border, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) encompasses four counties (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy) surrounded by smaller towns, cities and *colonias* with a total population of 1.36 million residents.¹ According to Index Mundi, Cameron County is 89.8% Hispanic/Latinx, Hidalgo is 92.4%, Starr County 96.4% and Willacy, 88.4%.² The RGV is considered a borderland (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2012) rather than a metroplex, with McAllen, Brownsville and Harlingen as its principal communities on the northern side of the Rio Grande and the sister cities of Matamoros, Rio Bravo, Nuevo Progreso, and Reynosa in the state of Tamaulipas on the southern side.² Indigenous people interacted with the land and its ecology for 12,000 years, before new settlers came—a reality that engendered the idea of a borderland. This borderland is defined by a history of struggle, political contention, and an elongated search for identity by Mexican-origin people who live on

² This article uses several terms depending on the context. The U.S. Census Bureau uses the pan-ethnic terms Hispanic and Latino/a interchangeably to classify a diverse population who have origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, other parts of the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and Spain (<https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/texas/hispanic-or-latino-population-percentage#map>). See also: Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert (2011). In this essay we mostly use Mexican, Mexican American, or Mexican-origin to accurately portray the demographic reality of the Rio Grande Valley. Chicana/o is used in historical context for Mexican Americans who call themselves Chicanas/os. The Pew Research Center shows that the 2019 national census figures indicate that the overall Hispanic/Latino population stands at 60.6 million, comprising 18 percent of the nation's total population. 63 percent of the overall Hispanic/Latino population is Mexican origin. The Mexican origin population includes Mexican nationals, U.S.-born citizens, naturalized citizens, undocumented immigrants, and the children of recent immigrants. Texas is home to 11.5 million Hispanics/Latinos, comprising 45 percent of the state's total (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/10/hispanics-have-accounted-for-more-than-half-of-total-u-s-population-growth-since-2010/>). We also use the term ELL (English Language Learners) and LEP (Limited English Proficient) interchangeably to refer to the subpopulation of students that this program targets. These terms encompass students who speak English as a second language and/or are bilingual.

both sides of the border. To be from the border is to be both Mexican and American, but it is also to be ensconced in a place of cultural and linguistic fluidity that has changed over time. To be from this borderland is to live in two worlds, but many may also feel that they are neither from here, nor from there (*ni de aquí, ni de allá*). This borderland exists as an *herida abierta* (open wound) and a place of survival (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2012). Settlement, migration, international trade, economic development, and cross-border social relations and commerce created binational communities with families residing on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border dating back to the Spanish colonial and Mexican periods (Alonzo, 1998; Valerio-Jiménez, 2013). Social and economic interdependence between families and communities on both sides of the border were established by the early 1900s and continued into the mid-20th century (Hernández, 2014; Montejano, 1987). Social and economic ties between families, communities, and businesses were significantly strengthened in the 1990s and early 21st century due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and increased immigration (De La Trinidad et al., 2018; Gutiérrez, 1996; Pagán, 2004). Given the historical demographic, cultural, and geographic realities of this region, the authors saw an opportunity to create a program that would enhance the K-12 social studies and history curriculum with content on Mexican American experiences and the contributions Mexican Americans have made to the social, economic, cultural, and political development of the Northeastern Mexican borderlands and Rio Grande Valley.

Since an important function of public schooling in the U.S. is to instill a sense of belonging, inclusion, and citizenship, the curriculum should reflect the diversity of the people who contributed to the making of the nation, so that all students see themselves in the content they learn. In the RGV, the school curriculum should also reflect the history, culture, and heritage of the majority Mexican descent student population served by local districts. In his book, *A Different Mirror: A Multicultural History of America*, historian Ronald Takaki used the metaphor of a “mirror” to describe the effect an incomplete historical narrative has on the student:

But what happens when historians do not “record” their stories, leaving out many of America’s peoples? What happens, to borrow the words of Adrienne Rich, “when someone with the authority of a teacher” describes our society, and “you are not in it”? Such an experience can be disorienting—“a moment of

psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.” What should we do about our invisibility? ... This truth is reflected in “a different mirror.” (Takaki, 2008, pp. 29-30)

Takaki’s “mirror” metaphor infers that learning history is akin to looking in the mirror; if students do not see themselves in the mirror, it is as if they do not exist. Thus, students should see themselves in the larger narrative to feel a sense of belonging, self-worth, and positive self-image. This is applicable in teaching social studies and history in K-12 since these are important years when students learn who they are as individuals and develop their sense of belonging and acceptance as valued members of society. Takaki’s message is also useful to describe what Mexican American/Chicana/o high school students in Los Angeles demanded after thousands walked out of their high schools in 1968 to protest discriminatory policies such as the “no-Spanish” rule, the lack of college preparatory courses, lack of bilingual education, and lack of courses in Mexican American history.

The massive Los Angeles walkouts reverberated in other parts of the Southwest and Midwest (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Muñoz, 2007; Navarro, 1995), including South Texas in San Antonio, Edcouch-Elsa, Kingsville, and Crystal City (Barrera, 2004; Echeverría, 2014; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Muñoz, 2007; Navarro, 1995). The activism sparked by the walkouts led to the creation of *El Plan de Santa Barbara*; the founding document for Chicana/o Studies, at the Santa Barbara Conference in 1969. Student activists designed a college program to meet the needs of Mexican American/Chicana/o students and communities with courses in history, anthropology, sociology, and literature on the Mexican American experience to celebrate their Mexican heritage and Spanish language (Muñoz, 2007). In writing *El Plan De Santa Barbara*, Chicana/o/x activists envisioned an education that “mirrored” and valued their experience as Mexican Americans/Chicanas/os/x—one that affirmed their identity and empowered them. This is reflected in the quotes below on the early development of Chicano and Mexican American Studies college programs that coincided with the creation of *El Plan de Santa Barbara*:

The present needs of the Chicano must be met in such a way as to provide relevant programs which will sustain self-confidence and provide a feeling of acceptance on the student’s terms ... to develop ... abilities to serve their communities, [and] to develop a potential for self-fulfillment in at least two cultures (quoted in Muñoz, 2007, p. 158).

This program ... is designed for students who elect to study this important minority group through the interdisciplinary approach or plan to engage in such professions as government service, education, social work, or others where knowledge of this subject would enhance professional opportunities (quoted in Muñoz, 2007, p. 159)

To study the contribution of the Mexican-American to American culture and society ... promote better understanding among all Americans...encourage Mexican-Americans to seek higher education by creating a greater feeling of pride for their heritage and acquainting them with the culture that helped form their community ... (Quoted in Muñoz, 2007, p. 160).

These statements give us insight into the type of education Chicana/o/x activists believed would improve Chicana/o/x students sense of self, academic engagement, and communities. At the time, high school and college student activists called for a curriculum that reflected their history, culture, identity, and community realities—one in which they saw themselves and their communities. In some ways, students were calling for what educational scholars refer to as culturally relevant education and place-based education, as students wanted to see their Mexican/Mexican American/Chicano culture and local communities reflected in their textbooks and the content they learned (Acuña, 2011; Barrera, 2004; Muñoz, 1989, 2007; Soldatenko, 2011).

The 1970s, 1980s and 1990s saw the growth of Mexican American/Chicana/o and Latinx Studies and other ethnic studies programs and centers in colleges and universities across the nation to facilitate the teaching and research on the Mexican American/Chicana/o/Latina/o experiences in the U.S., including the University of Texas Pan American, UTRGV's legacy institution. By the early 2000s, teachers, scholars, and educational leaders believed these programs should begin at the high school level. An example of this is the Mexican American/Raza Studies program developed by teachers at Tucson Unified School District in 2002 with the support of administrators and educational scholars, which included courses in history, government, and literature from a Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, social justice perspective (Cabrera, et al., 2014; Camarota, 2007, 2009-2010; Camarota & Romero, 2014).

In developing *Historias Americanas*, the authors of the proposal drew from established scholarship on effective practices in bilingual, bicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy,

and placed-based education to make education for students in the RGV more relevant and congruent to their culture, language, history, and location (Guajardo et al., 2016; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2004). They listened to the research on bicultural education by Cárdenas and Cárdenas (1977) who argued that the values and life experiences of Hispanic/Latinx children was incompatible with the values and teaching and learning approaches of U.S. public schools. Cárdenas and Cárdenas's "theory of incompatibilities" (1977) provided a relevant analytical framework to create a program that would promote an instructional process that was more congruent with the lives of students, families, and communities, including their home culture and language. Valenzuela (1999) updated this theory in her argument that historically Mexican American children have been subjected to "subtractive schooling" because schools used instructional practices negated the historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage of Mexican American children including those of recent immigrants, bilingual learners, and other Latinx student populations. Valenzuela argued that recognizing and affirming the knowledge and culture that students, families and communities bring to the educational process is effective in transforming the education of Mexican American and Latinx students from a subtractive education to an additive education to promote academic success (Valenzuela, 1999). Ladson-Billings's (1995, 2014) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, which links principles of learning to the cultural background and experiences of children, families, and communities. Moll, Amanti, Neff & González (1992) Funds of Knowledge framework holds that students bring to school knowledge from their families and communities that can be and should be tapped to help them connect to school. Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth strengthens the arguments for culturally relevant and culturally congruent teaching and learning to counter the negation of culture, language, and incongruence of values in K-12 education for Mexican origin/Latinx students (Smith, 2002; Smith & Sobel 2010; Sobel, 2004;) and culturally relevant pedagogical frameworks (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2014).

Historias Americanas also draws from more recent research on the impact of Mexican American and Ethnic Studies curricula on students' academic performance such as Cabrera et al., (2014) who analyzed data from the Mexican American/Raza Studies program in Tucson (2008-2014) that emphasized culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy, curricula, materials, and instructional practices at the high school level. Cabrera et al.'s (2014) study, which involved 8,400 mostly Latino/a/x students over 4 cohorts between 2008 and 2011, found that students

who took more than one high school course taught from a culturally relevant framework achieved higher grade point averages (GPAs), raised scores on the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), the state's mandated assessment test, and experienced a higher probability of graduating high school. The study concluded that student academic performance was increased through culturally relevant teaching and learning practices that positively affected learning and intellectual development. A similar study by Dee and Penner (2017) using data from 1,405 students from five school year cohorts in the San Francisco School District found that implementing culturally relevant curricula inspired students to "explore their individual identity, their family history, and their community history" (Dee & Penner, 2017, p. 10). These researchers argue that culturally relevant pedagogy and "instructional practices are substantially more effective when differentiated to align with the distinctive cultural experiences that individual students bring with them and affirm students' cultural identity" (Dee & Penner, 2017, p. 1). These studies demonstrate the merits of teaching culturally relevant content through culturally responsive pedagogical strategies to improve student learning, engagement in the content they learn, and academic success by connecting students' lived experiences and community realities. For example, teachers learned about Indigenous peoples of the Rio Grande Delta, how they lived their daily lives such as the mining of salt from an ancient salt lake, La Sal del Rey, north of Edinburg, to cure meat and foodstuffs, trade and commerce with Meso-American Indigenous peoples from central Mexico, through visits to La Sal del Rey and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and from scholarly presentations by Anthropologists such as Dr. Servando Hinojosa and Archivist Martín Salinas, museum and national park staff, discussions and readings. From class observations, surveys, and digital stories we learned how many teachers are teaching the content they learn using pedagogies such as oral history, family history, and funds of knowledge to help students feel connected to the lesson.

An objective of *Historias Americanas* is to help teachers make connections between themselves and the history, culture, and geography of the RGV to make social studies curricula more relevant to their students' Mexican American cultural identities, heritage, and "cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005). At the same time, another goal is to help teachers see themselves and their familias in the content they teach, so that they can help their students see themselves and their communities as significant agents in the larger historical narrative. Most of the teachers who participate in our program are Mexican American. However, helping all of the teachers

know themselves and make connections to the Rio Grande Valley through place-based education helps them connect to students and see themselves and their students in the place-based content.

The Historias Americanas Professional Development Components

The program helps teachers develop an awareness of the regions' rich Mexican American history and the role Mexican-origin people have had in shaping its history, since most people in most communities do not know their own history unless the place is Gettysburg, Williamsburg, or Jamestown (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998). For this reason, Historias Americanas uses culturally relevant and place-based educational frameworks in providing teachers with content. Teachers learn to draw from their own lived experiences, stories, and "cultural wealth" and about the power and value of place to make the content more meaningful and culturally and geographically relevant. Participants do this through reflective writing, group discussion, culturally responsive activities, and lesson-planning sessions in the workshops. Reflection prompts such as "Today we are visiting the Hidalgo Pumphouse historical museum. As we walk through this site, think about your family history (your story). What is the historical relevance of this location and how do you connect to it?" ask teachers to see themselves and their families in the place we visit and learn about. Writing and creating their own story using digital storytelling is another way we asked teachers to engage in to understand where they fit in the history, culture, and heritage of the Rio Grande Valley.

For each institute and workshop, we collected data using reflective journal writing, pre and posttests, pre and post workshop surveys and lesson plans. After the first summer institute in June 2019, one teacher wrote, "After the presentations, I feel connected to my past through the plight of my ancestors," (Maria, post survey) and another wrote, "I feel like I have more tools in my arsenal (teaching) to better educate my students about culturally relevant ideas" (Anthony, post survey). If teachers are excited about learning their own history and seeing themselves in the larger narrative of the American U.S. history, they will stimulate students' interest to learn about their own history and local communities by encouraging students to draw from their cultural knowledge to connect to the larger narrative. This was noted by another teacher who wrote, "This has spiked interest in my own history and learning more about my ancestors, so I can in turn be a better teacher for my students" (Jennifer, post

survey). Teachers readily embraced the program and expressed the ways in which they changed personally as teachers and how they will teach their Social Studies content after their participation in the first institute. Some teachers noted the following in their reflections:

It made me reflect and re-examine the delivery of my instruction and embrace my students' cultural background to enhance instruction. (Gloria, post survey, summer 2019 Institute)

I learned so much and really re-evaluated my way of teaching. (Robert, post survey, summer 2019 Institute)

This program has created an invigorating transformation in my role as a teacher, it also built a deeper awareness of the value of the place we live in. (Sandra, post survey, summer 2019 Institute)

To integrate the place-based educational framework the initiative was designed for three-day institutes and one-day workshops to be held at different historical sites that correspond to the content theme of a given institute or workshop. Workshops have been held at the Museum of South Texas History, La Sal del Rey, Palo Alto Battlefield, the Brownsville Historic Museum, and UTRGV's and Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge. Located in different parts of the Rio Grande Valley, these sites are relevant to the region's historical, cultural, and economic development and Mexican American history in the region. The program held virtual workshops via zoom due to the shelter-in mandates by the State of Texas and UTRGV guidelines to maintain the program's momentum and continuity and have provided teachers with additional relevant content and pedagogies through workshops offered by the Museum of South Texas History and led by Dr. Francisco Guajardo.

Since June 2019, the project has provided six Historias Americanas institutes and workshops. The inaugural three-day summer 2019 institute was held at the Museum of South Texas History, La Sal del Rey (a salt lake), Palo Alto Battlefield, the Brownsville Historical Museum, and the UTRGV Center for Innovation and Commercialization (CIC). Scholar presenters such as Dr. Manuel Medrano and Dr. Omar Valerio-Jiménez focused on the historical and cultural relevance of the salt lake, Spanish Colonization and Vaquero Culture in the Rio Grande Valley, The U.S.-Mexico War and Cross-border relations in their presentations. Other scholar presenters such as Dr. Gregory A. Smith and Dr. Francisco Guajardo introduced

teachers to Place-Based education and Culturally Relevant frameworks. The fall 2019 one-day workshop was held at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge with topics focusing Pre-Columbian History: People of Antiquity, Olmecs to Maya and Visión arqueológica, lingüística, etnohistórica y de la inmigración indígena al Delta del Rio Grande o Bravo.³ Due to the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, the spring 2020 workshop was held virtually via zoom. Our scholar presenter for this workshop, Dr. Sonia Hernández, focused her content presentation on Industrialization and the Rise of Commercial Agriculture in the United States, 1880-1930. The summer 2020 institute was an intense four-day virtual workshop on Digital Storytelling, provided by StoryCenter, an organization co-founded by Joe Lambert in San Francisco, California, and his team of faculty. The fall 2020 virtual workshop was on (1) early civil rights in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the founding of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (2) Adela Sloss-Vento's Civil Rights Activist, Public Intellectual, Feminist, and Aurora E. Orozco's Community Leader and Educator in Cuero, Texas, presented by Dr. Cynthia Orozco. In the spring 2021 workshop the content presented by the historian Armando Alonzo focused on making a living in Nuevo Santander, the ranch economy and culture and land grants in the Northeastern Mexico. Topics for the institutes and workshops content and the scholar presenters were chosen to reflect the historical development, economy, culture, and geography of the region from a Mexican American perspective. Relevant locations and sites in the RGV for the workshops corresponded to the topics and the relevant scholarship on the region that aligned with the goals of the program.

Place-based Education

Historias Americanas employs principles of place-based education to ground the teaching and learning process in the local heritage, culture, environment, and community in which students live (Anderson, 2017; Elder, 1998; Smith, 2002; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2004). Several realities guide the idea to include place-based education as part of this professional development initiative. The first is that the South Texas, Rio Grande Valley, region possesses a rich history and culture that has not quite made it into the social studies curriculum and history books in K-12. Building on Moll, Amanti & González's (1992) Funds of Knowledge

³ Translated as Vision of archeological, linguistic, ethnohistory and the migration of indigenous peoples to the Rio Grande or Bravo.

framework and Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth, teachers engage in opportunities to think about local history, culture, and traditions in new ways. Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth affirms that students of color have linguistic capital, familial capital, aspirational capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital. At the same time, the theory of funds of knowledge allows teachers begin to view knowledge beyond that acquired beyond the classroom, but rather found in students' lived experiences, world views, and cultural ways among other funds. These frameworks are rarely tapped into to reshape schooling, yet with *Historias Americanas* we strive to connect them so that they become "a starting point" as Sobel (2004) posits, "to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum" (p. 6).

Teacher preparation programs in Texas and across the country generally omit the historical and cultural experiences of Mexican Americans and other historically excluded groups from the professional development experience of preservice teachers. *Historias Americanas* makes an intentional attempt to rehabilitate that reality by situating place-based education at the center of the professional development process. One teacher noted, "we didn't get this kind of content in our teacher preparation program, so I'm really glad we're getting this through this program. It helps me teach better" (Norma, post survey, spring 2020 workshop). Place-based education situates the lives of students and the stories of their communities at the core of curricular offerings. For example, one of the locations we chose to take teachers for the first teacher institute is La Sal del Rey, an ancient salt lake that provided an important resource integral to the daily lives of Indigenous peoples, Spanish explorers, Mexican pioneers, later the U.S. army, and White settlers. Thus, La Sal del Rey, as a place for teaching and learning, is one example of how a historical place in the community becomes an integral part of learning the history, economy, biology, colonization, and geography of the region as part of the social studies curriculum. As one teacher noted, "Most of us had never been to Sal del Rey," "and that's a shame, because it's only 10 miles from my campus. My students and I should know of its importance" (Edward, post survey, summer 2019 Institute).

Place-based education is also an easy fit for dynamic pedagogical opportunities. "It's easy to emphasize hands-on and real-world learning when you can observe and interact with the land, and with local flora and fauna," said Jorge (post survey, fall 2019 workshop). By its very nature as content situated physically and geographically in community, placed-based learning

offers relevant content, but it also offers opportunities to engage content through engaging pedagogical approaches. Sobel (2004) describes place-based learning to help students “develop stronger ties to their community and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens” (p. 6). In short, place-based education positions the lives of students, their families, and their community at the center of the teaching and learning process.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Critical to the work of *Historias Americanas* is not just providing content, but it is also important to provide an understanding of MAS pedagogy. Embedded in the workshops is a deliberate training in culturally relevant pedagogy—a theory developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, which sets high expectations for students, helps students grow in the knowledge and understanding of their own culture in another culture, often mainstream culture (1994, 1995, 2014). Closely related to culturally relevant pedagogy and often used interchangeably, is culturally responsive pedagogy, which builds on Ladson-Billings’s framework to also include the need for teachers to assist students in developing positive ethnic and cultural identity as a means of achieving academic success (Gay, 2010). As MAS educators, the faculty purposefully incorporate models of culturally relevant pedagogy because it is critical to developing critical consciousness for students to assess social inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2014). Similarly, a key component of culturally responsive pedagogy is not only understanding how history, politics, and economics shape society, but also helping to students to develop a commitment to social justice (Gay, 2010; Gist et al., 2019; Valenzuela, 2016). Where culturally responsive pedagogy differs is in not only helping students learn to critique social inequalities, but to also deliberately cultivating a commitment to promoting social justice. Gist et al. assert that “culturally responsive pedagogy reflects “a combination of knowledge, practices, and dispositions that center racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students’ cultural traditions, experiences, and perspectives to facilitate meaningful and transformative learning opportunities” (p. 3). Therefore, *Historias Americanas* focuses specifically on: (1) bringing scholars to our workshops who actively research histories of the RGV and engage in deliberate conversations with teachers on the content they have researched and have an expertise in, (2) engage teachers in reflective activities on topics of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and

lesson-planning, and (3) deliver workshops on culturally relevant pedagogies such as oral history and digital storytelling.

Central to culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy as an anti-deficit approach is building upon the students' own linguistic and cultural wealth (González et al., 2006; Yosso, 2005). While many researchers have called upon teachers to tap into the students' linguistic and cultural wealth, *Historias Americanas* asks the teachers themselves to tap into their own linguistic and cultural wealth as well. Fundamental to the pedagogical theory and practice of *Historias Americanas* is that workshop leaders model the same pedagogies the teachers are engaging in the workshops as "students." Therefore, they experience the culturally responsive pedagogies first-hand through the lens of both teacher and student. While most of the teachers share common ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds as their students, they did not go through pre-service teacher programs that prepared them for culturally relevant/responsive teaching. It is important to engage in Mexican American history content and pedagogical development in teaching training. As Gay tells us, culturally responsive pedagogy "filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful" (2000, p. 20). This is evident in one teacher's reflection, "Being aware of my cultural background will eventually help me understand my students' backgrounds and will lead to culturally responsive teaching" (Josie, post survey, fall 2019 workshop). Thus, *Historias Americanas* has successfully implemented oral history and digital storytelling, two pedagogies that lend themselves well to culturally relevant and responsive teaching of Mexican American Studies.

Oral History and Digital Storytelling

The first of these pedagogical strategies is oral history. Oral history has long been used as a tool to democratize and decolonize the historical archive and the same can be said of the classroom (Benmayor, 1998; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012). The use of oral history in the classroom as a tool of culturally responsive pedagogy allows for the recovery of the voices of those left out of the official textbooks. Given the demographics of the Rio Grande Valley and the students served by the teachers of *Historias Americanas*, this is critical. When teachers incorporate an oral history assignment into their coursework, it is often the first time that students are asked to link their family or community's lived experiences to historical

events studied in class. This is critical not only because as Gay (2000) tells us, it is “culturally validating and affirming” (Gay, 2000, p. 29), but also, they are contributing to the critical need to produce knowledge about their communities—knowledge that contradicts the deficit narrative about their community. In essence, students feel cared for because their communities and their families are cared for and validated both intellectually and by the educational system itself.

Historias Americanas is aligned with Guajardo, Guajardo et al., (2016) theory of change that views the self as the most critical ecology of knowing; this is a process of self-discovery. In this professional development context, teachers undertake exercises in critical self-reflection for the purpose of personal and professional growth. The *Historias Americanas* process for growth employs several strategies that include reflective writing, dialogue, walk and talk, and a variety of storytelling activities. While the oral history is extremely powerful in the storytelling and story-collecting process, we wanted teachers to gain a better understanding of themselves; we wanted them to go deeper and take an introspective look into themselves. The Digital Story workshop was probably the most impactful on teachers because they gained an awareness and appreciation of their culture and heritage and the cultural wealth. They in turn will use this pedagogy and technology to teach their students to write their own story and know the cultural wealth and ancestral knowledge they bring to the classroom. The impact of this workshop on teachers are reflected in the quotes below from their post surveys:

It was helpful in allowing me to find my voice and understand how historical forces have shaped my life and who I am. This will help me to invite my students to also investigate who they are and start a process of discovery of self-identity. (Patricia, post survey, summer 2020 institute)

I think this form of teaching presents students with a substantial opportunity to connect with the course and their peers. It also allows for a different form of self-expression. (Andres, post survey, summer 2020 institute)

It will create a heightened level of awareness and build on the emotional learning of the classroom. By making education personal it elevates student learning to a level of deep understanding, far more than a text or curriculum framework. Students create their own text through their experience. (Dahlia, post survey, summer 2020 institute)

It was a tremendous opportunity to reconceptualize teaching as a process by adding a tool that will help students make stronger connections to who they are and how they can learn beyond a rigid, traditional classroom. (Sylvia, post survey, summer 2020 institute)

As a pedagogy we often use in teaching Mexican American Studies, storytelling allows students to explore their family histories, their place in community life, and as a search for personal identity. Stephanie Alvarez and Francisco Guajardo have many years of experience using digital storytelling in their classrooms and have found that digital storytelling is particularly powerful in ways that traditional storytelling and oral history are not (Alvarez & Martínez, 2014; Benmayor, 2012; Militello & Guajardo, 2013; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008). Rina Bemayor (2008) describes digital storytelling as:

An assets-based pedagogy where students can bring their own cultural knowledge and experience to the fore, including their skills and comfort with technology, to transform their thinking and empower themselves. The multiple creative languages of digital storytelling – writing, voice, image, and sound – encourage historically marginalized subjects, especially younger generations, to inscribe emerging social and cultural identities and challenge unified cultural discourses in a new and exciting way. (p. 200)

As a hybrid form, digital story-telling mirrors and enables the conceptual work of constructing new understandings of identity and places of belonging. Because we wanted to provide teachers with a culturally relevant pedagogical tool that would help them be self-reflective and use in the classroom with their students, we collaborated with StoryCenter, an organization based out the California Bay Area directed by Joe Lambert, for instructional guidance and facilitation to assist us with the coordination, due to having shifted to an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning digital storytelling has equipped *Historias Americanas* teachers with a professional development process that, in the words of one teacher, “has transformed the way I see my personal story and the way I approach my teaching” (Lucy, post survey, summer 2020 institute). Another teacher remarked, “I did not know how emotional, evocative, or transformative storytelling could be, not until I went through this digital storytelling process” (Juan, post survey, summer 2020 institute). The process challenges teachers to explore their personal story and identity as part of their growth process. It includes crafting a narrative,

identifying family artifacts to enhance the narrative, and using digital video editing technology to bring their story together. The power of digital storytelling is encapsulated by one high school teacher's observation, "Digital storytelling is the best professional development experience I've ever had" (Marisol, post survey, summer 2020 institute).

Applying the MAS Content and Pedagogies through the Historias Americanas (HA)

Lesson Planning Framework

Once educators internalize the information from the scholars' MAS content presentations through an introspective process, they begin the lesson planning development led by Joy Esquierdo. The grant team studied literature on how students, especially bilingual students, best process new information. We adopted a lesson plan framework that includes learning theories, language development approaches, and productive learning environments (California State Department of Education, 1982; Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; National Research Council, 2000). A variety of lesson plan formats can be found to assist teachers in delivering the learning objective in the most effective way. For *Historias Americanas* (HA), we chose to base the lesson planning practice on the Framework for Teaching Bilingual/Dual Language Learners New Content Literacy (Esquierdo, 2010). The modified framework begins with the teacher internalizing the Mexican American Studies content to strengthen the delivery of MAS lessons. The next sections of the framework integrate the three learning principles, language development theories, culturally relevant pedagogies, place-based practices within a learner-centered environment (see Figure 1). All these components, interacting and intertwined, lead to the development of Mexican American Studies content literacy. Content literacy is the acquisition and learning of MAS content at a metacognitive level of processing. This is to say that as teachers plan MAS content lessons to guide students through content literacy, they facilitate the students' metacognitive processing by asking them to reflect and connect with the content at various levels. The following sections will describe the essential components of the HA Lesson Plan Framework to support MAS Content Literacy.

Learning Theories for the Lesson Plan Framework

The National Research Council (2000) presented three learning principles that are fundamental for teachers to consider when delivering new content instruction: (1) all students

attend school with experiences of how the world functions; (2) students must acquire basic knowledge and skills and the ability to manipulate that new knowledge to make deeper inquiries; and (3) students become lifelong learners when they have an opportunity to practice their metacognitive skills. These three learning principles provide all students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of how the world works. In other words, teachers need to help students connect home knowledge to school knowledge. Additionally, students can extend those connections to the world once they have a strong understanding of the new content. Finally, students need to have time to reflect on their new understandings and connections of new content knowledge to existing knowledge. This reflection will help deepen their understanding and increase the chances of longer retention of the information. One main objective of the grant was to include effective teaching methodologies into a framework specific for bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural students.

Language Development Theories for the Lesson Plan Framework

Since the Historias Americanas teachers work in schools that serve a largely bilingual community, we wanted to include first (L1) and second (L2) language development approaches. Teachers are asked to consider the language standards—English Language Proficiency Skills (ELPS)—as they plan the delivery of the lesson. Hence, the team was sure to bring the dynamics of L1 and L2 proficiency into the framework through the Contextual Interactive Theory (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). The recognition of the benefits of the students' bilingualism in the HA classroom is critical to help access all the assets of the students to enhance the learning. Considering the bilingual community that surrounds the HA classroom, acknowledging that the L1 and L2 development within MAS content is a central factor in the lesson planning. The Contextual Interactive Theory is anchored on five empirically supported principles: linguistic threshold, dimensions of language proficiency, common underlying proficiency, second-language acquisition, and student status (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Krashen, 1982). The interaction of these five principles demonstrates how student experiences with language interact with instructional practice. The interaction between the context of the home and that of the school support the students' language development and MAS content understanding.

When crafting lesson plans, we guided teachers' focus on L1 and L2 development by carefully selecting the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) for each lesson. One of the

main goals of the ELPS is to provide bilingual learners (especially those learning English in school) opportunities to listen, speak, read, and write at their current stages of English development as they progress in their linguistic complexity development in English. Therefore, students are learning MAS content as they gradually increase in their English development. When MAS lessons incorporate learning theories and the contextual interaction theory in the designing phase and infuse culturally relevant pedagogies in the delivery stage, it is critical to also establish a learner-centered environment.

Learner-centered Environment for the Lesson Plan Framework

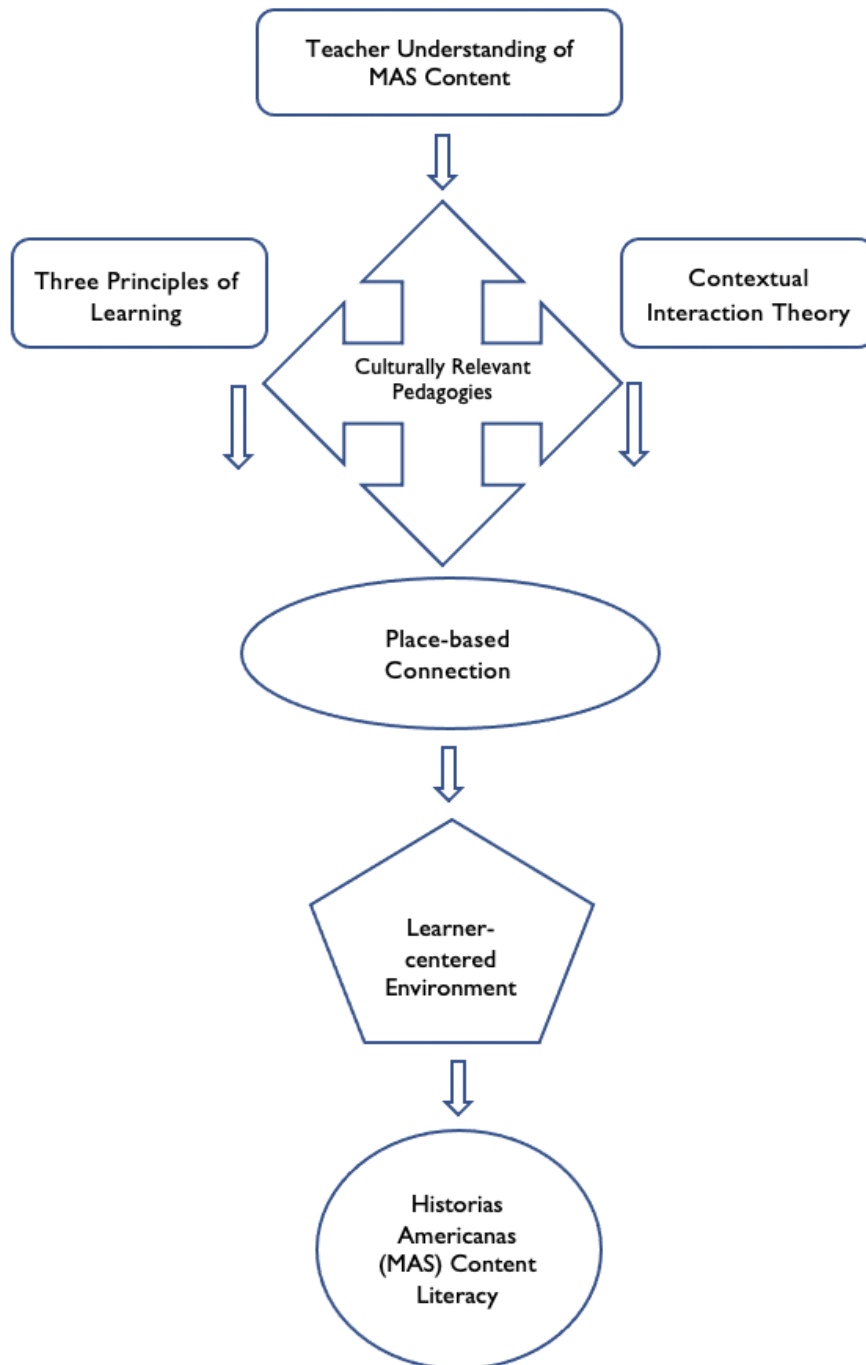
A learner-centered environment is one that focuses the lesson on the students' contribution to the learning process and learning opportunities provided by the teacher. Learner-centered environments involves students in making decisions and solving problems throughout the lesson and during the reflection process. In this framework, the lessons are designed to keep students at the center of the lesson, incorporating their funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and linguistic repertoire (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018), to optimize students' learning. When a teacher is not cognizant of keeping the learning environment student-centered, the lesson can evolve into a more teacher-centered one, in which the teacher may lecture more and move away from the students' funds of knowledge and cultural wealth at the center (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

As teachers used this framework to format their lesson plans, they included the elements essential to building MAS content literacy. Additionally, this approach to teaching helped build capacity for the school district using teachers as curriculum leaders. As curriculum writers, many of the grant participants also contribute to their school district's curriculum writing sessions during the summer. During these curriculum writing sessions, teachers revamp, update, and (re)structure the social studies-related content for all teachers in that district. The role of the grant participants is to incorporate the MAS material in the district's Scope and Sequence provided to all teachers that deliver that content. Teachers also integrate a placed-based and culturally relevant practice into the district's curricula. The impact of teachers' understanding and utilizing the elements of this framework to design MAS lessons can have a significant impact on how teachers outside the grant deliver social studies-related instruction

throughout the district, since it allows for the proliferation of MAS content well beyond the initial participants of the Historias Americanas program.

Figure I.

Framework for teaching MAS content literacy



Conclusion

Historias Americanas provides a unique example of how the expansion of Mexican American Studies in K-12 is being achieved in the Rio Grande Valley. While Historias Americanas does not create a MAS course or courses, one of its central missions is the proliferation of MAS by embedding MAS content in the social studies and history curricula in the two largest school districts in the region. Additionally, it is not just MAS content, but MAS content specific to the Rio Grande Valley, its bilingual population, and specific to the lived experiences of the students and families of the region using a place-based framework delivered in culturally relevant, responsive, and affirming ways. To date, over 110 teachers have participated in this three-year program of professional development institutes and workshops. To say that teachers and administrators have been transformed by this experience is an understatement. As authors, we have seen what such transformation looks like and have experienced it ourselves. We have also seen the transformation in teachers through their reflections, surveys, and lesson-plans that we have collected. These have helped us make modifications to adjust and improve the program to enhance teachers' experiences and achieve the goals of the grant. We have also drawn from our own cultural intuition and experience (Calderón et al., 2012; Calderón, 2014; Delgado-Bernal, 1998) to ensure that our objectives and outcomes are met.

Based on our data, teachers' growth and development as teachers, family and community members attest to the value and success of the program in meeting its goals of providing teachers with content, pedagogical strategies, and new educational frameworks that would change teaching and learning in K-12 in the RGV and beyond. This expansion is facilitated through Historias Americanas Digital Platform (HADP); a repository/archive that holds the resources, materials, lesson-plans, content, videos, scholarship and translated materials produced from the Historias Americanas institutes and workshops, workshops provided by the Museum of South Texas History and information about the school district partners. An accompanying website is also linked to the archive that provides information about the grant team, purpose of Historias Americanas, and a guide for archival materials. The HADP is housed within UTRGV's Scholarworks; a repository accessible to the public through the university's library website (<https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/historiasamericanas/>).

By using culturally relevant and place-based education frameworks in Historias Americanas, teachers have deepened their connections to their own funds of knowledge, cultural and linguistic heritage, and lived experiences and have changed the way they view teaching social studies, their students, and the region they live in. We have provided teachers content with innovative tools and skills such as oral history, digital storytelling, gracious space, walk-and-talk, discussion circles, and reflective writing to help them take full advantage of their lived experiences, culture, language, place, and community realities, and place them at the center of the learning and instructional process (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Smith & Sobel, 2010). In this way, Historias Americanas is integrating and expanding Mexican American Studies in K-12 Social Studies in the Rio Grande Valley and across the larger discipline.

Upcoming Grant Work and Publications

The main purpose of this article was to provide an overview of the work and frameworks developed through the Historias Americans grant and the structure of the professional development program. The authors are writing a more in-depth article on the process of developing Historias Americanas, implementation of the institutes and workshops and grant work over the first three years, and author's autoethnography. Given the amount of data collected during the first three years of the grant, grant faculty are planning to write a manuscript on the K-12 Historias Americanas Lesson Plan Framework that further explores the essential components of the framework. The examination of the framework will describe the interactions and intersections between the various theories used to construct the framework and how those apply to integrating MAS in the Historias Americanas classroom. An additional manuscript will provide an analysis of the lessons that are based on the framework and descriptions of how the lessons were implemented in the Historias Americanas classroom at different levels. Other articles will focus on the development of a unique Historias Americanas framework that combines place-based and culturally relevant educational frameworks, place-based education for the MAS classroom and culturally relevant pedagogy in Mexican American Studies. The grant team recently applied for an extension to extend the grant work for two additional years. If awarded, the grant team will expand this work to include two new smaller, rural school districts to expand the program's reach in the RGV to larger number of teachers and students.

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Texas Resistance: Mexican American Studies and the Fight Against Whiteness and White Supremacy in K-12 at the Turn of the 21st Century

Josue Puente

University of Texas Río Grande Valley

Stephanie Alvarez

University of Texas Río Grande Valley

Abstract

This essay recounts the efforts by various groups throughout Texas with a special emphasis on the Rio Grande Valley to implement Mexican American Studies at the turn of the twenty-first century. We offer a historical timeline of events that demonstrates how the Mexican American Studies course came into existence. We also detail the way in which some Mexican American Studies courses were implemented. In other cases, we describe the way different groups were able to offer professional development to teachers to help them incorporate more Mexican American Studies content in their non-Mexican American studies courses or provide the community with the resources on how to include Mexican American Studies at their school. The common theme throughout is an undeniable resistance and mobilization on the part of many, hundreds, of educators, students, and community members to ensure that the youth do not continue to receive a whitewashed education, to ensure that students receive a more accurate representation of history, culture, language, and literature. In essence, the essay details a very hard-fought battle against White supremacy in the schools at the turn of the twenty-first century in Texas in which Mexican American Studies emerged victorious many steps of the way.

Keywords: Mexican American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Chicano Activism, Rio Grande Valley Education

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In the 1960's, Mexican American youth took to the streets demanding change to an educational system that stripped them of their culture, history, and language with a singular goal of training them as laborers rather than allowing them the opportunity to seek a higher education. Calling themselves Chicanos, they demanded not only a change to the education system but also that society respect their community by asking to speak their mother tongue without punishment, for their history to be taught in schools, and for more opportunities to attend college or the university rather than simply be pushed into a trade or military (Muñoz, 2007, pp. 99-101). Chicana/o/xs were not the first to ask for educational change for Mexican Americans but, unlike earlier movements, they pushed away from assimilation and instead demanded schooling that instilled cultural pride proclaiming that brown is beautiful and emphasizing the importance of learning about their own history. In California, Mexican American college students organized and created el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) and made it their priority to advocate for Mexican American Studies at the university as part of their organization's founding papers known as Los Papeles or El Plan de Santa Barbara (<http://umich.edu/~mechaum/plan.html>). These multiple movements led to the creation of Mexican American Studies/Raza Studies Programs at universities and colleges across the country.

In K-12 public education, the Brown Beret's advocated for change in public education and supported high school Mexican American student walkouts in East Los Angeles. In the second point of the "Brown Beret's 10 Point Program" they advocated for, "The Right to bilingual education as guaranteed under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," along with point 4, "We demand that the true history of the Mexican American be taught in all schools in the five Southwest states," which marked the Brown Beret's position on public education reform for the Mexican American community (Valdez and Steiner, 1972 p. 304). In Texas, Chicana educational reform was pushed by MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) by helping organize walkouts across South Texas. Among such walkouts was the 1968 Edcouch Elsa walkout where students advocated for similar educational reforms like the ones the Brown Beret's demanded in California. Nevertheless, few of these changes occurred in K-12 public education, even in the states where the Chicano Movement was at its height like California, Texas, and other states.

Mexican American students, then, and even still today, often go through school without formally studying Mexican American history or culture. Instead, public schools push an assimilationist historical narrative of whiteness reinforcing white supremacy through social studies

state standards. In Texas, those standards are known as the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). TEKS are just one-way Texas intuitions have white-washed the curriculum and supported white supremacy, but like much of Mexican American history, oppression often finds different forms of resistance and in a state that prides itself in its popular motto “everything is bigger in Texas,” that also includes resistance. This essay explores how the TEKS function as a means of embedding whiteness by limiting who is and is not part of the historical narrative and why we must push away from seeing the standards as one dimensional and static and instead see them as dynamic with the ability to include culturally relevant content while still meeting a mandated state standard. This essay also looks at collective resistance to white supremacy in Texas education by communities, the public, and private organizations. The results range from the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) approving a hard-fought Mexican American history course to creating spaces for teacher trainings in an effort against whiteness and white supremacy.

In 2013, the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) *Tejas Foco* formed a K-12 Mexican American Studies (MAS) committee chaired by Juan Tejeda with the intent to advocate for MAS in K-12. The following year, 2014, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) representative Rubén Cortez, along with MAS advocates, would propose a Mexican American Studies course which would not be approved that year after much advocacy. However, four years later on April 11, 2018, the Texas SBOE, after two failed attempts to approve a MAS textbook, once again listened to testimony on the importance of creating standards for a high school social studies course in Mexican American history and approving a course. What could have been addressed in one board meeting was expanded to six months and three meetings in 2018 as a Republican controlled board questioned the harm this class might bring to students. Board members against creating this course used language that, as Bree Picower (2009) states, reveal ways in which white individuals maintain dominant racial ideologies. For example, they questioned the name Mexican American Studies as divisive and pushed against Americanism. According to board member David Bradley, “[I] do not subscribe to hyphenated Americanism... I find hyphenated Americanism to be divisive,” (Swaby, 2018). According to Picower’s (2009) research, this is how a white educator supports white supremacy by using tools of whiteness. Members of the board used these tools to try and mask the racist ideologies they had about this class.

According to Picower (2009), “ideological tools [are] beliefs to which they subscribe to protect their hegemonic stories,” explaining why the board saw no need for the course to even be created in the first place (p. 197). In other words, board members see the failure to fully embrace whiteness as divisive, but they do not recognize the failure to recognize Mexicans as part of an American identity as divisive. One of the solutions posed by Bradley was a name change “Americans of Mexican descent.” Board members were able to claim a win against the course with this changing of the name of the course by pushing ethnic identity second to Americanism (Picower, 2009, 197). Therefore, even when the course was voted into being implemented when the community fought against the name change, David Bradley, a firm believer of “we are all Americans,” mocked the community by pushing for and winning the name change (Swaby, 2018). This attempt included mocking Rubén Cortez, the board member who had been leading the cause for the class and naming it Mexican American Studies by stating that he “needs to learn to be thankful” (Swaby, 2018). Although much of the comments reinforcing these positions came from David Bradley, because he was the leader of the Republican control of the SBOE, the others also endorsed it reflecting a systemic support of whiteness and white supremacy. This response by the board member represents a performative tool of whiteness where the board member justified his actions based on his feelings and beliefs and “engaged to protect [his] beliefs based on [his] ideological tools or hegemonic understanding” (Picower, 2009, p. 199). Before the final vote on June 2018, the name of the course was changed to Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies thanks to the advocacy of many, yet political stunts to remind Mexican Americans of their social position were made making this a bitter sweet victory including David Bradley’s comments to the board on “needing to move on to more important things” (Yaffe-Bellany, 2018). Moreover, the change in name did not come willingly. There was quite a bit of activism by the Mexican American Studies community to have this name changed; newspaper essays, press conferences, blogs, mobilization to get as many people to the capital as possible to testify against the name change and a rally before the meeting.

This course provides an opportunity for Mexican American students to see that they are a part of the curriculum and gain an educational space to explore their own social and historical positions in the United States; an idea five years in the making when the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies Tejas Foco established the MAS K-12 committee in 2013 to push for the creation of a special topics course in the public schools. In 2014, with the assistance of Rio

Grande Valley (RGV) SBOE Representative Rubén Cortez, the committee struggled with a reluctant Texas State Board of Education. At first glance, it may be argued that the only limitation was a white republican-controlled board who used tools of whiteness to prevent educational changes, from supporting a racist textbook that had many historical errors to questioning the divisive idea of a Mexican American Studies class that according to them separated American ideologies by race, reminiscent of language used by those in Arizona that banned Raza Studies. Yet, there are several issues that limit the impact of this Mexican American studies course. For example, this course is not a required class, but rather an elective, making it up to the student to take this class and an option for a district to provide. This means that Mexican American students can go through the education system without taking the course because their district did not provide the class, or the student chose not to take it. In fact, this makes it so that it is highly unlikely that students will take the course. Nevertheless, many in the community want that to change and community resistance has changed their strategies from demanding state support to pushing their local school boards and high schools to provide this MAS class. In the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), local organizations along with university and state non-profit organizations began to advocate for the creation of this class in districts across the Valley as early as 2013. In fact, SBOE Representative Rubén Cortez ran on the promise of inserting MAS in the curriculum after hearing from constituents. Soon after, in 2015, the RGV MAS K-12 Coalition was founded, chaired by Christopher Carmona, which began to hold workshops for teachers interested in teaching MAS or already teaching MAS. In the spring of 2019, The Center for Mexican American Studies at University of Texas Rio Gran Valley (UTRGV) led and organized a MAS Mesa Comunitaria inviting districts across the Valley to get information on the need for MAS in K-12 and steps to take to provide this class.

At the 2019 Mesa Comunitaria, eleven RGV school districts were given testimonios from teachers, community members and students on the benefits MAS has on students. This initiative from The Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at UTRGV was not possible without the support of the community and from organizations like IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association), ARISE (A Resource In Serving Equality), LUPE (La Unión de Pueblo Entero), and the Equal Voice Network whose joint efforts showed strong support for these classes. At the same time, CMAS leading this effort marks an important moment in the positions that Texas universities have in changing the educational narrative from training future teachers to advocating for long-

term educational changes and support. For example, this Mesa Comunitaria did not consist simply of academic experts in the field but rather community members and students whose first-hand experiences were valued to be of greater value higher than empirical statistics and bringing the community into the fold of education (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). Even when it came to planning for this event Dr. Stephanie Alvarez, Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies, invited community members from across the RGV to sit down and discuss the best way to organize this event placing the community in charge of every part of the Mesa Comunitaria. This connection with education outside of the classroom counters an educational model that separates the home from the classroom that benefits white students but harms Mexican American students (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). To go even further, this Mesa Comunitaria also showcased the benefit this course brought to students. Testimonios from Donna Independent School District (Donna ISD) MAS high school students effectively demonstrated how the students who took this class had a pride in their community and felt like they belonged in the historical narrative that otherwise ignores them (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). Even so, it is important to note that the 2019 RGV Mesa Comunitaria was not the first attempt of a collective push from a state university, academic organization, or community organizations to counter white supremacy and whiteness in K-12 in the 21st Century Education. Other attempts that have been made and continue to be made by University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) Mexican American Studies, SOMOS MAS and NACCS (National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies) Tejas Foco.

Key to much of these efforts is how whiteness and white supremacy often use gatekeepers to limit what individuals can do to change the status quo which often takes the form of an institution or requirement but most often revolve around funding. For example, the UTSA and NACCS Tejas workshops are important resources for teachers, but both workshops require funding to continue to function. NACCS Tejas uses registration fees to subsidize their spending which allows them to provide resources for teachers. This limits the number of teachers who participate because of their limited access to funding for travel and registration. Like many teachers in the United States, Texas teachers are often overworked and underpaid which in turn means volunteering and self-funding their participation in workshops like these which is very difficult. Furthermore, most of these teachers are Raza and women, meaning that they face even more obstacles than other teachers.

Nevertheless, programs have responded to these limitations in a variety of different ways by applying for grants and funding from inside and outside their respected institutions. These grant-funded projects often tackle three major issues that affect teacher training; 1) funding—some grants pay the teachers for participating in the project, 2) time—the grants often work with teachers' schedules and the projects coordinate with the school districts, and 3) gives teachers valuable resources that they do not have to spend their money on. Moreover, in the case of the grant funded projects analyzed here, we find attempts to provide long-term impact and sustainability by sharing the resources through free access via bilingual websites that make the grant funded projects an important tool for countering whiteness and white supremacy.

In spring 2019, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's B3 Institute was awarded a two-million-dollar grant for *Historias Americanas* that would support enriching history content with place-based teacher trainings for K-12 in two school districts: Edinburg CISD and Brownsville ISD. At the same time, the Center for Mexican American Studies in collaboration with the Center for Bilingual Studies, which are also housed under the B3 Institute at UTRGV, was awarded a \$99,000 grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a project that would help create bilingual, culturally relevant social studies content for K-5 Social Studies classrooms in the Pharr San Juan Alamo (PSJA) ISD and Harlingen ISD in the Rio Grande Valley, which has a large Mexican American population of upwards of 98%. This program is Social Studies Through Authentic Relevant Content (SSTARC) and is directed by both Dr. Joy Esquiedo, Director of the Center for Bilingual Studies and Profesor of Bilingual Studies, and Dr. Stephanie Alvarez, Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies and Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies (<https://harlingenedc.com/data-resources/demographics/>). Dr. Maritza De La Trinidad, Associate Professor in the Mexican American Studies program, and Dr. Francisco Guajardo, former Director of the B3 Institute at the start of the project and now Chief Operating Officer of The Museum of South Texas, are the project directors of *Historias Americanas*. Although both *Historias Americanas* and SSTARC share some parallels such as people involved, location, and goals they have many differences in the approach taken to incorporate Mexican American Studies into the classroom. Whereas *Historias Americanas* includes site visits and lectures to provide resources and information for teachers to teach local histories, SSTARC involves collective work that is heavy on self-reflection and controlled by the teachers' deconstruction of their own internalized

institutionalized racism. Yet both grants bring important content forward to teachers intending to change the implication of Social Studies for Mexican American students.

The Historias Americanas grant is the collective work of four different institutions with B3 Institute as the main organizational institution, Edinburg CISD, and Brownsville ISD as supporting school districts and finally the Museum of South Texas History, the Center for Mexican American Studies, and the Center for Bilingual Studies as a resource hub. Historias' goal is to,

teach place-based pedagogical approaches to approximately 75 K-12 teachers that examine and build upon student and community knowledge and cultural wealth to link micro realities to American history. Historias Americanas develops and implements culturally, and historically relevant lessons, activities, and programs rooted in the geography, history and languages of the region to provide a micro-macro perspective to promote engaged citizenship. (Historias Americanas)

The interest, therefore, is in giving teachers the resources they need to teach local histories, and by doing so, they would be teaching MAS content. Historias is working with the assumption that a factor that is not allowing teachers to teach MAS content is because they do not have access to primary and secondary sources that are used to support historical arguments made. According to Emma Pérez, the decolonial imaginary is a third space between colonial and decolonial where things like identity, culture, and gender all exist in a secular narrative, where the imaginary reflects an incomplete mirror image of one's identity (Pérez, 1999). When it comes to history, Pérez argues that the imaginary often is reflected by a colonial historiography that makes Chicano/a/x historians write colonial views of a marginalized Mexican American community by dividing history into thematic and periodic elements often removing gender, culture, and individuals to fit the colonial mold (Pérez, 1999). It can be argued that Historias Americanas adopts the model of Pérez's decolonial imaginary by exploring other non-colonial methods to discuss Mexican American history and places it in Texas social studies education, yet Historias Americanas falls short in successfully crossing the colonial imaginary completely. This occurs because Historias Americanas uses a sort of transcultural methodological approach that incorporates traditional teacher training, inserting Mexican American History into the fold, but also incorporating some decolonial methods at the same time. However, they still "become historians under spatio-temporal bounds dependent upon a colonial moment" (Pérez, 1999). After all, it is nearly

impossible to fully escape the “colonial moment.” For example, in the Historias Americanas Summer 2019 Institute, for three days teachers participated in lectures, site visits, and engaged in small group discussions where half the day was spent learning about local histories from visiting scholars. The time that was dedicated to pedagogy was dedicated to “place-based pedagogy,” which according to Dr. Maritza De La Trinidad,

us[es] the environment as a classroom, so place-based becomes a way to use the community or locations in a community, whether it be here in the Rio Grande Valley, or in the Midwest, or in Arizona or Mexico, they can use place-based to teach the history and the culture of the region, of their region. (Cited in Hoang, 2019)

Historias Americanas, therefore, is a perfect example of an important form of social resistance to whiteness where educators find themselves in an external struggle of interpretation of ideologies. For one, Historias Americanas attempts to solve the issue with representation of content in the TEKS by using the same set standards as the blueprint in what content to provide and at the same time subvert. As it pertains to history, TEKS represent the historical narrative every Texan is taught and what they see as historical fact which too often places white individuals as central to history and superior to all other historical figures. Historias Americanas, however, uses their “decolonial imaginary” to circumvent the “recommended” events and people provided by the state of Texas for each of the TEKS standards and replaces them with place-based suggestions, given the place is the Rio Grande Valley, this, then allows for the place and people to be Mexican American.

Like Historias Americanas, Project SSTARC, deliberately works with selected teachers in two school districts to train them in culturally relevant curriculum. Since the project is funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) they can pay the teachers directly for their training, provide them with books, and materials to take back and use in their classrooms. The origins of Project STAARC are different in many ways from Historias Americanas and other initiatives around MAS activism, in part, because of the two individual Latinx women who are the Co-Directors of the grant, Stephanie Alvarez, Ph.D. and Joy Esquirodo, Ph.D., have publicly stated that SSTARC is, in large part, the result of two mothers who wanted to see more culturally relevant content in their kids’ education, one that represents the community their kids belong to because they understand the benefits this can have on all children. This demonstrates that

SSTARC is an attempt for educational change from two Latinx mothers who are in a position to advocate for it (Puente, Feb. 2019). Both Dr. Esquiedo's years of teaching in public schools and Dr. Alvarez's educational and social activism to bring MAS to the university and highlight cultural history in the RGV play a role in how SSTARC would achieve their goal. Moreover, Dr. Esquiedo and Dr. Alvarez have already had experience running similar project with Project CRESS (Culturally Relevant Education through Social Studies), a Humanities Texas grant in partnership with PSJA ISD and McAllen ISD in 2017 that provided 2-day workshops to K-5 Dual language teachers in Mexican American Studies. It should also be noted that Project SSTARC grant personnel had attended UTSA K-12 MAS Academies workshops that certainly influenced and inspired their own work.

The UTSA Mexican American Studies Program for eight years has hosted a series of MAS Teacher Academies and for the past three years along with San Antonio based non-profit educational enrichment organization IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) they have begun hosting a series of free teacher workshops throughout the year where they invite educators from across the state to gain knowledge on how to incorporate Mexican American Studies in their classrooms (Saldaña et al., 2020). This movement came from the creation of the K-12 Mexican American Studies NACCS Tejas Foco committee in 2013 when UTSA decided that since there would be an attempt to propose a Mexican American history course then there should also be workshops available for teachers to take that would provide them with the content and pedagogy required to teach the course (Saldaña et al., 2020). UTSA began to organize their MAS Teacher Academy in 2014 using whatever resources they could find and grounding their work in decolonial praxis under the guidance of professor Keta Miranda (UTSA MAS Teacher Academy, 2020). Because teachers asked for TEKS support for the content, the following year, the UTSA MAS Teaching Academy content was supported with TEKS. UTSA then, in 2018, began providing different opportunities for teachers by running one-day workshops in the fall and spring in partnership with IDRA in addition to their summer Teaching Academy that represented a shift from only social studies content into different subjects such as math, English and art (Saldaña et al., 2020). Unlike the UTRGV MAS Mesa Comunitaria, UTSA's workshop explores how to enrich different subjects and the workshops are run by teachers who are already writing MAS-based lesson plans (Saldaña et al., 2020). Therefore, UTSA's MAS Academy and spring and fall workshops explore the need for including MAS content in all subjects to better benefit a larger group of

students, which is shown by the inclusion of testimonios from both parents and students who have participated in Mexican American Studies classes.

Similar workshops have appeared in Texas from other University groups and organizations. For example, NACCS Tejas Foco in 2015 organized their own workshop during the first Annual MAS Summit. However, the NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Summit was different from UTSA since it required a paid registration to be part of this one-day workshop, where the UTSA/IDRA one-day workshop is free. It is important to note that the workshops are a resistance in and of itself. Part of what makes the resistance meaningful and impactful is the repetition of them every year. The community and teachers—both new to the field and veterans of MAS—come to rely on the workshops and know they are available. This then results in the amplification of MAS throughout the community, San Antonio, in particular, but the state as well. Although the adoption of the course is particularly powerful, teachers teaching common subjects, but integrating MAS content and MAS pedagogies that they learn through the MAS workshops and the grants is quite powerful and allows for the proliferation of MAS in extraordinary ways—a hidden resistance to white supremacy. This continuation and collective support from San Antonio teachers make the UTSA workshops an example of how collective support from teachers can help deconstruct whiteness in the curriculum without limiting the efforts to one subject (Saldaña et al., 2020). With the addition of the partnership of IDRA in 2018 and this organization's new teacher-based network, UTSA's workshops have put into effect a self-sustainable educational ecosystem placing teachers at the forefront of educational social changes (Saldaña et al., 2020). IDRA's own mission statement reads "to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs" (https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies). By partnering with UTSA, IDRA has brought with them an array of resources that teachers can use. This has led to IDRA creating within their "Equity Connection" a "MAS Community of Practice where educators, researchers, parents and community members [can] discuss and take action to strengthen public schooling" (https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies). It can be argued that with the partnership with IDRA and the foundation of IDRA's MAS community of practice, UTSA and IDRA's educational ecosystem has the potential of becoming a safe space where teachers can

deconstruct whiteness and fight back white supremacy by creating and sharing different methods to bring in Mexican American Studies into the classrooms all across the state (https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies).

Teacher run professional development workshops in Mexican American Studies offered by the university represent a change in the relationship of institutions and teachers that goes further than preparing them for the classroom, but also offer support after graduation in multiple ways. They not only offer teachers continued professional development in pedagogy, but also leadership development as they have practitioners, not professors, deliver the workshops. These workshops are a great example of how non-profits and state universities are resisting whiteness and deconstructing white supremacy by supporting the teachers who are at the forefront of the struggle (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015).

The goal of Project SSTARC is to, “provide an opportunity for local K-5 teachers to gain a better knowledge of local and regional history, create relevant social studies content for their students in both English and Spanish, and disseminate the content on a wide scale to enrich the schooling experience of students by exposing them to authentic humanities content” (<https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc>). To achieve this SSTARC is divided into two goals: short- term and long-term impact. The short-term consists of three-day workshops and the long-term made up by a bilingual website with teacher resources. Even so, both short- term and long-term goals all revolve around teacher involvement and teacher-made content developed during workshops in which SSTARC facilitates discussion, provides resources, and aides in building lesson plans to create a safe space for teachers to create culturally relevant MAS content.

In the summer of 2019, SSTARC ran their first workshop. Although it was a social studies workshop to the outsider it might have seemed to focus less on history and more on culture, but this is because SSTARC employs Pérez’s theory of decolonial imaginary as means to explore different sources of history that connect to not only teachers, but also their students. Teachers began to understand history in a much different way and sources of history in ways that were more relatable to them, their students, and the community. Cognizant of the fact that the teachers need to still address the issue of TEKS and the curriculum, SSTARC took the task of exploring what content was being taught and what TEKS were open to interpretation. After identifying these TEKS, Project SSTARC named those TEKS that are culturally relevant and thereby were the justification for teachers to include in their lesson plan. Moreover, SSTARC provided both digital

and physical resources teachers could use in their classrooms (Kohli, 2013). Scholars presented on subject matter that aligned to these culturally relevant TEKS to justify the use of the content they presented to the teachers.

With the culturally relevant TEKS and the content, teachers were then asked to engage in deep conversations with another teacher about the topics, how they related to them and how their lived experiences connected to them. They were asked to share with each other and then with the larger group. It was after this process of deep reflection, that the teachers then collaboratively engaged in creating a lesson plan based on their grade. Since teachers were grouped by their respected grade level each day, Project SSTARC collected six teacher-based lesson plans that represented a change in mainstream ideas of social studies. In just three days teachers brought forward a collection of lesson plans that tackled issues such as migration, colonization, culture, language, and civil rights which were not explicitly included in Texas standards, but still met the TEKS. What also came out from these lesson plans is that teachers began to realize and discuss their own lived experiences and see their internal struggle as Mexican and Mexican American teachers, specifically women of color and crafted lesson plans reflecting those experiences. Project SSTARC lesson plans are not just about the content teachers can use to teach Mexican American Studies but represent how these teachers accepted the need to teach this content and deconstructed their own experiences, internalized racism as well as institutionalized racism (Kohli, 2013). Although the written lesson plans do not explicitly show it, a crucial part of Project SSTARC is self-reflection where teachers are asked to reflect on the importance of teaching Mexican American Studies to their students. Their responses often reflected on the need they personally had as students for someone to teach them this content. The teachers who participated in the workshop began to discuss issues regarding race, culture, history, and language they faced as students at all levels of education, often sharing stories of themselves and/or families. They often shared stories of racial injustices that they themselves or their families faced that mirror what Rita Kohli discusses in her work on internalized racism where teachers of color “revealed a deep a connection between repeated experiences with racism and feeling racially inferior” (Kohli, 2013). These stories often resulted in teachers developing a great desire to implement the teaching of Mexican American Studies with their students, so they did not have to feel the same way they did throughout their schooling. Teachers even began to feel a sense of belonging and pride in being Mexican American because as some expressed it was the

first time someone told them that their lived experiences and their community were valued. This is another similarity to Kohli's own research where both Project SSTARC and Kohli, "shed light on the process teachers of color can engage in to unpack their experiences with internalized racism so they do not replicate racial hierarchies in their own classrooms" (Kohli, 2013). Therefore, the lesson plans represent a commitment from the teachers to not continue the same racial hierarchies for their students and communities but were just a small part of the work that came out of Project SSTARC. The larger takeaway was changing the teachers' perspective on what is being taught and the value of culturally relevant content not just for the students but the community as a whole.

The second aspect of Project SSTARC is the building of a website that houses the content created from Project SSTARC workshops lesson plans, articles, a list of Latina/o children's literature, and video presentations of teachers' work along with the scholar's presentations content. By creating the website this gives the teachers who participated in the workshops easy access to their work and resources. Their work will then also be accessible to other teachers and educators at the same time who are interested in teaching MAS in their classes. The Project SSTARC website is unique since not only does it house Project SSTARC content but includes content from other state and national resources. True to Project SSTARC's mission statement is that all the lesson plans are available in both English and Spanish (<https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc>). Another example is the website's plethora of videos showcasing teacher lesson plans and reflections because teachers were encouraged to speak in whatever language they would like. The lesson plans are bilingual, and teachers are also very comfortable using Tex-Mex (<https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc>). Because Project SSTARC is entering its second year, 2021, the website is still pending much of the content.

The year of 2020 proved to be a pivotal year for the entire nation, Texas, and the Río Grande Valley. On May 25, 2020 the world witnessed the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin thanks to the recording caught on cellphone by seventeen year-old Darnella Frazier. The murder sparked outrage across the nation and an already large #BlackLivesMatter movement swelled to unprecedented numbers for months. In McAllen, Texas one of the most astonishing moments of a #BLM protest occurred when on June 5, 2020 Daniel Peña emerged from his truck ripping a #BLM poster from the hands of a protester and then began to wield a powered chainsaw yelling racial slurs to the protestors to leave, that it was the

Valley, insinuating that there was no need for a #BLM protest, there is no racism in the Valley. Two of the people that were present at that event were recent graduates of McAllen ISD (MISD) and just beginning college. They connected with four other alumna and together the six women of would go on to found The Grande Narrative. The Grande Narrative would be a critical movement in the Valley in terms of Ethnic Studies. By August 2020, The Grande Narrative launched a social media campaign to petition MISD to incorporate more Black history and at least one literature book by a Black author in ELA courses among other things and had already gained the support of some school board members and met with MISD superintendent. By March 2021, The Grande Narrative after meeting several times with MISD social studies and ELA coordinators and seeking input from Stephanie Alvarez, PhD (UTRGV) and Trinidad Gonzalez, PhD (South Texas College) produced “Proposal: Diversify MISD. A Collection of resources to improve the teaching of ethnic studies courses, ELA readings, and inclusivity of minority narratives” and successfully got MISD to approve the teaching of both African American Studies and Mexican American Studies at all high school campuses in 2021-2022. MISD is the first school district in the Rio Grande Valley to offer African American Studies and the first to offer Mexican American Studies at all its campuses. The Grande Narrative continues to be active on social media sharing information about Ethnic Studies and how to take action on Ethnic Studies issues such as TX SB 2202; the ban on critical race theory.

In conclusion, Mexican American resistance against whiteness and white supremacy in the K-12 curriculum in the 21st Century consists of different singular yet interconnected movements (Figure 1). The most prominent emerging in 2014 with the desire to have a SBOE approved MAS course which would not come about until 2018. The result would lead to a local push for school districts to provide the class in schools and for universities and non-profit organization collaborations to provide resources and professional development opportunities for teachers to teach Mexican American Studies. In addition, professors sought ways through external funding to reach out and support and develop teachers’ ability to teach MAS content that likely would not have otherwise happen. There is no one person or group leading a Texas resistance since all these attempts of deconstructing racism through education are interconnected in multiple ways and the leadership of the programs not only know one another, but also seek-out one another for guidance and support. They offer a multitude of counter-narratives to white supremacy. It is

because of this collective resistance that Texas teachers now have more tools to deconstruct whiteness in the K-12 curriculum in Texas than ever before.

The UTSA MAS Teacher Academy and their fall and spring workshops have set forward examples on how to continuously provide educators with tools to deconstruct and resist whiteness through MAS. The work of NACCS Tejas K-12 Committee, CRESS, Project SSTARC and Historias Americanas declare that universities owe a debt to the communities, and they intend to represent and provide both teacher training and websites to house accessible lesson plans for teachers in K-12. The Grande Narrative, however, demonstrates the power of activism outside of the academy and the potency of youth to make change. In the case of the initiatives at both UTSA and UTRGV, they demonstrate a commitment to serving and educating teachers beyond the time they are there to receive their degree. Moreover, as the state changes, so does the resistance and new attempts to counter the state narrative and therefore allowing more Mexican American students to learn about their community, history, and culture. This Texas resistance is not the first and just represents a new chapter of educational change with the end goal to include as much Mexican American representation into the Texas curriculum as possible for the benefit of all students.

Appendix

K-12 MAS Efforts in Texas Timeline

- 2013: NACCS Tejas Foco forms Pre-K-12 MAS committee and begins to advocate for a MAS class in public schools (Chaired by Juan Tejeda)
- 2013: UTSA Mexican American Studies program decides to create workshops for MAS teachers (Founded by Marie “Keta” Miranda)
- 2013 Fall: The Rio Grande Valley Coalition for Mexican American Studies formed by faculty at South Texas College, UT Brownsville, and UT Pan American
- 2013: Nuestro Grupo is founded in Austin in September
- 2014: E-Mail and Call-In Campaign to SBOE regarding to create an elective in Mexican Studies, led by NACCS Tejas Foco
- 2014: SBOE votes in April to allow MAS into Social Studies Special Topics but does not create a new course and requests for a MAS textbook, arguing there is no need to create standards for the course, just a textbook

- 2014: Houston ISD approves a MAS class as an Innovative Course, approved unanimously, 9-0
- 2014 Spring: Mexican American History lesson plans created by NACCS TEJAS FOCO Pre K-12 MAS Committee chaired by Juan Carmona and Victoria Rojas, RGV MAS MAS Coalition houses lesson plans on UTPA MAS website until MAS Tejas Foco website created in 2015
- 2014 Spring: Ruben Cortez sets goal of 100 MAS classes before FALL so SBOE would not take down course because of lack of interest
- 2014 Summer: First UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy
- 2014 July: RGV MAS coalition runs a bilingual workshop on MAS (Chaired by Christopher Carmona)
- 2014 Fall: First MAS Dual Credit High School Course offered at Mission ISD in conjunction with South Texas College by Victoria Rojas
- 2014 Fall: Rio Grande Valley Coalition for Mexican American Studies members Victoria Rojas and Juan Carmona create Mexican American Studies curriculum aligned with TEKS Special Topics available online
- 2015 January 15: Academia Cuauhtli Opens its doors in Austin
- 2015 March /April: Request for Financial Support for MAS in Higher Ed to get MAS in K-12 by NACCS Tejas Foco
- 2015: Second UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy in June
- 2015: RGV MAS Summit and Workshop
- 2016: Feb 19: NACCS TEJAS FOCO K-12 MAS committee agrees to run a MAS Summit later that year in the summer
- 2016: Second UTSA MAS Teachers Academy
- 2016 Summer: Responsible Ethnic Studies Textbook (REST) Coalition is Formed of over 10 different organizations
 - Response to the only textbook that was submitted to SBOE for consideration for MAS
 - Textbook was riddled with offensive stereotypes and factual errors
 - REST undertakes a massive organizing campaign that includes, but is not limited to press conferences, protests, and petitions
- 2016 November 15: SBOE votes against the only MAS textbook submitted.
 - Call for a second round of MAS Textbooks
- 2017: SBOE does not approve the only textbook submitted

- 2017 Summer: RGV MAS Coalition hosts 2nd Educational Workshop
- 2017 Summer: Fourth UTSA MAS Teachers Academy
- 2017 Summer: UTRGV CMAS & CBS Project CRESS K-5 Bilingual Teacher Workshop for MAS Social Studies is funded by Texas Humanities (Stephanie Alvarez & Joy Esquierdo)
- 2018 February: SBOE begins to hear support for creating an elective course in MAS
- 2018 April: SBOE approves the elective class but changes the name to Ethnic Studies: Americans of Mexican decent
 - At same times the SBOE passes a motion calling for TEA to present innovative courses in Native American studies, Latino studies, African American studies, and/or Asian Pacific Islander studies to the SBOE for inclusion in the TEKS standards
- 2018 May 30: State-wide Press Conferences to Protest the Name Change/Keep Mexican American Studies as name of TEA approved elective class. Press conferences held in Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, and Rio Grande Valley
- 2018 June 12: SBOE changes name of course to Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies after protest from the community
- 2018 Summer: Fifth UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy
- 2018 Summer: Third NACCS Tejas Foco MAS K-12 Summit
- 2018 Fall: IDRA (Aurelio Montemayor) joins UTSA's MAS Teachers' Academy and provides one-day MAS teacher workshops in spring and fall
- 2018 December: Working group for Ethnic Studies in Texas is established. Orlando Lara, then Associate Director of Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies at TCU organizes a call to discuss state-wide efforts to develop a variety of Ethnic Studies courses. This group develops a working mission statement and begins to hold monthly calls to help support Ethnic Studies work across Texas
- 2019: UTRGV CBS & CMAS Project SSTARC is funded by National Endowment for the Humanities, project creates bilingual MAS teacher training and lesson plans in K-5 based off former CRESS grant. (Stephanie Alvarez & Joy Esquierdo). First Workshop held
- 2019: UTRGV B3 Historias Americanas is funded by the Department of Education and provides Social Studies K-12 teachers in Brownsville ISD & Edinburg ISD professional development in MAS. (Maritza De La Trinidad and Francisco Guajardo)

- 2019 April: UTRGV CMAS Mesa Comunitaria to guide Schools, Teachers, Parents & Community Organizations on how to offer MAS in the public schools. Partners with IDRA, ARISE, Equal Voice Network, NACCS Tejas Foco, IDRA & Rubén Cortez
- 2019 May: TCU Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies hosts a North Texas regional gathering for Ethnic Studies from K-16 in the North Texas Area (Lara 2021)
- 2019 Summer: Sixth UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy
- 2019 Summer: UTRGV CBS & CMAS First SSTARC K-5 Dual Language MAS teacher workshop
- 2019 Summer: UTRGV B3 Historias Americanas runs first institute
- 2019 September: Members of the Ethnic Studies working group name the group the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNT) and create an private Facebook group
- 2019 Fall: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2020 Spring: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2020 Summer: Seventh UTSA MAS Teacher's Academy (Virtual)
- 2020 August: The Grande Narrative is founded to fight for Black Studies in McAllen ISD.
- 2020 August 3-7: ESNT hosts its first Ethnic Studies Summer Web Series entirely online. A total of 120 people attend throughout the week. The series combines workshops for Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, and Afro-Latinx Studies. This is one of the first, perhaps the first, multi-Ethnic Studies professional development workshops held in the state (Lara 2021)
- 2020 Fall: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2020 October: 5th NACCS Tejas Foco Summit on MAS in Texas Public Schools- Virtual
- 2021 February 2: Representative Cristina Morales introduces HB 1504 which would allow students to count Ethnic Studies towards graduation. The bill would allow students to count Ethnic Studies as one of the 4 Social Studies required for graduation. Passes in the House, fails to make it to the floor in the Senate
- 2021 Spring: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2021 April 28: SB 2202 Passes in the Senate. Bill bans the teaching of a republican interpretation of "critical race theory" in Texas public schools
- 2021 May 11: HB 3979, duplicate bill of SB 2202 banning "critical race theory" in Texas Public Schools is introduced. Passed in Special session June 2021

- NACCS Tejas Foco PK-12 Committee organizes against SB 2202 & in support of HB 1504 with weekly calls, working in collaboration with IDRA, TELC, Tony Diaz, and others throughout Spring
- Ethnic Studies Network of Texas and The Grande Narrative organized in support of HB 1504 & against SB 2202 throughout spring & summer 2021
- 2021 May: Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD offers first ever Mexican American Studies Course as a dual language course in summer term
- 2021 Summer: Eighth UTSA MAS Teacher's Academy (Virtual)
- 2021 Summer: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans last summer Institute
- 2021 July 26-29: The ESNT hosts the "Powering Ethnic Studies in Texas Summer Convergence," entirely online. It begins to take donations to support the communications infrastructure and work of the network. The event focuses more on developing a vision for Ethnic Studies in Texas and a set of shared social movement values and strategies, while still offering pedagogical development and information about HB 3979 for participants (Lara 2021)
- 2021 August: Second UTRGV SSTARC K-5 Dual Language MAS Teacher Workshop
- 2021-2022: McAllen ISD offers Mexican American Studies and African American Studies at all High Schools

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Cinco Dedos: A Mexican American Studies Framework

Nicolas García, PhD

John Marshall High School

Anthony Gonzales

John Marshall High School

Abstract

Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses have been criticized for many years. Legislation in Arizona and Texas have attempted to ban the content. This article pushes back on this attempt of oppression and offers MAS teachers a framework to apply when teaching the content. Using a timeline to depict the years of attempts for Mexican American Studies to be approved, we offer practitioners and researchers an Ethnic Studies framework particularly with MAS courses. Using cultural art, poetry, and literature, MAS teachers can benefit from using the *Cinco Dedos* framework especially at the secondary (6-12) grade levels. This framework prepares MAS teachers to utilize various Chicanx histories to tell the stories of Mexican American heroes not talked about in traditional American history courses. This article also provides tools to use in secondary MAS classrooms that highlight Mexican American culture for students provided by a MAS teacher. One of the founders of the framework uses this in his MAS course at a high school located in San Antonio, TX.

Keywords: Ethnic Studies, Mexican American Studies, MAS Pedagogy, Cinco Dedos, MAS Framework

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Sleeter et. al. (2019) argue that ethnic studies benefits students in observable ways as they become more academically engaged, perform better on achievement tests, graduate at higher rates, and develop a sense of self-efficacy and personal empowerment. In 2018, the Texas State Board of Education (TSBOE) approved the Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies elective course for Texas high schools. The approval of Mexican American Studies (MAS) created a new challenge in making sure that students received quality lessons while educators explored a new curriculum with few readily available resources. This article describes a new framework, *Los Cinco Dedos*, created to assist educators in creating a multidisciplinary curriculum to address the needs of the students enrolled in Ethnic Studies classes, specifically Mexican American Studies.

This article begins by discussing the differentiation of terms of Hispanic, Latino, and Chicanx, and explains the geographic and political differences among those groups. Ethnic studies, Mexican American studies, Chicanx studies, and culturally relevant pedagogy are also significant bodies of literature for this study. The study then includes examples of a framework created by the co-author who highlights the *Cinco Dedos* of Mexican American Studies pedagogy in his MAS classroom. Examples of how the *Dedos* are used is also discussed, in order to provide educators and scholars with a better understanding of how this methodology is used to enhance the student experience in an Ethnic Studies classroom. The chapter concludes with a timeline beginning from the start of the 20th century as it relates to educational challenges and resistance from Chicanx students and leaders along with examples of *Los Cinco Dedos* in action.

Chicanx studies courses are relevant in this chapter as it relates to MAS and other ethnic studies courses. The discourse and scrutiny regarding these courses at the state level, and the importance of student movement to approve these courses is explained throughout the chapter. The history of deculturalization regarding Native Americans is included to exemplify colonization of education as a practice that still exists in K-12 schools today. Throughout these sections, notable experiences such as the banning of Mexican American Studies in Tucson, Arizona are mentioned. This is important as it relates to Texas' progress towards MAS, African American Studies, and Native American Studies. As these courses are expanded across the state of Texas, educators are faced with the challenge of creating, and maintaining, a culturally relevant curriculum.

Differentiation in Terms

Ethnic studies counters the traditional Eurocentric curriculum that leads many students of color to disengage from academic learning (Sleeter, et. al., 2019). Countering the traditional curriculum students receive allows communities of color to identify stories about themselves. One important issue regarding ethnic studies lies in the name of the course itself. Mora (2014), argues that terms like *Hispanic/Latino community*, and *Latino vote* are common and it is difficult to find a government report or political statement that does not describe persons of Latin American descent as “Hispanics” or “Latinos.” Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexican Americans often faced the same backlash but have also been lumped together using political terms. The term Hispanic, created by the Nixon administration, bunched communities of color who spoke Spanish. Several questions remain unanswered including why the Hispanic census category was ultimately deemed an ethnic and not a racial classification and offers little insight into how census officials tried to convince individuals to identify as Hispanic on government forms (Mora, 2014). Eventually, the Nixon administration moved forward and the term Hispanic is still used today. The term can be confusing since it is used as an ethnic term vs. racial classification.

Though they are often placed together in political terms, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans have many differences with the biggest being geographical differences. The largest of the groups, Mexican Americans clustered in the Southwest, while Puerto Ricans stayed near New York, and Cuban communities stayed in Miami (Mora, 2014). The Chicanx movement in California in the 1960s, sparked change in various political and social contexts, including how the education of Mexican Americans and other People of Color created social disparities in and outside the classroom. The term Chicanx has rich meaning in its name and became a term to empower and motivate Mexican Americans to take political and social action against racial injustice. According to the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE), the term Chicanx is defined as an individual living in the U.S. whose parents or grandparents came from Mexico (www.tache.org). Others argue and give more meaning behind the origin of the term Chicanx. Jackson (2010) argues that the term Chicanx began as a derogatory word describing poor Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. and has often been presented as an identity that represents the Mexican American experience or community. Furthermore, the term can be viewed as a symbol of pride as the Chicanx movement continued throughout the 1960s.

Similar to Chicanx, the term Mexican American may also take on different definitions depending on how one identifies oneself. The difficulty in categorizing all Latinos in a single group has affected the discussion regarding what to label the Mexican American Studies course. As students progress in an Ethnic Studies course, they begin to formulate a better sense of their own identity. *Los Cinco Dedos* framework allows students to explore the ideas of identity through a student-centered approach and decide what the name best represents for themselves. In the late 1990s, Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) changed the name of the Hispanic Studies Department to Mexican American/Raza Studies in 2002. They later changed the name again to Mexican American Studies in 2008 (Cammarota et al., 2014). Throughout the discourse of names and political terms, Chicanx will be used in the following sections as it relates to the timelines of the Chicanx movement demanding justice and equity starting in the 1900s. The term Chicanx is most significant because Chicanx studies courses were formed during the Civil Rights and Chicanx movement eras. The *Plan Espiritual Aztlan* and The *Plan de Santa Barbara* labeled those in the movement as Chicanos and set up the basis for Chicano Studies classes to be created at the college level. Although some events are not explained in detail in the next section, it is important to note the history of Spanish colonization on modern day Mexico land, and how this influenced practices and teachings today. While not explained in detail, they are highlighted throughout the timeline relating to Chicanx studies in America.

Framework For Mexican American Studies Pedagogy: *Los Cinco Dedos*

In relation to the history of MAS courses and the debate in Texas, several controversies co-exist. In 2018, the State of Texas approved a year-long Mexican American Studies (MAS) social studies course after a long battle led by Mexican American, Chicanx and Latinx educators, activists, and students. Now that the class is offered to students throughout the state, the challenge remains of providing quality content that satisfies the academic and cultural needs of our students. The importance of Mexican American Studies cannot be overstated. Mexican American students have long been denied the stories and lessons regarding Jovita Idar, Carmelita Torres, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, Ruben Salazar and countless other Mexican American heroes that committed themselves to the idea that Mexican Americans should be treated with dignity and respect. Traditionally, some Mexican American students have learned about the struggles of César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers (UFW). Although the impact and influence of the

UFW on the Chicana Movement is immeasurable, this was not the beginning or the end of the Chicana Movement. The purpose of this study is to identify ways in which MAS teachers can provide quality content using a multidisciplinary approach created by Keli Rosa Cabunoc Romero and Anthony Gonzales called *Los Cinco Dedos* while also providing an in-depth history of approving/rejecting MAS courses. This study explains *Los Cinco Dedos* and how they are used to increase social capital (Yosso, 2005) and build upon the strengths Mexican American students enter the classroom with. The framework attempts to create an immersive cultural experience for all students enrolled in a MAS class. *Los Cinco Dedos* highlights the important contributions of People of Color and the cultural aspects of art, music, and literature to supplement the history curriculum.

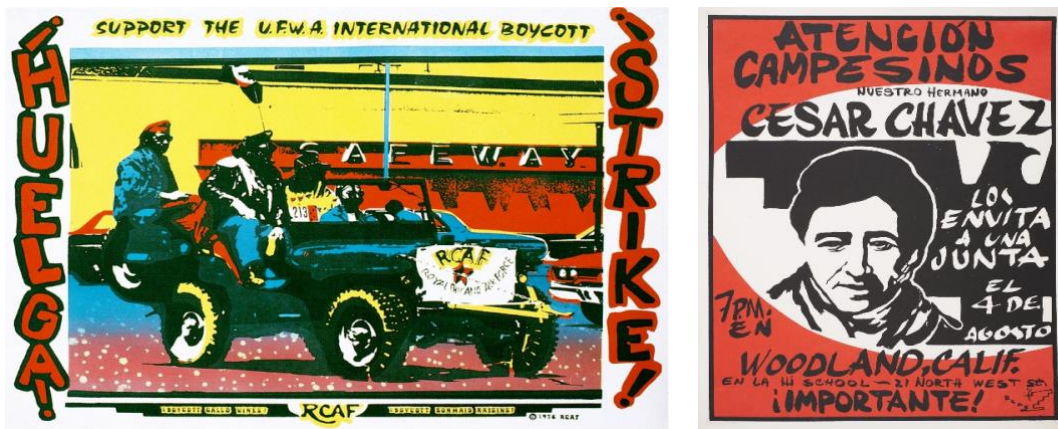
Dedo Uno: By Us, For Us

The first *Dedo* in creating an Ethnic Studies curriculum is to ensure that all material presented uses a *By Us, For Us* approach. Instructional material and the resources provided for Mexican American Studies should be created by members of the Mexican American, Chicana, Latina, and People of Color communities. If these stories are not told and portrayed correctly, others will disregard, exclude, or manipulate the truth of these stories. Teachers must be intentional and use works created by Chicana Latina, Black, and other Communities of Color to create lessons students can identify with in the curriculum. MAS teachers should refrain from simple Google searches that provide artwork and resources that do not credit the creator, but instead use Chicana archives from universities and colleges with strong Chicana communities such as Texas, Arizona, and California. These locations are critical as the Chicana movement's inspiration derived from these areas, however, numerous Chicana programs were created throughout the nation that provide similar archival information. These schools have long been committed to the Chicana Movement and provide educated individuals who have curated primary and secondary resources that can easily be adapted for the classroom. Using these primary sources from those involved in the fight for equality prior to, during, and after the 1960s allows our students to examine the rhetoric and analyze the purpose of those people who fought for equality, equity, and respect. In addition to the archives provided by institutions of higher learning, art collectives such as the Royal Chicana Airforce posted their entire catalog online.

The archives of the Royal Chicano Air Force and work from other Chicano artists can be used to provide visuals for lessons ranging from topics such as the Indigenous people of Mesoamerica, to the Mexican Revolution, and present issues facing the Chicano and Latino communities. It is important that Mexican American Studies incorporates all aspects of Mexican American society, not only history. Figure 1 (Favela, 1976; Montoya, n.d.) are used in the class as ways to deconstruct dialogue regarding the United Farmworkers' strike led by Cesar Chavez.

Figure 1.

Huelga! Strike! Support the UFW (Favela, 1976) and Atencion Campesinos! (Montoya, n.d.)



Dedo Dos: More Than a History Class

The *Cinco Dedos* framework is interdisciplinary and calls for MAS to be more than a history class. The Second *Dedo* calls for Chicano and Mexican American artwork, literature, theatre, music, music videos, movies, poems, and spoken word to be used to provide a total cultural experience for the students in MAS. The intertwining of Mexican art, music, and history make it impossible to teach a MAS course without including those elements. For example, following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), the Mexican government financed public art projects to celebrate the accomplishments and history of the Indigenous people in Mexico (Jackson, 2010). When discussing the impact of colonization on Mexico, one must also consider the response to that after the Mexican Revolution. These murals told the history of Mexico and muralism became an integral piece to the telling of Mexican American history in the United States. Other forms of art including theater have been important in telling the history of Mexican Americans. El Teatro Campesino, which was created by Luis Valdez in 1965, continues to produce theater for the

movement that empowers Mexican Americans. The works of El Teatro show the Mexican American and Chicax viewpoint to our students in a way that a reading or textbook cannot. Figure 2 (Aranda, 1984) is another use of Chicax artwork used within the *Cinco Dedos* framework.

Figure 2.

Wall of Heroes and Martyrs (Aranda, 1984)



The Chicax and Latinx communities continue to paint murals across the nation that provide visual imagery that supports the Civil Rights struggles while reclaiming cultural heritage. Figure 3 (Talavera & Melchor, 2020) provide opportunities for students to discuss the controversies centered around Mexican American women and the viewpoints students have. A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach ensures that students receive a complete representation of Mexican American and Chicax culture. Topics such as the murder of Vanessa Guillen allow students to voice their opinions of the press' handling of her murder. Students often identify with stories when they relate to the communities that are affected. In this case, students of color can identify with Vanessa Guillen as a young woman and a person of color.

Figure 3.

Entre Todas Las Mujeres (Talavera & Melchor, 2020)



Dedo Tres: Cultura

Ensuring that MAS is interdisciplinary will provide a more complete cultural experience. The third *Dedo* in the Mexican American Studies classroom asks that students not only read, view, and analyze work by Mexican Americans, Chicanx, and People of Color, but engage with those artists, musicians, writers, and community members who continue to spread awareness of Mexican American history and culture. Many are more than willing to work with MAS students. Teachers should encourage those who are active in the Mexican American community to speak to our students and this will help them come to the realization that the Chicanx Movement is not over. To our students, the Chicanx Movement seems like a lifetime ago, but it is important that they realize leaders of the Movement are still active today, and they left a legacy of Mexican American and Chicanx empowerment.

Dedo Cuatro: Student Centered Learning

The MAS classroom should be student centered. Our students are capable, articulate, and critical thinkers. MAS is one of the few classes in which many students will enter the room as experts. Some students who take MAS are somewhat familiar with the Mexican American culture based on their lived experiences, and many may consider themselves experts. MAS empowers our students and helps them realize that their stories are valid. MAS should provide a safe space and the opportunity for students to share and celebrate their cultural experiences with one another. For MAS students who do not identify as Mexican American, the opportunity to hear the

experiences within another culture empowers them to speak about their own experiences. The fourth *dedo* focuses on student centered learning. This is a vital part to success in the MAS classroom. A student-centered approach allows students to discuss the content using their own knowledge and experience to formulate their own opinions on critical issues that they explore in an academic setting for the first time.

Figure 4.

Students in MAS class at John Marshall High School celebrating Día de los Muertos



Dedo Cinco: Community Involvement

The fifth and final *dedo* centers on the idea of community involvement. As discussed before, Mexican American and Chicanx artists, writers, and activists have been integral parts of their community and often use their voice to empower that community. The *Cinco Dedos* framework calls for Mexican American Studies students to be given the opportunity to do the same and to use their voice to empower the community. Community involvement not only provides our students with an opportunity to become more active in their community, but also to become a part of and learn from their community. This *dedo* also creates a space where families of our students can enter the classroom and share important aspects of Mexican American culture. As more students realize and understand the validity of their own family's experiences, they understand all our stories and histories are important. In 1969, when Chicanx scholars came together to write el Plan de Santa Barbara to establish Chicano Studies throughout the Southwest, community activism was highlighted as one of the important pillars of Chicano Studies. It is important that MAS students contribute to the legacy of el Plan of Santa Barbara by actively

participating in their community. Figure 5 shows students with the co-author of this article giving back to the community of San Antonio. This gives students the opportunity to demonstrate the teachings they receive within their MAS class.

Figure 5.

MAS students at John Marshall High School volunteering at the 2020 Jaime P. Martinez Thanksgiving in the Barrio hosted in San Antonio, TX



Mexican American Education 1900 to 1960

The State approved Mexican American Studies course is classified as a history elective. Although the goal of *Los Cinco Dedos* is a multidisciplinary curriculum, it is important to understand the history of Mexican American education throughout the Southwest to better understand the needs of Mexican American students. Though the call for better schools and a demand for change sparked headlines during the Civil Rights era, one of the first boycotts against segregated facilities took place in San Angelo, Texas in 1910 (Acuña, 2011). In 1911, *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* (the first Mexicanist Congress) met in Laredo, Texas to discuss educational issues Mexicans and Mexican Americans faced. Jovita Idar organized the Women's League in an effort to provide education for poor children while advocating for women's rights including the right to vote. Jovita Idar's organization of El Congreso resulted in the founding of *La Gran Liga Mexicanista de Beneficencia y Protección* (The Great League for Relief and Protection.) Their goal was to eliminate the segregation of Mexican and Mexican American children in the public school system (Barragan Goetz, 2020). Idar's leadership and fight for school reform led her to opening *escuelitas* (little

schools) for Mexican American children. Figure 6 (Ortiz, n.d.) is used within the class to show the impact Idar's work had for Mexican American art, culture, and literature. During the same decade, Mexican organizations established other *escuelitas* offering reading and writing lessons for preschool aged children (Acuña, 2011). As our students learn about the efforts of Jovita Idar and *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, it is important that they know Idar left a living legacy. The work done by Idar continues to be celebrated in Chicanx artwork and literature. The implementation of *Los Cinco Dedos* and the examination of artwork by contemporary artists will demonstrate the impact of Idar and her contemporaries.

Figure 6.

Jovita Idar setting type in the sun (Ortiz, n.d.)



In the early 1920s, policymakers sought to eliminate the Spanish language from schools, an important aspect of Mexican American identity. The Immigration Act of 1924 attempted to colonize Communities of Color, by creating a quota system for immigrants with Western European nations having the highest number of immigrants allowed in the United States, while Mexican wage workers remained the same to maintain business interests (Grandin, 2019). To offset the nativist policies of the 1920s, the Mexican consulate offered support to *escuelitas* throughout South Texas by providing money, supplies, and attending school events (Goetz Barragan, 2020). Acuña (2011) argues an awareness for education reform increased after World War I with the formation of The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). The organization was formed in 1929 in Corpus Christi, Texas, and remains the largest Hispanic Civil

Rights organization in the U.S. LULAC, formed the Committee of Playgrounds and School Facilities, which was chaired by Eleuterio Escobar Jr. Escobar concluded that only education could lift Mexican Americans out of poverty. He later developed *La Liga Pro-Defensa Escolar* (School Improvement League) in San Antonio in 1935 (Garcia, 1997). Under his leadership, the inequities of funding schools and the policies regarding the Mexican American community and housing developments were exposed. La Liga also helped organize a student walkout at Sidney Lanier High School, a campus originally created as a vocational school for Mexican American students in San Antonio. Students at Lanier walked out again in the 1960s in demand for a better education.

Other Mexican American movements occurred during the 1930s including strikes in the agriculture business such as the pecan shellers in 1938. Led by Emma Tenayuca, the pecan sheller's strike of 1938 recruited thousands of participants in the demand for better working conditions and better wages. Vargas (1997) argues that with over 10,000 participants, it was the largest labor strike in San Antonio history and largest community-based strike by the Mexican population in the 1930s. Although the Pecan Shellers' Strike in San Antonio may not have yielded the economic benefits that the workers anticipated, it demonstrated the collective power of Mexican Americans in the community. Numerous murals of Emma Tenayuca exist throughout the Westside of San Antonio. *Los Cinco Dedos* can be used to introduce these pieces of art to students, while also increasing student knowledge of their own community.

The participation of Mexican Americans and other People of Color in World War II contributed to an increased level of social awareness and legislation regarding public segregation. Prior to the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, *Mendez vs. Westminster* set a precedent regarding school segregation: Sylvia Mendez, a nine-year old girl, was turned away from a "whites only" school in Orange County, California. Thurgood Marshall represented the Mendez family and argued that segregation of students was detrimental and unconstitutional. In 1947, Judge Paul McCormick agreed with Marshall and stated segregation of schools is similar to the segregation of races and religious groups that occurred in Nazi Germany (Ramos, 2004). *Mendez v. Westminster* was the first case to uphold that school segregation *itself* is unconstitutional and violates the 14th Amendment (Blanco, 2010).

During the decade of the 1950s, several Supreme Court cases affected educational policies still in effect today. In 1954, Pete Hernandez, a Mexican American farm worker, was accused of

killing an Anglo man and faced an all-white jury. In his appeals case, his attorney Gus Garcia argued that Mexican American citizens were discriminated against in Jackson County, Texas. Racial segregation of children in public schools was found unconstitutional in 1954 with the outcome of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*. Judge Earl Warren found segregation of schools unconstitutional in his ruling of the case. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* provided the legal support to begin the process of dismantling segregated schools throughout the United States, however, local state governments intentionally prolonged integration.

Only three years after *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission examined cases involving Communities of Color. The data reflected was meant to highlight the wrongdoings of the Mexican American community, however, the data also provided evidence that Mexican American dropout rates or “push out” rates in school continued to increase. The decisions in *Hernandez vs. Texas* and *Brown vs. The Board of Education* demonstrated that Mexican Americans and People of Color now had the legal backing of the Supreme Court, but in schools and other aspects of American society, the fight for equality was not over.

1960s

The 1960s sparked the biggest moment of Mexican American activism, the Chicano Movement. In 1962, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta co-founded the National Farm Workers Association as they demanded equal wages. The organization evolved into the United Farm Workers (UFW) in Delano, California. It was Chávez’ and Huerta’s leadership that ultimately led to the movement for greater equal schooling opportunities. In 1963, a political takeover began in Crystal City when a coalition called for Mexican Americans to be named to city council. An organization called the Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations (PASO) mounted the successful effort to elect five *Mexicanos* to city council, replacing the previously all white council. José Angel Gutierrez rose to prominence as a political leader in the effort to elect Mexican Americans to public office in Crystal City (Navarro, 2010).

As the actions of the UFW gained national attention, the Los Angeles Times sent a prominent writer Ruben Salazar to cover the stories in Delano. Salazar produced a series of articles highlighting the UFW movement and became an ally to organizers in the U.S speaking out for the equal rights of Mexican Americans. Published by the L.A. Times in 1963, Salazar’s writings linked Indigenous and Mexican American culture. At the time, a conference sponsored by John

Kennedy's Equal Opportunity Committee that demanded a more effective education for Mexican youth took place (Acuña, 2011). Salazar (1963), spoke at the conference about the educational and social problems of urban and rural Mexican-Americans and argued that Mexican American youth displayed low graduation rates because of the acculturation they faced in school. The writings of Ruben Salazar contributed to the motivation behind the student walkouts that became prominent throughout the Southwest in the 1960s.

This leadership continued throughout the 1960s when the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) developed a plan to take over school boards in an effort to demand equity in schools for communities of Color. MAYO was composed of five college students from San Antonio; Willie Velasquez, José Angel Gutierrez, Mario Compean, Ignacio Perez, and Juan Patlan (Acuña, 2011). MAYO's work towards education reform began with seeking culturally relevant courses, like Mexican American Studies. Their methods included boycotting and the organization of the famous student walkouts. MAYO provided innovative ideas while high school youth walked out in Del Rio, Uvalde, Abilene, and Robstown to name a few (Montejano, 1987). Towards the end of the decade, student power continued to grow and on March 5th 1968, the walkouts in East Los Angeles instigated a national student movement. The walkouts brought national attention to the achievement disparities in schools, lackluster education standards for Mexican American youth, and the term "Chicano" was embraced by Mexican American students as a term of ethnic and cultural pride (Sahagun, 2018).

San Antonio's first walkout occurred in 1968 when students protested teachers who did not accept a Mexican American student council nominee. Elida Aguilar was suspended for insubordination when she demanded the right to speak Spanish and advocated for Mexican American history classes (Acuña, 2011). The passion of these students caught the attention of state and city officials such as state senator Joe Bernal. On the Westside of San Antonio in Edgewood ISD, students fought for equitable funding and asked for the extermination of rats and roaches in school facilities. Janie Hilgen, a teacher in Edgewood at the time, supported students and was one of two teachers suspended by the district (Wright, 1968). In 2019, the Edgewood Walkouts were commemorated by Northwest Vista Community College in San Antonio with a mural that depicted the actions of the students. The students who walked out in the 1960 left a legacy of change and active resistance for students of color.

As a response to a lack of attention and care to the Mexican community in education, the first Chicax studies program was founded in 1967 at California State College in Los Angeles (Guidotti-Hernandez, 2017). The struggle to develop the department was countered by a student movement along with Mexican American faculty. Throughout the 1960s, higher education institutions faced resistance from People of Color that led to changes in course offerings. In 1968, *El Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlan* (MEChA) was formed from *El Plan de Santa Barbara*. The plan asked for recruitment of Chicax students, faculty, administrators and staff and included a curriculum that is relevant to Chicax culture and the historical experiences. Acuña (2011) argues changing the name from English to Spanish made this movement different; claiming “Aztlan” recognizes the indigenous roots of Mexican Americans and the fact that they were here before Euro Americans. This movement struck change and allowed for the development of the first Chicax Studies programs. The use of *Los Cinco Dedos* ensures that students not only receive the historical knowledge discussed in this section, but also the art, music, and literature of the Chicano Movement. The framework ensures that the goals set forth by the writers of *el Plan de Santa Barbara* are met. Mexican American students are given the opportunity to better understand their history, culture, and immerse themselves in their community.

1970s to Present Day

José Angel Gutierrez continued his leadership through the 1970s. Returning to Crystal City and similarly to his effort in 1963, he sought political change by attempting to have Mexican American leadership take over the school board and created the Raza United Party (RUP). The political party challenged the notion of a traditional two political party system. A Chicax political party was a reminder that *Mexicanos* were committed to democracy and community control in their pursuit for self-determination (Navarro, 2000). The RUP held its first national conference in El Paso two years later.

During his tenure as president, Richard Nixon and the transition to Reagan’s presidency coined the term “Hispanic”. This caused a disruption in the Chicax movement since the term attempted to lump communities of color together. In 1980, the government first used Hispanic on census forms with options for Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chicaxs, Puerto Rican, Cuban and “other” (Cruz, 2018). Although other events occurred between the 1980s through the 2000s, another movement occurred in the 2000s that impacted MAS courses significantly.

When Tucson and Arizona policy makers dismantled MAS courses, student voices demanded changes in schools. In response to eliminating MAS courses, students marched to the Capitol and chained themselves to school board members' chairs. Students responded to HB 2281 by using their voice and taking action in a topic passionate to them and their culture. This led to student leadership and movement to keep MAS offered in Tucson schools. These actions displayed resistance capital as students, teachers, and communities of color advocated for MAS courses to remain as options in K-12 schools. As a form of resistance, Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001a) argue that students' response acting from a critique of oppression and motivated by social justice, engages in transformative resistance and this is when social change is likely to occur. Students resisting the oppression formed a student leadership group through this process. Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Cintli Rodríguez (2013) state "Amidst the walkouts, UNIDOS created the day-long School of Ethnic Studies where students could learn from the forbidden curriculum of MAS (pp. 8).

In response to HB 2281, students from U.N.I.D.O.S. (United Non-Discriminatory Individuals Demanding Our Studies) used data to empower student voices and led to a cancelled board meeting by MAS students protesting these decisions. Ultimately, school board officials could not dismantle MAS that day because the board meeting did not take place, however, when later rescheduled, multiple law enforcement officials were called due to the protest. The goal of keeping MAS in schools was achieved that day using student and community voices. Although the board meeting was postponed, policy change later enacted and approved HB 2281 resulting in the loss and banning MAS courses.

Deriving from Chicana studies in California, MAS highlights untold heroes, the histories of migrant workers, and the oppression communities of color faced. Arellano (2018a) argues that Chicana studies forced Mexicans in the U.S. to confront their own pathologies and taught solidarity with Mexicans who immigrated illegally. Shedding light on Mexican histories not only gives students the opportunity to understand their culture but also inserts the untold stories of Mexican Americans. In an additional article, Arellano (2018b) describes the real agenda for Chicana studies is to push students to explore, and question the empirical truth no matter how inconvenient it may be for others.

Summary

This chapter summarized the *Cinco Dedos* framework as it applies to the experiences of the co-author's Mexican American Studies classroom in a South Texas high school. The framework provides opportunities and suggestions to build a curriculum for the Texas approved MAS course. Additionally, this chapter provided a breakdown in the differentiation of terms as well as a timeline of the Chicanx movement. It is important to note the controversies of approving a MAS course in Texas as it relates to the dismantling of MAS in Arizona. In Texas, students will take 28 total classes during their high school career. Because Mexican American Studies is the only course dedicated to their history and their culture, educators must ensure that they provide an interdisciplinary experience that highlights all elements of Mexican American history.

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Where Were the Mexicans? The Story is a Conversation

Elizabeth D. Rivas

University of Texas at San Antonio

Abstract

This essay explores the institutionalized master narrative of public institutions and how the mandated policies enacted by public institutions impact social studies teachers when they are delivering instruction to their students. A socio-transformative constructivist framework guides the essay in order to affirm that knowledge is socially constructed and mediated by cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Rodriguez, 1998; Rodriguez & Berryman, 2002). This essay also examines how educators can go beyond the teaching of their course curriculum to enact change at their campus and district. Also, this essay examines how district leaders can support teachers who want to be social justice change agents.

Keywords: Ethnic Studies, Mexican American studies, critical consciousness, integrated curriculum, socio-transformative constructivism

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Introduction

You start with the love of the kids, not the love of your subject matter...and know that you're going to go to the wall for them to make sure that they're successful. Then, you better reek of ethnic studies. In history, you talk about the American Revolution, and you throw in Mexican or Spanish surnames: Bernardo Gálvez, the 9,000 Mexican troops that came up here, the money that Mexico donated to Washington for the revolution, the missions that were collecting money for the revolution. The kids knew I cared. They knew that I was there for them even if they had already graduated. They saw the love. So, they had respect for me...I started as a teacher, and they may have to drag me feet first out of the classroom as a teacher.

— Teaching Is a Fight: An Interview with Sal Castro (Ochoa. 2010)

I do not purport that my teaching experience is similar to that of Sal Castro (Ochoa, 2010). After all, Sal Castro is one of the Chicano Movement's best-known advocates. He was a champion for Chicano student rights and fought against unequal conditions in the Los Angeles Unified School District. He is mainly known for providing guidance to high school students in their fight against the discriminatory treatment they suffered in high school. As a result, these Chicano high school students organized blowouts, i.e., walking out of classrooms as a show of protest. These student protests were known as Chicano Blowouts. However, in my classroom, my middle-school students were made aware of the contributions made by Latinas/os and other people of color. I taught for twelve years, and I tried to "reek of ethnic studies" when I could. However, because I was beholden to the state-mandated curriculum, I had to find creative ways to teach ethnic studies and disrupt, when I could, that mandated curriculum. I would say that the main turning point for me took place during a discussion about the American Revolution with my 8th grade US History students. It was sparked by a student question. It was after this question was raised that I began giving serious thought about my own teaching practice and, ultimately, about my dissertation research study and what I wanted to learn about social studies teachers.

The impetus for my research began when a student of mine asked, "Ms., where were the Mexicans?" Before I could begin to formulate an answer, another student chimed in and said, "We were in the back selling *raspas* (snow cones)." The class was predominantly Latina/o,

more specifically, of Mexican descent. They all had a good laugh, as did I, but later I began to internalize this. While I was fully aware of the master narrative and the idea of American Exceptionalism, it had never occurred to me that my students were just as aware of it. They may not have known the term American Exceptionalism, but they knew that they are not represented in the story of the United States that they are taught.

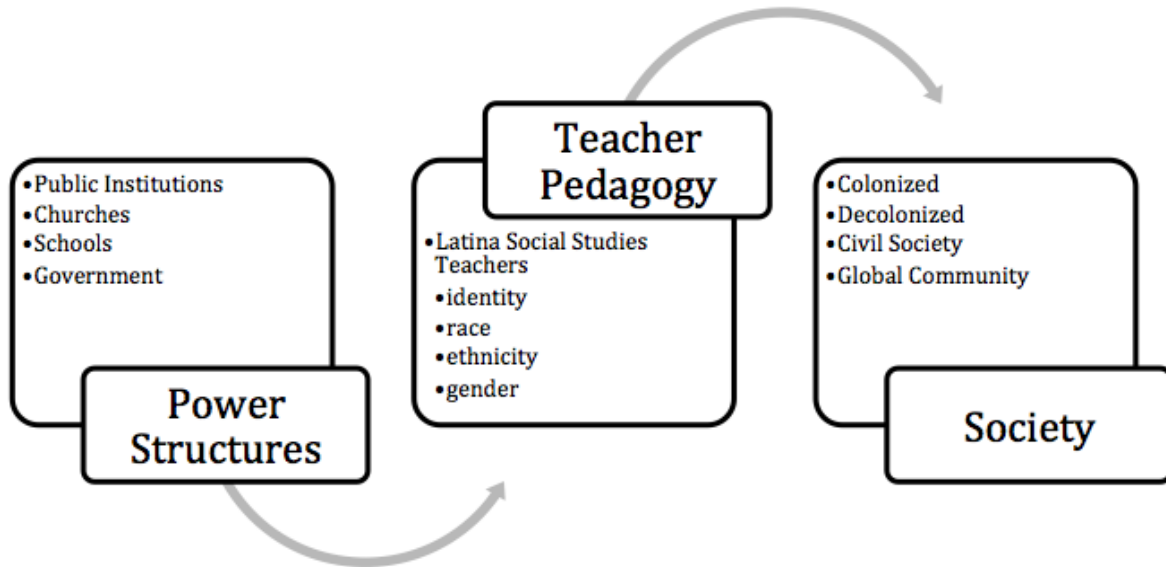
This idea of American Exceptionalism has been part of the story of the United States since its beginning and it is used to describe the country as a distinctively free nation based on democratic ideals and personal liberty. Questions of the validity of this view aside, few of my students feel like they are a part of this democratic ideal because they are not visible in the school curriculum, and neither are their ancestors. The contributions of their Latino ancestors are simply a footnote in history, or their contributions have been trivialized by way of separate periodic events like Hispanic Heritage Month.¹ So, what to do? I began to examine my own positionality as a social studies teacher and concluded that I would not be part of the indoctrination process. Instead, I would do what I could to challenge and disrupt the master narrative and bring various points of view to my students. I would challenge them to ask questions and become critical thinkers. I would demand that they take a position on an issue and defend it with a sound rationale. We would not shy away from issues of race and representation in my class.

The examination of my own positionality led me to also examine the role that my gender plays in the delivery of instruction. It was clear that I also had to address the patriarchal narrative and empower my students to question this as well. The more I considered my positionality, the more I began to wonder how my female social studies colleagues delivered instruction. I began to think of questions like, “Are social studies teachers aware that they are perpetuating the master narrative? If they are aware, do they do something about it? How do women deal with the patriarchal narrative?” These and other questions continued. I narrowed my research focus to Latina social studies teachers because I, too, was a Latina social studies teacher and I wanted to know how other Latina social studies teachers deal or do not deal with the master narrative.

¹ National Hispanic Heritage Month takes place from September 15 to October 15. Its goal is to recognize the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. However, most of the celebrations center on superficial contributions instead of political and economic contributions and furthers the marginalization of Latinas/os.

The examination and researching of Latina social studies teachers through the application of socio-transformative constructivist framework (sTc), “provided an orientation to teaching and learning that pays close attention to how issues of power, gender, and equity influence not only what subject matter is covered but also how it is taught and to whom” (Rodriguez & Berryman, 2002, p.1019). In addition, the socio-transformative constructivist framework (sTc) afforded me an opportunity to analyze how Latina social studies teachers disrupt the set parameters that have been established by local school districts, district board members, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas State Board of Education—all of which are societal public institutions and all of which are also directly influenced by political currents and the actions of political leaders. Another factor that was analyzed is the use of authentic instruction, i.e., the teacher instruction is meaningful to the student, resulting in student achievement beyond the classroom. Social studies teachers who practice authentic instruction use a variety of primary and secondary resources to give students opportunities to investigate history from various viewpoints, participating in critical interrogation of historical sources. By investigating how teachers connect the primary and secondary resources to real life, I was able to gain an understanding of how teachers create this space for their students.

I share this to give the reader a sense of all that is involved when examining teacher pedagogy. As the secondary social studies instructional coach in Harlandale Independent School District (Harlandale ISD), charged with working with secondary social studies teachers to impact student achievement, I encounter hypothetical concepts numerous times during different intersections related to my work. I often find myself having to “blur the lines” and “move out of my lane” to enact change. By applying the socio-transformative constructivist framework (sTc) to my work, I am able to examine the interconnectedness of power structures, teacher pedagogy, and society. To illustrate this, I have provided a visual representation of the interconnectedness of power structures, teacher pedagogy, and society (see Figure 1).

Figure I.*Interconnectedness of Power Structures, Teacher Pedagogy, and Society*

This diagram demonstrates how public institutions affect teacher pedagogy and how society, in general, is influenced by these structures. My lived experience as an educator intersects with how these interrelated factors impact the work I do as a social studies instructional coach. Because teachers' delivery and interpretation are contingent on the teachers' lived experiences, it is critical to understand the idea of change agents. To better understand change agents, a reference to the theory of constructivism is needed. Cobern (1993) posits that constructivism is a "model intended to describe learning. The model implies that an individual is always an active agent in the process of meaningful learning. Learning does not occur by transmission but by interpretation" (p. 110). If what Cobern theorizes is correct, then one can make an argument that social studies teachers act as interpreters of social studies content. If most of the coursework and teaching instruction were to be delivered using the institutionalized master narrative, then the presupposed position would be that social studies teachers will present their material via the dominant cultural lens. However, if a teacher is an active agent, then one can infer that teachers can present the curriculum using their own personal lenses. This is the overall idea of Figure I. Because social studies teachers have different lived experiences and use their personal frameworks, one conclusion that can be

drawn is that the interconnectedness of power structures, teacher pedagogy, and society are critical components that need to be analyzed to disrupt public institutions.

The reality is that teachers are forced to work within the mandated educational policies established by the state. Regrettably, educational policy decisions are enacted by people who often have little commonality with the communities that are most impacted by those policies. Most come from privileged backgrounds and adhere to the master narrative without considering how a person's identity, ethnicity, race, and gender impact the personal and professional trajectories of the community members that are marginalized. Additionally, many of those who make education policy are not professional educators and, in the case of social studies education, not historians. Social studies education, in particular, is frequently politicized to reinforce the master narrative, leading to situations such as a recent one in Texas where the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) is legislated against and signed into state law. Social studies teachers are prevented from discussing current events without giving equal time to both sides of issues, regardless of the issue. They also have limitations placed upon the discussion of the history of racism in the United States in their classrooms. These laws are made by policy makers who can't even define CRT. These educational policies impact students of color, which is one of the reasons why all teachers should act on behalf of their students. Moreover, teachers of color have an additional responsibility to act on behalf of their students of color. Responding to these policies is critical to disrupting the master narrative. The main question teachers, specifically teachers of social studies who are charged with teaching both the stories of history and the critical thinking skills of historical analysis, should ask themselves then becomes: How can they disrupt the master narrative?

Some social studies teachers may already feel overwhelmed simply keeping up with their own locally mandated rules. Consider the everyday issues that teachers deal with, i.e., student discipline, administrative demands, high stakes testing, etc. Now add the current layer of xenophobia in the United States and some social studies teachers may just want to bury their heads in the sand and wait for this to pass. Retribution against teachers who are perceived as advocating for social justice is a real fear for teachers who may not be willing to risk their livelihoods. Additionally, Covid-19 has added another layer of frustration and has further exposed the inequities found among marginalized communities. Because the institutionalized master narrative often nullifies the voices of people of color, it is imperative for teachers to

become active change agents. Because of their intersectionality status and because of their ready-made learning forum, i.e., environments that support and promote learning, Latina/o social studies teachers can facilitate these difficult discussions, as well as covertly teach the unwritten and unofficial histories concerning people of color.

Statement of Problem

The current political atmosphere in the United States is both volatile and fascinating. Issues such as the Black Lives Matter movement, immigration reform, national healthcare, and foreign policy should be topics where critical discourse should be taking place. In addition to discussions in political and communal spaces, the logical area where this discourse should occur is in schools; this is where young people can learn how to participate in critical discourse and both students and teachers can learn from participating. According to the Seven Themes found in the report *Educating for American Democracy* (2021), students should be taught to engage in civil disagreement regarding controversial topics. This is especially important in communities of color. According to Jones (2016) “In the African American and Latino communities, civic and social engagement is depended upon economics and social capital” (p.4). Language barriers, economics, and other factors limit civic participation by these communities, which leads to their not having a voice in creating the educational policies that impact their children.

Social studies teachers are in the best position when it comes to discussing current events. They have the opportunity to discuss issues such as immigration, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ rights, equal pay, gun liability, the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), Supreme Court decisions, COVID-19, etc. Theoretically, these issues have an impact on individuals because these types of policy decisions will directly impact the personal and professional trajectories of individuals. Interestingly, however, it appears that people of color and the historically marginalized are the ones that have a more tumultuous relationship with public institutions—one that either advances or inhibits their trajectory. One question to ponder is this: How do people who originate from colonized groups negotiate personal and structural conditions? Because a country’s history influences structural conditions, one has to consider how the United States was formed, i.e., via conquests, invasions, and settler colonization. Another question to consider is: How do descendants of colonized people, e.g., American Indians, African Americans, and Mexican Americans, overcome preconceived ideas about their

citizenry? One way of addressing these questions is to examine the role of teachers and how their pedagogy is used to either empower or hinder students who are members of historically marginalized groups.

Purpose of the Essay

Schools are a public institution, but they are often overlooked as power structures that need to be disrupted. Rarely are individuals cognizant enough to understand that the schools they attend are part of a system that is problematic. School is seen in its daily round of assignments, discipline, homework, extracurriculars, etc., rather than as an organized system with an agenda or set of agendas. For the purposes of this essay, schools are regarded as both public institutions and as power structures and are evaluated as such. Having stated that, I argue that teachers are at the epicenter of this ethnically and racially charged storm. In some classrooms across the United States, teachers have a cross-section of the United States' population. In other classrooms, the cross-section is far less diverse; usually, this cross-section is homogenous and based on economic status. This representative sample can be homogenous both ways: many members of the dominant group are together based on economic privilege, or many members of minority groups are together, based on economic disadvantages. Both representative samples are ethnically and racially divided. As race relations continue to deteriorate in society, teachers will be at the forefront of this situation. The teachers who are most responsible for the facilitation of a dialogue on ethnic and race issues are social studies teachers. Because the social studies classroom is the most appropriate stage on which to have these discussions and because these current event topics come up naturally through student questions about events that clearly tie into the historical narrative, social studies teachers will have to make a choice about whether to act and use these ethnic and race issues as teaching moments. A social studies teacher who discusses the history of slavery in the United States can expect students to ask questions about present-day race relations and even challenge the dominant narrative by asking the teacher questions like: Who built the United States? Which people held political, economic, and social power? Why have almost all the presidents been white? Teachers who are responsible for teaching Texas history and the Texas Revolution can expect to face questions from Latina/o students, and others, about who is a Texan, how borders change, and how immigrants should be perceived. So, too, will U.S. history teachers

who teach about immigration, nativist movements like the Know-Nothing Party, and migration within the U.S. be asked about current issues of immigration and xenophobic viewpoints. The teachers' responses, their words, and actions —whether active or inactive—will have an impact on the students and communities they serve in both the immediate and foreseeable future. Thus, the goal of my essay is to explain how the work I do in the Harlandale ISD addresses racially charged conflicts of the past and the present, and how the establishment of Mexican American Studies in the district will empower the students long after they graduate. Also, this essay will address how to go beyond ethnic studies and create a system that can change student trajectories.

Road to Mexican American Studies

Before delving into the initial steps taken to establish Mexican American Studies at Harlandale ISD, it is important to share some basic information about the district. Harlandale ISD has a unique cultural heritage that is inherent to the South Side of San Antonio. San José Mission was founded in 1720 by Padre Antonio Margil de Jesus. In 1793, the secularization of the five San Antonio missions was ordered. The lands that were surveyed were distributed to the local Indigenous peoples, ancestors to some of the residents of the Harlandale ISD community today. In 1888, the Granary at the San Jose Mission served as Harlandale ISD's first attended school. Eventually, the students were moved to the Saucedo House on the mission's plaza. The students were taught by individuals who descended from one of the original Spanish families that came from the Canary Islands to settle in San Antonio in 1731. While some may argue that Harlandale ISD's roots are entrenched in the colonizer's history, it is important to understand that this is the district's history and that it informs its present. One way to ensure that the history of the indigenous peoples is told is to apply the aforementioned socio-transformative constructivist framework (sTc). When applied by the district's social studies teachers, students will learn of the Jumanos, which includes peoples of the Southwest and South Plains. Students will get an understanding of this "other" history, which is just a small portion of the state-mandated curriculum. Students will learn that Jumanos were known for their language skills, the establishment of trade routes, and diplomatic relations with the Spanish and the French. Most importantly, they will learn of the local connections to the indigenous history of the area.

The telling of the “other” history is our goal at Harlandale ISD. Our journey to establishing Mexican American Studies (MAS) began in 2014. In 2014, the Texas State Board of Education (TSBOE) members voted in favor of including ethnic studies in Texas schools. One of the first proposed textbooks for Mexican American Studies in Texas was, *Mexican American Heritage* (Riddle & Angle, 2016) which resulted in controversy in the state. Reyes (2016) posits that the textbook “advances stereotypes [and] does not belong in the curriculum of any state” (p.1). For example, the textbook authors assert that some Mexican Americans “opposed Western civilization and wanted to destroy society [and links] Mexican Americans to the drug trade and illegal immigration and says that Mexican Americans are ambivalent about assimilating into the United States” (Reyes, 2016, p.2). In an article by Rogelio Sáenz (2016) published in June 2016 in the *San Antonio Express-News* Opinion, Sáenz provides background information on the textbook authors, Jaime Riddle and Valerie Angle, and on the publisher, Momentum Instruction. According to Sáenz, the authors are not “known as experts in Mexican American studies and lack the appropriate academic credentials.... [Momentum Instruction is] linked to Cynthia Dunbar, a far-right conservative who served on the Texas State Board of Education from 2007-2011” (Sáenz, 2016, p.3). In point of fact, Dunbar was the CEO of Momentum Instruction. Sáenz refers to basic factual errors found in the textbook and provides a summary of the number of images in the textbook, concluding that photos of white people disproportionately outnumber photos of Mexican Americans. He also notes that the book’s focus is more on other Latino groups instead of on Mexican Americans. The misrepresentation of the Mexican American experience in *Mexican American Heritage* ((Riddle & Angle, 2016) is a prime example of the actions taken by dominant members of society to further advance their agenda under a public institutional guise.

This textbook controversy marked the beginning of the journey to a Mexican American Studies course at Harlandale ISD. Because course catalog processes vary across districts, there is no established process in the state or even in the city. At Harlandale ISD, the initial step must come from a campus teacher who is interested in teaching a new course. Because of my role as district instructional leader, I cannot initiate this step. Doing so would have the appearance of it being sanctioned by the district. Fortunately, there are many social studies teachers who are also social justice activists and seek out opportunities to resist and disrupt the system. Such was the case for Harlandale ISD and the implementation of MAS courses. In this case, the teacher

that initiated this step is a former graduate school peer of mine who works in the district. When we heard of the textbook controversy, we both followed the story in the media and with colleagues in academia to see what would develop. After tracking what was occurring at the state level, Sarah Van Zant, a high social studies teacher, began this journey of a MAS course for Harlandale ISD.

Sarah Van Zant has been teaching for twelve years at Harlandale ISD. She earned a bachelor's degree and has a university-endorsed teaching certificate. Ms. Van Zant also holds a master's degree in bicultural-bilingual studies from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). She began teaching MAS with actual students during the 2017-2018 academic school year at Harlandale High School. In the ideal world, the process would have been easy. However, the start of this journey was difficult.

In 2015, Harlandale ISD, more specifically, Harlandale High School, began offering Mexican Americans Studies as an elective. In order to get a better understanding of the district's rollout, I have provided a visual representation of the timeline (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Road to Mexican American Studies: Timeline



The road initially traveled was difficult mainly due to competing classes for upper-level students. In my discussions with Ms. Van Zant, I learned that most of the counseling staff, while supportive of MAS, were still suggesting other classes to students. At this point, Ms. Van Zant decided to advertise and recruit students herself. She informed interested students and instructed them to ask counselors to enroll them in the MAS course sections, telling them that they would need to be proactive to have this option. As word spread, more students began to register for the MAS course sections. Eventually, other high school history teachers began to show interest and attended summer workshops in preparation for future academic calendars. Ms. Van Zant blazed the trail. Eventually, McCollum High School would follow Harlandale High School's lead and would establish their own MAS course sections during the 2018-2019 academic calendar. Today, both Harlandale and McCollum High Schools offer MAS courses, as do our non-traditional high schools: STEM Early College High and Frank Tejada Academy. When I asked Ms. Van Zant why she wanted to establish MAS at her campus, she said,

Looking at my own background I wanted to use my masters [in Bicultural-Bilingual studies]. [I] decided to look if [TEA] had a course in Mexican American Studies (MAS) and saw they did and started the paperwork. I just want the kids to know Mexican American history because some of them think in the context of American history, but not outside of the box. Why are there only certain people being mentioned in the history [text]book? I want them [students] to be more aware of their culture and history. Have more information so they're able to make decisions...be able to contribute.

Van Zant, S. (2018, September 12).

The leadership demonstrated by Ms. Van Zant is critical in providing students with opportunities to enroll in ethnic studies courses like MAS. Also, teachers like her are actively providing students with opportunities to learn about the contributions of historically marginalized peoples who have been left out of the master narrative.

Current State of Mexican American Studies

The establishment of MAS at Harlandale ISD has evolved over the years. During the 2017-2018 academic calendar, Ms. Van Zant followed the U.S. history era timeline. This essentially resulted in a U.S. history course that highlighted Mexican American contributions.

During the summer of 2018 two McCollum High School teachers attended the Mexican American Studies (MAS) Teachers Academy offered by the University of Texas at San Antonio. Because of the work I do with the UTSA teachers academy, I was able to meet with these Harlandale ISD teachers and was able to work on a new timeline for the course. This timeline would be different from the one initially followed by Ms. Van Zant. However, because Ms. Van Zant is always thinking about how to enhance her instruction, I was not surprised to learn that she had taken her timeline to a different level. By reflecting on what worked and did not work during the 2017-2018 academic school year, Ms. Van Zant created themes from which her lessons would be created and used them in the 2018-2019 academic year. When the other campus teachers and I learned of this, we immediately thought it was a great idea! With the help of our district social studies coordinator, Rubina Pantoja, the teachers were able to meet during the summer of 2018 and were able to plan curriculum together. I supported the teachers by offering instructional strategies that could be applied to the lessons they developed. While there was still work needed on the district scope and sequence, a draft of the newly created thematic curriculum was used during the 2018-2019 academic calendar. I have provided a visual representation of the themes that guide MAS instruction at the district (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Harlandale MAS Themes

| Harlandale MAS Themes | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1st Six Weeks | 2nd Six Weeks | 3rd Six Weeks |
| History Part I | Mexican/Mexican American Literature | Mexican Culture |
| 4th Six Weeks | 5th Six Weeks | 6th Six Weeks |
| Mexican/Mexican American Music/Art | History Part 2 | Political Activism |

This table lists the themes that are part of the district's unit and lesson planning process. The other vital part of the lesson planning process is the Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies (TEKS).

Every year the MAS teachers continue to refine and adjust their instruction. To support them, I conduct an annual review of the scope and sequence used in their courses. An added element to the 2020-2021 scope and sequence was the addition of conceptual lenses. Essentially, the detailed topics and TEKS that are used to create lessons are presented via the application of these conceptual lenses, i.e., political, economic, geographic, and social (PEGS). The use and application of these lenses allow the students to be able to access and understand the unit lessons on a broader and "big idea" scale. I have provided a visual representation of a select unit from the district's MAS curriculum guide to illustrate this (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Select Unit: Harlandale MAS Curriculum Guide

| 1st Six Weeks Unit | Unit Big Idea | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| History Part I Mesoamerica - 1920s | This unit uses a conceptual lens of PEGS (Political, Economic, Geographic, and Social) to explore and understand the origins of Mexican American people which emerged as a result of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. In addition, this unit will also explore the foreign threats to the Spanish Empire, specifically the northern frontier and independence movements within the frontier. | | |
| Political | Economic | Geographic | Social |
| 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B • Colonial North America • Mission System • Wars and Treaties and the US/Mexico Border | 7D • Relationship to early global economies, development of New Spain's/Mexico's | 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D • Wars and Treaties and the US/Mexico Border | 2A, 2B, 11A • Gender and power, resistance and emergence of Mexican identities |

| | | | |
|--|-------------------|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders and borderlands • Impact of Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo | northern frontier | | |
|--|-------------------|--|--|

This table shows one unit of study: History Part I: Mesoamerica-1920s. The “big idea” centers on the origins of Mexican American people and foreign threats or colonization. The numbers with letters represent the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies (TEKS) that are associated with the conceptual lenses. For example, MAS standard 2A asks that students be able to explain the significance of events that are considered to be turning points relevant to Mexican American history, i.e., Aztec arrival in Mexico's central valley, the establishment of the Aztec Empire, Hernán Cortés's first encounter with the Aztecs, the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, creation of the New Laws, and Jesuit expulsion from the Americas. Note that in this unit there are eleven additional TEKS. Each TEKS is as specific as the 2A example. While there is not a state-mandated assessment for MAS, the TEKS serve as a guide in our unit and lesson planning process. In addition, the MAS teachers are free to expand beyond the MAS TEKS, but this must be done with a scholarly intent that is meant to add value and relevance to the curriculum.

Mexican American Studies: Collaboration

My pedagogical training, practical classroom teaching, and research interests have impacted how I see society. These factors have intersected seamlessly during my time at Harlandale ISD. One of my personal goals is to go beyond Mexican American studies in my district and empower as many teachers as I can so they can then, in turn, empower their students. The MAS curriculum will always be of paramount importance to me. It is so important that when I was afforded an opportunity to work with teachers beyond Harlandale ISD, I jumped at the chance. I am currently collaborating with the Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI). This institute is a national organization that is dedicated to chronicling and advancing the contributions of Mexican Americans to the civil rights effort in the United States.

In conjunction with Region 20, the Education Service Center (ESC) serving San Antonio and a large portion of South Texas, MACRI was able to offer four virtual workshops—two in

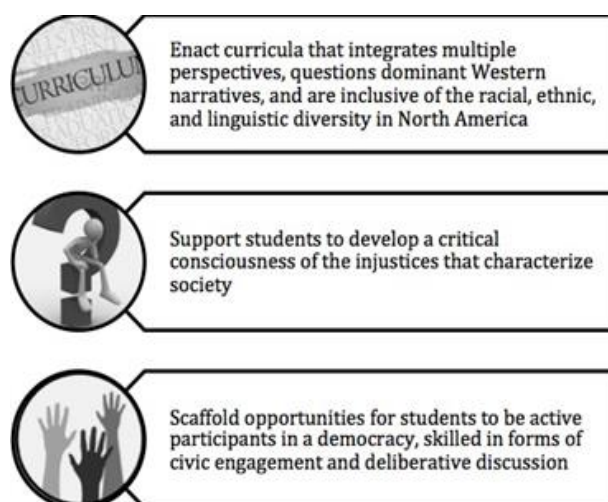
Fall 2020 and two in Spring 2021. The goal was to provide strategies that could be used to integrate MAS into the grade 4 and grade 7 curriculum. The work I do for MACRI has provided me with an opportunity to expand my reach and help teachers outside of my district find ways to resist, disrupt, and expand the mandated curriculum. The work I do with MACRI may also help in establishing an elementary and middle school pipeline to MAS at the high school level, perhaps even eventually establishing a MAS major pipeline to local universities. The opportunities seem to be very attainable and exciting. I look forward to seeing what develops from this work and future MACRI collaborations.

Critical Consciousness: Change Agents at Work

To enact meaningful change, teachers and anyone in the education field should be willing to engage in meaningful learning of the communities they serve. Cobern's (1993) change agent model centers on the idea that individuals are actively engaged in meaningful learning. When meaningful learning is a two-way street, then real change can take place. A change agent refers to a teacher who changes their practices, attitudes, and beliefs (Guskey, 2002). Building on Cobern's (1993) and Guskey's (2002) work is the research by Agarwal et al. (2010) which followed recent graduates and examined how these new inservice teachers enacted social justice curriculum into a viable pedagogy. The social justice principles outlined by Agarwal, et al (2010) are provided in a visual format (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.

Social Justice Principles. Adapted from Agarwal, et al (2010)



The application of these models allows teachers and those who work in the education field to contribute to the welfare of the community and the country by educating students and to engage in critical thinking at a personal and professional level. By evaluating their own personal values, teachers create a space in which they empower their students, encourage their students to be open-minded, and model and affirm ways for their students to be respectful of each other and of people from other groups. Together, teachers and their students learn about repressive actions that target and marginalize specific groups of people, e.g., institutionalized racial slavery and American Indian removal. By examining and learning about both the oppressors and oppressed, these educators work to foster critical thinking in their students, e.g., analyzing primary source documents for bias and point of view and supporting assertions with evidence. The end game is that the students will become active participants in their learning and their community and gain the skills needed by active and engaged citizenry navigating a world filled with contradictory and often biased messages.

Conclusion: Beyond Mexican American Studies

Building on Cobern's (1993) change agent model and the work by Agarwal, et al (2010), I would argue that change agents are also individuals who take steps to enact meaningful change that can impact their own and others' trajectory. That said, one of my personal goals is to go beyond Mexican American studies and support teachers who want to be agents of social justice for themselves and their students in their chosen areas of interest. The lessons I have learned in helping to implement a MAS program within the district have strengthened programs in related areas. With the support of the assistant superintendent and the district social studies coordinator, I have been able to work with teachers who support first-generation and immigrant students. I have had the privilege to veer from "my lane" and work with educators whose focus is working with students who fall under the Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA) category and are Development, Relief, and Education Alien Minors or DREAMers. Some of these educators include the Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) Coordinator, ESL language specialists, and campus counselors. Collectively, our aim is to serve as social justice change agents. One of our long-term goals has included the establishment of a DREAM center in Harlandale ISD. As of this writing, this goal has been realized. Creating a safe space for our immigrant and first-generation students was important to us. The steps taken to get here

were deliberate and calculated. We took nothing for granted because we understood that “buy-in” was critical to realizing this goal. This first district DREAM center will be housed at McCollum High School and the grand opening will take place in Fall 2021.

As I reflect, I cannot help but think back to my 8th-grade students and that discussion we had about Mexican Americans and the American Revolution. The choices educators make are critical and have a long-lasting impact on students, just as the words of our students can have a lifelong impact on us. In the end, realizing that the choices educators make are critical is the first step to developing critical consciousness, which I hope leads educators to humanize their students and the communities they serve.

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The Future of Middle Level Education–Chicana Maestras and Vignettes

Alexa M. Proffitt

University of Texas at San Antonio

Antonia Alderete

Northside Independent School District

Megan Villa

Northeast Independent School District

Violetta Villarreal

Thurgood Marshall School of Law

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

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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 Chicanx 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 Chicanx/Latinx materials by women and educate myself further on Chicanx/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 Chicanx 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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Kristel A. Orta-Puente

Southern Methodist University

The book *Reading, Writing, and Revolution: Escuelitas and the Emergence of a Mexican American Identity in Texas* by Philis M. Barragán-Goetz brilliantly brings to the forefront how escuelitas shaped ethnic Mexican leaders in the community and served as a foundational framework for Mexican American studies in the United States. The author states, “it is a forgotten narrative of how ethnic Mexicans...for generations, unfolded at the crossroads of language and education, race and identity, and survival and conquest—reacted and progressed as they settled into the idea of becoming Mexican Americans” (p. 3). While the United States educational experience was centered around making good Americans, the escuelitas accented the hyphenated experience for young Mexican children, teaching them how to navigate the part of their identity that society and politicians were requesting they drop. Barragán-Goetz explains that in the historiographical narrative of Mexican education in Texas that the politics of ethnic Mexican education significantly impacted the role of escuelitas (p. 2). In fact, Barragán-Goetz frames escuelitas as a tool of cultural resistance against western hegemonic forces in the Mexican American experience.

This book covers the history of escuelitas in five chapters, recovering issues surrounding escuelitas in a linear temporal analysis from 1865 to 1950. The geographical focus is primarily the borderlands region of Texas. Sources used in this historiographical investigation are newspaper articles, state department reports, census records, department of education records, historiographies, photos, and reference maps. It is impossible to know the exact number of students that went to escuelitas, yet Barragán-Goetz makes every effort to uncover important information, using evidence in the Spanish-Language Press, oral histories, and superintendent reports. (p. 13)

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Barragán-Goetz's Note On Terminology indicates her depth of understanding the complexities of ethnic experiences in the Borderlands. "In the 1980s, Mario T. Garcia first articulated his conceptual framework for what he called 'The Mexican American Generation' in an attempt to understand these men and women activists who were full of contradictions—contradictions that seemed especially egregious in a post-Chicano movement world." (p. 127). Barragán-Goetz uses this term that serves as a framework to historicize the methods used to approach civil rights activism. Throughout the analysis, a claim is made that the generation that last benefitted from *escuelitas* both brought about the demise of the *escuelitas* and birthed the Chicano Movement. Fundamentally *escuelitas* helped ethnic Mexican children negotiate their education and identity in the United States. However, their success ironically facilitated the demise of *escuelitas* by encouraging them to solidify their agency, channel that into activism, and fight for inclusion in white-only public schools, which ultimately was achieved.

Barragán-Goetz begins her analysis with two different time periods in *escuelita* history. The first is from 1865 to 1884, and second from 1884 to 1910. The 1910s analysis includes the Mexican Consulate's examination of the treatment of ethnic Mexican school children in Texas Public Schools. The Congreso Mexicanista called for an end to educational discrimination, lynchings, and land theft (Montejano, p. 116). *La Crónica* and the Idár family paid attention to the segregation of ethnic Mexican children and Barragán-Goetz argues that *La Crónica* brought to the forefront attention to the politicization of education. Jovita Idár as well as Leonor Villegas de Magnón, María Villarreal and María Rentería established *escuelitas* in Laredo from 1910 to 1920. Beginning with the quote, "Cada vez que se educa a niña se funda una *escuelita*. [Each time you educate a girl you found an *escuelita*.]" "Pensamientos y Aforismos," *La Prensa*, February 5, 1920.

Post-Mexican Revolution, Barragán-Goetz examines the shift for ethnic Mexican children from *escuelitas* to American public schools and analyzes the Mexican government's motives for funding and encouraging *escuelitas* in the 1920s and 1930s. Using oral histories from teachers and students of the 1930s-1950s, Barragán-Goetz argues that although the Mexican government intended to enforce hegemonic forces, students benefited from them in ways that surpassed any elements of control or indoctrination.

The activist movements of the post-world American generation shaped by *escuelitas* and provided students with the tools they needed to advocate for equity in education. Barragán-

Goetz challenges other scholars and disciplines to expand the focus of The Mexican American Generation from a narrow male-dominated space to include the women activists who worked tirelessly to address issues of education and civil rights. There were two main goals of those influenced by *escuelitas*: to get their curriculum taught in schools, and to use the model to teach children English, and women were at the center of this work.

In the context of the history of the education of ethnic Mexicans after 1848, the stories of *escuelitas* allow for the reclamation of heroes and pedagogical legacies. Barragán-Goetz frames *escuelita* history as the origin story for Mexican American studies (MAS) in the United States. Thus, MAS classrooms are providing a decolonizing space that is liberating education for students. “The *escuelitas* were the first place where an alternative narrative that was focused on ethnic Mexican’s experiences emerged, and where that narrative belongs- in its own space or integrated into the dominate one- is a question we have yet to answer today” (p. 17).

Reading, Writing, and Revolution: Escuelitas and the Emergence of a Mexican American Identity in Texas contextualizes the history of *escuelitas* in Texas History since 1848. Barragán-Goetz has produced a dynamic addition to the scholarship of Mexican American Studies, Texas history, and United States educational history. Goetz brings to the forefront the struggle of where this narrative belongs, either integrated into the dominant history/curriculum or as a cultural or ethnic studies alternative. The demand grows for Mexican American Studies across the United States and this historiography will inform the next generations of MAS educators and students.

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***The Undocumented Americans*. Cornejo Villavicencio, Karla. Penguin Random House LLC. 2021. pp. 185 pages. ISBN 9780399592683. \$12.35 (Hard cover)**

Alpha Martínez-Suárez

University of Texas at San Antonio

The Undocumented Americans written by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, a DACAmented writer and one of the first undocumented immigrants to graduate from Harvard, explores the narratives of the hidden lives and deeply personal stories of a variety of people living and subsisting in the United States under an undocumented status that significantly affects and permeates all aspects of their everyday lives. The book is dedicated to a specific person or group of people and their interwoven stories of life, work, health, their challenges, and struggles living in a country that rejects their existence while benefiting and profiteering from their work.

Cornejo Villavicencio's writing serves as a counternarrative against the usual trope of immigrants living off social security programs and welfare queens. Through her narrative, she tells the intimate stories of hardworking women going about their lives in the liminal spaces afforded by their citizenship statuses and the realities of everyday hyphenated identities of mothers, wives, workers, sisters, and daughters.

This book is not a traditional nonfiction work; this is the result of her lived experiences and reflections as an undocumented Latina student, birthed from an essay for *The Daily Beast*. For this book, Cornejo Villavicencio wrote anonymously in her senior year as an undergraduate student at Harvard, before DACA, crafting a story and her pull to incorporate the voices and stories of people from different circumstances that had a shared commonality living and working in the United States as undocumented human beings.

The author reflects on her earlier conflicting emotions and dislike about her identity as a professional writer and not wanting to be solely associated with a part of her identity as an undocumented student. Cornejo Villavicencio's raw honesty shows when she is declaring her writing manifesto of sorts: "I didn't want my first book to be a rueful tale about being a sickly Victorian orphan with tuberculosis who didn't have a social security number, which is what the agents wanted" (p. xiv).

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Cornejo Villavicencio delves into her family story about coming to the U.S. from Guatemala and El Salvador. While enrolled in a Catholic school in New York, she benefited from the patronage of wealthy billionairess from upstate New York that had heard of her from the school's bursar and paid her tuition, as long as she maintained good grades. She proceeds to reflect how during her studies at Harvard, she perceived herself as an artist being on the receiving end of funding for her studies from older wealthy people. "It was patronage. They were Gertrude Stein, and I was a young Hemingway. I was Van Gogh, crazy and broken. I truly did not have any racial anxieties about this, thank god. That kind of thing could really fuck a kid up" (p.6).

Cornejo Villavicencio then submerges into her work providing a harrowing narrative of the undocumented workers called to action by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and the extreme conditions of the rescue workers subcontracted to work on the recovery operations on the aftermath of the attack. Paloma's narrative offers the reader a poignant view of the 9/11 worker experience, and the continued onslaught on their health both mentally and physically, while enduring the ongoing injustices and barriers brought from the Victim Compensation Fund and its shortcomings.

In continuing the stories, Cornejo Villavicencio engages in another exercise of awareness about her personal views, coming to terms with her constructed identity dealing with the model student-child undocumented persona and the realities of her encounters with families that are victims of parental deportation. By centering the stories of people deported or facing deportation, the author brings a detailed account of the different deportation processes the undocumented population encounters and how the ever-present realities and terrors of being deported shape and shift their entire lives. Moreover, the reader encounters a reflective narrative around age and the undocumented workforce. By exploring her own family realities with an undocumented aging father, the author is able to deepen the audience's understanding of the many challenges undocumented elders face, including lack of access to pensions, dignified retirement, and proper healthcare resources to care for them. Cornejo Villavicencio brings awareness to the fragile conditions while bringing to light the abuses and dangers faced by the aging undocumented population. Ultimately, this particular situation brings another unique set of challenges undocumented families and individuals must face given the precarious working

conditions and the fragility of their economic power since they largely are dependent of the products of their manual labor.

Undocumented Americans by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio is a compelling book of honest, painful, narrated histories and engaging personal reflections by an author who looks to shed a light on the everyday lives of the undocumented people living in the United States. Without romanticizing the stories or looking to softening those portraits, Cornejo Villavicencio serves a powerful and compelling narrative that strives to bring the reader into the unflinching shortcomings of a deficient—to say the least—immigration system while counteracting the otherizing nativist and xenophobic discourses of undocumented immigrants that are so pervasive and still so currently damaging to the lives of many, given the longstanding racist and anti-immigrant political and cultural climate in the United States. This book contributes to the scholarship on immigration, and particularly the undocumented immigration, from a brown body and brown voice perspective in all its profound intimacy and unflinching frankness. As the author writes so eloquently at the end of the introduction, “this book is for everybody who wants to step away from the buzzwords in immigration, the talking heads, the kids in graduation caps and gowns, and read about the people underground. Not heroes. Randoms. People. Characters” (p. xvii), and I could not agree more.

Authors' Biographies

Sylvia Mendoza Aviña (she/her) was born and raised in Yanaguana/San Antonio, Texas. She is an assistant professor in the Mexican American Studies program at UTSA in the department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her research interests center Chicanx communities that have historically been erased or grossly misrepresented within the larger narrative of Texas history through the use of Chicanx/Latinx feminist research methodologies such as pláticas and oral histories. She has published in the journals of *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *Urban Education*, and *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*.

Lilliana Patricia Saldaña is an Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies (MAS) at UTSA and is co-director of the UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy. Her activist scholarship draws from Chicana/x/o studies, decolonial and anti-colonial studies, Indigenous epistemologies, and Chicana/Latina feminisms to investigate epistemic struggles in education, teacher identity and consciousness, and decolonial praxis in schools and community spaces. Over the past eight years, she's been actively involved in the statewide movement for MAS in Texas PreK-12 schools. She's also an active member of social justice organizations like the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center and the Mexican American Civil Rights Institute where she bridges activism and public scholarship in the community.

Maritza De La Trinidad, Ph.D., is a historian of Mexican American/Chicana/o history specializing in Mexican American education. She has published on the Mexican American educational experience in Arizona, bilingual education movement, desegregation cases, educational activism and HSIs. She is an Associate Professor in the Mexican American Studies program at UTRGV and teaches history and MAS courses. Dr. De La Trinidad is the Project Director of *Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley*, a professional development program for K-12 teachers from the Edinburg & Brownsville school districts that focuses on integrating Mexican American history and MAS into the K-12 social studies curriculum. The program is funded by a 3-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education under their American History and Civics Education National Activities Grant program.

Stephanie Alvarez, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies and is the founding Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She specializes in and has multiple publications that center on language, identity, race/racialization, and their intersections in education, literature, and culture. She has been recognized by CASE and Carnegie Foundation Teaching as the U.S. Professor of the Year, the American Association for Hispanics in Higher Education Outstanding Latina/o Faculty Award, and the UT Board or Regents Outstanding Teaching Award. She is fiercely committed to ensuring students have access to a linguistically and culturally affirming, responsive, and sustaining education.

Dr. J. Joy Esquierdo is a Professor in the Department of Bilingual and Literacy Studies at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley. She is also the Director for the Center for Bilingual Studies and the Interim Director for the School of Art. Dr. Esquierdo's academic interests center on Bilingual/Dual Language Education, Gifted and Talented Education and the cognitive development of children, especially bilingual children. She has co-authored two books: *Teaching Content to Latino Bilingual-Dual Language Learners: Maximizing Their Learning* and *A Practical Guide for Student Interns: Meeting the Needs of Latino Students and their Communities*.

Francisco Guajardo, Ph.D., is the Chief Executive Officer of the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg. He began his career as a high school teacher at his alma mater, Edcouch Elsa High School and then became a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). At UTRGV he was the founding director of the B3 Institute, a university-wide initiative that facilitated UTRGV's transition toward a bilingual, bicultural and biliterate institution. Dr. Guajardo is author or co-author of three books and more than 70 articles.

Josue Puente received a Bachelor of Art in History and a Master of Arts In Inter Disciplinary Studies in Mexican American Studies from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2017 and 2020. He presented his original research on Mexican American History in the National Association of Chicano Chicana Studies Tejas Foco from 2017 to 2020. From 2019 to Spring 2020 Josue Puente worked for the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at UTRGV as the Graduate Research Assistant for Project SSTARC assisted in the creation of culturally relevant content

supported by Texas Education Standard as well as digitize any and all content coming out of Project SSTARC and placing it in a website he helped create.

Dr. Nicolas García is an Assistant Principal at John Marshall High School in San Antonio, TX. He earned a BA in Communications from Angelo State, and an MA in Communication Arts from the University of the Incarnate Word. He earned his PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of Texas at San Antonio and researched the experiences of Mexican American Studies teachers at the high school level. He believes in the power of Ethnic Studies Courses and the value the course(s) offer all students.

Anthony Gonzales is a Chicano teacher, activist, and community organizer born in San Angelo, TX, currently residing in San Antonio, TX. Gonzales received a BA in History with a concentration in Social Studies from the University of Texas at San Antonio. For the past seven years, he has taught US History at John Marshall High School in San Antonio, for which he received teacher of the year for the 2018-2019 school year. Gonzales was the first teacher to teach Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies at Marshall, one of the original NISD schools to incorporate MAS. He also established and sponsors the Mexican American Studies Student Association, the first of its kind at Marshall.

Elizabeth D. Rivas is a native of San Antonio, Texas. She earned a Ph.D. in Culture, Literacy, and Language from the University of Texas in San Antonio, a Master of Arts in Bicultural-Bilingual Studies from UTSA, and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from St. Mary's University. She works with the Mexican American Civil Rights Institute in promoting the contributions of Mexican American and Chicano activists. She is a lecturer for UTSA where she teaches courses that center on Mexican American Studies and ethnological theory. She currently is a social studies instructional coach for Harlandale ISD in San Antonio.

Alexa M. Proffitt, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Practice at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is a former middle grades educator in San Antonio, TX. Her current research and teaching focuses on anticolonial curriculums and pedagogies as the foundation for preparing future middle grades educators. She engages in place-based pedagogies that challenge colonial narratives and honor the history of San Antonio and greater Texas. She works to prepare educators that

fundamentally understand that ethnic studies is foundational to teaching and learning in all classrooms.

Antonia Alderete was born and raised in San Antonio, TX. She is a Chicana feminist who currently teaches 6th and 7th grade English Language Arts. Her goal as an educator is to make an impact in my students' lives through diverse curriculums and pedagogies. She wants to challenge their way of thinking and have students develop their own criticality. She believes it is important that each student feels heard and represented in their education and knows that they can change the future.

Megan Villa is a current middle school English Language Arts and Reading teacher in San Antonio, TX, and a graduate student at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Born in the West Side of San Antonio, she has experienced the effects of Title I education and hopes to give her current and future students an education that will be meaningful to them. Her teaching is informed by anticolonial methodologies, Critical Race Theory, and other critical pedagogies. Megan hopes to continue engaging in research and engage in collective efforts towards educational justice.

Violetta Villarreal is a current law school student at Thurgood Marshall School of Law. She uses her background as a pre-service middle school teacher in her preparation as a lawyer. She seeks to work in educational law as a way of working towards educational equity for all students.

Kristel Andrea Orta-Puente is a Moody Graduate Fellow at Southern Methodist University seeking a Ph.D. in American History. Orta-Puente is a non-traditional first generation scholar that began her educational journey at San Antonio College with an Associates in Photography. She went on earning her undergraduate degree as a Mellon Fellow at The University of Texas-San Antonio with a Bachelor of Arts in Mexican American Studies, graduating with Highest Departmental Honors. She earned her Master's in History from The University of Texas at San Antonio as a Nau History Fellow. Her area of study is San Antonio history and the documentation of cultural bearers and San Antonio artists. Her interest also includes film, intersectional feminism, activism, the borderlands, fashion and Rasquachismo. She is also a professional photographer, rasquacha artist and community historian that intersects her work in the community with her work as a scholar to build bridges between those who produce knowledge and the community that are the source of that knowledge.

Alpha Martínez-Suárez is a Ph.D. Fellow in the Culture, Literacy, and Language at UTSA. Two-time Academy for Teacher Excellence Presidential Distinguished Scholar, and 2020's Golden Feather awardee. Martínez-Suárez is the founder of the Focused Library for the Dreamers' Center at UTSA. Her areas of research interests include the teacher as social justice advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse populations as well as teacher education to language teacher candidates on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI). She holds a B.H. in International Relations from the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas in México, and a MA in Bicultural and Bilingual Teaching Education, graduated with honors