

Becas para Aztlán: Personal Narrative

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Becas para Aztlán Narrative

Abstract: This narrative examines the writer's participation in the Becas para Aztlán Scholarship Program, a Mexican government program that provided scholarships to Chicano students to study in Mexican universities. It discusses how a group of Chicano graduate university students, many who have ended up in leadership positions and careers as university professors, doctors of medicine, teachers, and several other professions, banded together to form a strong enduring union. It also recounts the author's experiences in this international pedagogical journey and how this cultural, sociolinguistic, political and academic binational experience influenced and strengthened his professional teaching career with his own students over the last 34 years. It also details the writer's participation and fortification of thirty years of Spanish language high school newspaper journalism in South San Diego. It explains how his students' and his contribution to the maintenance of a Spanish primary language news, culture and literary publication, *La Voz Azteca* newspaper has been a part of additive bilingualism and established a formidable front against subtractive schooling policies. The narrative suggests that this form of transformational resistance has perhaps found a meaningful way into a part of the history of the struggle for Chicano/Mexican/Latino expression.

Key words: Becas para Aztlán, Chicano, *La Voz Azteca*, Additive Bilingualism, Primarily Language Education, Bilingual Education

Introduction

When I was finishing my Spanish BA at the University of Colorado I heard about an academic scholarship program named *Becas para Aztlán*. I don't quite remember exactly how I found out about the *Becas para Aztlán* Program, perhaps it was via a poster or flyer at the University. Most likely I saw the announcement at the Chicano Studies Department. I recall that it caught my interest and it motivated me to study in Mexico one more time. The *Becas para Aztlán* Program was an agreement between *El Partido Raza Unida* and the Mexican government. It was administered by CONACYT, which stands for *el Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología* (National Council of Science and Technology). The goal of the *Becas para Aztlán* Program was to offer Chicano post graduate students an opportunity to study at a university in Mexico, and then in turn return and help out the community.

My interest in the *Becas* program was also to continue learning and studying about my ancestors' and family's primary culture and language in Mexico. I was fascinated about the opportunity to live and attend a university in Mexico City, one of the largest cities in Latin America and in the world. I also wanted to be able to culturally, linguistically, and academically strengthen my work skills for the future career that I would later go into.

I was born near the old United States-Mexico border in Pueblo, Colorado. This part of Colorado was taken by the United States from Mexico in 1848. From Pueblo you can see to the north the majestic *El Capitán* which Anglos later renamed *Pikes Peak*. To the south you can see *las Huajatollas*, which Spanish speakers later renamed *los Picos Españoles* and the English speakers call the *Spanish Peaks*. Also to the southwest you can see *Cuerno Verde* named after a *Comanche* warrior, which English speakers call *Green Horn Mountain*.

The majority of people in Pueblo and Southern Colorado are Chicanos and there is a very strong cultural connection with Northern New Mexico. One of the sayings that I like about the city of Pueblo is, “*Yo soy de Pueblo y donde quiera que me lleve el pueblo voy*”.

I did not speak Spanish as fluently as many of the other *Becarios* (*Becas para Aztlán* Students) did. My great grandparents came to the United States when my grandparents were small children. My *abuelitos* migrated from the states of *Guanajuato*, *Michoacán*, *Jalisco*, and *Zacatecas*, after the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution, which left many people dead and caused many more to migrate to the U.S. between 1910 and 1930. I say migrate because they and other undocumented workers, refugees, and immigrants from Latin America moved north, and continue moving because of an exploitive international economy that doesn't respect borders, causes wars, and creates extreme poverty and violence that forces people to leave or flee their homeland. This process then refuses to let them in or kicks them out of the country when their labor is no longer needed for its economy. Many politicians and others, especially the current president of the United States, use undocumented workers and refugees as scapegoats and as a distraction for the country's economic problems.

My great grandparents ended up settling in Pueblo, Colorado. My grandparents on my mom's side were very bilingual and my parents were also bilingual with their English language skills being more dominant. My grandparents on my father's side spoke Spanish but not English. My brothers, sisters and I grew up speaking predominantly English with little comprehension of Spanish. So I was very motivated about studying and learning more Spanish in Mexico as a participant in the Becas para Aztlán Program.

Viaje al Sur

This was not the first time I had been to Mexico to study, it was my second. While I was an undergraduate at the University of Colorado I had the opportunity to take classes in Chicano Studies, Latin American Studies, and Spanish. I was also fortunate enough to take classes for two semesters in Spanish, Mexican history, culture and anthropology at the University of Veracruz in Xalapa.

The great majority of the students who participated in that program were Chicanos from Colorado, perhaps 20 to 25. Living and studying in Xalapa was a great experience as it was very different culturally and geographically from other areas in Mexico I had visited. Xalapa is very green, has a subtropical climate, and it seems like it is always raining. At times it's very foggy as if the clouds float down to hug the earth.

The first time I went to Mexico was in 1976. I started my journey by traveling to Holly, Colorado to meet with a friend I had met at the University of Colorado, Estanislao, whose parents were going to drive us to Ciudad Juárez in order to catch a train to Mexico City. Once there we would meet up with the rest of the University of Colorado students and professors so that we could ultimately travel to Xalapa, Veracruz. We were running late to our destination of Ciudad Juárez. After a stop in Northern New Mexico we hurried to catch our train. I remember Stanley's parents were jamming to the songs of Freddie Martínez as we rushed to and through the border to embark on the more than a day's train ride to the Mexican Capital. We barely made it to the station just before the train departed.

It was an eye-opening experience to be initiated to Mexico by this method of travel. We saw Mexico and its countryside from a point of view that cannot always be seen from the Mexican roads and highways. It was the best way of being immersed into Mexican culture and language. As we arrived to the outskirts of Mexico City we could see the hustle and bustle of people starting their day and we also observed many factories from the train. That one experience has inspired me to hopefully do something similar across a good part of India, China, South America and perhaps parts of Africa.

The second time I went to study in Mexico with the Becas para Aztlán Program I traveled by plane. I recall that it was raining and the song "Reloj" was playing in the taxi that I took to the hotel where we would meet with other Becas para Aztlán students. This trip from the airport to the hotel made me realize how immense and important the urban area of Mexico City was, to not only Latin America, but also to the Northern Hemisphere and to the world. This could equally be said of the Mexican people and their culture.

Mexico City is located in the Valley of Mexico approximately a mile and a half above sea level. Many mountains such as Popocatepétl and Iztaccíhuatl, active volcanoes that are over 18,000 and 17,000 feet, respectively, surround it. Mexico City has a very high demographic density. It is not like the northern Mexican Cities of Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez in the sense that there are many more people per square mile in Mexico City. The hustle and bustle of the city is felt for all of the daylight hours and for a good part of the night. Cars, busses, taxis and combis (commuter vans) are everywhere in this very vibrant city. Even though, the Metro (subway system or rapid transit system) is extremely overcrowded, it is very efficient and fast, and it allowed us to travel all over the city.

Becas para Aztlán Orientation

Deciding to live and study in Mexico City in the Becas para Aztlán Program was an opportunity to continue on an incredible educational experience in Mexico. This second time I went to Mexico I met up with a good-sized group of Chicano students, perhaps there were 20 to 25 Becarios. What was different about this group of students was that this time there were Chicanos from many different parts of Aztlán such as Tejas, Califas, Nuevo Mexico, Colorado, Salt Lake, Detroit and other areas.

Upon arriving and attending the Becas para Aztlán orientation program I met several different Chicano students and there was an immediate sense of group solidarity. During the orientation we all found out where we would be studying to work on our postgraduate or medical degrees. It wasn't long before I discovered that I would be studying at the UNAM in Mexico City (La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México or National Autonomous University of Mexico). I was excited and academically motivated to attend classes there. Not only was the university highly respected in Mexico and Latin America, but it was also one of the largest in the Western Hemisphere.

During my stay in Mexico I felt pretty much at home. The people in Veracruz and Mexico City treated me very well. I knew that they did not consider me like a Mexican from Mexico but what I did perceive is that they saw Chicano students as having a shared Mexican history with them and they were genuinely very welcoming. Of course, I felt as a Chicano/Mexicano from the northern side of the border that mis compañeros Chicanos and I had chapters and events of history that were pertinent to the Chicano/Mexican population living and working in the United States. I never really felt like they saw us as gringos.

Participating in the Becas program, living with Chicano students and studying at the UNAM really made me feel and consider myself a Northern Latin American in the sense that most of the Chicano/Mexican population that lives and works in the United States in an area that is justifiably culturally, linguistically and at times politically the Northern most part of Latin America.

The education that I received from the Becas para Aztlán Program in Mexico, the United Mexican American Students Program (UMAS) and the Chicano and Latin American Studies Department in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Bilingual Programs at the

University of Texas at El Paso and San Diego State University all helped me see that my family and I are indigenous to this side of the planet as the majority of the Chicano/Mexican population residing in North America is. I also recognized that as a Chicano I am an American, not because I am a U.S. citizen or because I reside within the boundaries of the United States, but because I live in the Américas along with all the people from Tierra del Fuego in Southern Argentina and Chile to the Bering Strait in the north.

Participating in these programs also enlightened my understanding that on our side of the world, Americans are not just white U.S. citizens. There are two continents in the Americas inhabited by many different peoples who have many different cultures and speak many different languages and language varieties. I remember reading in Eduardo Galeano's "Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina" (The Open Veins of Latin America) a book read in Latin American Studies at the National University in Mexico City, a statement along the lines that due to colonization, economic and national subordination; ethnic groups, diverse linguistic speakers, and entire nations in the American continents lost the right to call themselves Americans. However, domination by certain nations on the American continents cannot take this away, as people from all over Latin America have risen up and are rising up with a democratic consciousness to state who they are, while demanding justice and equality, which are human rights, while at the same time refusing to be defined and denied by those who see it another way.

My feelings about Mexico actually did change from when I first arrived to Mexico City. The university experience was different from the first time around when I had gone to Veracruz. When I was in school in Xalapa the university educational experience was more of a study abroad program where many very good classes were set up for us. In addition each student in the program was placed to live with a host family. Any problems or academic questions that we had were taken care of by our University of Colorado professors. The Becas para Aztlán Program was a full integration into the Mexican university education system. Each one of us was pretty much on our own within the university systems. I believe the medical students were able to take some classes together. There was a lot of support among the Becarios (students who were participating in the grant program).

Aztlán in México

After our Becas para Aztlán Orientation was over, all of us Chicanos students were left on our own to find our housing and make ends meet with the monthly beca (grant) that we were awarded. Those of us that were to study in Mexico City banded together and moved into three different houses that were referred to as Casa Califas, Casa Ténis and Casa Aztlán. I ended up living in Casa Aztlán with 5 other Chicano Becas para Aztlán students.

There were a few married couples and other Becarios that sought out to live in different houses or apartments. There was also at least one generation of Becas para Aztlán students who were there before the generation of 79 when I arrived to Mexico D.F. (Distrito Federal). This group of veteran Chicano students was extremely helpful in making our transition out of suitcases, finding a place to live, and guiding us about what to expect from the soon to be imparted educational experience in the Mexican higher education system. I noted many

examples of solidarity among Becarios. They set an example for us to give back to our community not only in Mexico but also later on in life.

Several of our Chicano compañeros suggested having organizational meetings with the objective of creating solidarity and a united front when we had common problems. There was also a representative, Benito Orona, chosen to present and speak on behalf of the becarios when we had difficulties or concerns about our grants and educational necessities. In a certain way we became an international Chicano organization based in Mexico City. There was also someone who communicated with José Ángel Gutiérrez and his wife who were the principal persons who had set up our opportunity to study in Mexico.

Later on, Chicano students in Casa Aztlán lived in a cooperative way by solving common problems sharing chores, contributing for food, going to the mercado and cooking for one another. Politics in Mexico, the United States, Latin America and other parts of the world were often talked about and analyzed.

We lived in a really down to earth and receptive working class neighborhood that was very warm and helpful to us. Our most immediate neighbors, los Cabrera treated us as family. At times, when our lights went out in Tlalpan, the area of Mexico City that we lived in, they would help us by sharing their electrical connection and we would do the same when needed. They would also invite us to important family events and fiestas.

Several students went on to form and become part of a binational organization to study and come up with solutions to border and immigration struggles of the Mexican workers. A Mexican anthropologist, who studied the Chicano community in the U.S., and several Chicano Becarios, Roberto de Anda Moreno, Eric Romero and Carlos Quirino, established this program. It was called "Semanario Permanente de Estudios Chicanos y de Fronteras". All of these Chicano students went on to earn their doctoral degrees and are presently teaching at universities in the United States.

University Life

I decided to study Spanish Linguistics at the School of Philosophy and Letters at the UNAM in Mexico City. Other Becarios studied medicine, anthropology, international relations, political science, and other disciplines as well. The philosophical orientation of the program that I was in was for the most part focused on Spanish linguistics that studied the history and varieties of the language. I was exposed to literature that was pertinent to the studies of Mexican Spanish and the study of the origins of Spanish. In sociolinguistics I was exposed to the readings of some Mexican and European sociolinguists, studies of Mexican indigenous languages, and their influence in Spanish. We also learned about their struggles to have their languages and cultures valued and employed in the Mexican educational system.

I felt the Spanish Linguistics program met my needs in that it allowed me to study the Spanish language and its history in depth. There were classes that I took, such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics where the professors were much more progressive in their ideologies and perhaps swung more toward socialism and Marxism.

I also sat in on several Latin American Studies classes. In the UNAM, if the professor allowed you to do so, you could sit in the class as an "oyente." You would not receive credit for the class but it was super interesting to learn about Latin American history and culture. Being able to do this also opened up my eyes more to Latin America and the world. In another sense it allowed me an opportunity to observe the Mexican and Latin American viewpoint of the United States through the eyes of the Latin Americans.

The teachings and philosophies of Pablo Freire and critical pedagogy were also very influential at the time. When I sat in on Latin American studies classes they were definitely more progressive and ideals of Marxism were often employed. Some of the university and area names attested to the orientation of many of the students at the university such as the name of one of our university auditoriums, el Auditorio Che Guevarra. One of the biggest bookstores right off campus was named after the democratically elected socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende.

I think Marxism and socialism were central to social sciences at many Mexican universities at the time because of the recent influence of the Mexican student and political movements of the late 60s and also because of the great economic disparities among the Mexican people, Latin Americans, and other people around the world. Perhaps another factor contributing to this ideological focus was the Cuban Revolution, in spite of the U.S.'s economic strangle hold, and the triumph of a freely elected socialist government in Chile. At that time, the recent Nicaraguan Revolution and the conflicts in El Salvador were signs of transformations that were happening in Latin America. I also believe that Mexican universities in part wanted to better their country in a more economical and equitable way.

I really like the saying from one of the books I was exposed to while I was studying at the UNAM, "El camino se hace al andar" "You make your own way through life by positively moving forward." I had read this before in one of my literature classes in Spanish, it was written by Antonio Machado. There was also a book title that I saw as it was being used at the Mexican university called, "El hombre se hace a sí mismo," "Man Makes Himself." Basically, we are responsible for making changes and new roads toward economic and political liberation. What I understood from this is that although we may not be responsible for some of the negative and repressive situations that we are in, we must unite and struggle to get ourselves out of them.

In my university classes it was a very difficult challenge for me to understand, comprehend and to speak academic Mexican Spanish at the graduate level or undergraduate level for that matter. My linguistic and academic skills were not at that level in Spanish and I don't believe they were there in English yet either.

I also felt that my education in Mexico was different than what it had been in the United States. In the UNAM there was a lot more presentation and discussion work in class. This was unlike my undergraduate studies at the University of Colorado where I hardly had to speak in class at all. There was, at times, a different relationship among some Mexican professors and their students who would call you and other students, *compañero* and ask for your opinion. "Tú, ¿Qué opinas *compañero*?" "What's your opinion, *compañero*?" was frequently asked. It was also

notable that some instructors were very formal, even more so than in the U.S. At the university, where I studied, the classes were for the most part large to very large at the undergraduate level but much smaller at the graduate level. As part of my program at the UNAM I was required to take several undergraduate prerequisite classes.

I found the Mexican students friendly and helpful. Many times on the buses, even if they didn't know you, but had realized that you were a student, they would say "¿Me encargo de tus libros compañero?" "Can I help you with your books?" when you were standing and didn't have a seat. They would offer to help me with my classwork and were very curious about the life of Chicanos in the U.S.

Cultura Mexicana and Latinoamericana

Before I went to Mexico I was exposed to mostly música en español de Nuevo México, Colorado and Tejas. When I first started studying Spanish at the University of Colorado and I would go home to Pueblo during the weekends and vacations. At night I would tune the AM radio to hear Música Norteña and Ranchera that came from XEJ, la Ranchera de Monterrey, Radio Cañón from Ciudad Juárez, and La G Grande de Hermosillo, Sonora. These were/are powerful radio stations that can be heard at night from Northern Mexico. We also had a daytime Spanish language radio station in Pueblo, KAPI that would unfortunately go off at sundown. At events such as weddings, anniversaries, quinceañeras, and dances they would also play music in Spanish from northern New Mexico, Southern Colorado and Texas.

When I lived in Mexico I heard many different varieties of music in Spanish. Some of the kinds of music that I really hadn't listened to very much before were música tropical, música romántica, música andina, and música de protesta. In Mexico City there are many different types of radio stations with numerous genres of music. However, what I never heard on the radio stations in Mexico City was the Chicano music that I grew up with. Not only when I lived in Xalapa but also when I lived in Mexico City, we went several times to small clubs where we could listen to music from the Andes region of South America. In Veracruz Mexican and Chicano students would bring guitars to the fiestas.

During my first trip to Mexico I was exposed to la comida jarocho de Veracruz: plátanos fritos, frijoles negros, chayotes, gorditas, and a lot of pescado. In Mexico City I was exposed to many types of food, especially in the mercados, which had food from all over Mexico, especially, tropical fruits, vegetables and cheeses. There were many different types of tamales, tortas, and delicious foods that are not always found in the Southwestern U.S.

One of the places that I will always remember from living in and visiting many different parts of Mexico City was a stone sign in an area named Tlatelolco, which is also known as La Plaza de las Tres Culturas. It reads "El 13 de agosto de 1521, heroicamente defendido por Cuauhtémoc, cayó Tlatelolco en poder de Hernán Cortes. No fue triunfo ni derrota, fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo mestizo, que es el México de hoy." "On August 13, 1521 Tlatelolco, heroically defended by Cuauhtémoc, fell into the Hands of Hernán Cortés. It was not a triumph or a loss; it was the painfully beginning of the Mestizo people that is today's Mexico. I

thought this illustrated a piece of the history of colonization, oppression and fusion that we have passed through as a people.

Another of the lasting memories that I have of Mexican culture is the several times I was able to visit el Museo de Antropología e Historia (The Museum of Anthropology and History) in Chapultepec Park. This museum is an educating and amazing testimonial display of Mexican indigenous culture and history.

Benefits of Studying in the Becas para Aztlán Program

For me there were many benefits of living and studying in Mexico City and Veracruz. I would most definitely recommend to a young Chicano student to study like Becarios did in the Mexican universities with Mexicans and other international students. It is an eye and heart opening experience to see how the Mexican people live, work and study. The perspective of the United States is very different from the one that is propagated in the U.S. The importance of studying one's native culture and language is also a valuable experience, especially for students who are planning on working with Latinos in the U.S.

I felt that living in Mexico made my ethnic identity stronger. Before going to Mexico I identified as a Chicano. By living and studying there I definitely knew that I was a Chicano and at the same time a Mexicano who was born, lived, studied, and worked in the northern most part of Latin America. I remember one of the Chicano Becarios stating that when we say "Yo Soy Chicano" that it was a reaffirmation of not only our Mexican identity, culture, and history, but also of our Latin America identity, culture, and history. The brothers that I lived with also confirmed our Chicanismo on a daily basis by constantly expressing solidarity, hermandad, and by supporting each other in numerous ways.

While living in Mexico we also had a chance to travel to different areas and states. During my two stays in Mexico I was fortunate to have visited every Mexican state except for Baja California Sur and Tamaulipas. These journeys were amazing because I saw many different, aspects, cultures, peoples, and geographies of Mexico. It was an enriching educational experience to see how varied and diverse the culture is. In addition I was able to hear and appreciate many different indigenous languages in Mexico. Also as you travel and pay attention to all the different people in Mexico you realize how profound many of the economic disparities are.

Living in Mexico changed my opinion not only about Mexico but also about the United States. During the time that I was in Mexico, and before then, when I was in the United States I would hear about the Mexican Government's official opinion on different events. I didn't really hear the opinions of other political parties, students, indigenous people and the Mexican people in general. Living in Mexico was a true international educational experience. Studying with Mexican students, sharing a Chicano perspective, observing Mexico and the United States from a third point of view with other Chicano students was a very enlightening pedagogical opportunity.

Even though I had taken classes in Chicano Studies, Spanish language literature, and Latin American Studies, there was nothing more impactful than hearing the voices and opinions of the Mexican people in general and Mexican students about how they perceived the United

States, its people and Chicanos. I definitely felt that while living in Mexico, not as tourist but as international Chicano students that we not only saw but also experienced Mexico to a great extent as Mexicans did. Many times Mexicans would express that it was not the majority of people of the U.S. that were unjust but the political and economic system. Mexican students would go much further and point out how the capitalist system repressed poor people inside and outside of the U.S.

Likewise living in Casa Aztlán and being a student in the Becas para Aztlán Program has been very influential in my life. Just the opportunity to get to know, live with, and share experiences with Chicanos from many parts of Aztlán and the U.S. was perhaps more valuable than the formal educational experience. The unifying experience of Chicanos sharing narratives from many different areas was also one of the most important learning occurrences of my time spent in Mexico.

Regreso a Aztlán

After returning to the U.S., I was most definitely able to use the education I had received in Mexico. Even though I was able to finish all my course work toward my degree in Spanish Linguistics at the UNAM, I was not successful at finishing my master's thesis. I think if I had used a more focused approach, had a clearer objective to what I was investigating and better research preparation on my part, I may have finished. Nevertheless I was able to apply this education to further studies and to my work in the future. I thought the Becas para Aztlán experience and program were invaluable as I believe I was able to apply my Spanish language skills, critical education, and better understanding of Chicanismo to what I began studying and teaching in the U.S.

I have come to believe that education takes place not only at school in a formal situation but also outside of school in non-formal situations; at home with the family and in the community. Now as a teacher I encourage students to be aware of and to celebrate their culture, multiculturalism, and above all their history.

Before going to Mexico City I had never really taught classes with the exception of observing a few classes in an elementary school when I was a student at the University of Colorado, so for the most part it was a first time experience in teaching for me. The initial teaching experience that I acquired in Mexico City helped me get started in pedagogy. More importantly it made me aware of the great respect that the Mexican people have for education and teachers.

When I decided to become a teacher it was in part because I felt I owed something to my community and to my family and the people who had made it possible to work in the profession. My parents, my older brothers, my sisters, and my padrinos encouraged me to do well in school. In addition I was motivated by the UMAS Program (United Mexican American Students) to attend college. I was also strongly influenced to continue my education by the academic discipline and commitment of the other Chicano Becario students in the program. If it weren't for all of these people and their positive influences and motivation I may not have ever gone to nor finished college.

What really got me hooked on teaching and working together with high school students was the high I would feel when I saw young people and adults get excited when they would learn something new. I also felt very good when my adult, high school students, parents and other people made me realize and feel how respectful it is to be a teacher. I learned in the Becas para Aztlán Program and in some of my other studies as well that we as teachers could help make positive changes in a society that is frequently unjust to so many people.

Education, is not just about numbers, nouns, literature, historical information and lately, test scores; it is also about character education (from the cultures of all people) values and motivation to do well not only for one's self, but to turn around and help others as well. Education requires being passionate about what we teach, making changes in our lives, our communities, our nation, the world, and then going on to encourage this in our students.

The Becas para Aztlán Program and its participants have influenced me to do this and that experience has made a lasting impression on my personal and professional life. Living and studying with Chicano and Mexican students was an incredible pedagogical journey. Even though it was difficult for me to fully participate and understand some of my studies at the time, I believe they had a latent effect on my journey back to Aztlán.

A short time after I returned to Colorado, I decided to move to the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez border area where I received my Texas Teaching Certificate in Spanish and English Language Development (ELD) with a focus on Computers in Bilingual Education at the University of Texas at El Paso. From 1985 to 1986, I was fortunate and very honored to receive a scholarship and become a part of the Project MIBE Program (Micro Computers in Bilingual Education) at UTEP. One of the projects I was most proud of was a program I had created about Cuauhtémoc, the last Emperor of the Aztecs, who never gave up the struggle against the Spaniards.

My goal of working with linguistic and ethnic minorities was amplified by the Becas para Aztlán Program and it continued when I moved to the San Diego/Tijuana border area where I have been an educator at the high school level for 30 years in South San Diego and Chula Vista. The two high schools where I have taught, Montgomery and Chula Vista, are located very close to the border and are predominately Chicano/Mexicano with an additional mixture of different ethnic and linguistic groups. I taught ELD and Spanish for Spanish Speakers for several years and then continued to teach Spanish for Native Speakers, Graphic Design, Multimedia and Computer Art. I also had the privilege of being the advisor of La Voz Azteca Spanish language newspaper for 19 years.

In San Diego I obtained a Bilingual Certificate of Competence for the California Public Schools in 1993. At Montgomery High School I was the Bilingual Tutoring Center Coordinator for several years. I was the Bilingual Resource Teacher & Student/Teacher/Parent Meeting Coordinator for Bilingual, ELD Teachers, Students and El Comité de Padres Bilingües for two years. From 1990 to 1997 I prepared and guided more than 280 students to take and successfully pass (more than 95%) the AP Spanish Language Exam. In the 2001- 2002 school year some of my former students who went on to study at the University of California at San Diego, UCSD nominated me for an Outstanding Teacher Recognition Award. In May of 2004, I received a

Leadership in Bilingual Award from the San Diego County Office of Education. In 2008, I was very honored to be selected by my fellow teachers as Teacher of the Year in 2008.

In 1993, I started working on a Masters Degree in Policy Studies in Bilingual Education but did not finish until 2016 when the program had become the Dual Language and English Learner Education in Critical Literacy and Social Justice. This was an amazing program whose professors and students motivated and guided me to finish my Masters Project, which was a longitudinal study of La Voz Azteca Spanish language newspaper. In that study I sought out to demonstrate the positive effects that participating in a journalism program in language one, Spanish in this case for the majority of La Voz Azteca newspaper students, has had on the academic, linguistic, and social lives of the high school students who have taken the course. It also sought to examine its historical place in the history of the Chicano/Mexican population that lives in the United States. In addition the study examined data and employed both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods and then triangulating them in order to determine the degree of success and resistance the Spanish language high school newspaper had had. In addition, it looked into some of the positive effects that the primary language and culture journalism experience had on the lives and careers of its past students. I also attempted to answer how the Spanish language newspaper experience, transformational resistance, and critical group conscious impacted/transformed students.

La Voz Azteca Newspaper Background

The high school student newspaper in Spanish, La Voz Azteca, and its talented student staff over the years is something that I am very proud of. Chicano students at Montgomery High School started the Spanish language newspaper 30 years ago. The opportunity to become the advisor for the newspaper from 1996 until 2015 was and is an important experience in primary culture and language expression for both the students and myself.

My great love of newspapers and maps had happened before I had gone to Mexico. My first journalism experience took place when I was a member of the ninth grade journalism class. My interest in newspapers continued at the University of Colorado where I had the opportunity to read Chicano Movement, U.S. national, and world newspapers. When I lived in Mexico I also enjoyed buying and reading Mexican newspapers and collecting maps. So I was very honored and proud to work with students and guide them through an additional 19 years of publications. Even though I was not the advisor of La Voz Azteca from 1988 to 1995 nor from the 2015-16 school year until now, students of mine from English Language Development and/or Spanish Speakers, and Computer Art Classes have been in every generation of La Voz Azteca Newspaper from 1989 until 2016.

La Voz Azteca was not created by the school district or the school itself. La Voz Azteca was initially created as part of transformational resistance to begin publishing a Spanish primary language news, culture and literary publication. Montgomery High School opened in 1971 and the English language newspaper class began publishing during the 70's. The only newspaper published at the high school in 1986 was in English. In that same year when the student founder of La Voz Azteca, Alberto Mendoza, brought the idea of a newspaper in Spanish to life, he was

not given permission to do so. In 1987 when he became the incoming Associated Student Body Vice President, the idea moved forward. Persistently and with conviction the same student, Mendoza successfully started “La Voz Azteca” Spanish language newspaper in 1988 in the English language journalism class. Mendoza, along with a small group of students begin in Spanish to address concerns, news and cultural topics pertaining to the Latino community that were not always being expressed in the mainstream English newspaper. His next steps were to recruit other students to join the newspaper. The first edition was published in 1988. For Alberto, it was the lessons that he learned during the time he fought to get the paper published that helped shape the rest of his life. The newspaper then became an independent class and was advised by a caring and wonderful teacher, Ms. Jan Glenn.

Additionally, the initial goal of La Voz Azteca Newspaper was also to afford Spanish-speaking students an opportunity to develop their journalistic skills in their native language. This allowed them an opportunity to not be shut out of this field of study because many of them were beginning ELD students and as emerging bilingual students they hadn’t acquired English well enough yet to write in an all-English journalism class. In addition there is rapidly growing need for journalists in Spanish. This is also a way for them to prepare for a career in media by studying and practicing journalism in high school which would help them prepare to enroll in journalism courses in college. This is something they would not likely be able to do if they had not participated in Spanish high school newspaper class. The newspaper was also borne out of the desire of students that wanted to express themselves, their culture, develop their literacy skills, and express themselves in Spanish. With this opportunity they were able to further develop and establish a platform of not only a road to higher literacy in Spanish, but also biliteracy in Spanish and English. La Voz Azteca has been a part of a critical bicultural education that has helped increase effective education to many immigrant children in their native language.

The students at Montgomery High are known as Aztecs. The use of the word *Voz*, in the name of the newspaper signifies the struggle of Chicano/Mexican students to have their voices heard and read about in their native language, Spanish. Over the last three decades La Voz Azteca has helped awaken the bicultural and multicultural expression of Montgomery High School students. The creation and production of La Voz Azteca Spanish language newspaper has continued to this very day as the bilingual and bicultural student opinions of these high school journalism students have not been silenced in thirty years.

The need for a Spanish language newspaper in the late 1980’s, and at this present time, was still very similar to what the need was in the 1960’s and 1970’s during the Chicano Movement. The existence and tradition of the newspaper is not only a manifestation of a sense of cultural pride but also a clear sign that bilingual and bicultural people are just expressing their needs, wants and feelings in one of the major languages of the world and in one of the languages that symbolizes and reflects their sociolinguistic reality.

In addition, through reviewing the history of Mexican/Chicano literary expression, it has been shown that even after the end of the Mexican/American War in 1848, the voice of Latinos in what is now part of the United States was never silenced and that La Voz Azteca high school

newspaper is part of that continued manifestation. Furthermore, even though this Spanish language newspaper is one of the few periodic high school newspapers in the country, after nearly three decades of publication it has perhaps found its way into a part of the history of the struggle for Chicano/Mexican/Latino expression in the larger context of the history of this community living in the United States.

In San Diego County, California the number of Latino students is 48 percent. In the Sweetwater Union High School District the percentage is 75. At Montgomery High School, where *La Voz Azteca* newspaper is published, the percentage of Latino students is 86%. 27 percent are classified as English Language Learners.

La Voz Azteca newspaper has been a part of additive bilingualism. There have been approximately 700 students who have taken this Spanish language journalism class and have created and successfully published more than 118 newspapers since its establishment. *La Voz Azteca*, along with Montgomery High School's Spanish for Spanish Speaker's six-level program, its high success rate of students, who pass the Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Literature exam, its M.E.Ch.A. program, Chicanos Studies (No longer offered), and its bilingual classes have established a formidable front against subtractive schooling policies.

Some of the awards and successes *La Voz Azteca* has had have been: The students of *La Voz Azteca* staff have never missed a publication over the last 30 years. In 2000, *La Voz Azteca* Newspaper was selected to receive one of the Best Practices Student Showcase Selection Awards by the San Diego County Regional Chamber of Commerce. In 1999, 2001, 2002, 2015 and 2018, *La Voz Azteca* was awarded first place in newspaper competition at the Del Mar County Fair and also the now named San Diego Country Fair. The newspaper was featured in the San Diego Union Tribune in April of 1989 and on Univisión Television in 2006.

At Montgomery High School there have been a more than 129 students who have received the state Seal of Biliteracy. Thirteen of these students have also been members of *La Voz Azteca* Newspaper. The state Seal of Biliteracy, which was initiated in 2012 is an award given by a school, district, or county office of education that recognizes students who have studied and achieved proficiency in two or more languages by the time they graduate from high school. The Seal of Biliteracy encourages students to strive for biliteracy and recognizes their accomplishment of high-level mastery or two or more languages. In addition there have been dozens of students who have passed either the Advanced Placement Spanish Language Exam and/or the Advanced Placement Literature Exam.

Some of our past students have gone on to work in the field of journalism. For example, Alberto Mendoza is now the Executive Director of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. Humberto Gurmilán, was the Sports Director/Sports Reporter of Telemundo in San Diego and presented the sports on TV every weekday evening and night. He is also a college journalism instructor at San Diego Community College. Raquel Márquez was a writer for the San Diego Union Tribune's *Enlace*; Vanessa Nevárez was the editor for the nationally awarded *Southwestern Sun* and Luisa Sifuentes has been a writer for one of our local Spanish speaking

community newspapers. In addition there are many other students who have gone on to have successful professions and careers.

The production of the newspaper is actually challenging the dominant ideology about language and self-expression. The organization and creation of *La Voz Azteca Newspaper* perhaps then can be considered as a collective discourse of the students to confirm their student lives and histories and their determination to express them.

Since the passage of Proposition 227, which limited access to effective and additive multilingual educational programs, it has been much more difficult for non English speaking & multicultural children to receive a socially just education. It may be argued that *La Voz Azteca* newspaper is also part of a process of emancipatory literacy and a three-decade old model of bilingual enrichment, which has been motivated by students and staff to maintain its publication through different forms of transformational resistance as there have been several challenges to maintaining the newspaper throughout the years. Just recently the *La Voz Azteca* and M.E.Ch.A murals along with many other murals were painted over without taking into account their history and that of their student creators.

Many of the things that *La Voz Azteca* students have done can be looked at through critical pedagogy in the way they have united, challenged and given their own viewpoint of their school, community, nation, and world. The students have also promoted equity by keeping and promoting their own Mexican, Chicano and Latino culture. In addition they have also covered and promoted multiculturalism in their journalistic coverage. *LVA* hasn't been just about a newspaper in Spanish. The newspaper students have promoted mutual respect and solidarity among students by stressing that all school cultures and ethnicities matter. It has gone beyond celebration and solidarity. This was truly an incredible journey for me as an educator as I know I learned many things right along with the students.

Finally, I knew that I would most likely not be able to continue being the newspaper advisor for another 19 years so I encouraged a super effective bilingual teacher to continue with this important task. The newspaper advisor is now Mrs. Sonia Perkins an incredible motivating teacher who is nationally recognized for leading students to success in Spanish Language and Literature Advanced Placement Exams.

New Challenges

Starting with the academic 2016-17 school year, I decided to embark upon a new challenge and became a member of the Chula Vista High School Learning Center, which is part of the Sweetwater Union High School District Alternative Education Program. This is an independent study program where students are offered the opportunity to recover credits toward graduation or to study in a non-traditional academic environment. Students arrive to the Learning Center for many reasons. No matter how students come to join our center they are helped and guided through a positive experience.

The learning environment that I now work in is made unique by the dedicated and caring team that I have the privilege of being a member of. The staff consists of our coordinator teacher, Roberto Chaidez, our registrar, Rosa Enríquez, our counselor, Kevin Smith, our Special

Education Teacher, Martha Calderón, our teacher aide, Alexandra Brown and myself. I am very honored and fortunate to work with this team.

What makes this staff unique is how they welcome and take into account the whole student, inside and outside of the classroom. The academic environment is a safe haven for these students, no matter what difficulties they have encountered, walk of life they have chosen or disability that they may have. We get to know and involve their families as much as we can. We deal with the whole student and not just the academic one. Once they belong here, they belong here for life as they are prepared with not just academic goals, but life goals as well for their transition into adulthood, their college studies or their career technical educations. Our counselor makes sure every student is taken care of as best as possible with the finances of post high school education. Student graduates come back after they graduate seeking advice, recommendations and informing staff how they are doing. In our counselor's words, students are introduced to themselves as being capable of achieving greatness, as many arrive not seeing their own brilliance.

Social justice is a big part of the education students are provided here. Disparities in our society also challenge the team with the task of teaching about the falsehoods that are propagated frequently by some politicians along with their misrepresentations of ethnic minorities in the media. Students are encouraged to become aware of and positively transform the divide and conquer attitude of the present U.S. administration. Some of our students have had run-ins with the law, drugs and violence and are encouraged to not become part of the mass incarcerations and modern day slave labor in this country's prisons. It is really a privilege for me to work with this group of educators in this challenging pedagogical struggle.

Éxito del Programa Becas para Aztlán

The Becas para Aztlán Program and its Chicano becario graduate students have made an impact on education and social justice issues for forty years. Participating in the Becas para Aztlán program in the Chicano Becario students' primary language and culture has demonstrated many positive academic, cultural and linguistic positive effects on the social and academic lives of the students who have taken and participated in this international didactic experience. Becario students have shown what can happen with the success they have had by studying abroad in an international educational program.

Many Chicano Becario students have ended up in leadership positions and careers as university professors with doctoral degrees, doctors of medicine, teachers, and several other areas as well.

I feel it can also be said that the Becas para Aztlán program has been part of transformational resistance of Chicano students and their education. Also I believe the program has contributed to additive multiculturalism and multilingualism. It has established a formidable front against subtractive schooling policies at the graduate level. The education of students in Mexico and the uniting of them abroad have established a platform of not only a road to higher literacy in Spanish but also to biliteracy in both Spanish and English.

It has been demonstrated that by creating a space and opportunity that Becas para Aztlán Students were inspired to take very positive directions in their education and careers, which have shaped the future of many of their students, patients, coworkers, and all of those that they have influenced by their collective struggle for social justice.

In addition, one of the most incredible experiences I have also had has been working in unison with my predominately Chicano/Mexicano bilingual students, which also includes many other multicultural and multilingual students, for the last 30 years in South San Diego and Chula Vista. What an incredibly talented and multiculturally gifted over 5,000 students I have had the pleasure of working with. They have given me tremendous energy to continue in the pedagogical field of primary language and cultural expression.

Being able to do this has also been a direct result of the continuing impression and influence that the Becas para Aztlán Program and living in Casa Aztlán has had on me. With the support and influence from the compañeros I lived with and other Chicano Becario students that I met along the way, I have been motivated to continue being a high school teacher. I would highly recommend that an international program like the Becas para Aztlán Program be continued or initiated again in order to allow university Chicano students to have the great benefits of experiencing a national and international gathering of Chicano students abroad in Mexico, in the homeland of their relatives and ancestors, so that they too may embark upon a Mexican/Chicano transformational pedagogical journey.

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