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Guadalupe Domínguez Chávez

2014

**The Dissertation Committee for Guadalupe Domínguez Chávez**

**Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**La identidad y la practica ‘entrelazadas’: Towards a  
Humanizing Pedagogy**

Committee:

---

Cinthia S. Salinas, Supervisor

---

María E. Fránquiz, Co-Supervisor

---

Ramón A. Martínez

---

Haydeé M. Rodríguez

---

Lucila Ek

---

Katherina A. Payne

**La identidad y la práctica ‘entrelazadas’: Towards a  
Humanizing Pedagogy**

by

**Guadalupe Domínguez Chávez, B.S.; M.Ed.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of the University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2014

## **Dedication**

To my students and their families, who strengthened my resolve  
that the fight for a quality education is worth the effort.

To my husband, Rogelio who reminded me to stay focused  
and to my amazing, supportive, children,

Roger, Anthony and Veronica, whose loving encouragement gave me wings.

To my sisters, Susana, Alma, Janie and my brother Frank, for believing in me,  
even when I did not.

*Pero especialmente para mi mami (gracias por las velitas) y para mi Daddy*

*a quién extraño mucho, pero sé que ha estado conmigo, apoyandome,*

*terminando este viaje juntos.*

*¡Lo hicimos Daddy!*



## Acknowledgements

The road has been long and often a struggle, but some exceptional people have crossed my path along the way. I thank them for their support and belief in me. They are my inspiration.

To my committee members, Drs. Ramón Martínez, Lucila Ek, Katherina Payne and last, but by no means least, Dra. Haydeé Rodríguez, who has been my shining light. I thank you all for your time, your support and patience! I want to especially thank my committee chairs, Dean María E. Fránquiz for graciously mentoring and guiding me through light and dark times. I have great admiration and respect for her, and will always be grateful for her guidance and mentorship. Dr. Cinthia Salinas, for whom I am at a loss for words to describe all that her generosity has provided me, I admire her knowledge and dedication. I am in awe of her quick mind and bigger than life sense of humor, my mentor and my friend.

My fellow PhD friends, Irene Garza, with whom I crossed the finish line and together grabbed the golden ring; Corina Zavala who kept reminding me que *¡sí se puede!* My beautiful allies, *mis comadres*, for whom I hold a special place in my heart, we shared ideas, goals, strategies and above all strength! Anissa Wicktor Lynch, Christian Zuñiga y Kiyomi Colgrove for their feedback, support and friendship. You held my hand when I needed it, provided tissues when necessary, but most of all you nourished my faith—I've never been alone on this trek. *Ustedes saben*, I'm here for you. *¡Las quiero mucho amigas!*

To Carol Dusek, my children's kindergarten teacher, and later my colleague, who taught me that learning can lead to transformation. Thom McNeil, thank you for gently nudging me into graduate school, for your support and for generously sharing of your time along the way. Rob Ramage, another one of my favorite people...you know...we will always have algebra! To all my family and friends who have supported and encouraged me along the way, I love you all!

# **La identidad y la practica ‘entrelazadas’: Towards a Humanizing Pedagogy**

by

Guadalupe Domínguez Chávez, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

SUPERVISORS: Cinthia S. Salinas, María E. Fránquiz

Abstract: The purpose of this dissertation study was two-fold. First, the study explored how personal and professional experiences shaped three *Latina* bilingual *Maestras*' identities. Secondly, this qualitative study further explored how histories framed a meaning of pedagogy for the *Maestras*. Presented in three case studies, there were four themes that emerged across the case studies: First, taking on the role of advocate; second, becoming a leader through professional development; third, culturally relevant practices accomplished within a humanizing pedagogy; and fourth, reflexivity for critical consciousness.

Data were manually coded, themed and analyzed to answer the following research questions: 1) How do *Latina* teachers position their identities in the figured worlds of their bilingual classroom and school campus? 2) What are the challenges and affordances of these positionings? 3) How do *Latina* teachers' experiences influence professional identity and inform (or not) the (re)conceptualization of pedagogical

practices? Theoretical lenses framing this dissertation study include figured worlds and situated identities, critical race theory/Latina critical theory and sociocultural theory to analyze the data gathered through interviews, narratives, classroom and field observations, classroom and teacher artifacts, lessons and informal conversations collected over nine months of study. This dissertation study attempted to understand the findings as complex *componentes entrelazados* (interwoven components).

The data were gathered in the classrooms and school campuses of three elementary schools across two school districts in two urban South Central Texas cities. The results provided six findings and they are 1) Tracing the positioning of Maestras, 2) Identifying opportunities of authoring self, 3) *¿Qué es ser maestra?* What does it mean to be a maestra? 4) Identity, culture and language: Racialized notions, 5) Taking on the role of advocate, and finally 6) Learning from lived experiences.

The research revealed how *Maestras'* positionings challenged structures of oppression in school and education in general and how opportunities for critical dialogue can support development of a more critical *concientización* (consciousness) and perspective, viewed through a social justice lens.

## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	v
Abstract .....	vii
List of Tables .....	xiii
List of Figures .....	xiv
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Background .....	3
Problem Statement .....	3
My Journey .....	4
Statement of Purpose .....	7
Research Questions .....	10
Significance of Study .....	10
Overview of the Study .....	11
Summary .....	12
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .....	15
Introduction .....	15
Brief History of Bilingual Education .....	16
Bilingual Teachers: Ideological and Pedagogical Views .....	19
La pedagogía humanizante (Humanizing Pedagogy) and Social Justice .....	23
Theoretical Framework .....	28
Sociocultural Theory .....	28
Figured Worlds and Situated Identities .....	31
Understanding Through Critical Race Theory and Latina Critical Race Theory .....	34
Summary .....	36

Chapter Three: Methodology .....	37
Introduction .....	37
Research Design.....	37
Case Study Design .....	38
The Settings .....	39
The Participants .....	42
<i>Natasha</i> .....	43
<i>Clarisa</i> .....	44
<i>Esmé</i> .....	45
Data Collection .....	46
Interviews.....	47
Teacher Narratives .....	48
Participant Observations .....	49
Fieldnotes .....	49
Data Analysis .....	51
Summary .....	52
Chapter Four: Findings. <i>Maestras'</i> Path for Social Justice.....	54
Introduction .....	54
<i>La Maestra</i> Natasha .....	56
Theme One: Taking on the Role of Advocate .....	58
Knowing the Community.....	58
Recognizing the Cultural Wealth and Cultural Knowledge of <i>Familias</i> .....	60
Theme Two: Becoming a Leader Through Professional Development .....	67
Theme Three: Using Culturally Relevant Practices Within a Humanizing Pedagogy .....	72
Cultural Intuitiveness Guiding Professional Choices .....	76
Offering Students Opportunities for Critical Encounters .....	78
Theme Four: Reflexivity for Critical Consciousness .....	81

Summary .....	83
<i>La Maestra Clarisa</i> .....	84
Theme One: Taking on the Role of Advocate .....	86
Knowing the Community .....	86
Recognizing the Cultural Wealth and Cultural Knowledge of <i>Familias</i> .....	90
Theme Two: Becoming a Leader Through Professional Development .....	95
Theme Three: Using Culturally Relevant Practices Within a Humanizing Pedagogy .....	101
Cultural Intuitiveness Guiding Professional Choices .....	106
Offering Students Opportunities for Critical Encounters .....	107
Summary .....	108
<i>La Maestra Esme</i> .....	109
Theme One: Taking on the Role of Advocate .....	110
Knowing the Community .....	111
Recognizing the Cultural Wealth and Cultural Knowledge of <i>Familias</i> .....	113
Theme Two: Becoming a Leader Through Professional Development .....	117
Theme Three: Using Culturally Relevant Practices Within a Humanizing Pedagogy .....	122
Cultural Intuitiveness Guiding Professional Choices .....	133
Offering Students Opportunities for Critical Encounters .....	134
Theme Four: Reflexivity for Critical Consciousness .....	136
Summary .....	140
Chapter Five: Conclusions .....	141
Overview of the Study .....	141
Discussion of Research Question One .....	143
Finding 1: Tracing the Positioning of <i>Maestras</i> .....	143

Finding 2: Identifying Opportunities of Authoring the Self .....	144
Finding 3: <i>¿Qué es ser maestra?</i> What does it mean to be a maestra?.....	145
Finding 4: Identity, Culture and Language: Racialized Notions .....	147
Bilingualism as a Strategic Tool .....	147
Biculturalism as a Strategic Tool .....	149
Discussion of Research Question Two .....	149
Finding 5: Actively Sustaining Agency .....	150
Positioning in Professional Development .....	151
Cultivating Additive Practices in Bilingual Education .....	151
Discussion of Research Question Three .....	153
Finding 6: Learning From Lived Experiences .....	153
Implications.....	155
Recommendations for Future Research .....	157
Appendices.....	158
Appendix A: First Interview Protocol .....	158
Appendix B: Second Interview Protocol .....	159
References.....	160
Vita .....	171



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Overview of School Districts and State Demographics.....	41
Table 3.2	Comparative Demographics Overview of The Three School Campuses.....	41
Table 3.3	Selected Characteristics of Participants.....	43

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1: <i>Elementos entrelazados: Towards a Humanizing Pedagogy</i> .....	9
Figure 2.1: The classroom family picture tree .....	61
Figure 2.2: Classroom Mexican Culture Museum .....	92
Figure 2.3: Clarisa’s achievement display .....	93
Figure 2.4: Books, <i>Friends From the Other Side</i> and <i>The Other Side</i> .....	124
Figure 2.5: Esme and students discuss text to text connections .....	127
Figure 2.6: The class watched <i>Mexico en tus sentidos</i> .....	131

## Chapter One: Introduction

This qualitative study examined how personal and professional experiences influenced three *Latina* bilingual teachers' professional identities and informed pedagogical practices. To better understand these matters as complex *componentes entrelazados* (interwoven components), Figured Worlds and Situated Identities (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte & Cain, 1998), Critical Race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) LatCrit theory (Solórzano, & Yosso, 2001) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) were the theoretical lenses used to frame this dissertation study.

Studies have documented Latina teachers' and teacher candidates' experiences with the pedagogical push to transition from Spanish into English (Ek & Sánchez, 2008; Weisman, 2001; Weisman, Flores, Valenciana, 2007). *Latin@*<sup>1</sup> bilingual teachers may develop conflict in their professional identities “mediated by their responses to their marginalization, their professional development...and their personal histories” (Varghese, 2006, p. 211). Experienced and pre-service bilingual teachers may struggle further as they contend with rigid program guidelines, school demands and district policies, while making decisions how to resist, conform and/or negotiate, on behalf of their students (Austin, Willet, Gebhard, & Laó Mones, 2010). Consequently, bilingual

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Latin@* will be used when referencing both male and female incultural and linguistic groups from Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas except when using direct citations. My use of the @ reflects the widespread gesture to eliminate “the gender power of the noun’s masculine form to signify all Latinos irrespective of gender; also a self-adopted alternative to the term Hispanic” (Allatson, 2007, p. 140).

programs may only be successful to the degree that teachers understand humanizing pedagogy<sup>2</sup> (Bartolomé, 1994; Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008).

Teachers, and teacher candidates, working with Spanish-speaking children must think beyond the constructs of traditional teaching, away from the idea that students are passive learners, that teachers are the source of knowledge, and that bilingual parents, as well as families of low socio-economic status, must be trained for parental involvement. Students enter school with an identity kit formed by primary Discourses<sup>3</sup> focused on family, culture and community (Gee, 1996). Programs created with the goal to study and reflect critically on the importance of Latino families' cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and the goals of bilingual education can assist teachers in becoming advocates for a more just education for their students. An awareness of intra-group diversity could further develop the *Maestras*'<sup>4</sup> consciousness to the uniqueness of the individual experience, home culture and language use, for the learning of bilingual students (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004). In this way, humanizing pedagogy also considers identities within a cultural group as well as between cultural groups (Freire, 1970; Huerta, 2011). For example,

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<sup>2</sup> Social justice, critical and culturally relevant pedagogy is practiced within a humanizing pedagogy. The pedagogy focuses on the development of the whole person, with learning for both the teacher and students; encompassing the link between home, school, society and politics (Nemeth, 1981); including the culture and language, voice and agency of the Other, towards the development of “conscientizacao” (Freire, 1970, p. 26); supporting students' identity and pride in their home cultures, and explicitly teaching mainstream knowledge to enable marginalized students to fully participate in the dominant culture (Giroux, 1988; Huerta, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Discourse (with a capital ‘D’) describes the language use, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network, part of identity; discourse (little “d”) refers to language use (Gee, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> *Maestr@s* will be used when referring to both bilingual male and female teachers as a group.

teachers can learn how to effectively plan for classes that use culturally relevant materials that do not promote one pan-Latin@ identity; rather, these materials can be used to foster a deeper understanding and recognition of a multiplicity of inter-group diversity (e.g. Puerto Rican, Mexican, Honduran, Salvadorian, Columbian, Panamanian, etc.) and intra-group diversity.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Problem Statement**

The consistent immigration of families from Mexico, the Caribbean, and South America to the United States, as well as children of immigrants born in the United States who grow up speaking Spanish, create an environment in schools that reflects a wide range of linguistically diverse communities. However, many Spanish-speaking students are placed in bilingual programs, the educational goal of many of these programs continues to be that of assimilating students to the expected norm through the acquisition of English as quickly as possible (Cummins, 2001; Macedo, 1999/2000; Reyes, 2001; Salazar, 2013). Dual language<sup>5</sup>, another form of bilingual education, is being implemented in elementary schools across Texas. These programs are described as enrichment programs. Nevertheless, whatever bilingual program is implemented,

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<sup>5</sup> A dual language classroom typically consists of native English speakers and native Spanish speakers (or another language). The students receive content instruction in both languages; the goal is for all students to become proficient in the use of two languages (Gomez, Freeman & Freeman, 2005; Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

maestr@s come face to face with very difficult choices about how to meet their students needs when their choices may challenge a programs' integrity.

### **My Journey**

Nieto (2009) reasons that the pressure to assimilate can be personally and/or collectively traumatic for teacher and teacher candidates of color. In their education, their native language and culture may have been denigrated forcing some identities to be subverted. In my own experience, growing up included contradictory messages. I was welcomed by constantly being told how lucky I was to be in the United States, but there was also great pressure at school to leave my language and acquire “the” American language. At six years of age and a newcomer from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, I did not understand what was so wrong with the language of my home, Spanish. At Carvajal Elementary we were not allowed to speak Spanish and were punished when caught speaking our native language. Although school was a place of learning and a builder of knowledge, it was also the place where I learned I needed to be “fixed”. The teachers and administrators at my elementary school believed assimilation to the American language and culture led to success; and therefore, it should happen quickly. Darder (1991/2012) postulates that this assimilation continues to be a persistent and dominant ideology in American schools. This is demonstrated in the educational structure’s hidden curriculum, a hegemonic concept, which perpetuates the established social system (Giroux, 2001; Apple, 1982).

In first grade when my teacher yelled at us, “You people are lazy and stupid and you should be grateful that someone wants to teach you!” I realized I understood every

word. I wondered if I was now an American since I understood every word. It was at that moment that I also decided I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up, and that I would never treat a child the way I was treated. Years later, as a teacher I tried to live up to the decision I had made as a child. I built new knowledge on the rich culture my students brought with them into my class. I nurtured their language and provided them with tools that could empower them in becoming bicultural and biliterate. At least, these were my objectives.

Even though as a teacher I tried to be fully responsive to my students, my own cultural identity in my 1<sup>st</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade education was assaulted to such a degree that I worried that I might unintentionally reproduce deficit views of my students' home language, culture, and literacy. For that reason, after seven years of teaching and as a member of a specialized masters program, I attended graduate school and worked to reclaim multiple identities that had been forced underground. Not only did I uncover these identities, I found they were in constant flux, depending on the space I was situated in at a particular time. By unveiling myself I could acquire a new consciousness and affirm I am a *madre, maestra, mujer, Mexicana, hija, esposa, Chicana, Mestiza* (mother, teacher, woman, Mexican, daughter, wife, Chicana, of mixed race), "Rather than a reductive, essential self, the New Mestiza constantly migrates between knowing herself...not knowing who or what she is...and the fear of not owning who she is" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 9). It was with a new *mestiza* consciousness (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Prieto, 2009)) and through these unveiled identities that I perceived and navigated the world with my fullest human potential.

Embracing my identities did not happen in my undergraduate educational program because in that program I was not challenged to become culturally aware or to engage in critical thinking. My bilingual, bicultural and biliterate journey in graduate school was different. Finally, I was asked to embark on a mission to value my resources as a Latina teacher and to reconstruct the “devalued Latina”. At times the assignments were overwhelming and painful, at other times, wonderful and enlightening – a plethora of emotions and new consciousness. It was in the specialized masters program, *Proyecto Bilingüe*<sup>6</sup>, for *Maestras bilingües* (bilingual teachers) that I was encouraged to “unlock the cultural suitcase<sup>7</sup>” (Quiocho & Rios, 2000, p. 516). The treasures in that suitcase had shaped the self that had been hidden, the identity that could make a positive influence on my students.

My graduate journey was and continued to be a *mélange* of consciousness raising experiences that reinforced and supported my belief that bilingual education is so much more than the development of language literacy abilities. My personal and professional experiences have led me to want to explore and understand more how *elementos entrelazados* (interwoven elements) can shape teacher identity and influence (or not) pedagogical choices.

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<sup>6</sup> Name is a pseudonym.

<sup>7</sup> The “cultural suitcase” is used to describe what the individual acquires since birth guiding how their culture, which includes family, community and language, shapes their lives (Quiocho & Rios, 2000).



## **Statement of Purpose**

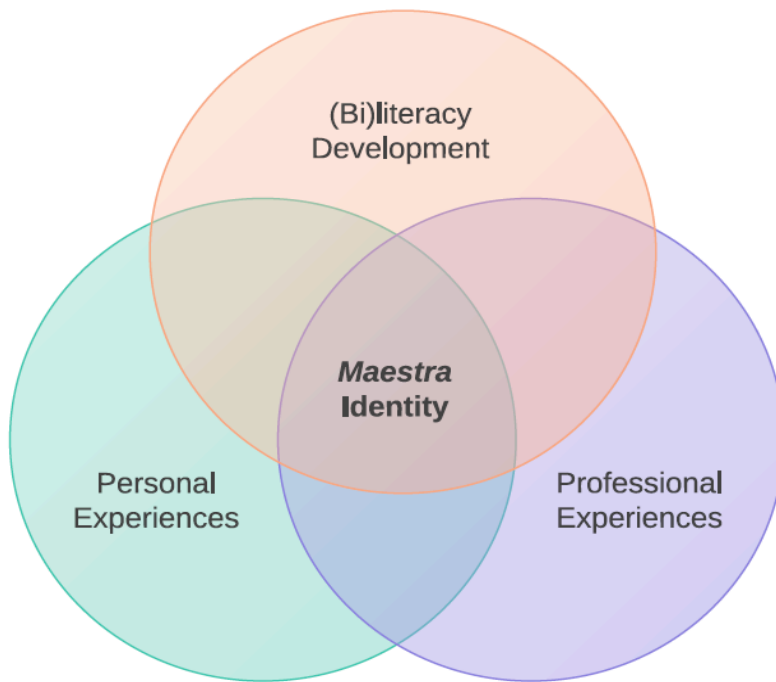
Research recognizes teachers as the salient force impacting what is presented in the classroom (Bartolomé, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Nieto & Rolón, 1997). Therefore, in order for *Maestr@s* to become active advocates for their students, they must develop a (critical) sociocultural consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 22). Educators possessing a critical consciousness recognize not only the ways schools can reproduce social inequalities, but also the ways in which they can be sites for transformation and social justice (Freire, 1970; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), understanding that factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, social class and gender can influence students' thinking, behavior and language. The knowledge that these factors shape an individual's identity provides access to culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995), a pedagogy of opposition dedicated to "collective empowerment" (p. 160), within a humanizing pedagogy.

Nevertheless, the teachers' understanding of what is appropriate and culturally relevant can be challenged by the reality of local, state, and national standards. That is, once a teacher steps into a classroom they have to contend with the bureaucracy and politicization of education. The high-stakes testing in Texas, for instance, is a mandate that teacher candidates and experienced teachers view as "being intrusive on their curricular and instructional decision-making" (Flores and Clark, 2003, np). It is in this institutional school context that the Discourse (Gee, 1996) of dominant mainstream culture persistently devalues the cultural background and the native language of emergent

bilinguals (Volk & Long, 2005). *Maestr@s* must make choices for the best way to teach their students in these highly politicized contexts.

Research studies in teacher education have looked at elements such as identity (Bartlett, 2007; Clark & Flores, 2001; Wortham, 2006), narratives (Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012; Ek & Sánchez, 2008; Galindo, Aragón & Underhill, 1996; González, 1998; McVee, 2004) language and culture (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010; Cazden, John & Hymes, 1972; Garcia, 2005; Heath, 1983, 1989; Varghese, 2005) as individual themes or one with another, focusing on elements that aid our understanding about influences in teacher's ideological shifts, as well as their teaching practices. My study, though, attempts to understand these matters as complex dialectic *componentes entrelazados* (interwoven components). Therefore, examining these elements of teacher identity and pedagogy, not compartmentalized, but instead overlapping and interwoven using a critical lens.

The purpose of the study was two-fold. First, this qualitative study explored how histories, shared through narratives, frame a meaning of pedagogy for the *Maestras*. Secondly, the study sought to understand how personal and professional experiences shape *Latina* teacher identities (See Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1. Elementos entrelazados: Developing Humanizing Pedagogies**

The results of examining *Latina* teachers' personal and professional experiences as conceptualized in Figure 1.1 can be significant in light of calls for deeper understanding of the approaches that can access *Latin@* students' hidden funds of knowledge (Martinez-Roldan & Fránquiz, 2008). Such documentation has potential to inform the areas of bilingual teacher preparation, teacher professional development, as well as language and literacy studies. This qualitative study may allow for deeper and expedient comprehension of the processes and contexts that influence teacher identity buildups and breakdowns and how these experiences in turn, influence pedagogy.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research questions are both theoretical and pedagogical to explore how experiences influenced (or not) the three *Maestras*' pedagogical practices, how these experiences informed their (re)conceptualization of knowledge about bilingual students' learning and finally, how personal and professional experiences influenced identity shifts.

1. How do *Latina* teachers position their identities in the figured world of their bilingual classroom and school campus?
2. What are the challenges and affordances of these positionings?
3. How do *Latina* teacher's experiences influence professional identity and inform (or not) the (re)conceptualization of pedagogical practices?

### Significance of the Study

A bilingual teacher's view of students' language and literacy development can assist or constrain students' emerging voices and identities (Weisman, 2001). It must not be assumed, however, that when teachers share socioeconomic or racial characteristics with their students they will easily understand students' needs. Empirical research (Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1999) argues this as an erroneous assumption. Other research studies (Flores, 2011; Huerta, 2011) showed that prior knowledge and life experiences greatly influence the way *Maestr@s* perceive the nature of learning and the background of their students. *Maestr@s* negotiate and (re)contextualize previous knowledge while navigating identities as they process the learning occurring in the figured worlds in which they participate, such as in the figured worlds of their classrooms and schools.

Teachers, whether novice or experienced, need opportunities and safe spaces to reflect critically and learn how to resolve disconnects, draw on connections, and build strong and resilient professional and personal identities as bilingual teachers and biliterate/bicultural individuals to meet the challenges posed by the demands placed on linguistically diverse student populations. As the *Latin@* student population continues to grow, so does the necessity for building a mutual respectful relationship between teacher, students, family and community. Forming connections where knowledge flows back and forth between home and school can influence the quality of instruction. This development can provide a basis for a more just learning experience.

This dissertation study recognized that *Maestr@s* are individuals with their own philosophical perspective, and in becoming self-reflective about their views, could move teaching closer to attaining “educational justice” for students (Ochoa, 20007, pg. 192). Additional backing can come with the provision of programs and professional development where *maestr@s* are supported in gaining a clearer sense of the identities they claim and those in which they are situated. It can lead to an understanding of their experiences and multiple identities in relation to classroom pedagogical choices.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

Teachers struggle to provide a fair and equitable education for students. It is all the more difficult for bilingual teachers and their Spanish-dominant students, particularly in the wake of the many U.S. educational policies. *Maestr@s bilingües*, then, need to have a critical awareness of their histories and their ever-changing identities. They must

also have a well-rounded understanding of the students' acquisition of bilingualism and biliteracy development along a continuum (Hornberger, 2004). This dissertation study examined how teachers' professional identities were influenced by personal and professional experiences that, in turn, influenced pedagogical practices. Thus, the teachers' pedagogical decision in general, was considered, and in particular, during lessons/projects/dialogue that the maestr@s described as linguistically and culturally relevant for an evolving bilingual community. In order to take into account individual intra-group differences of *Latin@* teachers, a sample of three teachers was traced across the months of the dissertation study.

This research offers thick descriptions of *Latina* teachers of *Latin@* youth, accessing, utilizing and expanding their linguistic and cultural repertoires. Rather than perpetuate subtractive policies instituted by bilingual models that transition emerging bilingual children toward English only (Valdés, 2001) this research documented teachers in classrooms that capitalized on the students' cultural knowledge and benefits of bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy. Ways to optimize access, and use, of cultural tools and resources is important as Texas and the nation become increasingly diverse.

## **SUMMARY**

Chapter one provides an overview of the study, the background, the problem in bilingual education classrooms and the significance of this qualitative study. I included descriptive details of my positionality in this chapter to establish the importance of providing initial transparency for this study, as well as its significance to me as a *Latina*

researcher. A section that poses the central research questions was provided in the chapter.

Chapter two includes a literature review of empirical studies from complementary theoretical frameworks. Theoretical lenses framing this study are figured worlds and situated identities (Holland, et. al., 1998), Critical Race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, 1989, 1999; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005), LatCrit theory (Solórzano, & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986; Moll, 1992). The chapter includes a section on the value of Latin@ children's cultural wealth. Included in this chapter is a short overview on the history of bilingual education. Understanding the long presence of bilingual education, the struggles and its continued survival due to people who believe in an equitable education for marginalized groups is important, particularly in recognizing *Maestr@s* who continue to push for social justice in education.

In chapter three, I describe the research methodology for this dissertation study, the methods for collection and analysis of these data. The chapter is divided into discrete sections expounding on the context of the study, background of the participants, the sites for the study and procedures for data gathering and analysis. Methods used to collect data included classroom observations, interviews/conversations, narratives, artifacts and fieldnotes. Triangulation was utilized in and through the various data sources to maintain trustworthiness.

Chapter four contains the study's findings and data analysis. The findings are presented as three case studies that focus on the emergent themes and highlighting each

*maestra* individually. The voice of each *maestra* is fundamental to the framework used in this dissertation study. The four emergent themes, and subthemes, were discussed and emphasized the *Maestras*' engagement in, and advocacy for, social justice. Chapter five summarizes salient results and provides the study's conclusions and implications. Limitations of the study are also provided.



## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation study explores the interwoven complexity of Latina teachers' personal and professional experiences, situated identities and pedagogical choices. Based on retroactive views of linguistic, cultural and literate experiences and their influence on the *Latina* bilingual teachers' professional identities, I seek to learn the effects of these on the *Maestras*' teaching practices. Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) holds that learning occurs in the interactions with others, and the overarching theory. Donato and McCormick (1994) maintain the theory views language learning tasks and contexts as situated activities that are continually under development and influence learning. I draw from Holland et al. (1998) notion of figured worlds and situated identities, as a theoretical frame in my study as I explored the *Maestras*' experiences and identities within social, educational and politically institutionalized contexts. CRT/LatCrit lends a critical perspective to the *Maestras*' understanding of the value of cultural knowledge and community wealth as women of color.

According to Holland et al. (1998) definition of identity, an individual's culture and agency together contribute to the forming of multiple identities on a continuum. From this perspective, life histories are important to gather because they capture a diversity of experiences and perspectives for a better understanding of the *Maestras*' pedagogical choices. The *Maestras* provided their histories in narratives both in oral and written form. The data offered by narratives can complicate assumptions of what

individuals know or understand (Sikes, 2001) giving greater insight to *Maestr@s* “system of knowing” (Ladson-Billings, 2002, p.106 cited in Delgado Bernal, 2002). I used positioning theory as explained in Holland, et al. to better understand teacher narratives, teacher development and teacher perspectives on humanizing pedagogy.

Following, I present a brief overview of the context of bilingual education in the U.S. broadly and in Texas specifically. Clearly the context of bilingual education demands that teachers and researchers be aware of the contested language ideologies that persist to impact education, law and society. I follow the brief history of bilingual education with empirical literature addressing the complex ideological and pedagogical concerns that impact teacher professional development. Finally, I close the chapter with the theoretical framework that informs the dissertation study.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

The U.S. holds a vast richness of linguistic and cultural diversity; yet, bilingual education has been challenged and reconstructed within historical, political, social, and economic contexts (Flores, 2001). *Latin@s* form the largest emergent bilingual population in Texas. According to the U.S. Department of Education, English Language Learners<sup>8</sup> (ELLs) in the U.S. speak more than 150 languages; yet, Spanish is

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<sup>8</sup> English Language Learner (ELL) is the conventional term used to identify students learning English as a second language. This term will be used when citing official documents such as district and government records; otherwise, the term Spanish-dominant or emergent bilingual will be used, presenting an additive view (Escamilla, 2006; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010; Gort, 2006; Tellez, 1999) in contrast to the term ELL, which implies a deficit perspective of the heritage language.

overwhelmingly the most represented (73.1%) first language, or home language (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp & Tahan, 2011).

Crawford's (1992) argument that bilingual education is much more than a 'pedagogical tool' stresses the importance of bilingual education. He contends that instead, bilingual education encompasses larger sociopolitical and cultural issues because "language gives individuals and groups their identity" (p. 341). Historically, languages other than English were allowed in many public and private schools. However, contexts such as World War I and World War II promoted assimilation from bilingual to monolingual education with periods such as the Americanization Movement that pushed to create a homogeneous national identity towards a more conservative nationalism (Blanton, 2004; San Miguel, 1987).

In Texas, children were segregated to substandard and poorly staffed Mexican schools (Blanton, pg. 26). In 1880, English-only practices grew in Texas. Additionally, corporal punishment was enforced if the students used their native language on school grounds (Crawford, 1999). In the 1890s to the 1930s *escuelitas* (little schools) came to fruition. These locally controlled schools were a show of resistance for the discriminatory practices in public education (Blanton, 2004). The *escuelitas* were often supported by the Catholic Church, for example, El Colegio Altamirani, *una escuela* in Hebbronville, Texas, was founded in 1897 and operated until its closing in 1958 (Salinas, 2000). The *escuelitas* embraced students' language, culture, and family beliefs and were a contrast to the state's designated "Mexican" schools.

In 1954, Brown versus the Board of Education ordered the desegregation of all

schools, acknowledging the inequality and unfairness of education for people of color (Nieto, 2009), but practices restricting bilingual education for Mexican-Americans continued into the late 1960's. In 1968 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act. Its purpose was to provide school districts with federal funds, in the form of competitive grants, to establish innovative educational programs for emergent bilingual students. This was of great significance because it was the first law that recognized minority linguistic rights in the history of the United States (Nieto, 2009). In the same year *Lau v. Nichols* required schools to remove barriers so that children could have access to the curriculum. Unfortunately, neither the Bilingual Education Act nor the *Lau* decision offered guidelines for teaching emergent bilinguals (NABE, 1998).

In 1970, the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Texas ordered the State to remedy past discrimination of emergent bilingual students. In 1981, the District Court found that the state had failed to comply with the Equal Education Opportunity Act of 1974. It was found that the Mexican students faced de facto discrimination and segregation from the State and the education agency (Blanton, 2004). The Federal court then ruled on the elimination of discrimination on grounds of race, color, or national origin in public and charter schools in Texas.

Bilingual education is necessary because limiting, or denying, the use of the native language is denying the individual's participation in society "and of [their] very peoplehood" (Hernández-Chávez, 1988 in Ovando, 2003, pg. 19). Tollefson (2002 in Nieto, 2009, p. 66) defines the word 'bilingual,' as moving "beyond denoting 'speaker of two languages,' [it] has come to symbolize an immigrant, typically a Latino or Latina,

who does not—and refuses to—speak English correctly and, therefore, who cannot be considered American”. Still, this negative force impacts national, and local, educational policies, which in turn influence school mandates that commonly support hegemonic monolingual and monocultural ideologies in the name of a united American identity. Nonetheless, bilingual education continues to be provided in the U.S. and in Texas through various models of bilingual programs.

### **BILINGUAL TEACHERS: IDEOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL VIEWS**

Bilingual education history presents a story of resistance and a fight for a fair education for the children. However, teachers’ lived experiences are based in a different context, or contexts, so that as individuals, the individual teacher’s own understanding about learning drive the pedagogical choices applied in their classrooms (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Heath’s seminal, ethnographic, study (1983/1996) presents the premise that other factors besides being a member of an ethnic group form teachers’ ideology. While teachers may want to provide students an equitable education, engagement in dominant discourse can lead them to adopt views of the dominant group and accept the status quo.

Heath’s seminal study examined language acquisition, language development and its use in an African-American community and in a White community. While the children of both rural communities attended the same school in town, both groups of children struggled academically. The African-American students, however, were consistently ranked low performing. An African-American teacher was assigned to an all

African-American class assuming the teacher would naturally understand the students' needs, but there was no measureable improvement in the students' academic performance. When the teacher was later interviewed she conceded that in reflecting, she was surprised to find that she had held preconceived ideas about the students. She also recognized that her socioeconomic status (middle class) may have caused a disconnect between herself and her students.

Although, the study was not about bilingual classrooms or bilingual students, the findings are relevant to this dissertation study. An important finding was that a teacher from the same group as the students could still hold preconceived ideas about the students. So race cannot be the only, or primary, factor when considering support for students of color. Further research (Britzman, 1986; Flores & Clark, 2004; Flores, Clark, Guerra & Sánchez, 2008; Prieto, 2009) continued to unveil a prevailing mismatch of varying factors found between teachers and students. Besides socioeconomic status, culture and language, racial and ethnic identities have also been identified as teacher-student disparities (Romo, 1999 cited in Flores, Sheets, Clark, 2011). Heath's study highlights the need for support and training to help teachers learn to recognize and understand student Discourse as important to student learning. Being a teacher of color and a member of a particular group does not guarantee the provision of an equitable education for minority children (Flores, 2001). Considering students' Discourses along with opportunities for reflection, can lead *Maestr@s* to critically assess their teaching, opening a venue to a more humanizing pedagogy.

I propose that acknowledging the identity toolkit (Gee, 1996) emerging bilingual

students bring to the classroom can strengthen the capacity to better integrate their cultural capital<sup>9</sup> into their academic learning. Weisman (2001) points to a strong relationship between culture, political consciousness and valuing the Spanish language in respect to the affirmation of Latin@ students' cultural identities. The valuing of students' identities can increase their confidence in knowing that what they know is valued. *Maestr@s* want to provide a fair and just education for their students, but navigating through the school standards and the needs of the students can be overwhelming. Teacher preparation programs, as well as professional development, can offer resources that support *Maestr@s* valuable cultural and linguistic capital to be recognized and expanded into pedagogical tools. They need significant resources and training to take steps towards a humanizing pedagogy. This step would be beneficial for all students, but especially significant for bilingual students. Teacher preparation programs and professional development can be created to offer resources that support *Maestr@s*' cultural and linguistic capital and see them as a connection to their students' own cultural wealth.

Scholarly research recognizes teachers as mediators in their students' learning (Bartolomé & Bartolomé, 2001; Diaz & Flores, 2001). Diaz and Flores (2001) posit that while the United States holds equal opportunity as a policy, "equal educational access [is] organized by teachers who choose to provide it for all students" (pg. 46). Thus, it is

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<sup>9</sup> Yosso (2005) defines cultural capital as utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (pg. 77), in contrast to Bourdieu's theory of cultural wealth (1990), which identifies communities as either culturally wealthy or culturally poor; allowing for dominant culture to be privileged and valued as the norm.

beneficial when teachers reflect on their experiences and perspective in order to identify the contexts and media that are most for students' smoother journey toward (bi)literacy (Fránquiz, 2003). It is not solely a matter of saying and believing that (bi)literacy is important for the bilingual child, but the fundamental point is the *Maestr@s*'s ability to understand how bilingual students learn. *Maestr@s* can then teach the curriculum in a manner most beneficial for their students.

Educational research strongly recommends that to support bilingual students' learning, teachers build on funds of knowledge from students' families in their teaching practice (González, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001; Gonzáles, Moll & Amanti, 1992; Moll, 1992; Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). This type of pedagogy allows students a better chance of achieving comprehension. Knowledge is not static; it is flowing, moving, changing and growing, thereby, moving back and forth between home and school (Cummins, 2000; Lambert, 1974). Bridging primary Discourses such as home literacies, language and culture, with the schools' secondary discourses, defined, as the established method for academic learning and standard expectations (Gee, 1996), is advantageous when providing students with authentic opportunities for a clearer understanding of content to make connections for their learning. In this way, humanizing pedagogy refers to teachers' abilities to affirm identities within a cultural group as well as between cultural groups (Bartolomé, 1994; Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Freire, 1970/2000; Huerta, 2011).



## La pedagogía humanizante (Humanizing Pedagogy) and Social Justice

*What I have been proposing is a profound respect for the cultural identity of students—a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the color of the other, the gender of the other, the class of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other; that implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other. But these things take place in a social and historical context and not in pure air. (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 307–308)*

Freire's conceptualization of humanization is thought to be the greatest element of his philosophy (Salazar, 2013). Humanizing pedagogy includes community cultural wealth, what Yosso (2005) describes as community resources “utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (p. 77). The pedagogy does not provide specific teaching methods, but instead encourages *maestr@s* creativity and imagination to build on student knowledge and experiences (Salazar, 2013). The pedagogy not only fosters acceptance and respect for students' culture, but also strongly proposes that teachers explicitly teach students the dominant discourse to prepare them to be successful in mainstream culture. Knowledge of dominant discourse is introduced as an additive process, adding to present knowledge and not to replace students' discourse.

*Maestr@s* who hold humanizing pedagogy as important for students, acknowledge that it is necessary to include students' background knowledge, culture, and linguistic abilities in classroom lessons (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto & Rolón, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Huerta (2011) states that when practicing this type of pedagogy, *Maestr@s* “strive to develop a critical understanding of their purpose as teachers and that of their students as unique individuals influenced by their culture,

communities, and the larger society” (p. 51). They promote an environment where student’s identity and culture is valued while their language and knowledge elucidates the adopted curriculum. The classroom is transformed into a space where a holistic view of the students, presents opportunities for socially meaningful lessons. The lessons build students’ social consciousness beyond the normative form of academic reasoning.

Freire (1970/2000) argues that the pedagogical ideology does not rest solely on the shoulders of the teacher to construct humanizing pedagogy, but emphasizes that it is the teacher’s duty to create the space where students, their families and the community can participate, and share, in its construction. In an ethnographic study (Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008) of a new ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, the researchers present a view of the novice teacher’s developing consciousness towards a humanizing pedagogy and its impact on her students. Initially conforming to mainstream school culture, the teacher set classroom rules and strict language guidelines. In time, she recognized that she was struggling and her students demonstrated a lack of interest and motivation. Through “deep reflection on her practice” (Salazar and Fránquiz, p.187) she came to comprehend that instruction had to be relevant to the students. She understood learning about the community would help her learn about her students. The changes she made, moved beyond the curriculum to include students’ linguistic expertise, their interests and cultural understandings allowing them to not only make connections in their learning, but to develop deeper comprehension. The teacher and her students created a space of mutual trust, which further encouraged students’ pride in their heritage. The ethnographic study exemplifies the learning that can occur for *Maestr@s* and their

students within a humanizing pedagogical approach.

*Maestr@s* participating in these actions are in the social justice space, although sometimes they do not recognize as such. *Maestr@s* can recreate, reinvent, adapt, or adjust their teaching methods when considering students' lives within various contexts in and outside of school (Bartolomé, 1994; Huerta, 2011; Roberts, 2000; Salazar, 2013). Their knowledge of appropriate and culturally relevant pedagogy, though, can be challenged by the reality of local, state, and national standards. The high-stakes testing in Texas, for example, is a mandate that teacher candidates and experienced teachers view as “being intrusive on their curricular and instructional decision-making” (Flores and Clark, 2003, np). Furthermore, in the state’s attempt to raise school standardized test scores, teachers’ are required to use best practices<sup>10</sup> to teach the district’s adopted school curriculum to all students, creating very strict guidelines for teaching subject content using a scripted dialogue. Nieto (2013), though, argues that the caveat of best practices is that it holds teachers to a one-fits-all mode of teaching. Nieto (2013) further contends that a culturally responsive teacher understands there is no rubric to guide them to magical results. The use of best practices is problematic as it attempts to meld all children into the status quo. This creates a state of confusion and conflict for teachers, in particular *Maestr@s*, as they navigate through the educational minefield of what policy states is “best for the children” and what the *Maestr@s* believe their students need. The teacher using humanizing pedagogy advocates for the students, has an open mind,

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<sup>10</sup> Ertha Patrick, director of special projects at TEA defines best practice as “a technique, methodology, program, or other intervention that through action research or empirical research demonstrates a positive result” (2008, np).

engages families and the community; thereby, demonstrating the value of the students' first Discourse in their learning.

Further research (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Brozo, Brobst, & Moje, 1995) points to a strong link between cultural resources and a positive relationship with the teacher, in strengthening student resiliency. This dissertation study recognizes that *Maestr@s* are individuals with their own philosophical perspectives formed by their individual histories, experiences and interpretations, but in becoming self-reflective about these views could move teaching closer to attaining “educational justice” (Ochoa, 2007, pg. 192). The nexus created by the teacher-student link reinforces the commitment for student academic success. The framework of the dissertation then focuses on exploring each *Maestr@s*'s journey to their understanding of educational justice, pedagogical growth and identity shifts in relation to professional and personal experiences.

Teacher knowledge is flexible and fluid, described by Connelly and Clandinin (2000) “in terms of narrative life constructions...as something that flows forward in ever changing shapes...[so] to understand what happens when teacher and student meet in teaching-learning situations it is necessary to understand their stories” (p. 318). Research examining narratives (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012; Gomez, Rodriguez & Agosto, 2008; González, 1998; McVee, 2004; Sheets, 2004; Weisman, Flores & Valenciana, 2008) provide insight to teachers' ideology, cultural border crossings and identities. Narratives afford an interpretation of the *maestr@s* creation of self and identity (Riessman, 2005; Holland et al., 1998).

In Texas it is common that *Maestr@s* and their students hold similar histories and cultural experiences that consist of physical, linguistic or cultural border crossings (Anzaldúa, 1987). The most commonly shared experience by Spanish-speaking bilinguals is the devaluing of their native or heritage language (Macedo, 2000). Weisman (2001) suggests language is an intricate part of culture and the conduit to making meaning within a context and “learning to express that meaning through speech” (p. 208). For example, it is common for bilingual students to translate for their family under various circumstances. Translating is a skill that includes a sophisticated use of language, social and cognitive demands, with an emotional strand, making the act of translation very complex (Orellana, 2009). Translating by children, nevertheless, is greatly misunderstood as it is not the norm in monolingual White middle class America. In addition, this important skill is not valued in most schools, particularly when the sole purpose of schooling is reduced to only learning English and disciplinary content. So how do you begin to uncover the impact of personal and professional experiences on bilingual teachers?

Ek and Sánchez (2008) conducted a study examining *Latina* pre-service bilingual teachers’ narratives, using the teacher’s voice to describe their school experience. One participant described being hit with a ruler by her teacher, a nun, for speaking Spanish in class and so never spoke in class again, instead spending her time observing and listening. Another told of teachers not engaging her in their classes, but she felt grateful because she was embarrassed to speak. She was afraid of being laughed at or made fun of by the other students. The possibility of being ridiculed by her classmates or her

teacher silenced this student. These examples are memories of the violent manner in which children are forced to relinquish their language. The authors identified linguistic violence as a recurring theme in the narratives. Gotanda and Santos (2002) argue, “language has become a proxy for race in that it is no longer acceptable to attack people because of their race, but it is acceptable to attack their language” (as cited in Ek & Sánchez, 2008, pg. 7). The study showed how reflection of the *Maestr@s*’ own subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) reinforced their decision to become bilingual teachers and their drive to provide positive experiences for their students.

In another study (Ek & Sanchez, 2008), findings included strong beliefs in the value of Spanish resistance towards negative attitudes from the dominant discourse. The findings emphasize how bilingual teachers may slowly become assimilated to the dominant school culture (Flores & Clark, 2004; Flores, Clark, Guerra & Sánchez, 2008). With a deep understanding of student needs, *Maestr@s* can develop a high level of sociocultural consciousness helping them to recognize the ways in which schools can reproduce social inequalities. Such consciousness can move them to transform schools from sites of oppression to sites for the practice of social justice.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Sociocultural Theory**

Vygotsky (1986) stressed that the critical outcome of any learning experience is not so much its purported content; rather it is the process or method through which learning occurs. The theory stresses interaction, which is an ongoing process where

learning begins externally in social activities and is then internalized. He strongly believed that community played a central role in the process of making meaning of what is being learned and the context in which it is learned. The individual not only gains knowledge, but also contributes knowledge through peer interaction. Sociocultural theory recognizes that literacy skills, which include language, are used to clarify emergent understandings of the task and its goals, to share knowledge, to assist one another.

*Latin@* teachers bring cultural assets that may not be recognized as important into the various contexts of interaction. Delgado Bernal (2001) posits that *Latin@* situatedness influences mestiza consciousness<sup>11</sup> and the way of understanding lived experiences, thereby, transforming the meaning of their experiences. Wertsch (1998) contends drawing from Vygotsky's sociocultural mediation is useful for understanding and the bringing together of various perspectives as well as urgent social issues. The specialized masters program from which the sample of teachers for this dissertation graduated, offered innovative courses. In some of the courses *Maestr@s* were encouraged to share experiences and histories, to critically assess educational policies and their effect on minority students. Knowing, learning, teaching and pedagogy are strands that relate and influence each other. Each strand can coalesce into an interweaving continuum. Through these interactions many teachers were able to open doors to

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<sup>11</sup> Anzaldúa (1987) uses this border dweller consciousness or *la Facultad* to formulate a strategy that is not based on dualities; a multi-faceted consciousness and transitory identity provides the *mestiza* with the ability to construct her own space that resists appropriation and negation.

(re)conceptualize prior knowledge and understandings. The sociocultural lens can provide crucial data to support humanizing pedagogy in teacher training and facilitating the use of cultural knowledge in building *Maestr@s conocimiento* within contexts *entrelazadas*.

According to Vygotsky (1978) language and literacy are inseparable tools of the sociocultural context of development because they can be used to make sense of content learned in context.

From this sociocultural perspective, individuals can use their literacy skills, which includes language, to clarify their own emergent understandings of the task and its goals, to share knowledge, to assist one another, and to shift roles in the learning process (Gutierrez, et. al., p. 125).

The value of using the native language for development of comprehension between prior knowledge and newly acquired knowledge is garnered from a sociocultural perspective. Teachers are able to embrace the language(s). Therefore, a sociocultural lens is applied to the examination of the *Maestr@s*' assessment of their interactions and experiences in addition to their application of new consciousness in each of their bilingual elementary school classrooms.

Interaction in different spaces such as with colleagues, school campus, with their students and in social interactions, can help *Maestr@s* gain a greater understanding of how their perceptions of language, language use, and language learning are shaped by their own sociocultural positionings (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). Interactions always include a speaker and a listener using language as a tool for communicating and understanding. Transformation, then, depends on a shared understanding of how



language is used in the interactions, including the cultural values embedded in the language as a tool (Wertsch, 1998). Sociocultural theory acknowledges the significance of considering background, culture, language and identity (trans)formation within interactions.

Providing programs, with continued professional development, where *Maestr@s* are supported in gaining a clearer sense of the identities they claim and those they are situated in, can segue to a better understanding of the experiences and multiple identities in relation to their classroom pedagogy.

### **Figured Worlds and Situated Identities**

According to various scholars (Bartlett, 2007; Holland, et al., 1998; Urrieta, 1007), a figured world is a social construct where both micro and macro indexical systems of identity amalgamate. Urrieta (2007) describes figured worlds in connection with sociocultural theory as a place where identities are formed in continuum, since figured worlds, and situated identities are socially constructed. Holland et al. (1998) and Bartlett (2007) refer to identity in practice as constructs in contexts of activity. They argue that when entering a group the individual navigates the rules enacted within the group and others in the group can likewise influence such enactments. It is important to recognize that identities constructed within a historical and cultural context are formed at a micro level. These cultural identities are formed with knowledge acquired from family and community, and experiences within broader lived worlds. Whereas identities formed in the larger social discourse, are constructed at a macro level. These identities are influenced by interactions in societal, or institutional discourse, such as the interaction of

my participants as members in a specialized bilingual *maestría* (masters) program, in the cohort and in their positions as bilingual educators on their campuses. Individuals constantly develop new identities or experience shifts in identities in figured worlds (Holland, et. al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007). New identities, or situated identities, are formed within the social construct of a figured world and the discourse within that context.

Examination of a figured world such as constructed in bilingual classrooms incorporates the identities and the interactional work that occurs within this world. When a person enters a figured world she assumes a situated identity, whether situated by self or situated by others, whereas they adopt or reject characteristics of the world's discourse. Each potential member of a figured world owns a Discourse gained from the community she identifies with, known as an 'identity kit' (Gee, 1996, p. 142). The identity kit includes cultural markers, for example, the language that is used, the manner in which it is used and the group's values and beliefs. Gutierrez (2008) maintain that sociocultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge interact with each other in this Discourse domain.

Gee (1999) defines situated identities as changes, or shifts, in the language practices and interaction made by a person, depending on time, place, people, and practices in context. The practices include the use of language or artifacts as tools for interaction in the figured world. The language, accent, grammar and dialect are cultural markers used as tools by the speaker in the figured world. According to Davies and Harré (1990) the shift in language practices change more than how someone acts in a situation, it can affect the way of thinking. They argue positioning is first and foremost a

conversational phenomenon contingent on the way speakers position themselves or in their positioning by the listeners. Social positions as gender, race, ethnicity and class, among others, are consistently found within figured worlds, however, the positioning of each also varies dependent on the privilege afforded them (or not) when participating in the discourse. Bartlett (2007) further includes the importance of cultural artifacts in social interaction. The artifacts are what could be identified as markers of a group.

For the purpose of my study I draw from Holland's et al. meaning of positionality in the construction and performance of identities. A figured world can be a community that has constructed their own language and beliefs such that these characteristics form part of the identity of community members. For example,

[I]n the world of academia, being verbally aggressive may be a sign of high status and position; but for a person who has formed an identity in a figured world where maintaining egalitarian relations is important, verbal aggressiveness has connotations of a moral failing (Hollad et al., p. 131).

Holland's et al. study argues that it is erroneous to consider indications of social positioning as separate from the moral meanings found in a figured world. Positioning is defined as a "separable", but not separate, counterpart of figuration, "inextricably linked to power, status and rank" more so than the "hereness and thereeness of people" (p. 271).

An example of this is Skinner's 1990 study (cited in Holland et al., 1998) in Naudada, in central Nepal. The predominantly Hindu community held strict moral conventions set in religious texts interpreted by priests. "For Naudada's women the figured world of domestic relations was dominated by a narrativized account of the life path of a good woman" (p. 53). The narrative detailed the characteristics and

expectations of a good woman, for instance, being hard-working daughters, marrying, being respectful and diligent in their household, obeying their husband's demands, bearing sons and lastly, dying before her husband. Women were positioned as good or bad as their everyday actions were figured against this narrative. The study describes how the word widow was used as a derogatory term for women and girls. "A widow was a woman who had decisively departed from the course of the moral narrative by outliving her husband" (p. 54). The term then signifies the group's belief of a divergence of the life path of a good woman. Consequently, within the social construct of a figured world, a situated identity is positioned by a self or a self is positioned by others. The theoretical framework is appropriate for this study as it highlights the process of *Maestr@s* (trans)forming (or not) identities across complex and interrelated issues of Discourse within the figured worlds of the schools, their classroom, and the *Proyecto* program.

### **Understanding Through Critical Race Theory and Latina Critical Race Theory**

My study employs a LatCrit epistemology so as to better address the analysis of the *maestr@s*' system of knowledge. Researchers have applied LatCrit in the study of "issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality" (Espinoza, 1990; Garcia, 1995; Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Martinez, 1994; Montoya, 1994 as cited in Delgado Bernal, 2002). Therefore, I draw from LatCrit theory for added dimension to the analysis of the *Maestr@s*' histories, experiences and interviews. LatCrit provides a venue for the *Maestr@s* voice to be central to my study.

This framework stresses experiential knowledge as valuable, thereby recognizing

the importance of including narratives and oral histories in research to highlight the experiences of people of color (Dillard, 2000). Other elements of LatCrit important to the study are, the challenge to dominant ideology and the commitment to social justice (Delgado Bernal, 2002). For instance, during a literacy class conducted in Spanish, the *Maestría* cohort discussed their ideology on native language use in their classrooms. The conversation evolved into a discussion of their individual language use and language ideology. The teachers, male and female, *Latin@* and non-*Latin@*, all shared how they self-described as culturally relevant teachers at the beginning of the course. Now, several sessions into the course they admitted that in some ways they had followed the districts' and schools' scripted curriculum.

“Within this framework, [*maestr@s Latin@s*] become agents of knowledge who participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change” (Bernal, p. 113). Using this perspective encompasses “Chicana and Mexicana and Latina ways of knowing” moving away from the traditional academic thought of education (Elenes, Gonzalez, Bernal & Villenas, 2001, p. 595). In Natasha's case there was a shift in the dialectical relationship between the use of language and the value of codeswitching as an element of culture. The new acquired knowledge was being transferred to her home. Her new awareness in respect to her own children's ways of knowing provided a way of refiguring her world at home and at school. It is through the many forms of communication, experiences, the connection of home, school and community *entrelazadas* that *maestr@s* understanding of the importance of a humanizing pedagogy and social justice in particular.

## **SUMMARY**

The dissertation will examine the figured world of bilingual education as enacted in four elementary bilingual classrooms by four bilingual *Latina* teachers. Sociocultural theory invites researchers to pay attention to interactions be they in university, or elementary school classrooms. The history of bilingual education as well as the ideological and pedagogical concerns of bilingual teachers offer complex narratives of intergroup and intragroup conflicts and contradictions as well as the promise of a more humanizing enterprise for the public education of future citizens.

In Chapter 3, I describe the setting, participants, methods of data collection and data analysis used for the dissertation study. I also included demographic information on the district where the study took place and the framework for analyses.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In chapter one, the research questions were posed and the purpose of the study was described. In chapter two highlights on the historical background of bilingual education were provided, arriving to its status in present day sociocultural contexts. An overview of the theoretical frameworks of figured worlds and situated identities, CRT/LatCrit and sociocultural theory that inform the dissertation study was provided. The study was informed by several related literatures that form a compelling interdisciplinary intersection, with identity theory and humanizing pedagogy. In chapter three I provided a detailed description of the design and methods used to gather and organize the data and data analysis for the dissertation study were also included.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

I used a qualitative research design, which allowed the study to be emergent and flexible, responding to change through the research process while permitting themes and general patterns to surface from the data (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research was especially effective in obtaining information about cultural values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular groups or populations (Glesne, 2010). Smaller, focused samples are fitting in qualitative research because the aim is to gather an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon.

## Case Study Design

The unit of study in a case study can be an individual, a group, a program, an event, and/or a community (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 1995). Case study, therefore, was especially effective for this dissertation study because bilingual teachers were studied within a naturalistic context in their classrooms in order to provide in-depth, holistically rich, thick descriptions, while also providing emphasis on a detailed contextual analysis of the events and their relationships (Geertz, 1973; Guba, 1981; Shaw, 1978; Yin, 2003). Developed with a qualitative approach, I used a case study design (Merriam, 1998) to explore how *Latina* bilingual teachers positioned their identities on their school campuses, the challenges and advantages of these positionings, and finally, how personal and professional experiences influenced (or not) bilingual teachers professional identities and a (re)conceptualization of classroom practices. The three *Latina* teachers, then, constitute the bounded system (Stake, 1995).

The participants in my study were former cohort members in the *Proyecto Bilingüe Program*. The program was created in collaboration between Central University and Adelia Independent School District<sup>12</sup>, a large local school district located in a large urban city in South Central Texas. The program was described as follows,

The *Proyecto Bilingüe Program*'s goals are to improve the quality and increase the quantity of highly skilled Bilingual and ESL teachers in the [city's] metroplex, to promote teacher retention, and to improve the educational outcome for the region's growing population of English Language Learners. (University website, 2012)

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<sup>12</sup>All names are pseudonyms.



*Maestr@s* entered the cohort-designed Masters degree program while continuing to teach full-time. The program consisted of 15 months of intensive coursework beginning in June and ending in August of the following year. Major themes of coursework offered in the specialized masters program centered on research design, language theories, diversity issues, culturally relevant pedagogy and academic literacies. Such courses may be influential as *Maestr@s* are required to look critically at their personal and professional experiences, including their individual histories of literacy development in schools (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Ek & Sanchez, 2008; Varghese, Morgan, Johnson & Johnson, 2005). The program included coursework on biliteracy, multicultural children's literature (Latino literature), and bilingual foundations. Readings and discussions were predominantly focused upon Freire's notion of *concientización* and the work of Bartolomé and others on humanizing pedagogy. Two noteworthy assignments included the journey boxes (Fránquiz, Salazar & DeNicolo, 2011) and the *caminatas* (community walks). Both promoted the sharing of the teacher's personal experience and the importance of connections between self and the communities that are served by bilingual education programs.

### **The Settings**

The research study was conducted in three schools and two school districts in Central Texas. I conducted observations at Bailey Elementary<sup>13</sup> and Palmira Elementary in the Adelia Independent School District, a large school district with a diverse student population, located in the same large metropolitan city as Central University. Additional

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<sup>13</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

observations were made in Calisto Elementary in River Creek Independent School District, a smaller school district located in a rapidly growing suburbs northwest of the large urban city.

Table 3.1 juxtaposes the two school districts' along with the state's demographics. As demonstrated in the table, the two school districts were similar in average years of teacher experience and student teacher ratio. A contrast appeared in the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged and students with limited English proficiency. Likewise, Table 3.2 is a comparative chart of the three elementary schools. Bailey and Palmira Elementary present high percentages of Hispanic students. Although Calisto Elementary also showed a higher number of Hispanic students, the gap between Hispanic and White students was not as high in contrast to the numbers at Bailey and Palmira elementary schools.

Table 3.1

*Overview of School Districts' and State Demographics*

<b>2011 - 2012</b>	<b>Adelia ISD</b>	<b>River Creek ISD</b>	<b>Statewide</b>
Average teachers' number of years experience	11.2	10.6	11.6
Economically disadvantaged students	60.0%	29.8%	60.4%
Students with limited English proficiency	26.2%	8.2%	16.8%
Student / teacher ratio	14.2	14.7	14.9
Student enrollment	84,676	43,008	4,998,579

Source: Texas Education Agency

Table 3.2

*Comparative Demographics Overview of the Three School Campuses*

<b>2010-2011</b>	<b>Latino/a Hispanic</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Native American</b>	<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>
Bailey Elementary	74.6%	10.7%	10.7%	0.4%	3.6%
Palmira Elementary	88.37%	10.11%	1.52%	0%	0%
Calisto Elementary	48.6%	14%	33.3%	0.4%	3.7%

Source: Texas Education Agency

## **The Participants**

Ten *maestr@s* in the *Proyecto Bilingüe* Program were invited to participate in the study. Availability and proximity were two requisites for purposeful sampling. A goal was to select three focal participants from the larger group for this dissertation study. The recruitment of volunteers was made possible through conversations with a professor, in the Bilingual/Bicultural Program. She provided me with the opportunity to meet the *Maestr@s* in the *Proyecto* program, which included allowing me to attend program courses and to participate in one of the *Proyecto* courses.

As an activity on the first day of class, everyone introduced themselves. The professor had generously encouraged me to share with the group my own prior experience in the *Proyecto* program and my motivation for my decision to earn a Doctoral degree. I introduced myself, explained the nature of my presence, provided some background information and spoke about my study. I informed them that I would pass out a sign-up sheet and asked the *Maestr@s* to consider volunteering to participate in my study. I requested they provide their names and contact information if they were willing to voluntarily participate. All ten bilingual teachers returned the signed forms to participate in the study.

The small focal group of three bilingual teachers was strategically selected from the larger group for their diverse background and professional expertise in the early elementary school grades. I argue that three participants provided a range of intra-group differences of the *Latina* identity in the United States. All three participants were female and self identified as Puerto Rican, Mexican-American and *Mexicana*. From informal

interview segments of discourse, and narratives, I provided an introduction to each of the participants, Natasha, Clarisa and Esme<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, I included a composite (see Table 3.3) of the participants' professional experience by grade level and roles undertaken at their schools.

Table 3.3

*Selected Characteristics of Participants*

<i>Maestras</i>	<b>Natasha</b>	<b>Clarisa</b>	<b>Esme</b>
School District	Adelia ISD		River Creek ISD
School	Bailey Elementary	Palmira Elementary	Calisto Elementary
<i>Proyecto Bilingüe</i> Cohort	2012-2013	2012-2013	2012-2013
Number of years experience	12 years	6 years	10 years
Grade levels taught	PreKinder - 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Kinder - 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Other	Substituted 2 years		

***Natasha***

At the time of the study Natasha had been living outside of Puerto Rico approximately 20 years. She was 21 years old when she moved from the island, after graduating from a university in Puerto Rico. Her first occupation was as a translator in

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<sup>14</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

California. Five years later, in Texas, she became a substitute teacher, but did not consider teaching as a career. Through a period of time her attitude changed stating, “*Al visitar muchos salones y llegar a conocer muchas maestras me fui encariñando con la idea de tener mi propio grupo y de ayudar a los niños*” (While visiting many classrooms and getting to know many teachers I began to enjoy the idea of having my own group and of helping the children) (Interview, August 27, 2013). Natasha found the work fulfilling and wondered why she waited so long to teach.

During the dissertation study she was assigned to teach in a Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) dual language<sup>15</sup> classroom at Bailey Elementary. When asked why she chose bilingual education as a career she replied with a smile and tears in her eyes, “Why bilingual? ... I would have never considered anything else. My language is Spanish and that's where I see myself...*cuando yo entro por mi puerta y entro a mi salón – yo me inspiro*” (when I enter my door and I enter my room – I am inspired) (used her hands for emphasis while talking) (Interview, August 27, 2013). Natasha described her position as more of a calling than a profession.

### ***Clarisa***

Clarisa was born in the U.S and described herself as a “proud Mexican-American woman”. She had been a teacher for six years, in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at Palmira Elementary. At the beginning of the dissertation study Clarisa was assigned to teach 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Clarisa recounted her entry into bilingual education as a professional choice:

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<sup>15</sup> Dual language is a bilingual program in which students are taught content in two languages; in Texas it is usually Spanish and English.

[E]ver since I was little my mom would always tell me '*tienes que estudiar por que no quiero que tengas que depender de un hombre, tu tienes que salir adelante tu sola.*' (you need to study because I don't want you to depend on a man; you need to get ahead on your own). I took a couple of classes at [community college], but I didn't know what to do and I remember my mom always said '*se maestra, se maestra*' (be a teacher, be a teacher). I started volunteering in the elementary school near campus and I thought, hey I really like kids, this is really good. When I decided to become a teacher, I decided 'oh, I want to be this [emphasis added] kind of teacher. I want to be a bilingual teacher'. My mom guided me ... and then ... I found my place. I want to help other children be bilingual too. (Interview, August 27, 2013)

She wanted to share with children the value of being bilingual, as well as the importance of an education.

### ***Esme***

Esme and her family emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico where she had attended school to the fifth grade. Esme's father worked in the U.S. while she and her family lived in Mexico. After a year of living apart Esme's father sent for his family. Esme was a sixth grader in school when she joined her family in the fields, migrating regularly as farmworkers.

During the dissertation study, Esme was assigned to teach second grade at the Calisto Elementary campus. She had now lived in the U.S. 25 years and, still, she shivered and her voice broke as she spoke of her past experiences in school and growing up in the U.S. Desiring to provide a more positive educational experience for Mexican children and alleviating negative feelings due to marginalization, she was motivated to become a bilingual teacher. As a *Maestra*, Esme strived to provide support, encouragement and positive experiences for her students.

## DATA COLLECTION

Data was gathered for 22 weeks beginning September 2013 until May 2014. Data sources for this qualitative study included interviews, narratives, conversations, observations, fieldnotes and artifacts; also included are the *Maestra's* oral narratives taken during interviews. The *Maestra's* narratives were used to aid in gaining a better understanding of identity and examined as primary data sources because research studies demonstrate how narratives often offer evidence of identity shifts (Galindo, Aragón, Underhill, 1996; McVee, 2004).

In noting my positionality, I would argue that there was a great degree of *confianza* that existed between the informants and me. *Confianza* is not easily translated into English has deeply rooted meanings such as self-esteem, confidence or trust in others. As the researcher I had to make choices about how much to share about myself with my participants as we got to know each other, because I did not want to influence the results of our interviews or our conversations. However, as I respectfully listened and demonstrated value for their shared narratives, *confianza* was developed between my three participants and myself.

The use of various sources provides deeper, richer data (Denzin, 1988) and establishes trustworthiness in the study (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shenton, 2004). Scholars (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; González, 1998; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Wortham, 2008) indicate the use of multiple resources provides a multidimensional view of the activities in a particular setting. The various sources were cross-referenced and compared, or triangulated, coding the various sources



in order to maximize the authenticity and consistency of the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that triangulation serves to provide corroborating evidence to confirm theories and support findings, in addition to locating inconsistencies.

### ***Interviews***

The first interview was conducted with each of the ten members of the 2012-2013 cohort during the summer of 2012. The study participants were then selected from the larger group allowing me to establish a relationship with the *maestr@s*. The intent of the first interview was to share their personal narrative, their educational experience, and to discuss expectations and motivation for entering the *Proyecto Bilingüe* Program. Once the three participants for the study were selected, two formal interviews were conducted with each participant. An interview protocol (See Appendix A) was created to guide each of the two semi-structured interviews (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 2005), which were approximately 45 minutes in length. The same open-ended interview protocol was used for all three participants. The interviews were purposely used to record the *maestras'* interpretation and understanding of their literacy development, program experiences, pedagogy, identity shifts and (re)conceptualization of literacy development for emergent bilingual students. The second interviews were conducted early in the 2013-2014 school year to explore *reflexiones* (reflections) of meaningful and influential experiences in the *Proyecto* program and plans for their lessons for the school year. During the school fall and spring semesters, additional, less formal interviews were conducted as needed, in addition to scheduled observations. The final interviews were conducted in May 2014. Participants and the researcher

communicated via email or in person for the purpose of data clarification and member checking.

### ***Teacher Narratives***

Narratives offered a way of “exploring the relationship between culture, social structure and individual lives” (Clandinin, 2007; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Rogoff, 2003). They captured emotions of the experience being shared, “rendering the event active rather than passive, infused with the latent meaning being communicated by the teller” (Bruner, 1990, pg. 85). Narratives allowed the participant’s voice to emerge, communicating their perception of events and/or experiences that influenced their lives and identity formation. Narrative modes of thought aimed to create interpreted descriptions of the rich and multilayered meanings of historical and personal events (Bruner, 1986).

*Maestras* spoke and reflected as they shared narratives, leading to identity shifts and continued identity development. Research (Bruner, 1990; Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero & Muñiz, 2012) indicated that narratives are on a continuum, explaining how past experiences influence the present and how these in turn may influence future experiences. Retelling experiences was a form of resistance promoting an awareness of institutionalized marginalization, while leading to the empowerment of the teller. This in turn informed the *maestras* perspective of *Latin@* bilingual children’s literacy development in different contexts. Narratives, then, played an important role in the figured worlds of the classroom and school. Denzin (2000) contends that in conducting analysis of the narrative, close attention must be placed as to how language is used by the

narrator. Therefore, attention to the *maestras*' language choice to describe, emphasize and share the narrative afforded significant data for a stronger analysis.

### ***Participant Observations***

Participants were observed for 25 weeks in the classroom, twice a week, or in intense periods depending on curricular plans. Observations were performed during the language arts block, typically 90 minutes of instruction. However, participants also made suggestions about lessons and/or projects to be observed. I provided a detailed plan for time of observations on-site, for observable interaction between the *maestras* with their students, and *maestras* with colleagues. The observations considered the (re)conceptualization (or not) of humanizing pedagogy in literacy events and activities within them. Attention was given to discussions and interactions during the lesson and in the classroom. I compared the observational data to the interviews and assessed what the *maestras* described as culturally relevant with what was implemented in the lessons. Corroborating data from interviews and observational fieldnotes yielded additional data. Lessons were video recorded and artifacts (i.e. curriculum, schedules, lesson plans, reflections) were collected for the purpose of triangulation. Triangulation was viewed as a method of ensuring validity of the findings, while Merriam (1998) further notes its use for the construction of a more holistic view of the phenomenon of interest.

### ***Fieldnotes***

To juxtapose what teachers did in classrooms with what they said in interviews, I kept regular observational fieldnotes throughout the study. Fieldnotes traced events across time, contexts, and persons. It is common for teachers to give non-verbal signs,

such as visuals, or signals providing a message that may be considered influential to student's language choice, or used as signals for the method of completion of a particular assignment. DeWault (1990 cited in Taylor & Bogden, 1998) states that "gestures, nonverbal communications, tone of voice, and speed of speaking help the observer to interpret the meaning of [the teachers'] words" (). Therefore, data was coded for. For example, it is common for teachers to give non-verbal signs, such as visuals, or signals providing a message that may be considered influential in student's language choice, or as signals for the method of completion of an assignment. These "dialogue accessories" (pg. 73) provided a better understanding of the interaction in the event. Classroom talk was audio recorded and transcribed.

The data gathered through fieldnotes was an accumulation of observations and experiences in context that enrich these data (Emerson, 1995; Sanjek, 1990). Fieldnotes helped the researcher focus on the questions posed in the study. Merriam (1998) posits that while commenting and questioning on what is observed, "the researcher is actually engaging in some preliminary data analysis, essential in qualitative research" (pg. 105). I kept a field journal<sup>16</sup> to record my own thoughts, ideas and feelings; including, reflections on my own understanding that might have influenced the way in which the data was connected to the study (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 2011; Merriam, 1998). Every effort was made to expand on fieldnotes within 24 hours using video and/or audio as aid to include

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<sup>16</sup> Field journals record the researcher's personal reactions, frustrations, and assessments of life and work in the field, and when constructed chronologically they can provide a guide to the information in fieldnotes and other records (Sanjek, R., 1990).

more detail, including theoretical<sup>17</sup> and methodological<sup>18</sup> notes, creating a more complete picture of data collected from interviews and observations.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves continuous reflection about the data collected and transcribed (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The data was then chunked and analyzed to obtain patterns and ideas. Codes were developed to classify data and to initiate the process of identifying themes. These themes, or domains, were used for taxonomic analysis of more specific themes as data collection continued (Spradley, 1980). Fine-tuning of initial codes continued as I reviewed across the data sources, developing ideas of how codes could be refined, combined and mixed or added. Interview transcripts were reviewed to test the codes and generate preliminary themes based on groupings of codes and analyzing them to arrive at comparisons and contrasts. Reducing the data to themes required determining conceptual explanations of the case study from the fieldnotes, transcripts, and when necessary, recordings of interviews. During this inductive, constant comparative process (Creswell, 2009), the participants were asked to review interview

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<sup>17</sup> Theoretical notes are seen through the lens of the theoretical framework applied to the study; they are taken during the course of the study, particularly in observations. They can occur during coding and may at some time lead to the discovery of categories and may cause the researcher to go back to the data to explore more (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Methodological notes refer to the methods applied (Merriam, 1998). These notes can contain new ideas that the researcher has on how to carry out the research project, which can be about methods chosen, on what basis they were chosen, how they are carried out and whether or not the method is providing results (De Walt & De Walt, 2011).

transcripts for accuracy. This member-checking step ensured that participants' voices were represented authentically (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Data gathered from *Maestras* narratives were analyzed using CRT/LatCrit to complicate the multidimensionality of *Latina* experiences and identity because CRT explores race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation in different settings, and LatCrit explains *Latin@s*' multidimensional identities while "offering a strong gender analysis" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 102). In addition, LatCrit examines experiences unique to *Latin@* communities such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. The narrative captures emotions of the experience being shared, "rendering the event active rather than passive, infused with the latent meaning being communicated by the teller" (Bruner, 1990, p. 85). Bruner further posits that narratives are on a continuum, with past experiences influencing present experiences and these experiences influencing future experiences. Histories through narratives offer a way of "exploring the relationship between the culture, social structure and individual lives" of the *maestr@s* (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Rogoff, 2003). For these reasons, the narratives of the teachers own literacy development in the past, during their *Proyecto Bilingüe* program and in their classrooms, were examined.

## **SUMMARY**

The study lasted eight months. It is possible that an extended study would likely yield more conclusive evidence of transforming identities and literacy practices. Although, the apparent experiences of a masters program may be similar to those offered

in other universities, the intrinsic effects for each individual was different when personal experiences were taken into account. Another possible limitation is in using figured worlds and situated identities due to each teacher's unique experiences. For this reason the experiences of each teacher is not generalizable to teachers in general, or *Latina* teachers in particular.

## Chapter Four: Findings. *Maestras*' Path for Social Justice

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of social justice in education promotes social change, adopting culturally relevant pedagogy and to acknowledge students' home culture, recognizing the value of the community wealth they hold (Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1971; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Freire (1971) proposed that teaching is a political act; so therefore, it is never neutral. In this chapter I present my findings for this qualitative study. Three research questions were explored: How do *Latina* teachers position their identities in the figured world of their bilingual classroom and school campus? What are the challenges and affordances of these positionings? How do *Latina* teacher's experiences influence professional identity and inform (or not) the (re)conceptualization of pedagogical practices? I use Figured Worlds and Situated Identities, Critical Race Theory (CRT)/Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Sociocultural Theory as an intersecting framework.

Data gleaned from the examination of narratives, interviews and observations of the participants, was organized via three case studies. The emergent themes are presented *Maestra por Maestra*, (teacher by teacher) to allow each *Maestra* to be centered, as well as to pose Natasha's, Clarisa's and Esme's voice in an uninterrupted narrative/counternarrative, vital to CRT/LatCrit. Four emergent themes most salient for the *Maestras*' engagement in social justice are included within each case study.

- The first, endeavoring to advocate for students and their families. The *maestras*



shared the principle of advocacy. This principle stresses the importance of knowing the cultural wealth and knowledge held by bilingual families.

- Second is the development of leadership roles through professional development as a way to build intellectual and professional communities for teachers. Effective professional development can prompt critical awareness that could support and develop social and academic capital for bilingual students.
- Third, choices made in classroom practices to encompass the students' cultural and linguistic background, while including opportunities for critical encounters moving students to a more global awareness.
- Fourth, and final, is the practice of reflexivity as a method to aid in the continued growth of critical consciousness, as well as cultural awareness. Reflexivity was acknowledged by the *Maestras* as a way to critically assess ideas to make fair decisions, but more importantly, as an aid in preventing assimilation.

My data analysis showed that the *Maestras*' recent self-awareness pushed each participant further to a critical *concientización* (consciousness) and to ascertain social justice as a responsibility.

[She] learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa, 1999, pg. 101)

As polymorphous individuals, the *maestras* in this study situated identities within multiple settings. Each *maestra* considered her situatedness in context, along with the behaviors and actions taken within the occupied spaces, thereby shaping her identity.

Bilingual teachers must have an understanding of the societal forces that have influenced their cultural and linguistic identity so that they can stop passively accepting their circumstances and become not only agents of their own transformation but also leaders in the world around them. (Flor Ada, 1995)

In the same way, the *maestras*' positioning as social justice teachers confirm their self-identification as advocates for their students and families, not only in the action of advocating, but in situating their identity as advocate. Holland, et al. (1998) posited that the positioning of a person's way of knowing matters, the particular way of knowing, then, shapes the identity situated in that position, or figured world.

### ***La Maestra Natasha***

In her narrative, Natasha, *maestra* of pre-kinder, described her journey to become literate in two languages and her gain of appreciation for her two cultures.

*Tengo que explicar que soy boricua, que mi madre ... por su trasfondo, en su emoción de llamar a su hija con el nombre de su padre, lo hizo en inglés en lugar de español. Prefiero pensar que ella no sabía lo que hacía al nombrarme de una forma poco usual, pero que a la vez representaría la historia de mi vida ... una persona que se desplazaba entre dos idiomas, dos culturas y dos países. Mi tiempo en Texas ha marcado definitivamente mi vida en el sentido de abrir mis ojos a ver quién soy como Hispana.—De repente, el idioma que pensé poseer y dominar se convirtió en mi peor enemigo y me separaba de las personas que hasta ese momento creía mis aliadas ... de repente otros me decían que hablaba inglés con palabras en español.—A pesar de que fui criticada en muchas ocasiones me dí a la tarea de aprender y mejorar mis destrezas de escritura y hasta cierto punto aprendí también a hablar un poco más lento y claro.*

#### Translation:

I have to explain that I'm Puerto Rican, my mother-because of her background, in her excitement to name her daughter by her father's name, did it in English instead of Spanish. I prefer to think she didn't know what she was doing in naming me in an unusual way, but at the same time it represents the story of my life ... a person moving between two languages, two cultures and two countries. My time in Texas has definitely shaped my life in that it opened my eyes to see who I am as an *Hispana*. Suddenly, the language I thought to possess and master, became my worst enemy and separated me from the people who until then I

thought were allies ... suddenly I was told I spoke English words in Spanish.- Although I was criticized on many occasions, I took the task to learn and improve my writing skills and to some extent, I also learned to speak a little more slowly and clearly. (Interview, August 27, 2013)

Natasha formed a bilingual/biliterate identity, confident of her bilingualism. However, when her language use and manner of speech was criticized Natasha came to doubt her language skills and acculturated to mainstream expectations. Natasha's narrative emphasized how deficit views towards different languages and cultures positions individuals as the Other. Research (Cummins, 2001; Macedo & Barolomé, 1999; Nieto, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) shows that students' struggles are attributed to their culture, language and family. In her career, however, she moved to negotiate, navigate and resist social pressures. Natasha later commented she wanted to help students avoid the same insecurities by providing her students a quality education and modeling pride for cultural identity.

Natasha used the word *Hispana* in her narrative. It is important to note that Natasha's use of the word *Hispana* had a very different meaning to the literal translation of Hispanic (a Spanish-speaking person living in the US, especially one of Latin American descent). Natasha explained she used the term because at the time, it was how she knew to identify herself to describe who she is, "a *Latina*, with all that the term implies, full of heritage, full of *sabor*, full of color—claiming [her] origins, [her] culture, against assimilation and conformism" (Interview, August 15, 2014). *Hispana* was her identity, while Hispanic is a label created by the government to identify a group of people. In our interview she also stated that after her experiences in *Proyecto* she re-

identified herself as *Latina*.

Terms are found throughout the case studies with similar difficulties as *Hispanic* when translated, words that do not have literal translations, therefore, I will provide translations of descriptors and/or explanations to provide an understanding of the term in its context.

### **Taking on the Role of Advocate**

Data analysis revealed the *maestras'* feelings about the importance of a rich collaboration between school and neighborhood communities. Two principle facets were recognized: (a) knowing the school community in order to gain a real world understanding of the students' experiences and needs and (b) highlighting bilingual families' cultural wealth and its contribution to the children's education.

**Knowing the Community.** Natasha briefly summarized her understanding of the relevance of the school and home connection in one statement. She affirmed that it was something “[she] just knew was right”. Natasha brought this belief into her teaching career. She stood up for her students and even argued with parents if she believed they were not supportive of what she considered as good for their own children. She joked about being referred to as *la maestra regañona* (the scolding teacher) by parents. Natasha wore the title as a badge of honor, explaining:

*Yo me peleaba con quien fuera por mis estudiantes, hasta con sus papás, y regañaba a los padres* (I would fight with whomever for my students, even with their parents. I would scold the parents)... .Parents would point at me in the hall and say, ‘*ahí va la maestra regañona* (there goes the scolding teacher). I was a part of that deficit thinking of parents. But, I started to think, who am I to judge? They do the best they can and anything they do, big or small, helps their child.

My job is to help them support their child, not the other way around. (Interview, September 25, 2013)

As Natasha began to *reflexionar criticamente* (critically reflect) on her previous actions, she started to peel back the layers of standard beliefs; she was shocked to discover her own deficit perspective of bilingual parents. Natasha believed she was doing what was best for her students. However, it was from a position as the expert and the holder of knowledge. Such opportunities to *reflexionar* offered Natasha insight into her students' needs and this gave her confidence to challenge standard methods of teaching bilingual students to meet those needs (Quioco & Rios, 2000). Natasha deduced that the experience in *Proyecto* influenced shifts in her views, "*las discusiones en las clases [de Proyecto] me hacían pensar en lo que yo hacía en mi propio salón*" (the discussions in *Proyecto* made me think about what I was doing) and my view became more positive" (Interview, September 25, 2013). Reassessment of Natasha's way of thinking during her time with *Proyecto* was also guided by literature, which further reinforced her growing reconceptualization of bilingual education and parent-teacher relationships.

One example of this literature was *Burro Genius*, a memoir by Victor Villaseñor, which tells of his marginalization and abuse, mentally and physically, by his teachers and other students. Despite being the son of a wealthy family, he experienced racism and prejudice because he was Mexican. Natasha explained,

*I hated [emphasis added sarcastically] Burro Genius. I cried! It was brutally honest. But it made me see parents differently. Of course they see you like [an adversary] when they are not respected. It is my job to earn their trust.* (Interview, September 25, 2013)

The book influenced Natasha's decision on the way she planned to meet her students' family for the new school year, and the future. Discussions of empirical work influenced Natasha's knowledge of bilingual education and her way of teaching, yet, it was narrative like *Burro Genius* with which she made a more emotional connection.

**Recognizing the Cultural Wealth and Cultural Knowledge of *Familias*.** In our first interview, Natasha excitedly described her plan to visit every one of her students' homes “*como una humilde ignorante y aprender de ellos*” (as a humble learner and learn from them) in the fall. As part of the visit the family had a picture taken that Natasha placed in her classroom. The student and the parent/s chose what the picture would include. Natasha created a classroom family tree and placed all the pictures on the tree (See figure 2.1). Her aim was to apply her developing *concientización* in building a relationship with her students' families and to become a member of the community. Similar to methods used in studies of funds of knowledge (González, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendón, Gonzáles, & Amanti, 1995; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005), Natasha entered homes not as the *maestra*, but as a student. She found families who genuinely opened their home to her. She shared that “the families were kind and welcoming. They were [very] open and shared stories of their family” (Interview, September 25, 2013). The classroom family tree was a strategy to help the young students consider their classroom as an extension of their community and classmates as their family away from home.



Figure 2.1. The classroom family picture tree.

Natasha was emotionally overwhelmed by the trust and respect bestowed to her by the families, simply because she had taken time to visit their homes. She stated “the experience changed [her] identity as a bilingual teacher”.

*Nos americanizamos mucho, para el americano<sup>19</sup> profesionalismo es distancia. Para nuestra cultura cuando tu rompes esa distancia tu sigues siendo profesional pero haces un toque humano. ... Nosotros somos una cultura de comunidad.*

*Translation:*

We Americanized a lot. For the *americano*, professionalism is distance. For our culture when you break that distance you continue to be professional, but with a human touch. ... We are a culture of community. (Interview, September 25, 2013)

Natasha further described the result of her visits as positive and humbling experiences. The knowledge Natasha gleaned from these experiences led her to conclude that she could no longer support traditional ways of looking at students and their families. She became a more confident advocate for the families, even becoming more vocal and

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<sup>19</sup> In this context *americano* is not referring to a citizen of the U.S., but instead refers to established mainstream, middle-class society norms.

pushing back against the habit of blaming parents, their culture and their language for a student's academic difficulties or low academic performance.

For instance, Natasha developed projects and events for both the classroom and the Bailey campus that included parent participation as venues for sharing cultural knowledge and a way for teachers to get to know their students' families. She felt that the completed tasks could result in student awareness of the value of their own cultural background, while also educating the school community of the abundance of cultural wealth held by families, specifically Latino bilingual families. Natasha's first step was to arrange to have the school's main hall as the place to showcase the final products campus wide that involved students and parents. She then met with administration and teachers to plan and organize upcoming projects. During my interviews I learned that Natasha experienced resistance, as some educators believed such ventures would take too much time from other lessons. Natasha stated that teachers, mostly from the upper grades, believed projects would take time away from the testing practice that they felt they needed to focus on as educators. Natasha felt the final products would benefit the campus, and countering negativity, she argued the benefits of planned school projects as she moved forward with an initial event.

An example was a writing assignment that required students to complete their family history. The assignment was an ongoing task planned for four weeks, and it was adapted for the different grade level's curriculum. A homework element was added to include parent participation. When completed the students shared it in their classrooms, and parents were invited to attend on the day of student presentations. The finished



products were then displayed in the main hall of the campus. The family histories were one example of the various efforts Natasha cultivated in and for the school community.

A component of the family history required students to research the native country of their family and the heritage language spoken there. Students were also encouraged to investigate special celebrations and the historical background. Finally, students were expected to make connections from their research to their family's cultural practices. During the semester I asked Natasha how she felt the family history project was progressing across the school. She responded that she observed exciting learning occurring almost immediately due to discussions generated by the topics the families presented. At the conclusion of the project, however, Natasha was disappointed at the low number of teacher participants and the fact that some of the teachers did not follow the whole process.

The results showed that only half of the classrooms at Bailey Elementary participated, mostly the lower grades. Natasha confirmed, "*no me fue muy bien, pero ya se que esperar y el año que entra voy a estar mejor preparada* [emphasis added]" (it didn't go very well, but now I know what to expect and next year I will be better prepared) (Interview, September 25, 2013). Natasha was not deterred and began to search for ways to increase participation for the following year. She talked to teachers that did not participate even though it was difficult to listen to the reasons given for their lack of participation. Nevertheless, Natasha believed the project achieved her goal of bringing attention to *Latin@* families' cultural knowledge and for raising cultural awareness in the school.

Another project was a classroom assignment planned specifically so students would work cooperatively with their parent/s to write about things they did at home. Although the majority of the students in Natasha's pre-kinder class were Spanish-dominant, the children dictated their ideas to the parents in whatever language they chose. The children were encouraged to illustrate the assignment. Natasha invited parents to come in and present with their child. Due to some parents' sometimes-complicated schedules, the *maestra* scheduled presentations of the final work throughout one week.

Some of the parents work two or three jobs. It's not that they don't want to come ... they can't! I get so tired of people saying parents don't care (deep sigh). So I make adjustments to my schedule to accommodate parents when they can come. *Es mas importante* (It's more important). *No sabes la emoción que me da cuando veo la reacción de los padres y los chiquitos cuando presentan.* (You don't know the emotion I feel when I see the reaction from the parents and the little ones when they present). (Interview, October 31, 2013)

Each presentation was followed by a question and answer session. The students' affirming responses encouraged parents to return to the classroom and provide how-to demonstrations for them. A few examples of the demonstrations requested were for gardening, baking, knitting, making tortillas and making paper mache decorations. As a result one little girl assisted her *mamá* in demonstrating the steps to making tortillas. The *mamá* responded to the excitement of the children and answered their questions, and her daughter proudly kept saying, "*yo le ayudo a mi mamá, yo también hago tortillas*" (I help my mother, I make tortillas too) (Observation October 31, 2013). When the presentation was completed, Natasha took it further when she connected the activity with learning math, specifically in measuring ingredients to make good tortillas. Familial capital and

cultural capital were acknowledged, enabling parents to understand that they had knowledge that was valued (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Also highlighted was how what the parents do at home can, and do, support their children's learning.

Natasha grew in her self-awareness and critical consciousness as a professional and as an individual. Consequently, what happens inside the figured world of the classroom and/or campus also impacts what happens outside of them (Holland et al., 1998). One could argue that Natasha's professional and personal perspectives flow back and forth, intersecting, influencing one another.

I remember riding with a friend, she is Mexican, and every time she was cut-off she would throw her arm out the window and yell, '*México ven por tu gente!*' *Entonces yo también comence a hacer y decir lo mismo. ¿Tu crees? Yo también gritaba '¡México ven por tu gente!' Cuando comencé a pensar en esto, hay no, que racista—yo—que comentario tan racista, ¡ay no!* (Mexico, come for your people! Then I began to do and say the same. Can you believe it? I would also yell, Mexico come for your people! When I began to think of this, oh no, how racist—I—what a racist comment, oh no! (Interview, September 25, 2013)

Natasha's mortification was obvious as she recounted the story. She laughed intermittently while bringing her hands up to her face with embarrassment as she spoke. Sharing the story was important to her. She used stories like the one above, and others, as a standpoint from which she now situated herself as an active advocate.

*A veces como maestros bilingües tenemos la oportunidad de ayudar a las familias que no saben como obtener ayudas o que no entienden detalles del sistema [escolar]. También podemos crear conciencia en nuestras escuelas de la importancia de recibir otros idiomas y culturas.*

Translation:

Sometimes, as bilingual teachers, we have the opportunity to help families who do not know how to get help or do not understand details of the [school] system. We can also create awareness in our schools of the importance of accepting other languages and cultures. (Interview, September 25, 2013)

As a *Maestra*, and a social justice advocate, Natasha was a proponent of keeping bilingual parents well informed of what was occurring in the classroom and school. Natasha undertook her position of bilingual teacher as an obligation to advocate for students and families. She was cognizant of the importance of providing parents the tools necessary to navigate the school system, develop voice, and advocate for their children.

Natasha's relationship with her bilingual families was not traditional by conventional standards. The trust and respect Natasha gave parents was returned. For instance, colleagues warned Natasha to never give classroom parents her personal phone number because parents would take advantage of it and that 'these' parents were very needy. Natasha informed me she had given all parents from her classroom her phone number. She proudly stated that not one parent abused the offer; in fact, she had to encourage them to call with any questions they might have. Natasha tried to follow school protocol when responding to parents' questions and concerns. However, when they were directed to administration, she helped parents prepare and generate questions to ensure maximum results to obtain information, she also directed them to the particular person they would need to talk to.

Natasha approached bilingual parents, inviting them to volunteer and participate in campus and school district committees. She emphasized to parents that the knowledge they held would provide a different perspective, thereby; benefitting the group, or committee they would be involved in by utilizing the parent's communal capital (Yosso, 2006).

## **Becoming a Leader Through Professional Development**

All four *Maestras* participated in various forms of leadership that were brought to the forefront through their participation in the *Proyecto* program and to other related staff development opportunities. First, they agreed that leadership was an important piece, and significant, as a social justice teacher. During one of our conversations, Natasha confessed she was never very interested in being in charge, except in her classroom. Natasha stated that she would have never considered volunteering to be a committee leader unless it was a directive from administration. She did, nevertheless, credit experiences in *Proyecto* for giving her the confidence and motivation to take risks outside of her classroom and even reach beyond what is comfortable for her. Natasha reiterated that experiences such as sharing her biography and literacy development in *Proyecto* reinforced her belief that it was her responsibility to share knowledge, to mediate and engage others in cultural relevant practices. The dialoguing after sharing with her cohort produced self-awareness. Once she understood the potential for empowerment, she actively sought leadership positions.

Leadership roles, big and small, offered Natasha the opportunity to challenge established ways of viewing teacher professional development. She was able to recommend workshops, share literature, and work with teachers across grade levels. She asked questions and pushed for critical thought knowing her way of thinking might be challenged. The goal was always to focus on the students and their success. What follows is an example of Natasha's choice for a leadership position.

Natasha commented she volunteered to chair the Social Studies Committee, and in an exaggerated serious tone explained, “*el comite de estudio sociales no hacia nada entonces yo me hice chair person*” (the social studies committee didn’t do anything, so I made myself chair person) (Interview, August 27, 2013). I asked her why particularly the Social Studies Committee, what was the attraction to this committee? Natasha did not hesitate and responded that social studies was a great medium to teach about culture, “*se pueden estudiar tantas cosas, historia de paises, idiomas, cultura ... nosotros ... muchas cosas!*” (many things can be studied, history of countries, languages, culture ... us ... many things) (Interview, August 27, 2013). She described social studies as the most appropriate venue to introduce critical epistemology. Natasha felt her position as chair afforded her some small influence to encourage teachers to reassess their teaching practices particularly in the education of bilingual students and include social studies in the curriculum more often. Natasha’s move to chair the Social Studies/Cultural Awareness Committee was described by her, as “a premeditated move” (Interview, August 27, 2013).

This study demonstrated a rationale for the participation in, and implementing, purposeful professional training that includes support for the added demands in bilingual classrooms. The *maestras* preferred training that involved “knowledge-sharing based in real situations” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597). The positioning in leadership roles provided the *maestras* with opportunities to offer this type of knowledge-sharing with others. Interestingly, the four participants preferred to work collaboratively whenever possible. It was these opportunities that promoted professional development,

as well as in the sharing of information. A significant change in the *maestras* teacher leadership roles is the teachers positioning as leaders of change.

Natasha took steps to participate in, or form, groups that she believed filled gaps left by professional development provided by the school district. Professional development is very often tightly structured to content, it is time limited and most often only one-day trainings that lack a follow-up. Teachers, like their students, need to have their learning scaffolded through collaborative work, building on prior knowledge and some form sustained support (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). Natasha was resolute to continue developing her critical perspective and self-awareness:

*Digo yo si después de una experiencia [Proyecto] tan dinámica, si con el tiempo te alejas de la universidad, de las lecturas se ... you get numb. Si lees, bueno es una cosa, pero si lees y tienes esa conversación con otros, es diferente. Hablas con otros con diferentes ideas eso ayuda. Necesitamos esa comunicación. Me preocupa que si no tengo las oportunidades de compartir con alguien...(her eyes filled with tears) pues tengo miedo de que me comience a volver sin darme cuenta. De todo, es lo que más temo*

Translation:

Let's say, if after such a dynamic experience, if over time you get away from the university, the readings ... you get numb. If you read it's a good thing, but if you read and have that conversation with others it's different. You talk to others with different ideas, that helps. We need that communication. I worry that if I don't have the opportunity to share with others ... I'm afraid to slide back without noticing. Of everything, this is what I fear most. (Interview, August 27, 2013)

When I began the study, Natasha was already offering some time after school for any teacher who wanted to stop by her room to share ideas and discuss collaborative activities for their students. Natasha described sharing resources as beneficial for all and a venue to continue developing a critical perspective. She also took the opportunity to share scholarly articles, gathered in her courses, with her colleagues. The goal was to create

purposeful, informal, professional training that included support for the added demands experienced in bilingual classrooms. Natasha noted, “You work one-to-one with another teacher and just plant a little seed, but I don’t think I can do more” (Interview, October 24, 2013).

The same afternoon, walking together, as I was leaving the Bailey campus and after Natasha walked her class to the cafeteria for lunch, she stopped to talk to a young woman, whom I assumed was a high school volunteer; the young woman was a new bilingual teacher. Natasha commented to the new teacher, how impressed she was with her lessons and the relationship she had developed with her students. The young *maestra* seemed surprised and responded she was following and implementing Natasha’s suggestions. The young *maestra* stated that after reading some of the literature too, the theory made sense to her. Her students were engaged and their parents actively participated in her classroom. The novice teacher validated Natasha’s work, which was an obvious lift for Natasha. The very surprised Natasha told me,

I think I need to continue doing what I’m doing. I have to learn to talk to people so its not offensive, to inspire, but I need to continue talking. Affirmation [and] confirmation of what you believe in, so just keep talking because you don’t know who is listening. (Interview, October 24, 2013)

Their collaborative interactions provided reciprocity supporting Natasha’s leadership role and the new *maestra*’s professional development.

Comparable to the findings of Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995), my observations presented results of collaborative work and shared knowledge to gain the understanding of new concepts. Natasha described the small gatherings as learning



experiences. She recognized not only the importance of having spaces that nurtured the growth of professional identity, but also participating in them.

Natasha's objective was to create a dialogue, "*porque cuando tus ojos son abiertos a otras realidades comienzas a evaluar y a tratar de definir las tuyas*" (because when your eyes are opened to other realities you begin to evaluate and try to define yours) (Interview, September 26, 2013). Natasha believed it was important that people knew that many things they take for granted have Mexican, or Latino origin. Natasha maintained this was important and should be celebrated by the school since the majority of its school population came from various Latin American countries. Not everyone responded positively, but she had colleagues that did approach her to share ideas for future projects. Natasha acknowledged this as a step for teachers to work more collaboratively and her plans consistently included parent participation. She continued to develop this plan of action because it was new, but vital to her goal of community.

Natasha made it clear she felt professional presentations, both on her campus and at conferences, were necessary and described the opportunities to present as assuming leadership roles. On presentation panels she shared spaces with scholars that added to her knowledge, challenged her views, and provided data to support her beliefs. Natasha explained that through preparing and participating in presentations, she further developed professionalism; "*Las presentaciones son importantes porque es una buena oportunidad para compartir información y para añadir mas información a lo que ya sabes pero viene de otras personas que también piensan críticamente*" (Presentations are important because it is a good opportunity to share information and to add more information to

what you already know, but it comes from others who think critically) (Interview, September 26, 2013). Natasha shared information through presentations in school campuses, school district trainings and state presentations.

### **Using Culturally Relevant Practices Within a Humanizing Pedagogy**

Our responsibility is to meet them where they are and take them someplace else, and have them carry who they are along with them. –Sonia Nieto

Although this study looks at teachers as practitioners of social justice, it is important to note that in addition, Natasha, Clarisa and Esme, argued specifically for the importance and benefits of native language instruction. They agreed that through their growing confidence and newly acquired academic discourse, they were better able to articulate what they did in the classroom, and assess the appropriateness of their pedagogical practices. The *maestras*' practices fostered student achievement; still, they were concerned they could get in trouble for not following the strict guidelines of the García & González Dual Language Model (Adelia ISD Website, 2011; Dual Language Training Institute, 2014). This was increasingly problematic during the implementation of the García & González dual language program at elementary schools in the Adelia and River Creek School Districts. Classroom practices were highly monitored, placing restrictions on curriculum flexibility for student needs. The dual language program also requires the use of language of the day by all students, parents and school staff (Dual Language Training Institute, 2014).

Everyone is reminded of the language for the day by posting signs throughout the school. On one of my earlier visits to the Bailey campus I noticed a large sign in the

office that said Spanish Day in red letters. I checked the back of the sign and sure enough, it said English Day in blue letters. I observed smaller signs with the same notice on some of the classroom doors. I asked Natasha about these and she informed me that only the bilingual classrooms displayed the signs. Natasha said she hated the signs, “*Si mis niños necesitan apoyo en español o inglés yo se los voy a dar, aunque García & González [program] lo prohíbe. ¿Como van a aprender si no entienden y no los apoyo?*” (If my children need support in Spanish or English I'm going to give it to them, but García & González [program] prohibits it. How will they learn if they don't understand and I don't support them?) (Interview, August 13, 2013)

Another concern was the constant lack of resources:

*Pues la vida no puede ser perfecta ... siempre hacen falta materiales y literatura en español y tal vez en ocasiones sientes que hay personas en tu escuela que no entienden la necesidad de tus estudiantes, pero por eso somos maestros bilingües, sabemos <sup>20</sup>hacer de tripas corazones’.*

Translation:

Well, life can't be perfect ... there is always a need for materials and literature in Spanish and maybe on occasions you feel that there are persons in your school that do not understand your students' needs, but that's why we are bilingual teachers, we know how to make do with what we have. (Interview, August 13, 2013)

It is not uncommon for teachers to buy or create their own materials, however *maestras bilingües* added that very often the materials that are available are not of the same quality as those existing for English dominant students. It is therefore, very common to find *maestras* buying, translating and creating their own materials.

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<sup>20</sup> A Spanish proverb that cannot be literally translated but refers to overcoming adversity, doing with what you have.

Natasha had to deal with prevalent assumptions made about her students' due to their age, since she taught pre-kindergarten. She complained that pre-kinder students were often left out of school activities because it was generally believed that they were too young to participate in many of the activities. It is important to recognize the institutional system's deficit perspective of bilingual students, but there is also a narrow view of young students' capabilities. Natasha challenged the positioning of her students as *non-abled*. She challenged the invisible wall set to limit her students, with the excuse of age. Natasha's identity as a social justice educator did not accept the label and a humanizing pedagogy moved her students to excel:

*En mi carrera como maestra me he dispuesto proveer a mis estudiantes un ambiente rico en vocabulario. He tratado de enseñarles un español variado y ambiente lleno de oportunidades para crecer como lectores y como oradores. No importa la edad, todos los niños deben verse como lectores y como escritores. En cuanto a mi filosofía de enseñanza, pues soy una rebelde. Odio los currículos que limitan y que no le permiten a los niños a explorar y a profundizar en los temas y asuntos que de verdad le interesan ... cuando traemos al salón asuntos más reales en las vidas de nuestros estudiantes, los niños se interesan más y le sacan más provecho.*

Translation:

In my teaching career I have provided my students an environment rich in vocabulary. I have tried to teach diverse Spanish in an environment full of opportunities to grow as readers and as speakers. No matter the age, all children should be seen as readers and as writers. As for my teaching philosophy, well I am a rebel. I hate curricula that limit and do not allow children to explore and deepen the themes and issues that really interest them ... when we bring to the classroom issues more real to the lives of our students, children become more interested and will be more beneficial. (Interview, August 13, 2013)

Natasha stated that she set high expectations for her students, which they readily surpassed. Together she and her students proved that neither age nor language was an issue. School rules describe assembly attendance as a privilege. Natasha bragged that

her group of four year olds was the only pre-kinder class invited to all the school assemblies. “Ask any teacher. That is a great accomplishment,” smiled Natasha. She added that this accomplishment was aided by respecting her students as individuals

This *maestra* embraced her way of knowing, to teach her students. When Natasha tried to teach by following the curriculum without any deviation, her students struggled, and so did she. For this reason, Natasha began the year with “Mi familia, My Family” while the adopted unit begins with “I am me”. It was important to her to help her students understand the connection they have with their families. She wanted them to see that what they knew, what they like, and their language are part of their family. “I want them to understand that ‘I am me’, the me, is because of ‘mi familia’” (Interview, October 7, 2013).

An overview of a lesson highlights how the *maestra* guided her students to define what a family is. After the read-aloud (October 7, 2013) of Robert Kraus’, *Germán el ayudante/ Herman the Helper*, Natasha invited student discussions. She stated that her students sometimes “took the lesson into a different direction” from her plans, but she felt they learned more this way. During the read-aloud, students related the actions to what they did with their family by making connections, discussing experiences, and exploring the theme of the lesson.

Natasha: *¿Ayudan en casa?*

Marilu: *¡Si! Yo le ayudo a mi mamá en la cocina!*

Natasha: *Que bien que se ayudan uno a otro ¿verdad? En mi casa mis hijos tienen trabajos que hacen. Así me ayudan ellos.*

Josue: *Yo también ayudo.*

Natasha: *¿Qué es una familia?*

Eric: *Se quieren.*

Elli: *Se ayudan y se cuidan. Mi mamá me cuida.*  
Maria: *¡Porque vivimos juntos!*  
Jake: *Y aquí estamos juntos. (en el salón)*  
Elli: *Yo quiero a mis amigos.*  
Natasha: *Tú eres parte de mi familia en la escuela. Dile a tu amigo 'soy feliz que eres parte de mi familia de la escuela'. Y recuerden esto todos los días, somos una familia en la escuela.*

Translation:

Natasha: Do you help at home?  
Marilu: Yes! I help my mom in the kitchen!  
Natasha: It's great that you help one another, right? In my house my kids have jobs they do. That's how they help me.  
Joshua: I help too.  
Natasha: What's a family?  
Eric: They love each other.  
Elli: They help and take care of each other. My mom takes care of me.  
Maria: Because we live together.  
Jake: And here we're together. (in the classroom)  
Elli: I love my friends.  
Natasha: You're part of my school family. Tell your friend 'I am happy you're part of my school family'. And remember this everyday, we are a family at school.  
(Observation, October 7, 2013)

Natasha and I talked about the lesson that afternoon after school. Most noticeably, was the students' initial hesitation to share, but when Natasha used examples of her own family, the students became eager to share home experiences. It had been wonderful watching the Spanish-dominant students open up and become excited contributors.

**Cultural Intuitiveness Guiding Professional Choices.** Similar to the scholarship of Delgado Bernal (pg. 563) Natasha used her cultural intuitiveness to negotiate and navigate the institutional system. I asked Natasha why she felt she had to teach the way she did despite knowing that it could be disapproved or she could be reprimanded. She replied, "for the sake of your students you have to be willing to work

with other people and different ideologies [but] without sacrificing your own. ...*soy fiel a mis creencias entonces aunque se me venga el mundo encima si es lo mejor para mis niños entonces bueno*” (I am true to my beliefs even if the world falls on me, if it’s best for my children well then) (Interview, October 7, 2013).

Natasha had strong feelings about providing her students a quality equitable education, feeling a responsibility to become an active advocate and provide for her students. Natasha’s raised critical consciousness led her to recognize her assimilation into dominant ideology; it pushed her to change her way of thinking. Her shift in perception also moved her to consider how, and what, she was teaching. Before her graduate school experience Natasha had been quiet and subdued about her students’ accomplishments, but once positioned as a leader and a strong *maestra*, she confidently showcased her students’ work. She sought to demonstrate to her students the value of their work and their bilingual identity.

Natasha knew that her way of teaching sometimes came under scrutiny because it looked too different. She defined many of her teaching strategies as *natural* and described her teaching as something that evolved organically regardless of mandated practices.

*El pensamiento critico hacia el currículo siempre lo he tenido, no se porque, pero sí, y ahora tengo la lectura que lo apoya pero yo siempre e sabido que es así. No se como explicarlo, pero yo sabia ... yo sentía que así era.”*

Translation:

A critical thought about the curriculum, I have always had it, I don’t know why but yes, but now I have literature that supports it, but I have always known this. I don’t know how to explain it, I just knew ... I felt it was like that. (Interview, September 25, 2013)

Natasha resisted the pressure of the institutional power even when she could not explain the correlation between her practices and the declared results because her goal was to affirm and strengthen students' cultural wealth.

**Offering Students Opportunities for Critical Encounters.** I arrived for one of my observations, I noted the schedule had been shifted a little and I arrived during the science block. Science is a subject that was taught in Spanish, and Natasha prepared her students prior to the lesson that would be shared with the group of English-dominant students from another classroom.

*Recuerden que ustedes son inteligentes y quiero que contesten las preguntas. Son bilingües a si que saben mucho. No quiero que se detengan enseñenles a los niños de la otra clase lo que ustedes saben. Tomen a su pareja para que le ayuden con la lección.*

Translation:

Remember that you are intelligent and I want you to answer questions. You are bilingual so you know a lot. I don't want you to hold back, show the children from the other class what you know. Take your partner to help them with the lesson. (Interview, November 4, 2013)

During the lesson, I observed the Spanish-dominant students actively participating. The majority of Natasha's bilingual students were eagerly raising their hands to answer questions, as well as engaging the students from the other classroom. The following is a short example of my observation (November 4, 2013) of students' interactions:

Natasha: *Vamos a averiguar qué objetos flotan y cuales no flotan. Ustedes harán una predicción, flota ... ¿sí o no? Después tomando turnos cada uno de ustedes se acercará a la tina colocando el objeto en el agua y comprobaremos nuestro hipótesis.* (We will find out which objects float and which ones do not float. You will make a prediction, does it float ... yes or no? Then taking turns, each of you will come to the tub and by placing the object in the water we will prove our hypothesis.)

Paul: The pencil will float, ah, how do you say pencil?



Josue: *El lápiz va a flotar.* (The pencil will float.)

Paul: *El lápiz.* (The pencil)

Josue: Yes. The next object.

Melody: Ummm, it will float ... floater?

Marta: Flota. F-l-o-ta, flota.

Melody: Floa-ta (smiling).

At our post-observation meeting, Natasha indicated she took the specific coaching step because she was troubled when she noticed that the Spanish-dominant students consistently conceded to the English-dominant students. She watched how her bilingual students regularly sat back and allowed the English-dominant group to dominate the interaction during the lessons even when a lesson was in Spanish.

*Todo ser humano usa unos mecanismos básicos para hacerse entender y para compartir sus pensamientos. No importa si lo hacemos de la manera convencional o si inventamos nuestro propio código para lograrlo. Lo importante es que nadie nos corte las alas...que nadie nos diga, 'No puedes'. Nadie nació sabiéndolo todo y nadie lo sabe todo...esta vida es una carrera de aprendizaje.*

Translation:

Every human being uses basic mechanisms to be understood and to share their thoughts. It doesn't matter if it's done the conventional way, or invent our own code to do it. The important thing is that no one cut our wings...that no one tell us, 'You can't'. Nobody was born knowing it all and nobody knows everything...this life is a learning profession (Interview, November 4, 2013).

Natasha then made a conscious decision to be overt in situating her students as active participants in the figured world of her classroom; she built on their language strength and encouraged them to be confident speakers by allowing them to answer questions in whatever language they preferred and in providing support for their partner during the lesson. Natasha encouraged the students' "linguistic facility" tapping into it to enhance Spanish and English literach and language skills (Arvizu, 2011).

Natasha felt a responsibility to teach the students how to navigate mainstream discourse. Yosso (2005) describes familial capital as cultural knowledge nurtured by family and community. Natasha's aim to build a family environment in the classroom nurtured the students' cultural wealth within the academic environment. She was clear about what she wanted the students to learn, the goal, was learning beyond academics. She was overt in teaching her students how to act, what to say and what to do in order to be successful in White middle class mainstream society (Freire, 1970; Huerta, 2011), along with supporting students' cultural awareness.

Natasha also taught students to be observant. Just before one of my scheduled observations, the students were in centers when Jose shyly approached Natasha and handed her a book opened to a specific page. He pointed to the picture and walked away. Natasha called him back and asked a few questions.

Natasha: *Ven Jose. ¿Te gusta este libro, Jose, verdad? Lo escoges todos los días.*

Jose: (nods)

Natasha: *¿Te gusta el libro, sí ... porque te gusta?*

Jose: *Como yo* (pointing to the illustration of a little boy)

Natasha: *Oh, ¿se parece a ti?*

Jose: (nods again)

Translation:

Natasha: Come Jose. You like this book Jose, right? You choose it everyday.

Jose: (nods)

Natasha: You like the book, why do you like it?

Jose: Like me.

Natasha: Oh, he looks like you?

Jose: (nods again)

(Observation, November 4, 2013)

Cultural context influences comprehension, so that students recall more details in the literature because it is relevant to them. Natasha took great effort in providing students with a variety of literature that they could connect with and continue their literacy development. In this particular example, it helped Jose pick up a book and skim it.

Natasha additionally tried to make her students visible on campus by celebrating their accomplishments in a more public manner, usually by posting her students' work in the building's main hall. This pedagogical practice allowed the students and their community wealth to be represented. Natasha used a *Latina* critical lens to consider the best ways to instruct her students and value their families' cultural knowledge.

### **Reflexivity For Critical Consciousness**

Reflexivity encouraged Natasha to critically examine power structures and fostered the need to challenge issues affecting her students and their families. She recognized her own social capital and understood that the knowledge she gained helped her to continue examining issues critically.

*Hasta cierto punto, cuando llegas a este país adoptas una posición de asimilación, 'mejor me parezco a ellos para no ser la nota discordante o para evitar el no ser aceptada' pero al hacer esto estás negando tu propia identidad y lo que te define ... pasas por una experiencia de despojo que te deja inconforme, en paz exteriormente, pero con una guerra campante en lo interior. A raíz de mi corto tiempo en Proyecto he podido identificar áreas de mi vida [personal] y de mi práctica como maestra que se encontraban en total oposición a lo que en realidad creo y quiero ser. Pero no quiero pasar por otro proceso de asimilación, aún aquí podemos correr el riesgo de asimilarnos a todo lo que se nos dice— pienso analizar y entender los puntos que se me presentan y quiero adoptar los que me lleven a la paz interna que todos necesitamos.*

#### Translation:

To some extent, when you come to this country you adopt a position of assimilation, 'better I look like them and not be the discordant note or to avoid not

being accepted', but by doing this, you are denying your own identity and what defines you (pause) you go through an experience of dispossession that leaves you unhappy, peace on the outside, but with a rampant war within. Following my short time in *Proyecto [Maestría]* I was able to identify areas of my [personal] life and my practice as a teacher which were in total opposition to what I really believe and want to be. But I do not want to go through another process of assimilation, even here we run the risk of assimilating to what is said—I plan to analyze and understand the points presented to me and I want to adopt those leading me to the inner peace we all need. (Interview, August 27, 2013)

I chose to include this piece from Natasha's narrative because it summarized her journey to the person and *maestra* she has become. Natasha's sociocultural experiences as a *Latina* and a woman of color were not consistent to hegemonic ideology, but like Quijano and Rios (2000) I found Natasha reproduced, or became a part of, the status quo because she had not developed ideological clarity (Balderrama & Bartolomé, 2001; Bartolomé, 2004). Natasha, as well as Clarisa and Esme, admitted their initial lack of a critical perspective, however, when they were challenged to look at their experiences through a critical lens they embarked a new consciousness.

Natasha arrived to her understanding that as a *maestra*, her responsibility to her students was more than just 'a job'. In our conversations, Natasha consistently described herself as an intuitive person with a strong faith, so that reflexivity for self-awareness was natural for her. The critical aspect, however, was new to Natasha, as she offered, "I always had a critical view for curriculum, but not for the other stuff. For curriculum ... I just knew what felt right and what didn't" (Interview, November 4, 2013). Natasha was aware of how easy it would be to slip into the comfort of assimilation, so she worked to stay informed and continued to apply her *Latina* critical lens to view her personal and professional worlds.

In my church, there was an elderly gentleman, he always stared at me. I would say hello but he never replied. One day he came up to me pointing to my arm and said, '*tu no debes de estar aquí porque tu forma de hablar y el color de tu piel, son una aberración a Dios*' (you do not belong here because the way you speak and the color of your skin are an aberration to God.). I knew he was wrong! How could the way God made me be wrong. It was his prejudice not God. I realized I had been judging too, maybe not like that, *pero en el modo de pensar, las cosas que decía* (but in the way I thought, the things I said). (Interview, September 25, 2013)

Reevaluating this incident pushed her to acknowledge it as ignorance and prejudice, things she found absolutely unacceptable. Natasha described how in the past she would have dismissed the incident, chalking it up to the man's age. Reexamining the incident, however, she was deeply aware how negatively she was situated by this man. Natasha's awareness pushed her to reexamine her own perspective of others, concluding that any kind of deprecation must not be accepted. Confronting her prejudices, Natasha understood and respected the complexity of families' lives.

Natasha had not considered the influence a critical consciousness would have on her personal life. She stated, "no puedo ver las cosas como antes, no puedo volver hacia atrás" (I can't see things like before, I can't go back) (Interview, November 4, 2013). A critical perspective allowed her to "*abrir los ojos y la mente*" (open her eyes and her mind). The incident was an extreme experience, but it also pushed Natasha to embrace a deeper self-awareness and strengthened her identity as a woman of color.

## SUMMARY

Natasha entered the teaching profession eager to support bilingual students' learning. Still, she resisted teaching methods she felt were not relevant to her students.

Situating her identity as *Maestra*, she used her intuitive cultural awareness to guide her, choosing what she felt was right for her bilingual students. Also, as she further developed critical self-awareness through discussions and interactions with other teachers she became motivated to participate as an agent of change for bilingual students and their families, as well as the school community.

### ***La Maestra Clarisa***

Transnationalism<sup>21</sup> produces simultaneous living experiences which constructs deterritorialization, by which individuals identify themselves as part of a group from a country they do not live in (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). When I asked Clarisa, a second grade *maestra*, how she would identify herself she stated, “I am a proud Mexican-American woman”. Clarisa grew up learning to navigate in this “transnational social space” (Sanchez & Kasun, 2012, p. 72).

I have strong ties to both Mexico and Texas. I was born in Dallas, Texas in 1985 into a Spanish-only speaking family. Both of my parents were born and raised in Coahuila, Mexico and immigrated to Texas in the early 1970’s and became legal U.S.A. residents in 1985. Ever since then we have traveled to Coahuila [regularly]. In fact most of my extended family lives in Coahuila today—My summer vacations and school holidays were spent in Mexico with family. Since we have traveled to Mexico consistently especially when I was younger, I always spoke Spanish. I still only communicate in Spanish with my parents and most family members. [I] have an older sister and an older brother and they already knew English and I think that’s where I learned my English—we talk to each other in Spanglish a lot. (Interview, September 18, 2013)

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<sup>21</sup> “Transnationalism embodies social practices by people who engage more than one national context with some depth of familiarity through activities with family in multiple countries, . . . visits, communication with home country, the exchange of goods, information and accumulated local knowledges between countries” (Sanchez & Kasun, 2012, p. 75).

When Clarisa entered elementary school she was immediately immersed into dominant discourse. Clarisa credited her bilingual development to her family and home. She acknowledged she “was raised knowing that Spanish was important to communicate with her extended family” (Interview, September 18, 2013). Placement in English-only classrooms is a common practice in Texas schools. Clarisa encompassed a more additive method of sustaining (Arce, 2004) bilingual students’ bilingualism.

I was placed in all English instruction and continued that way throughout my entire educational life. (Pause) I am fortunate to beat the odds. Despite not having received any Spanish instruction I have maintained my parents’ language proficiently. I have learned that my personal preference for Spanish has a deeper and more meaningful reason. Spanish identifies where I come from and who my parents are. I am first generation and the first person to graduate college. Many opportunities have been presented to me because of my bilingualism and biliterate skills and it allows me to help others by sharing literature, ideas and make people aware of why it is important to be bilingual and biliterate, *especially* [emphasis added] my students and their families. My colleagues too, but it is really hard to get them to buy into it...even some of the bilingual teachers. (Interview, September 18, 2013).

Clarisa’s bilingualism was not acknowledged or validated in school, she was simply identified as a fluent English-speaker. Similar to Bartolomé’s study (2011), in my informal conversations with Clarisa, I learned that she was certain her language retention was aided by *las novelas* (soap operas) she watched at home, *la música* she listened to and sang with her sister, *los poemas* (the poems) she wrote and read in Spanish. Additionally, translating for her parents assisted the development of language and literacy skills. For Clarisa, her bilingualism and biliteracy was intricately entwined to her family.

Clarisa believed her experiences fostered her strong belief to retain and support her students’ own biliteracy development. Clarisa’s practices were driven to sustain the

students' culture and bilingualism (Paris, 2012). In order to sustain students' cultural knowledge and community wealth, *Maestras* include methods that reflect students' identity and experiences.

### **Taking on the Role of Advocate**

To deny children a powerful tool for developing their unexplored potential by failing to expose them to multiple semiotic systems is to truncate their eventual development and derail their limitless possibilities. (NormaGonzález, 2005, p.xx)

Clarisa wanted to give back to the community she believed helped her retain her cultural identity. It was, therefore, important to Clarisa to help her students understand that they could achieve and be successful through advantages provided by their (bi)literacy and bilingualism. She would support the maintenance of the bilingual students' linguistic and cultural identities. The three *Maestras*, Natasha, Clarisa and Esme advocated for the support of the whole child.

**Knowing the Community.** When Clarisa decided to become a teacher she knew exactly where she wanted to begin her teaching career, "I used to ride the bus to go to class and it went by my elementary school. I would think 'that's where I want to teach', (with a big smile she whispered) and I did" (Interview, August 27, 2013).

I have taught for six years, four years in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and two years in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. I love to teach and I especially love *who* [emphasis added] I teach. I specifically chose to teach at my campus [and bilingual students]. I grew up in the neighborhood where I teach, so I empathize with my students greatly. My philosophy is that all my students feel that the resources, [both] linguistically and culturally they bring from home (voice quivers) are recognized and valued in the classroom. *Es mi deber como maestra mantener mis expectativas igual de altas para todos* (It is my duty as a *maestra* to maintain my expectations high for all). I want to develop all my students to be bilingual, biliterate [and] bicultural, and achieve academically! (Interview, September 18, 2013)



Clarisa helped her students develop strong identities and self-esteem. By Texas law (Texas Education Agency, 2012) students whose home language is other than English are required to be tested so they can be identified. Clarisa was identified as an English speaker, not bilingual, encountering a subtractive perspective for her bilingualism as soon as she entered school. Clarisa knew her students were bright and so she was determined to highlight the rich funds of knowledge they held. She created spaces visible to classroom visitors in her classroom to display students' work, validating and demonstrating their work as valuable.

[I] really love reading about the Mexican-American experience. I like to read a person's life story and compare it to mine, like struggles in learning a second language. I even extend it in (my) classroom like, 'oh and what is your biliterate history', and 'how do you use your biliteracy at home'? Valuing my students is behind everything I do. I read Freire's (1970), "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", the idea of *conscientization*, brought me to my own awareness, how I perceive myself and how I perceive others; it affected my own self-awareness as a person and a professional that ultimately affected my teacher role. (Interview, September 18, 2013)

Clarisa, like Natsha, was influenced by literature, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, read in classes for *Proyecto*. The literature strengthened their teaching philosophy, and the experiences produced by reading it influenced the way they chose to teach. Clarisa's growing critical awareness caused a shift in the lens she used to view her students, their families and herself; there was a shift in the way she situated herself as a bilingual teacher. She wanted to be critically aware and to do more.

Many of Clarisa's classroom parents were unable to come to the classroom on a regular basis, so she held an open door policy and parents were welcome anytime.

*Los papás de varios de mis estudiantes tienen dos o tres trabajos. Uno de mis estudiantes va con su mamá al trabajo. Es difícil venir a la escuela. Un niño (pause) acaban de devolver a su papá para México hace poco tiempo. Así que ahora están solos su mamá y sus hermanitos. Ella no tiene tiempo de venir, pero me llama.*

Translation:

The parents of several of my students have two or three jobs. One of my students goes to work with his mom. It's hard for them to come to school. One student (pause) his Dad was just sent back to Mexico. So now, only his mom and siblings are here. She does not have time to come, but she calls me. (Interview, October 7, 2013)

Recognizing parents could not always come to the classroom, she felt it was imperative that parents were comfortable with her. Clarisa believed it would allow for an enhanced communication between her and parents.

Parents began the year by providing information they believed necessary for their child's smoother adjustment into Clarisa's class. In the classroom, Clarisa applied different methods that encouraged students to share with her. She felt these practices were similarly important because while they assisted in her developing relationships with the students, it helped her learn about the families too.

*Al principio del año escolar, los padres me avisan de las cosas que ellos piensan que yo debo saber sobre sus niños. Después me doy cuenta de lo que pasa en las familias por los estudiantes. Unos me dicen y otros lo escriben en sus diarios. Ellos saben que solamente yo los leo.*

Translation:

At the beginning of the school year, parents notify me of the things that they think I should know about their children. Later I find out what's going on with the families through the students. Some tell me and others write it in their journals. They know that I'm the only one that reads them. (Interview, October 7, 2013)

Clarisa knew language was one of the obstacles that kept most parents' off the school campus. Her mother had not participated in school activities because teachers did

not speak Spanish. It was Clarisa's personal goal to make bilingual parents feel welcome to visit the school and her classroom. Clarisa commented to me, as the researcher, that when students feel confident they encouraged their parents to visit the classroom, and she wanted parents to be a part of their classroom community. She stressed her goal to let parents know that they were an integral part of their children's learning. Collaboration between Clarisa's students and their families was important to her. She recognized that the standard view of parental involvement situated the majority of bilingual parents as not involved in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Clarisa provided opportunities for communication and interaction with the students and parents.

The *Maestra* stated she wanted to offer opportunities where the students and their parents could share their knowledge. For instance, there were assignments in which parents shared narratives of family histories, while the students shared school experiences, thereby forming a home-school connection. The expectations encouraged the family to complete assignments together because it helped parents become aware of what their children were learning. Clarisa proudly commented that parents called or stopped by if they had difficulty understanding the instructions because they were comfortable with her. She identified those practices as obvious statements to the value bilingual *Latino* families placed in their children's education, disproving standard belief about *Latino* families' lack of interest in the education of their children. Consequently, she offered opportunities for parents to participate by sending work home that would require interaction between the parent(s) and the child.

“*Trato de inculcar* (I try to instill) the importance of bilingual education to my students. I think understanding this does make an impact on the students ... in some way” (Interview, September 18, 2013). Just as Clarisa is “grateful for being bilingual”, she wanted her students to value their bilingualism. Her classroom parents were well informed through her communication with them, but most importantly, the students shared with their families their excitement for, and about, what they were learning in Spanish at school. Clarisa commented that parents were encouraged to attend school events not only by her but by their children too. She laughed as she commented that her students were “pushier” than she was in getting parents to attend campus events.

**Recognizing the Cultural Wealth and Cultural Knowledge of *Familias*.** Clarisa noted, “I love, and really enjoy, discussing with my students, how special we are as bilingual individuals and discussing our special abilities, what we [offer] as bilingual people” (Interview, September 19, 2013). The ability to make sense of the world by using two languages (Garcia, 1994, 2005) is a skill Clarisa speaks of often. In other words, if you don’t understand in one language you can use the other as a resource. “That is crazy, right!” stated Clarisa excitedly, “it’s great!” She continued as she recalled students’ capabilities, “My students translate for their parents and at school. I remind them not everyone can do that” (Interview, September 18, 2013).

Like Anzaldúa said, “I am my language,” well (pause) I am my language. I speak Spanish, I speak English and Spanglish. Sometimes I codeswitch when I teach, but I try not to, not because it’s wrong, but because I want to teach my students to [navigate] mainstream society. They need to be able to participate and succeed. Once they’re in it they can make changes (smiled). It’s really neat because I actually see them negotiating these choices. You can see it on their faces! So I think the parents see their children become confident so then they feel a little

more confident and they trust me. They feel very comfortable, I become approachable. (Interview, October 7, 2013)

Clarisa consistently included students' home culture into class assignments and reinforced linguistic and cultural capital. She created assignments with topics and themes that encouraged the use of students' home knowledge integrated into multiple subjects. When I asked why integrating was necessary, Clarisa replied, "It is important for them to see that culture and language is part of their learning, and that what they learn is connected. What they learn is not in isolation." (Interview, September 18, 2013)

Clarisa used culturally relevant materials and themes to teach content so that the learning that occurred would be relevant as well as interesting to the students.

For science we study plants and I connect it to their homes. We begin talking about the plants they know. What they have at home, how they're used—[F]or social studies I have [the students] bring an artifact from home, and I bring some too—I try to get them to see how what they bring and what I bring come from Mexico and that what they see and do comes from Mexico. That's even if they didn't come from Mexico [and born here]. The point is to get them to see that a lot of what they do at home is from Mexico even if they don't consider that they're from Mexico because it's just what they do. If you ask them what is part of their culture they can't tell you, they don't understand, they don't know because they think that everyone does that because that's just what they do. So that's the first part then I introduce culturally relevant books and connect what they know with facts. It's a long project. We also create a Mexican Cultural Museum (See Figure 4.2) and include everything they bring, and that stays in the classroom all year. (Interview, September 18, 2013)

I did not observe Clarisa's introduction of the science lesson to the students, however I was present for the introduction to the other subjects. For example, for social studies each student presented an artifact. They described what it was and how it was used at home and then placed in the Classroom Mexican Culture Museum (see Figure 2.2). The assignment also required that each student research their family's native country and find

four facts they did not know, which would also be shared at a later date. For language arts, culturally relevant literature included *Latin@* authors and/or *Latin@* protagonists to focus on comprehension, inferencing and identifying literature genres. The presentations were preludes to the *Mi cajita especial* (My special box) project.



Figure 2.2. Classroom Mexican Culture Museum

Additionally, to prepare for *Mi cajita especial*, Clarisa modeled the lesson. Clarisa was resolute that the artifacts be meaningful to the students. Clarisa introduced each of her artifacts in an order that slowly unveiled her story, sharing it in an oral narrative. She began with a picture of her family, sharing special stories and memories about them. Clarisa shared her graduation picture, describing the emotions she experienced that day and she showed them her teacher certificate, finally she displayed her Masters' diploma. Clarisa closed the presentation acknowledging her success to her family and her *orgullo*

(pride) in being bilingual. Sharing her story with her students, generated dialogue about family, culture and expectations. She included pictures of her family and artifacts of her educational and professional achievements, which she kept in her classroom all year (See Figure 2.3).



*Figure 2.3.* Clarisa’s achievement display

In a later observation a student made a connection with what they were discussing at the time and referred to something Clarisa had previously shared about her father.

Clarisa acknowledged bilingual students’ home knowledge plus supporting their increasing classroom community wealth. Clarisa facilitated the students’ development for the social studies project, “I didn’t just want to create the social studies project and bring it in [to class]. I wanted it to be relevant, so the students helped create the project, like the rubric and the goal of the product” (Interview, September 19, 2013). Clarisa included mainstream discourse (Huerta, 2011) as she modeled presentation protocol and

expectations for the lesson. Students were not only exposed to shared cultural knowledge, but also expected behavior for presentations. Before presentations began the class reviewed expectations for the audience, listening, asking appropriate questions and clapping when concluded; presenters were reminded to make eye contact, stand straight and to speak clearly.

Clarisa's students demonstrated pride in their biliteracy, identifying themselves to other teachers and adults as bilingual. Clarisa stated that after reading Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth and empowerment she knew she wanted students to recognize their own cultural wealth and to embrace it. Clarisa situated her students as knowledgeable individuals remarking, "so many times they bring up things I would have never thought of, amazing, great ideas" (Interview, September 18, 2013). For example, the students discussed the different venues available to practice their literacy regularly, some recommendations were reading comics, environmental print; one student mentioned she tried to read every t-shirt she came across that had print on it.

As the researcher in Clarisa's classroom, I observed the students' curiosity, joy, and self-confidence as biliterate and bicultural learners. For example, when I arrived to my first observation, I introduced myself to the students. They were polite and welcoming. They showed great interest when they learned I was originally from Mexico, bilingual and studying for my doctoral degree. Later in the class, several students shared their aspirations with me. They spoke of their family and where they came from. One student asked eagerly, "*Usted es bilingüe?*" (Are you bilingual?) A second remarked, "*Cuando yo crezca voy a ser maestra bilingüe*" (When I grow up I'm going to be a



bilingual teacher). Hesitant at first, a third approached and smiled saying, “I go to college.” Jorge was the last to talk to me, but he waited until most of his peers had walked away. He stated his goal for himself and his family, “*Yo cuido a mi mamá y mis hermanitos, voy a estudiar para tener un buen trabajo porque les voy a comprar una casa*” (I take care of my mom and my little brother and sister, I’m going to get an education so I can have a good job because I’m going to buy them a house). These statements illustrate aspirations involved giving back to their family material things such as a house and in service to their community as a teacher (Yosso, 2005).

### **Becoming a Leader Through Professional Development**

Clarisa wanted to learn about leadership and decided she had to take risks. She believed strongly in the benefits of bilingual education. Clarisa sought to develop her leadership capabilities to promote it. Clarisa believed that participation in *Proyecto* could help her prepare for positions in leadership roles.

*Me informe de Proyecto Maestría solo que no podría aplicar ni participar porque no tenía los requerimientos [sic] necesarios. Quería ser parte de Proyecto principalmente por el apoyo que yo miraba que había entre los miembros cuando tome unas clases con ellos. [Quería] aprender cómo ser líder en mi escuela y apoyar a otras maestras porque se que eso afectaría positivamente el aprendizaje de los estudiantes bilingües. Al fin entre al Proyecto. Quiero hacer lo que pueda para cambiar a mi escuela de una manera positiva. Entonces he aprendido mucho. En cuanto lo que e aprendido con el cohorte ... es el apoyo; he aprendido cuanta diferencia hace el tener un grupo de personas conmigo que me apoyan y que me entienden y sean igual que yo.*

#### Translation:

I became infomed about *Proyecto Maestría* but I could not apply or participate because I didn’t have the necessary requirements. I wanted to be part of the program primarily for the support that I observed between the participants when I had some classes with them. [I wanted] to learn how to be a leader in my school and support other teachers because I know it could positively affect the learning

of bilingual students. Finally I entered *Proyecto*. I want to do what I can to change my school in a positive way. I have learned alot. What I learned from the cohort ... is the support; I learned how much difference it makes to have a group of people with me that support me, that understand me and that are like me. (Interview, September 18, 2013)

Clarisa decided that she needed to do more for bilingual students, and she believed she could gain the experience needed by participating in *Proyecto*. She desired camaraderie like she observed from the previous cohort. Clarisa desired experience that would give her confidence to become an elementary school leader. She sought positive Latin@ role models and recognized herfor Latin@ students also needed them. Clarisa believed gaining new knowledge could be useful to colleagues, particularly those who were bilingual educators.

In *Proyecto* Clarisa reported that her growing critical perspective pushed her to continue developing lessons that encouraged the progress of her students' critical awareness. Clarisa was impressed by and wanted to promote critical cultural awareness to others in the school. She claimed that to realize social justice in the schools, all students had to be provided the opportunity to develop critical consciousness.

Teachers can say they add the critical aspect of culture in the lessons, but just because you say you do, does not mean it's done. I would like to help teachers do this, but I also don't want to look like a know-it-all. I have to find strategic ways to approach this, gaining *confianza con los demas* (trust with the others) and being credible and setting an environment to work together. (Interview, September 18, 2013)

Clarisa felt her role as leader was not only to mentor her students, but also to move beyond the classroom walls and the school campus. During the progress of my study, this *maestra* was meeting with administrators and school district personnel to discuss the

addition of culturally relevant materials and practices in dual language classrooms. She agreed with the research that suggests culturally relevant practices make content meaningful and relevant for Latin@ students (Huerta, 2011).

Clarisa shared her new understandings from *Proyecto* with colleagues and novice teachers. She was invested in passing on her knowledge and renewed commitment to students and their families to others. She imagined a collective movement towards a humanizing pedagogy and a social justice perspective. Humanizing pedagogy is a counterpractice to dehumanization in education (Bartolomé, 1994; Salazar, 2013).

As part of her new leadership role Clarisa formed a professional learning unit on her campus. The meetings were not mandatory, but she encouraged teachers to attend. The group planned together. Members had an opportunity to develop their voice, share ideas and assess what was working and what was not, thereby forming a community of friendly critics and professional experts. Clarisa invited colleagues to be open to suggestions and to create helpful discussions for critical reflection. She enjoyed sharing literature from her *Proyecto* coursework in the professional learning unit meetings. She believed that sharing of ideas and reading appropriate scholarly literature supported strong teaching. Clarisa indicated that the *maestras'* confidence in what they were doing could be raised if they became acquainted with available research; thereby she provided her colleagues with scholarly literature.

Presentations at conferences, local and out-of-state, were important to Clarisa as she thought this was a great way to reach a greater number of educators. She felt that students benefited and teachers could motivate fellow educators with opportunities to

learn from the critical practices that have been identified as indicators of pedagogical excellence. Nieto (2003) moves away from the notion of “best practices”, indicating that the best way to improve education is by supporting teachers that are excited about their own learning, value students and families and meet students’ needs using creative methods, often under difficult circumstances. Clarisa, described her teaching approach as one that shares teaching successes with other teachers and creates relevant and exciting projects for the students. On one hand, she agrees with research that states it is the teacher that makes the difference in the learning experience (Nieto, 2003). On the other hand, she also notes the importance of “building an understanding that if the students take ownership of the lessons it is likely there will be much more learning happening” (Interview, September 23, 2013).

Clarisa described her personal and professional experiences as fueling her motivation to advocate for social justice. Once Clarisa saw herself as a leader she moved to offer her colleagues experiences she believed would help them grow as educators, leaders, and advocates for bilingual children. The steps Clarisa took to assume a leadership role were a part of her professional growth. Clarisa looked at those experiences and the difficulties she encountered and felt strongly that teachers needed confidence to be able to teach using a social justice perspective. She believed the support she received from participating in a cohort based program with people who understood her, helped build her confidence. Her idea, then, was to try to create a community where maestr@s could generate this kind of support. Clarisa promoted social justice in bilingual education. It was important to her to try and create a comfortable space where

professionals could share and challenge each other to move beyond mandated expectations.

When the Adelia school district's newly acquired dual language program was introduced, Palmira Elementary was chosen as a pilot school due in great part to Clarisa's efforts. After three years of implementation, Clarisa affirmed,

[L]earning about the bilingual education program and the dual language program helped me want to do more. When you start [your career] you want the best for your students, but then I got to a point through [*Proyecto*] I wanted the best for not only my students *but for all* [emphasis added] the students. Understanding the educational history of Latinos and where it is now you learn to compromise to get to the goal you really want. For now García & González <sup>22</sup> is what we have, I don't agree with all of it, but it's what we have. If we didn't have this, what would we have...early transition? I don't want to go back to that. (Interview, September 23, 2013)

Although she found colleagues who disagreed with her endorsement of a dual language model, arguing that to be successful students needed to be immersed in English as quickly as possible, Clarisa did not give up. Instead she listened, was flexible and sometimes she compromised as a way to earn her colleagues *confianza*.

During my weeks in Clarisa's classroom, I commented that she demonstrated huge passion for bilingual education and support for bilingual students, I asked her why it was so important to her to advocate for bilingual education and social justice. Clarisa replied,

Bilingual education has struggled. It's disregarded. People still think it's remedial...and some are teachers (spoken in a soft voice). I want the best for my students and I see what they can do and they are amazing ... (her eyes filled with tears as she spoke and used her hands for emphasis). They deserve so much more

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<sup>22</sup> The García & González program (name pseudonym) had been implemented three years at the time of the dissertation study.

... They are underestimated ... They deserve better. I want them to know that they are smart and that they can accomplish whatever they want. But I also want them to know that it's not easy. I want to prepare them for that too. I think we [*maestr@s*] have to. You know learning about the bilingual history, really understanding—the mislabeling that they had like special education—really understanding all that, has helped me be more passionate as a teacher. (Interview, October 7, 2013)

Providing an equitable education for her students was a passion for Clarisa. Several times when speaking of her students she reacted with emotion. She was adamant, however, that when she spoke to official personnel she had to maintain a professional persona to be taken seriously. “Tu sabes, right, you show them you know what you’re talking about” (Interview, October 7, 2013). Clarisa believed that just as the students needed to learn to navigate

Clarisa argued the importance of language stating; “I learned that language is tied to identity and, so, really understanding *that* [emphasis added] is [essential]. I know it’s important to have discussions of language acquisition. We’re learning both” (Interview, September 23, 2013). It was critical to her to validate the students’ language use, “whichever language-practice that may be [for them]”. Clarisa felt the lessons she introduced were taken to a much higher level than even she expected because the students were allowed to use their linguistic tools (Cazden, John & Hymes, 1972; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) in addition to their cultural knowledge for their learning. Before *Proyecto*, Clarisa felt unprepared to articulate her classroom practices and she understood that like her, there were *maestr@s* who were teaching ‘underground’ because they did not have a way to support their reasoning. She felt that like her, they saw how well their strategies worked, but they could not explain why. Clarisa’s plan was to support other *maestras* in

their provision of positive cultural learning experiences for their students and ways to verbalize them.

Due to Clarisa's strong belief in dual language instruction, she agreed to present training workshops for professional development in the Adelia school district. Her focus for training was to add a critical component to culturally relevant practices. Clarisa explained the first step was to establish regular meetings to share scholarly literature and discuss ideas.

### **Using Culturally Relevant Practices Within a Humanizing Pedagogy**

Clarisa described how while attending community college and contemplating what to do next, her mother pushed for her to become a teacher. Clarisa mentored and tutored bilingual students through her school programs. She discovered that working with Latin@ bilingual children was what she wanted to do.

From what I've learned from my experiences [in *Proyecto*], I see myself as a social justice teacher (pause) and I think that a powerful way to advocate for the students is to have them present in the curriculum, because if you look at the curriculum, it is not made for us, it is made for mainstream students. (Interview, February 2, 2014)

When Clarisa referred to the curriculum as "not made for us", she was identifying with the students. The *Maestra* could not remove herself from the "us", because she recognized this was her experience too. Her goal was to change this by including her own and the student's cultural knowledge in the curriculum.

For instance, one of many projects Clarisa was proud of, *Mi cajita especial* (My special little box), was adapted from an assignment from a class in *Proyecto*. The

following is her introduction to the project. It was a short opening to get her students to begin presenting. She modeled the lesson before the students began.

Clarisa: *Ésta es una lata de salsa, porque me gusta y a la mayoría de Mexicanos nos gusta el chile.*

Jorge: *A mi papá le gusta!*

Josue: My dad too.

Clarisa: *A mi papá también. Ésto (rolling pin) también es algo que teníamos en la casa y ahora yo tengo una en la mía.*

Mari: Oh yeah, *mi mamá también tiene una y la usa para hacer tortillas.*

Translation:

Clarisa: This is a can of salsa, because I like it and most Mexicanos like chile.

Jorge: My dad likes it!

Josue: My dad too.

Clarisa: My dad too. This (rolling pin) is also something we had at home and now I have one at my house.

Mari: Oh yeah, my mom also has one and she uses it to make tortillas.  
(Observation, September 18, 2013).

Clarisa introduced the project in September. She showed her *cajita* to the class, describing each artifact, connecting to an experience or a memory; sharing her narrative with her students. Clarisa announced, to a room of excited students, that they would create their own *cajitas*. A few weeks later the students prepared to give their presentations. The following is highlighted as an example of Clarisa's pursuit to use critical culturally relevant lessons for her students:

Clarisa: *Acuérdate que—este proyecto es muy importante ¿para qué...?*

Miguel: *¡Para conocernos mejor!*

Julia: *Para aprender de nosotros.*

Clarisa: *Para conocernos mejor, para saber de nosotros. Pero aparte, por medio de las cajitas que incluye cosas de tu vida, de ti, podemos aprender de tu vida ... se acuerdan de la mía? Este año van a venir varias personas a ver lo que están haciendo porque ustedes son tan inteligentes [emphasis added]. –Van a venir varias personas a ver cómo trabajas y ver las cosas padres que estamos haciendo en este salón.*

Grupo: *¡Woohoo, yayyy!!*



Clarisa: *Recuerdas que al principio del año estuvimos aprendiendo sobre biografías y en específico la vida de quién?*

Grupo: *¡Cesar Chávez!*

Clarisa: *Nosotros aprendimos sobre su vida por medio de los libros, ¿verdad? pero también nosotros podemos aprender de nuestras propias vidas por medio de este proyecto de las cajitas. La primera parte de este proyecto fue que crearas tu cajita, y luego lo vas a presentar que es lo que vamos a empezar hoy. Pero después siguen otras partes que vamos a hacer con este proyecto para poder escribir y entender sobre nuestras propias vidas y compartir, ok, porque así como la vida de Cesar Chávez y de las otras personas que hemos aprendido son muy importantes ... nuestras vidas también son muy...*

Group: *¡Importantes!*

Clarisa: *Importantes ... y a la misma ves estamos aprendiendo de todos.*

Translation:

Clarisa: Remember, this project is important because...?

Miguel: To know us better!

Julia: To learn about us.

Clarisa: To know us better, to learn from each other. Besides that, through the *cajitas* that includes things from your life, about you, we can learn about your life ... remember mine? This year several people are coming to see what you are doing because you are *so smart* [emphasis added]. Ms. Chávez is here today, I told her about this project and she said, 'Can I see it?', 'I want to go see!' Several people will come to see how you work and the wonderful things we are doing in this classroom.

Group: Woohoo!!

Clarisa: Remember that at the beginning of the year we were learning about studying biographies, and specifically whose life?

Group: Cesar Chávez!

Clarisa: We learned about his life through books, right? But we can learn about our own lives through this project. The first part of this project was that you create your *cajita*, and then present it, which is what we will start today. But there are other parts that we will do with this project to write and understand about our own lives, and share, ok, because just as the life of Cesar Chavez and the other people we have studied are very important ... our lives are also very ...

Group: Important!

Clarisa: Important, and at the same time we are all learning about everyone (Observation, October 7, 2013).

In this segment of transcript Clarisa provided her students with questions such as this project is important because...? Specifically we were studying the life of...?, to make sure student understood the purpose of their autobiographical presentation. Clarisa reminded them of their valuable background and compared their lives to notable people they had read about such as César Chávez. This is the kind of work that as a former teacher, I was often told that bilingual students could not do because it would be too hard for them and parents would not help them. This project showcased the collaborative connection between the students, their family and Clarisa.

Clarisa placed high expectations for the presentations, reviewing presentation protocol with her class. As I listened to the presentations, I could not help being amazed at the amount of work students put into their *cajitas*. They were serious and helped each other follow presentation protocol; reminding each other to speak louder, to listen, to stand up straight and to clap in appreciation of the content shared. Most impressive was the interest and respect they displayed for each other's *cajitas*. In fact, days later, they were given a free choice after a completed assignment. The unanimous choice was to share their *cajitas* again. A week and a half of testing had interrupted the progress of the project and Clarisa was forced to adjust the schedule for finishing the presentations, composing an autobiography and the final presentation to parents.

The purpose of the composition was, “to practice the writing process by writing a personal narrative and scaffolding with the *cajitas*, while at the same time their stories get validated in the classroom” (Interview, October 7, 2013). The *cajitas* allowed students to use their cultural background to support the writing of a composition based on their lived

experiences. Using their story instills great family and cultural pride, as displayed by the artifacts Clarisa's students included in their *cajitas*.

Jorge, for example, who was mentioned previously, included a picture of his *papá*, a picture of a house, a picture of the rest of his family, awards he had received in school, money (bills and coins) and a stuffed toy duck with a catheter and hospital cap. Jorge spoke eloquently,

*Mi papá se lo llevaron para México y soy el hombre de la casa. Yo cuido a mi mamá y mi hermanita. Los libros representan que yo soy bilingüe. Éste está en inglés y la biblia está en español. Ésto (pointing to the money) simboliza la casa que les voy a comprar. Por eso estudi; para ser buen estudiante.*

Researcher: *¿Y el patito?*

*Es mi amigo. Me lo dieron cuando fui al hospital cuando tenia cancer. Pero ya estoy bien, ya no tengo cancer (smiling). Pensaba en ser doctor, pero no se, depende en el mejor trabajo.*

Translation:

My dad they took him to Mexico and I'm the man of the house. I take care of my mom and my little sister. The books represent that I am bilingual, this is in English and the bible is in Spanish. This (pointing to the money) symbolizes the house that I'm going to buy, that's why I study, to be a good student.)

Researcher: And the duck?

He's my friend. I got him when I went to the hospital when I had cancer. But I'm fine now, I don't have cancer anymore (smiling). I thought of being a doctor, but I don't know, it depends on the best job (Observation, October 7, 2013).

In this presentation Jorge has assumed the gendered role of "man of the house." He has also revealed that his biliteracy is maintained by reading a story in English and a Bible in Spanish. Children often show attachment to important toys and for Jorge it was the duck that helped him through cancer treatments. These affirmations of his history

encouraged Clarisa to continue providing meaningful lessons like the one she had experienced in her *Proyecto* class.

**Cultural Intuitiveness Guiding Professional Choices.** Clarisa's continued development of critical consciousness inspired her to ask questions about what she was told to teach, to challenge procedures, instead of merely following directives from the district. She knew that using "pedagogies of the home" (Delgado Bernal, 2001) placed her students in a position as knowers from their first teaching environment – their home. Clarisa worked hard to create relevant lessons for the students.

Clarisa applied a critical lens to assess the methods she used to teach bilingual students. Her personal experiences growing up influenced her perspective on the value of being biliterate and bilingual. While in her own educational experience her parent's language was devalued, it was with her family and in her home that she understood the value of her home language. As an educator she strove to impart on her students, and educators, knowledge that holds the importance of culture and language, but she also took the step to be very clear with the students of mainstream rules and expectations.

I feel like we (Latino bilinguals) always have to prove something. I want them to see how successful the students can be. They say, "oh they can only do it in Spanish." So I introduce [assignments] in English and do a lot of scaffolding with movement, voice, pictures and cognates. I want to show what they can do and that language is not a deficit. I believe students need to have the opportunity and challenge to work in a project in whatever language they choose. During class discussions the students [also] codeswitch. (Interview, February 27, 2013)

Clarisa acknowledges she must defend her students' knowledge and linguistic repertoire. She reports affirming her students' native language as an asset, but also provides assignments in English that are skillfully scaffolded with "movement, voice, pictures and

cognates”. Although the campus had days designated for the alternation of Spanish and English the students in her classroom were allowed to read and write in the language of their choice, which included Spanglish and codeswitching.

Clarisa shared with me that when she entered *Proyecto* she realized she was not “the only one”, who advocated for linguistic flexibility or for stronger connections between knowledge from home and learning at school. She reported that in *Proyecto* classes the members of her cohort shared inspiring stories. In fact, when they shared their “literacy boxes” they cried together in response to the autobiographical narratives they shared. Because the cohort members understood her words, her thoughts, and her ideas, she realized she was a good teacher. Conversations in classes and between members of the *Proyecto* cohort assisted her in adding “the culturally relevant component” (Interview, February 2, 2014) to her bilingual curriculum.

Clarisa realized that as a graduate student in *Proyecto* she was afforded social capital and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). The *Maestra* used this advantage to negotiate and navigate the figured worlds of the school district and her school campus to continue advocating for bilingual students.

**Offering Students Opportunities for Critical Encounters.** Clarisa was constantly looking for ways to provide students with opportunities for self-awareness. From a *Proyecto* class Clarisa demonstrated a better understanding of ways to use childrens literature to build students’ cultural and self-awareness. Clarisa affirmed the use of literature, projects and discussions to show that her students’ knowledge is

valuable. Participation in these events fostered student exploration and cultural awareness.

The *Proyecto* experience moved Clarisa to the realization that she had to adopt strategies by which her students would become much more aware of their own background and take pride in it while preparing them to succeed in mainstream discourse. Lessons and projects were venues for students to speak about their lives, to explore their thought process and to ask questions. The *cajita especial* project for example, encouraged the reflection of students' cultural background prompting self-awareness and moving towards a critical cultural consciousness. Clarisa believed her experiences, both personal and professional, had influenced shifts in her own identities. She felt this confirmed the need to support bilingual students self-awareness to form strong identities.

### **SUMMARY**

As an advocate, Clarisa was active in bringing her students' parents to the classroom. She knew it was important to include them in their children's learning. It brought home knowledge and school learning together. It was also key for students to see their parents as valuable contributors of knowledge, while similarly emphasizing to parents the importance of their knowledge. Clarisa's leadership roles gave her the opportunity to share with colleagues the treasures in bilingual families' community wealth, in addition to the strong foundation cultural knowledge could provide for bilingual students' academic progress.

### *La Maestra Esme*

At the time of the dissertation study, Esme was a second grade teacher and an experienced teacher of ten years. She felt she could relate to her students' experiences because she shared very similar experiences to her students. Even though Esme had resided in the U.S. for 25 years, recalling her personal experiences during our interviews and conversations evoked emotional responses.

I attended school in Mexico until the second semester of fifth grade. My teachers taught me patriotism through the study of Mexican heroes. —Due to financial hardships, my father immigrated to the United States in search for work while my mother looked after my four siblings and me all on her own. After a year of living away from the family, my father sent for us. We had to leave everything behind in the blink of an eye. We literally came to the U.S. just with the clothes we wore. What hurt the most was leaving my oldest sister and her baby, my first nephew, knowing that we were not going to see them for a long time. Once we were in Texas, we stayed with one of my aunts. Meanwhile, my dad arranged for us to stay in a house provided by the farm owner for whom he was working.

[In] —my 6<sup>th</sup> grade year my family decided that we would migrate to Michigan in order to work in the fields. We, again, left the house in this farm and traveled in our beat-up car for days and days until we reached our destination. The three-day trip would last weeks because our car was in poor condition. Once we arrived in Michigan, we found ourselves in an area where Mexicans are obviously a minority. My parents could not communicate [in English]. My sisters and I became the translators. The family depended on us to buy food at the grocery stores, to ask for directions, to find housing and work and even to get a haircut.

My family continued the tradition of migrating every summer. My parents would pull us out of school in April or May and we would come back in September. Although as a kid I felt resentful because we were deprived from a “normal” youth [sic], I now see that those experiences are what shaped me into whom I am now. Working under the sun for long hours, feeling every bang, every clash between rock and blunt iron of the hoe, was a constant reminder that I did not want to do that for the rest of my life. (Interview, August 27, 2013)

As an adult Esme recognized the skills she developed in helping her family, as assets, which she recognized as skills also held by many of her immigrant students. Esme

understood the sacrifices and losses experienced by immigrant children and felt that in her position as *maestra* she could minimize the difficult transition into their new school community. Sánchez and Kusan (2012) allude to the disregard and minimization of “the incredible knowledge bases these families bring with them from the countries they leave, along with the lessons learned in navigating U.S. society” (p. 72). Esme stated that her experiences motivated her career choice at an early age, believing her experiences would make it possible for her to better connect with her students, and in particular with immigrant students.

### **Taking on the Role of Advocate**

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970)

Esme, like Natasha and Clarisa, had experienced being labeled and referred to in derogatory terms and manner during her schooling years. Esme recounted being called the Spanish kid and that nobody intervened to correct this. “They said it in a derogatory way. I only remember feeling like Spanish was inferior and English was the goal. I want my students to know that Spanish is not bad, that they should be proud of their bilingualism” (Interview, September 9, 2013). Esme chose to use her position as bilingual teacher to voice the benefits of bilingualism and celebrate her students’ bilingualism by focusing on skills brought with them from home. Esme provided opportunities in which students could recognize the skills they held as assets. Her bilingual students were encouraged to help their monolingual English partners with



activities which included translating. The students knew not everyone, students and adults, had that skill. Esme wanted to build her students' identity as valuable bilingual/biliterate individuals.

**Knowing the Community.** Like the other two participants, Esme knew the value of bilingualism and bilingual education, but she also understood she too had assimilated to the institutionalized educational discourse. The experience gained from being a member of *Proyecto* helped Esme develop a higher level of critical awareness. "I remember thinking when I first started teaching, you just teach—I think we (*maestras*) took it for granted, why bilingual education [was] started." (Interview October 18, 2013). Esme was now determined to take conscious steps to teach for social justice. It was important to Esme to create projects and lessons that incorporated her students' cultural knowledge while emphasizing the richness of it for them. An additional goal was to include parents to take part in the lessons, in the activities planned and in school events.

Esme took effort to help build Calisto Elementary into a campus open to, and accepting of, cultural diversity. Her new determination increased her degree of vocality.

*Bueno antes si el grupo (nivel de grado) decidia hacer algo y no estaba de acuerdo yo no decía nada y me iba a mi salón y no lo hacia. Now I do speak up. I'll say I read an article that says this, or research shows that... [Proyecto] Me dio el poder de poder o defender mi posición.*

Translation:

Before if the group (grade level) decided to do something and I didn't agree, I did not say anything and I would go to my room and didn't do it. Now I do speak up. I'll say I read an article that says this, or research shows that. [*Proyecto*] gave me the power to be able to defend my position. (Interview, September 9, 2013)

Now, using her voice, Esme was able to articulate her opinions. This in turn built her confidence as a professional so that she was better prepared to share her resources and materials with colleagues, and support her positioning. She was encouraged to adopt social justice into her pedagogical practices. Esme became aware that to be able to teach outside the norm, she also had to be strategic about the manner in which she presented her teaching practices. *Proyecto* had reinforced her pride as a *maestra*.

Esme's English-native-speakers initially resisted instruction in Spanish; she struggled to get the group to accept the dual language approach. Moreover, there was a tendency to reply in English so that Spanish-native-speakers were also choosing to interact in English. More distressing was how Spanish-dominant speakers would cede to the group of English-speaking students, regardless if they knew the answer to a question or not, even if the lessons were delivered in Spanish, so here too, English was quickly becoming the dominant language. Likewise, non-Spanish speaking students were quickly dominating the lessons in Esmer's dual language classroom.

Decidedly, Esme took steps to explicitly coach her bilingual students. First, she discussed bilingual students' participation in class, specifically highlighting their strengths; then, she spoke about their advantage of being bilingual. She explained that both languages, Spanish and English, could be used as resources for comprehension. Finally, Esme pushed bilingual students to become leaders by encouraging them to support their non-bilingual peers, particularly in lessons delivered in Spanish. Esme, like Natasha, positioned her students as bilingual experts.

My lessons are not scripted. —We guide each other. As a bilingual educator, I have to make a conscious choice to place them in a leadership role. I want them to develop strength and understand they can do everything others can do. They develop confidence and they learn to step up instead of just letting someone else take the lead. As experts they provide guidance for the English-native speakers towards bilingualism. I tell my English-native speakers of the great gift they are receiving in becoming bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. To me, being bilingual is a gift, an advantage and a connection to two world. (Interview, September 17, 2013)

Esme felt that if she wanted all her students to be successful, her bilingual students had to be purposefully situated in positions where they could build confidence and strength in their bicultural identity. Esme's classroom was a space where bilingual students showcased their intellectual abilities and they were validated; where deficit statements were challenged and not ignored. Even those moments were opportunities to unpack societal norms, to dialogue and discuss, encouraged learning from each other as emergent bilinguals.

Esme looked to have all her students become students of social justice. By offering multicultural literature and social justice practices to her students, Esme tried to build a community of diverse thinkers working towards a mutual respect between her students.

**Recognizing Cultural Wealth and Cultural Knowledge of *Familias*.** Esme discussed her literacy experience with her students. She joked about coming to the realization that *La Lotería or La Chalupa*, was her “first set of flash cards”. She also told how her parents and her siblings would teach her prayers, for example, *El Padre Nuestro* (The Our Father) which was one of the first things she could “read before she entered Kinder” (Interview October 18, 2013). Esme felt that it was something she had in

common with some of the bilingual students and/or their parents. These kind of shared experiences offered great discussion opportunities for her students about their own literacy development. The connections Esme made with students and parents was in relation to shared histories.

Esme believed her background provided her with a deeper more respectful perspective of bilingual families. Esme felt that being respectful and building mutual trust created strong relationships with parents, this had been her experience in the past and she believed it would continue to be so. She knew the value of parent partnerships for students' learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Therefore, she felt it was important that she allow parents to get to know her to better earn their trust. Esme spoke of the cultural knowledge parents brought into the classroom and the positive student response to the parents presence in their classroom. Esme explained her process for inviting parents into her room.

*Bueno por ejemplo este año puse una lista (sign-up sheet) en la mesa porque quiero tener padres en el salón. También se que hay padres que no pueden venir entonces les pido el mejor modo de comunicación y en cualquier chansita hablo con ellos o les mando cositas que hagan en casa pero mi idea de que sean voluntarios es que ayuden con los niños. Tenia una mamá que venia durante centros porque necesitaba un buen modelo de español.*

Translation:

Well for example this year I placed a list on a table because I want parents in the classroom. I also know there are parents who can't come and I ask them the best way to communicate and any little opportunity I talk to them or ask them to do stuff at home but my idea of volunteering is for them to help the children. I had a

mom who came during centers because I needed a good Spanish model.  
(Interview, September 20, 2013)

The sign-up volunteer list she provided was a way to bring parents into the classroom, but

once they felt more confident with their participation, they volunteered their own ideas, which Esme welcomed. Esme's goal was to have most, if not all, her bilingual parents become part of the class community.

Esme provided the following example of the learning support and positive influence parents provided students in the classroom.

The kids were using a lot of English [almost exclusively], even on Spanish days, so I needed [the *mamá*] to come. All the kids knew her. She knew a little English, I told her I wanted her to speak Spanish to them and 'if you understand, tell them you don't understand' and it worked! They really tried to speak Spanish to her. She was a parent that peaked through the [hallway] window but wouldn't come in (smiling), she wanted to (pause) but she didn't think she could and I said, 'come in', I wanted her in. (Interview, September 20, 2013)

Esme believed it was her responsibility to help Latino bilingual families become a part of the class and school communities. She did not hesitate to reach out to the parents in different ways to make them feel welcomed; in addition, bilingual parents were made visible as they were situated as valuable contributors in an academic environment.

A usual practice for Esme was to begin the school year getting to know the parents, and helping them feel comfortable with her. She greeted and spoke to parents in the hall, in the classroom and out on the school campus; she consistently acknowledged them with respect and with an open invitation to her classroom. Esme was also involved with the families outside the school in social settings. She made it a point to attend student birthday parties and other events she was invited to by the families. Many times these opportunities permitted Esme a view into the student's background and a chance to get to know the family better.

I would always tell [parents] 'you need to come in', *hablando de los talentos que*

*tenían* (speaking of the talents they had). *Como uno de los papas en su casa tenían un florero lleno de flores echos de origami, tan bonitos. Me llamo la atención y lo toque entonces el niño me dijo, 'mi papí lo hizo' entonces* (Like one of the dads in his house had a vase full of flowers made of origami, so pretty. It caught my attention and I touched it, then his son told me, 'my daddy made it' and then) ... [the dad] started showing me all the things he had done. I told him he had to come to the class and show the students how he made them and teach them how to do origami. He asked if I thought they would be interested and I said of course. He did and brought all the materials (smiled, gesturing with her hands) even the paper and the tools he used, and he did, he set out all his tools (pause) and he taught them how to make origami. (Pause) He was one of the families that had said they didn't have anything to offer. It was really great, and his son, oh my god, he was so proud. (Interview, September 20, 2013)

Esme visited homes as a guest and a possible friend. The *Maestra* stated that the parents were very giving and treated her with great respect. Esme offered, "the biggest reason [parents] gave for not coming to school was, '*oh es puro ingles*' (oh, it's only English)". Furthermore, they felt there was not much they could offer. Esme countered, explaining to the *familias* the influence they had in their children's education and the value of their knowledge to the Calisto community.

González, Moll and Amanti (2005) posit that educators need to visit the students' homes to gather cultural histories and practices, their funds of knowledge, and then find ways to incorporate those into the classrooms. Esme, however, created a space where families are invited to share their funds of knowledge in the figured world of the school classroom. Esme, like Natasha and Clarisa, offers a space where the cultural knowledge, and cultural identity, of *Latino* Spanish-speaking families are validated and valued.

*Latino* bilingual parents presented various topics, for instance, how to manage a family owned business; a mom made a presentation for making tortillas and others shared various knowledge and skills. The effect of the event on the families is powerful. Esme

appreciatively conveyed the wealth of knowledge parents contribute to the class. She addressed the wonderful resources parents provide and the excitement of the students whose parents visit the campus. Esme was very proud of the high number of parent participation in her classroom, which included bilingual parents and, monolingual Spanish and monolingual English speaking parents.

As a bilingual teacher, Esme experienced added demands and a lack of quality bilingual materials and resources. Esme declared, “when we’re growing up we were always outcasts, never empowered (pause) even in the profession, that’s how we’re placed (sighed), but now I have changed *!tengo orgullo!* (I have pride!) (Interview, September 20, 2013). Esme positioned herself as a leader, but she did not identify as such. She viewed what she did as a natural extension of being a *Maestra*.

### **Becoming a Leader Through Professional Development**

Esme had ideas to create all-inclusive type of lessons and projects that would involve everyone in her team. Classes and coursework in *Proyecto* challenged Esme’s way of thinking. Esme, however, struggled against the wall of mainstream conformity within the campus educational system.

*Bueno,—hemos tenido lo de “oh [that’s] dual language, so we’re doing this”. Muchas veces es porque los del otro equipo no lo quieren hacer porque es mucho trabajo, ¿verdad? Hemos tenido mucha gente así en el equipo, entonces lo que hemos hecho antes era de ‘pues bueno no lo quieren hacer, entonces lo hacemos nosotros’. Es que tenemos que hacer Project based, teacher inquiry, bueno pues. Pero siempre lo hacemos solamente las dos (the teacher she partners with).*

#### Translation:

Well,—we had the ‘oh [that’s] dual language, so we’re doing this’. Many times it’s because the other team didn’t want to do because it’s a lot of work, you know? We have had many people like this on the team, so what we’ve done before was

'so they don't want to do it, then we will do it'. We have to do Project based, teacher inquiry, so... But only the two of us did it. (Interview, September 17, 2013)

Though Esme felt it was important for her to share knowledge and resources with her team members, the English-only team members were not receptive to her proposals. Esme stated they were good teachers, but set in their ways and resisted changing something they felt was working well for them. Esme would continue creating and translating materials not found in Spanish and planning lessons relevant to her students because she wanted her students represented in the curriculum. Esme remarked that she had received support for her curriculum choices in previous years from teachers and staff, but a shift in focus followed when the goal was to increase school test scores. Undeterred, Esme continued to share her lesson ideas and resources. She felt someone would eventually listen.

Mrs. Bennet, an English-only teacher, approached Esme to ask her if she would consider bringing their classes together to work together. Mrs. Bennet liked what she saw happening in Esme's classroom and noted that they worked on similar things. Esme was excited and searched subject content for units of study that could be integrated to create fluidity in the lessons they would teach. Esme also looked forward to the collaboration and sharing of ideas. The idea that students, not usually exposed to bilingual (or dual language) classrooms, would work closely with bilingual students and in a bilingual classroom was a very exciting prospect *para la maestra* (for the teacher).

Esme, Mrs. Galvan, the teacher she paired with for dual language, and Mrs. Bennet, collaborated to create a small project to have their three classes work together.



Esme described the project as a trial run to see if rotating three classes was possible. They hoped that if it worked they could do this on a regular basis with bigger, on-going projects. The teachers tried to schedule the initial lessons several times, but for various reasons it did not come to fruition. Finally, at one point the students were studying the same science unit, using the same science kit and generating similar ideas. Esme then suggested they take these science lessons and extend them to language arts and math. It was agreed that their students would be mixed and divided into three groups with Spanish experts, the Spanish-dominant students, in each group; the groups would then rotate classrooms for each subject. The plan to include bilingual students in each group was a strategy to situate Spanish-dominant students as knowledgeable individuals and as leaders. Esme discovered that institutionalized systemic discourses made strong, consistent support for students necessary.

In my observation (October 18, 2013) I noted the students' excitement and the energetic interaction between the students because of the collaboration. The science and social studies lessons were delivered in Spanish, while math was in English. The teachers were facilitators and made clarifications when needed, but the students turned to each other when they had questions and they translated for each other. I asked Esme how she felt about the results of the project between classes. Esme responded that she felt students were learning because each rotation still focused on one lesson and one subject content in each classroom. Most significant though, was that English-dominant speaking students learned bilingual classrooms are not remedial, that they were studying the same things, and that bilingual students were learning in two languages.

*Me gusta, porque, son sólo tres clases, pero los estudiantes tienen la oportunidad de ver que todos están aprendiendo inglés y todos están aprendiendo español. Los Native-English-speakers tienen esta idea de que en esta clase sólo hablan español, aunque es una clase mixta y dicen 'oh, es una clase de español' y lo dicen con una gran cantidad de negatividad.*

Translation:

I like it, because, it's only three classes, but the students get to see that they are all learning English and they are all learning Spanish. Native-English-speakers have this idea that in this class we only speak Spanish even though it's a mixed class. They'll say 'oh it's a Spanish class' and they say it with a lot of negativity. (Interview, October 18, 2013)

It was interesting to listen to a couple of students from Mrs. Bennet's classroom state their surprise to find English literacy in Esme's classroom, however, they both agreed having posters and books both in Spanish and English was "cool". The collaboration was important to Esme. It was as a way to demonstrate to her students, as well as students and teachers from other classrooms, the value of biliteracy and to acquaint others with the learning that occurs in bilingual/dual language classrooms.

*Maestr@s* must be aware of the various pedagogical strategies that are available to support success for bilingual students. "[In *Proyecto*] we were introduced to culturally relevant literature, which I turned around quickly and I saw the difference [it made] in my classroom" (Interview, September 9, 2013). Esme's notion of equity moved her to become a risk-taker in the face of opposition from some teachers and staff on her campus. For instance, she informed me her colleagues did not necessarily respond positively to the collaboration of the three teachers.

*Me llamaron a la oficina porque algunos maestros se quejaron. Según sintieron que los papas iban a preguntar porque ellos no hicieron lo mismo, qué si los niños estaban aprendiendo lo mismo. Pero el problema es que no quieren hacer lo mismo porque 'es mucho trabajo'. Entonces explique a la directora el objetivo*

*del proyecto, las lecciones... Me dijo que en otra ocasión primero hablara con administración and my colleagues (sighing). Y cuando presente (to team and administration) un proyecto usando Día de los Muertos me dijeron que no era relevante y que los estudiantes se iban a asustar, hmmm, y Halloween? Pero nosotras [tres] vamos a seguir. The students will create their own altar, but they will be able to carry it, we call it a diorama (smiled).*

Translation:

I was called to the office because some teachers complained. They felt that the parents were going to ask why they didn't do the same, if the children were learning the same things. But the problem is they don't want to do the same because 'it is too much work'. Then I explained to the principal our objective for the project, the lessons... I was informed that next time to first talk to administration and my colleagues (sighing). When I presented (to team and administration) a project using *Día de los Muertos* I was told it was not relevant and that the students were going to be frightened, hmmm, and Halloween? Well three of us are going to move forward. The students will create their own altar, but they will be able to carry it, we call it a diorama (smiled). (Interview, October 22, 2013)

Esme challenged conformist views in education, especially so in the education of bilingual students. She had a deep belief that risks were necessary when the aim is to develop students as strong, caring, critical thinkers. Due to the resistance she experienced on her school campus, however, Esme approached her teammates cautiously, but in a professional and respectful manner. Esme asserted she would not stop sharing with her co-workers. Similar to Natasha and Clarisa, Esme shared literature with teachers across grade levels. She reached out to previous participants of *Proyecto*, which Esme said gave her the space for continued critical dialogue. She noted the process kept her grounded in her philosophy.

Regardless if it was communicating with teachers on her campus, at other schools or at conferences, Esme enjoyed the opportunities for critical discussions. Presenting, and sharing on a larger level, in conferences for instance, both local and out-of-state

conferences helped Esme continue to grow professionally. She confirmed conferences were a good method for professional interaction and a good way to reach out to teachers on a larger scope.

Esme had enough confidence to recognize she held significant knowledge of bilingual education to share with other educators. “It’s an uphill battle, but there are successes too. The bilingual students matter and I’m here for them” (Interview, September 17, 2013). Esme insisted that regardless of any frustration she experienced, she was resolute to continue to share and actively advocate for her students.

### **Using Culturally Relevant Practices Within a Humanizing Pedagogy**

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (Freire, 1970, p. 54)

The River Creek School District had just begun the implementation of dual language on their elementary school campuses. Esme informed me that the district adopted a dual language approach based on the research of Thomas and Collier (2009, 2012, 2013). This system too, like the García and González dual language program, supports alternating days for language of instruction, but the former does include guidelines for culturally relevant instruction. Esme had included the culturally relevant component before dual language and even before participating in *Proyecto*. Esme’s value for cultural identity and the belief in the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy motivated decisions she made for her class. Participation in *Proyecto*, nevertheless, helped her gain confidence in her classroom practices.

Esme used literature that was relevant and interesting to the students while still meeting the learning requirements set by the district, and it was important for this *maestra* to find ways to do both. Research (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Alvarez, 2001) shows that pushing the boundaries of standard literacy practices fosters zones of proximal development. Many times she allowed the lessons to develop naturally taking direction from the questions students posed. Esme stated that challenging students, moving them to critical thinking came at a cost. Many times she experienced criticism and disregard from colleagues, and sometimes even from administration. She felt that as the *maestra* she has to be willing to take risks and to adapt. Esme tells it “is exhausting, and frustrating but totally worth it” (Interview, November 14, 2013).

The students had been reading and comparing texts within the context of previous lessons to learn about inference. The lessons observed were a continuation of these, but in addition, the students were expected to make text-to-text connections, drawing on prior knowledge to help them understand what they read and then use that knowledge to make connections. The presentation of the following two exceptional lessons was important to highlight examples of Esmer’s adaptation, as well as her dedication for social justice.

Esme used two books (see Figure 2.4) for the lessons, first, “The Other Side” by Jacqueline Woodson, a story of two young girls, Clover who is African-American and Annie who is White, in a town divided by a fence. The girls were instructed by their mothers not to climb over the fence because it was not safe, so they could only watch each other from a distance. The second book was “Friends from the Other Side, *Amigos del otro lado*” by Gloria Anzaldua, this story focuses on the friendship between *Prietita*,

a Mexican-American girl and Joaquin, a Mexican boy who is undocumented. He crossed the River Grande with his family. When *la migra* (border patrol) shows up in their community *Prietita* knows she must help her friend and his family.

Esme knew it was important to include culturally relevant literature in her lessons, but they would not be relevant unless she could help students open their minds to diversity and differences they might not be familiar with. Ladson-Billings (1992) study states the necessity to move student perspectives beyond superficial references and stereotypical assumptions by using Latin@, and African-American culture, making them a frame of reference.



Figure 2.4. The read-aloud books, *Friends From the Other Side* and *The Other Side*

A short overview of the lesson on English-day pointed to the students use of prior knowledge based on discussions about the Civil Rights Movement, and their own developing ideas. Esme read the story and stopped intermittently to ask questions.

*La Maestra*: Do you remember that they were not supposed to play with each

other? They had to stay on their own side of the fence?

Mark: Yeah, they could get in trouble if they cross the fence.

Jose: Maybe it's talking about being together.

Mari: (Very softly) *Su mamá las dejo jugar juntas* (The mom let them play together).

*La Maestra*: Mhm, sí verdad, right. (Continued reading) 'Some day somebody is going to come along and knock this old fence down,—yeah I said, some day.' (Pause) Remember when Martin Luther King was here, he was trying to fight segregation.

Cory: They had water fountains for White only, *White only, a water fountain* [emphasis added], it's just a water fountain!

*La Maestra*: Yeah, and that's exactly the point this author was trying to make. The author, Jacqueline Woodson, was trying to say 'you know, even though Martin Luther King said everybody is created equal and we should not have segregation and Abraham Lincoln passed laws for freedom, things like that were still happening. Even though it wasn't legal (pause) segregation was still happening. Just like Mexicans, well, people were still saying 'umm, you know what, you don't get to go to this really nice school' and sometimes they wouldn't say because you are Mexican, they would say 'because you don't live in this area, you have to go to this school over here', and you know what (pause) that school was very different than the school for the Whites. So segregation was still happening it just wasn't called the same, it was labeled differently. Jacqueline Woodson, is saying segregation still exists. So she wanted to send a message to you guys. The author's purpose was for you guys to see that people are equal. Those kids were friends right? Was one better than the other?

Students: No! They had fun together! They were the same.

*La Maestra*: Right, good —yes, I want you to remember several things. The author wanted it to be a meaningful story; she wanted to cause a change. She wanted there to be no fence (pause) so she decided to do this story kid friendly. She wanted *kids like you* [emphasis added] to realize that you needed to treat others [fairly]. She researched about Martin Luther King and the 1950's, she searched for facts and wrote non-fiction. (Observation, November 11, 2013).

The students were interested throughout the read-aloud, their eagerness to speak was quite visible. Esmer consistently referred to previous lessons about Martin Luther King to help students make connections. Using previous knowledge and the points of reference provided by their *Maestra*, the students made connections such as, "Remember

when Martin Luther King said he had a dream?” “Martin Luther King said we are equal.” “He said the color of our skin didn’t matter.” Many students spoke of the “silliness” of separating the two girls in the story, relating it to their own friendships.

Cory’s comment about the water fountain was an amazing response and a beautiful example of his awareness of the situation. When commenting, he shook his head, he gestured with his hands emphasizing his disdain with the forced separation of water fountains. He chuckled nervously, unable to fathom why anyone would do such a thing; it was obvious the practice was incomprehensible to him. The idea of “separating people is dumb” (Observation, November 11, 2013). Cory’s response also offered Esme a chance to present links between the treatment of African Americans and Mexicans, setting a base of knowledge for the lesson with the next book.

Students were allowed to participate in authentic, uncensored, critical dialogue with guidance by the *maestra* in a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Esme used opportunities like these to encourage student awareness. When the read-aloud concluded, students moved to their tables to write reflections in their journals. The students continued to dialogue with each other at their tables. Esme approached Cory and engaged him in conversation, validating his feelings and supporting his developing awareness.

The next observation occurred a couple of days later. Esme’s class held a larger group of English-speakers than Spanish-speakers, so on Spanish-days, before beginning, she reminded students to sit next to their bilingual partner. Spanish experts would provide support for their partner that included translating if necessary. Esme had given



the class a short overview of *Friends From the Other Side* the day before the read-aloud, the day before my observation. Even with the preparation, the read-aloud still took longer than the previous observation.

Esme had difficulty keeping English-dominant students engaged while she read, in fact, several of the English-dominant students were distracted, showing little interest in the story. The English-dominant speakers became impatient when they could not follow or understand the story. Esme was stopping for text-to-text connections, but she stopped more frequently to offer clarification of vocabulary and phrases found in the story (See Figure 2.4).



*Figure 2.5.* Esme and her students discuss text-to-text connections.

*La maestra: Levanten la mano si quieren compartir algunas semejanzas de este con (Raise your hand if you want to share some similarities with this one and) “The Other Side”.*

Mari: *Yo creo que es que no estan juntos, estan en diferentes partes, es casi igual.*

Jose: *El titulo es similar pero uno dice Prietita y esa es la diferencia* (The title is similar, but one says Prietita and that is the difference).

*La maestra*: Yes, would you like to say something (to another student).

Jonathan: I can make a connection, this page and this page (points to page in the other book, inaudible).

*La maestra*: Oh let me see, oh I love that you noticed that! Look boys and girls, he made an excellent text-to-text connection. Look, this page and this page. Remember how we talked about how the authors play a very big role in how we read their books? In this book the fence was separating the place; it was the obstacle. In this story, see the river, we know the author wanted to represent, to show that there was another side. *Voy a seguir leyendo* (I'll continue reading). (Observation, November 14, 2014)

Esme acknowledged the text-to-text connections the students made. She was impressed with the quality of skills they demonstrated to make the connections. In my observation, nevertheless, I found short discussions and the students had difficulty relating to the experiences of the characters. There appeared to be an absence of emotional empathy for the characters, Joaquin and Prietita.

*La maestra*: *La migra, es como*, is kind of like a police officer, but they look for people that crossed without documents, the permission, that is needed.

They look for people that crossed and if they find them they send them back. Remember (pause) Joaquin's family was just looking for work.

Were they doing something bad?

Marcos: They crossed without the permission.

Jose: *No tienen documentos* (They don't have documents).

Larry: *La migra*, they look around for people without papers.

(Observation, November 14, 2014)

The students did not answer Esme's question about the family, they were focused on the border patrol and their job. A student identified the border patrol as a security force that returned undocumented Mexicans back to Mexico. Esme retold integral parts of the story, mostly in English, and tried to relate cultural references from the story into contexts of student experiences to help them form an understanding of Joaquin's fear.

Still, they could not connect the characters experience to real world experiences like they did in the read-aloud of the first book.

*La maestra: Si utilizamos las habilidades de inferencia tal vez podamos ver lo que era importante para la familia mirando las paredes de su casa en los dibujos. Hemos dicho que la familia no tenia trabajo y se mudó de México* (If we use referencing skills maybe we can find what is important to the family by looking at the walls in their home in the pictures. We know that the family didn't have work and they moved from Mexico). So what they had...

Sara: *Se los regalaron?*(It was given to them?)

*La maestra: Sí, puede ser, recuerdan que* (yes, it's possible, remember that) (pause) remember they crossed the river and they didn't bring anything with them, unless maybe it was something very small.

Marcos: He could take the *fotos* (photos) *y cortar a circle* (and cut a circle) and put *a tornillo para el foto* (a nail for the photo) and (pause) hang it. (Observation, November 14, 2014)

When Esme explained Joaquin's family had crossed with nothing except very small personal items. Marcos mentioned pictures, because he considered them important. Marcos usually chose to speak English, but codeswitched in his excitement to describe a possible connection to the character. Students also became very excited when they recognized the *loteria* game in the story. *La maestra* reminded them that one of their friends brought the game for the class and she had it laminated for their use.

At this point Marcos commented, "Well, this is a Mexican game that the Mexican people play." Esme acknowledged that it was a popular game played in Mexico, but that people played it "here too". A student added, "In other countries kids don't have many, like Mexico. We have more", while his friend nodded in agreement. Esme asked if he was referring to board games, the little boy hesitated and another student answered, "We have more things than Mexican people, we have more games (pause) food too." Still

another added, “Yeah, the Mexico people don’t have much stuff. Mexico is kinda dirty because they don’t have stuff (pause) they’re kind of poor (in a low voice).” It became apparent that there was a disconnect, and even as first graders, students held common deficit views about Mexican culture and the Mexican people.

I watched Esme growing tense, her body language showed stress and frustration, yet she remained calm. On one hand, Jose, a bilingual student, declared, “*La migra usa helicopteros para buscar a gente que viene de Mexico sin papeles*” (The border patrol uses helicopters to look for people from Mexico without papers). His bilingual peers looked at him and nodded with understanding. Yet on the other hand, the rest of the students continued to have difficulty understanding why Joaquin and his mother were scared. An English-speaking student asked, “Why don’t they talk to [border patrol] and tell them they need help? My mom says policemen help.” A few students indicated Joaquin’s fear was due to the fact that they broke the law crossing illegally. Esme was resolute to continue guiding students towards a deeper, critical way of thinking.

As facilitator, Esme asked direct questions, such as, How do you know? Have you researched it? Is that a fact or an assumption? Finally she warned the students about the danger of making blanket statements and generalizations about a group of people. Esme dismissed the students to write reflections, however, her frustration was visible. When the students were finally at their tables, it became obvious that most students had trouble writing reflections. There were also less discussions between the students than the day of the first read-aloud. The students were unable to relate to the characters emotional experiences.

Esme walked over to me and at that moment she did not look to me as the researcher, but instead as another colleague. Esme voiced her need for something she could use to show the class the diversity found in Mexico. As the students continued to work on the reflections, she searched and decided on *Mexico en tus sentidos* (Mexico in Your Senses) by Willy Sousa. With her determination, it took her fifteen minutes to look for the video, give it a quick view and set it up.

Esme called the students back to the carpet (see figure 2.5). She explained to the students that she was going to share with them a video about Mexico. Esmer pointed out that in their earlier conversations students made statements that presented all Mexican people as the same and students had made huge assumptions about what Mexico and its people were like. Esme had asked a student if he thought Mexico was beautiful and the response was, no. Esme hoped that by watching the video maybe they would change their minds and challenge their perceptions.



*Figure 2.6.* The class watched *Mexico en tus sentidos*.

As the video began, students were immediately surprised to see mountains and valleys. The greatest surprise was when they saw pyramids in Mexico. At the conclusion it was difficult to identify the speakers because almost immediately there was talking happening everywhere. A few comments included, “I’ve been there on vacation.” “*Donde yo vivia es asi*” (Where I used to live was like that). “I know how to make tortillas!” “Wow, I want to go there!” “We were there *y ahí sacaron un foto*” (and we took a picture). “*Nosotros hemos hido a las piramidas*” (We’ve been to the pyramids). “Is that real?” (Observation, November 14, 2014). The questions were endemic to the contrast of the reality the student was being exposed to, and what he assumed was real.

Students were surprised when they saw Mexicans of different phenotypes. Esme asked, “Can we say everybody in Mexico looks the same, or everybody in Mexico does this or nobody in Mexico has this?” Students answered no. One student, Bella, replied, “I’m Mexican and I’m White!” Mike answered surprised, “But you speak English!” Esme continued her argument about the problems with making assumptions about people and judging people by their skin color. Bella, blond, fair with hazel eyes, continued, “My dad is dark. He has black hair and black eyes. And I speak Spanish too.” Esme felt a sense of achievement for taking the chance to have a critical dialogue and challenging students’ preconceived ideas; the very occurrence of the dialogue was a success. Maybe not all students understood the meaning of the experience, but Esme believed many did at some level, while most important was that she provided the space for this type of interaction. Freire (1970) described dialogue as communication focused on collaborative learning and developing consciousness. More encouraging was that the students

continued these conversations the rest of the school day. These were the kind of results that encouraged Esme to continue challenging her students with critical thought.

**Cultural Intuitiveness Guiding Professional Choices.** Esme's experiences growing up developed much of her belief about the importance of education for Latino bilingual students. She took risks. Overtly, or not, Esmer challenged the status quo, and questioned methods she found patronizing to her students. It was obvious that Esme's understanding of social justice was based on her personal and professional experiences. Esme indicated she did not identify as Chicana before starting her graduate journey, but once she became aware of the cultural strength the term held; Esme claimed it as part of her identity.

Esme's education pushed her to accept that she wanted more than a life working in the fields as a migrant worker. She indicated she felt guilt about leaving her family, but she wanted a different future. Esme's difficult decision added to her understanding of the high cost due to choices made by Latino students' families, which strengthened her respect for the students, and their families. Latino immigrant parents want to hold on to their culture and to help their children succeed in school, but they struggle with the enormous push by educational institutions and society for their assimilation. This was why Esme advocated, not only for her students, but for the families as a complete unit.

Esme and I spoke about the lessons I have previously highlighted and she added some interesting information.

Yes, it was a good lesson, but if I had been observed [by administration] I would have failed. They would not consider the discussions or student results. They go by the schedule and the amount of time it took. If you go over the amount of time

mandated you'll get written up and fail your observation, and I went over the allotted time (laughing gently). They follow strict guidelines. I wouldn't be able to do this. This is why I always try to align what I do with the goals so that I can at least say 'oh yeah I taught that, it just looks a little different (laughs). (Interview, November 14, 2014)

The school and school district's focused on school ratings, and test scores, creating a web of challenges, which Esme had to navigate. The focus not only challenged the manner in which Esme chose to teach, it also challenged her identity as a professional. Esme's choice to teach social justice did not fit into school policies. In relation to Gee's (1999) notion of situated identities, her choices created identity shifts in different contexts. Whether consciously or not, Esme situated herself as advocate and activist. Esme constantly evaluated her professional identity while navigating institutionalized academic discourses, her identity shifting as she moved from one figured space to another. Esme made it clear that risks were necessary when providing the type of lessons relevant to her students, and essential for them, to become confident members of society.

Esme became a teacher to offer something better for Latino bilingual students; she wanted to help give immigrant children a positive experience. Of course, Esme would prefer that it not be so difficult, but nevertheless, she stated her plans to continue providing student experiences that would help them develop strong self-esteem and to become critical thinkers.

**Offering Students Opportunities for Critical Encounters.** Esme's class held more English speakers than Spanish speakers. Esme was more consistent in trying to encourage self-awareness. Although it was appropriate for all her students, it was needed for her bilingual students. Esme wanted them aware of their cultural wealth.



The greatest example of self-awareness was, of course, when she made the decision to stop the language arts lesson to show the video of Mexico to the students. The decision she made was supported by her critical consciousness. Esme guided a dialogue about the phenotypes in the classroom. The students looked at each other taking note of their color, their looks. Talking about skin color, ethnicity and race are rarely, if at all, included in school classrooms especially in the lower grades. However, Esme's commitment to guide her students to a critical awareness pushed her to move forward towards a humanizing pedagogy.

Another project Esme chose was *Día de los Muertos* and she chose this project purposefully. She hoped her bilingual students would make connections with it just as she did. The project involved students doing research about holidays or a comparison of *Día de los Muertos* and Halloween. Parents and other classes were invited to the three classrooms to view student work and short presentations.

The students were so excited, they couldn't wait for the visitors to get here. They stood and talked about their altars. It was really cool, they could give the background of the holiday. *Y cuando veían a sus papas ellos estaban preparados para presentar su proyecto* (and when they saw their parents they were ready to present their project). (Interview, November 14, 2013)

I observed the students at various times and unlike the other two participants, Esme had a much more difficult time getting her students to think critically, but Esme worked harder to create a space for the development of students' self-awareness. In Esme's class the process occurred on a more regular basis. It was woven into their daily activities. It happened when Esme reminded bilingual students to help their peers, when bilingual

students comprehended the bilingual books read in class and through the regular discussions about culture, and knowledge.

When Esme read a bilingual book, as soon as she read a part in Spanish the Spanish-speaking students smiled and commented to each other or to the *maestra*. The bilingual group, nevertheless, was not very vocal. It was in my observations that I saw physical responses though, such as sitting up straight, smiling and whispering excitedly during the video. The student's engagement in the activity was visible. Interestingly, during the read-aloud the bilingual students did not volunteer to the whole group, but again comments were directed between themselves and to the *maestra*.

Esme's passion for her students and bilingual education was evident in her choices and in the risks she took to support her bilingual students continued biliterate/bicultural development.

### **Reflexivity For Critical Consciousness**

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970)

I asked Esme to identify the experience or action that moved her towards a more critical cultural awareness. She did not hesitate and answered, “the literacy box—that was the beginning. It was an eye-opener ... and that was the first. It really made you look at the (literacy) journey.”

*Lo mas, que me impacto [Poryecto], lo que fue mas significativa para mi fue la idea de reconocer, de saber quienes somos, the self. Creo que fue una experiencia*

*que nos ayudo a buscarnos quienes somos, la idea de identidad en lo profesional y lo personal. Siento que habían cositas que yo ya ni pensaba, no le tomaba importancia. Después de las clases eran cosas que saltaron y mutuamente en la vida profesional como en la vida personal.*

Translation:

What struck me most in [*Proyecto*], what was most significant for me was the idea of recognizing, to know who we are, the self. I think it was an experience that helped us to look at who we are, the idea of identity professionally and personally. I feel there were things that I had not even thought about, I did not consider it important. After the classes they were things that jumped, mutually in the professional life as well as in personal life. (Interview, November 11, 2013)

The critical aspects of the courses in *Proyecto* moved Esme to an awareness of self (Quiocho & Rios, 2000), learning to value who she was as a *Maestra* and as a *mujer Latina*. Esme's personal experiences affected her professional identity, it formed her way of thinking as a *Maestra*. The experiences had formed very clear ideas of what she planned to provide her bilingual students, still, she had not considered her university experiences influencing her personal life. Esme had expected shifts in her professional identity, although the depth of consciousness was fairly surprising to her, but claimed surprise by the influence her university experiences played in her personal life.

*Proyecto* provided tools and taught Esme how to critically analyze her lessons, the literature she included in her classroom and the way her students, and she, were situated at her school. Esme reasoned that culturally relevant practices in school could help with self-awareness. Teachers often become frustrated with bilingual students because they still call them *maestr@* in the middle of the school year instead of by their name. Esme, however, was proud of it because she knew it is a title of respect. Her

cultural background provided her this knowledge and her cultural consciousness valued the practice.

Esme stated that most teachers reflect about their teaching. Using reflexivity, however, allowed her to uncover her own assimilation, and her recreation of issues she wanted to eliminate. She found her personal and profesional identities influenced each other, they were intertwined. Reflexivity brought Esme to an awareness that gave her pride and pain, and provided growth. Still, she was not prepared for the influence her experience in *Proyecto* would have on her identities.

As a teacher I see how I make a difference in their (the students) reaction. I can't (pause), I just can't go back, I can't. I'll keep doing it for them. I think my professional identiy and my personal identity are tied together. Ummm...ok, it's like for example, we had never celebrated *Día de los Muertos*. My mom used to talk about it and in Mexico I saw it, I remember it. Well later, I got married, and our religion (pause) we don't celebrate it, we don't do altars. I never questioned it, it was never an issue.

Translation:

When I started teaching here, in dual language and it was like 'oh we do culturally relevant things'... I remember my first year the language coach brought me something, a *Día de los Muertos* packet and said you can use this. So I did, but I did it very superficially, we didn't talk about it. I saw others that did more with it and I didn't think much about it. I knew I wouldn't do it because I always thought of it as a religious thing because my husband made it that way. I just thought he knew everything, especially about the religion. Then I started going to the university and found it was more cultural, not religious. So I started analyzing it. I started paying attention to it. (Interview, November 11, 2013)

Before participating in *Proyecto*, although not very vocal, Esme was an advocate in her position as an educator, yet, in her personal life she acquiesced to others opinions, ideas and philosophies. Esme's university experiences moved her to the development of critical conscientization, which in turn motivated her to explore, to search and to

question elements confusing to her. Her discoveries were complex, she found that a critical perspective influenced her self-awareness in her professional and personal lives.

There was a teacher and she was not Latina. She was Buddhist and she was all into it. She said, 'I have an altar in the house, don't you have an altar at the house, for your mom?' I thought, *she's doing it* [emphasis added]... The following year I did a little more and then this year, I took it home (smiling). I actually made an altar for my mom. And yes, I got in trouble with my husband (laughing), he started with how it was wrong. I told him it was not religious and it was to honor my mom's memory. I took the kids to a festival, I told my husband I was going and he didn't have to go, but he went. When we got home the kids asked if we were going to make an altar, and we did. I made it clear to my husband I was not doing it for religious purposes, but for our culture. I told him, 'oh we don't believe in Halloween, but we let the kids go trick or treating? So why can't I do this?' *I changed* [emphasis added]. I thought of that particular moment as the cultural aspect as the teacher and I *reclaimed* [emphasis added] it for my culture, personal. I don't think I separate my identities, it's who I am (pause) maybe subconsciously, but... . (November 11, 2013)

Esme was shocked and confused, when she thought her cultural identity was disappearing. She asked herself how someone not *Latin@* could have a better understanding of a cultural holiday than she did. Again, like Natasha and Clarisa, Esme was pushed to critical consciousness and self-reflection.

The challenge for Esme was that she was ready to embrace her identity, her 'self', her cultural wealth, but her husband resisted. Esme had come to realize she did not know her culture as well as she thought, and she was not willing to give it up again. Esme also wanted to give her own children the gift of their heritage. Her understanding of her culture was gained in school, and she reclaimed it for her family.

Esme laughed as she remembered her behavior before expanding her critical consciousness and admitted she feels more whole. Furthermore, it is something she

shared with her own children. Esme ascertained that culture forms identity and should, therefore, be validated and nurtured.

### **SUMMARY**

Esme's respect for her bilingual students and their families nurtured her commitment to social justice. Esme worked to build a community in her classroom, but struggled bringing her two groups together. However, she persisted because she felt it would help her bilingual students gain a stronger, positive perspective of self. She came across a lot of resistance from colleagues, but focusing on her classroom success fueled agency. Esme remained firm in providing a culturally relevant curriculum. In her practice of reflexivity, and analyzing with a critical lens, Esme continued to look for ways to continue to develop her students' self-awareness to prepare more culturally responsive individuals.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In this chapter I include an overview of the questions and methods for this dissertation study. The purpose of this dissertation study was to understand how *Latina* bilingual teachers negotiated what appeared to be the *entrelazamiento* of their professional and personal experiences, their situated identities while navigating the figured worlds of the bilingual classroom and the school campus, and the influence of these for a humanizing pedagogy. I employed the use of three case studies in this qualitative research investigation, that include three bilingual teachers, Natasha, a pre-kinder teacher, Clarisa, a second grade teacher and Esme, also a second grade teacher. Data were collected from interviews, classroom observations, field and teacher/student produced artifacts. These data were manually coded, themed and analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Latina teachers position their identities in the figured world of their bilingual classroom and school campus?
2. What are the challenges and affordances of these positionings?
3. How do Latina teacher's experiences influence professional identity and inform (or not) the (re)conceptualization of pedagogical practices?

I used a framework of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998), CRT/LatCrit (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to examine the *Maestras* experiences and

pedagogical practices for the study. The theory of CRT/LatCrit is a nice compliment to the constructs of figured worlds and situated identities. *Maestras* co-constructed figured worlds by positioning their, and students', identities in those worlds in specific ways. Sociocultural theory highlighted how peers influenced individual learning and their specific figured world of the classroom and school communities. Using elements of sociocultural theory, I examined the bidirectional learning that occurs between maestras, students and families.

In addressing the research questions, four themes became consistently evident across the three case studies. The first theme identified in the data was the *maestras'* advocacy for students and the community, emphasizing the cultural wealth held within the families and their community. In order to build on students' cultural wealth the *Maestras* created spaces where students and families could develop their individual and collective voices. The second theme was willingness to take up leadership roles for *Maestras* to position their agency to support and promote their, and other teachers' professional development. Theme three was centered on providing students for critical encounters with literature that highlights racism. Lastly, the fourth theme reflected the practice of reflexivity and its influence on the *Maestras'* continued development of critical cultural awareness and professional identity.

I present this chapter in three sections. First, I summarize my findings as they relate to each research question. Then I discuss how the themes have important implications for in-service teacher training and education. Finally, I present recommendations for future research studies.



## DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

How do *Latina* teachers position their identities in the figured world of their bilingual classroom and school campus?

### **Finding 1: Tracing the Positioning of *Maestras***

The *Maestras* positioned their identities in powerful ways as classroom teachers. Holland et al. posit that individuals position themselves, or are positioned by others in any given context. Holland et al. further state that individuals make the choice to respond in any given context by negotiating, accepting or resisting the positioning. *Maestras* positionings are processes created in interactions with other individuals in the context of a figured world. Holland et al. describe authoring as an individual's way of making sense of what is around them and of self-understanding. Understanding of self supported *Maestra* identity formation, and shifts, in figured worlds.

The *Maestras* embraced their identities, drawing on their histories, experiences and linguistic practices. As offered in Chapter 4, the *Maestras* held some level of cultural awareness before participating in programs like *Proyecto*. Urrieta (2007) posits that participation is the focus in figured worlds because it is through interactions and interrelationships that critical identities are produced “while expanding the fluidity of culture” (p. 120). Interaction is consistent, it is in this continuum that situated identities shift and/or change. The *Maestras* authored their selves through cultural and professional experiences, ethnicity, identities and culture beyond the familiar realm of the teaching profession.

## **Finding 2: Identifying Opportunities of Authoring Self**

Every day power relations and social interactions are enacted in figured worlds as positional identities are enacted and/or resisted. “In the making of meaning, we ‘author’ the world. But the ‘I’ is by no means a freewheeling agent authoring worlds from creative springs within” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 170). As one is authoring the world to make sense of it, one is also authored by those making sense of their own reality (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist 1990; Urrieta, 2007), therefore the position of self-authoring and being authored can be a simultaneous occurrence. Accordingly, the results of the dissertation study revealed multiple ways of authoring. Teachers are often marginalized in the figured world of schools, particularly teachers of color (Ek & Sánchez, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), as well as teachers attempting to be more culturally responsive. In the case of the three bilingual teachers, power and agency was reinforced through the use of reflexivity, which in turn engaged the teachers in the process of self-authoring. My study, nuances Holland’s notion of figured worlds and situated identities by focusing particularly on *Latina* bilingual teachers.

Bilingual teachers choose to self-author in a figured world that often constrains them to be active agents of change (Ek & Sánchez, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Twenty years ago teacher educators, Lytle & Cochran-Smith (1994) stated that teachers are influenced by how they know and understand themselves as teachers, as well as by their learning experiences. A better understanding of self strengthens an ethnic identity of *Latinidad*. Teachers are commonly positioned in the figured worlds of classrooms and schools with standardized values that include expectations set by an institutionalized

educational system. The findings of the dissertation study demonstrate that bilingual teachers can strengthen understandings of self and are able to reposition themselves by participating in professional development programs like *Proyecto*.

The *Maestras* construct a bilingual figured world in which they position their bilingual students as knowledgeable and active participants. The *Maestras* position themselves as role models, consistently highlighting the benefits of being a bilingual, biliterate and bicultural individual. *Maestras* strive to offer the students opportunities to sustain their cultural practices and linguistic skills. They endeavor to develop *confianza* as well as connections with their students and their families. The figured world of bilingualism becomes a place where students and *Maestras* are both learners and providers of knowledge.

**Finding 3: ¿Qué es ser maestra?, What does it mean to be a maestra?**

The term *Maestra* embraces the notion of humanizing pedagogy and the ideals of social justice, culturally responsiveness and critical consciousness. Development of more critical sociocultural awareness added a deeper meaning of the term for bilingual teachers. Delgado Bernal (2002) maintains that the use of a *Latina* critical lens centers on knowledge in regards to language, culture and a commitment to the community. The strength found in the claimed identities encouraged *Maestras*' to develop their roles as classroom teachers and vital members of their communities. My findings showed that the term '*Maestra*' was an identity *Latina* bilingual teachers held as they embraced the notion of humanizing pedagogy and everything it involved, such as, social justice, cultural responsiveness and critical consciousness.

Reconceptualization of ethnic and professional identities as *Maestras Latinas* was supported with active participation in the figured world of the classroom. In my dissertation study I found that the *Maestras* sustained an emotional connection to what they did in their positioning as *Maestras*. The positioning as a *Maestra* was not only about teaching, but instead, it was a responsibility to create affirming opportunities and an additive educational environment for bilingual students and their families. As a way to change the schooling dynamic, *Maestras* made personal choices to invest of themselves in their students and their families. A positioning as learner instead of the knowledgeable expert added depth to developing relationships between families and *Maestras*. Scholarly work (Ek & Sánchez, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Weisman, Flores, Valenciana, 2007) presents *Maestras*' schooling experiences and the influence of these in their understanding of *Latin@* immigrant families frustrations because of their similar experiences.

The three *Maestras* accepted their bilingual students as capable, intelligent individuals and, therefore, held high expectations for every one of their students (Nieto, 2009; Bartolomé, 1994). Using a critical lens and a social justice perspective, the *Maestras* created plans to prepare their students to be successful in the classroom and mainstream society. The idea is for students to be successful authoring themselves in the *entrelazamiento* of the worlds of home, school, and the wider community. For the *Maestras* the *entrelazamiento* of educational experiences from childhood to becoming bilingual teachers and leaders at school was also a successful journey.

#### **Finding 4: Identity, Culture and Language: Racialized Notions**

I argue the ethnic or cultural markers of the *Latin@* communities were acknowledged as powerful facets of the three teachers' identities. For example, the *Maestras* identified as *boricua* (born in Puerto Rico), Mexican-American and *Mexicana*. These identifiers were central to their enactment of agency in the classroom and school communities. The *Maestras* identities were produced in the process of participating in specific bilingual figured worlds that validated their histories and race/ethnicity as *Latinas* and by using a new professional identity perspective (Urrieta, 2007). The identity risks the *Maestras* were willing to take propelled them to step into major leadership roles. I found that an individual *Maestras*' new understanding of self in relation to others like her, projected her to make more conscious choices from a position of *Latinaness*, or *Latinidad* (Cantü and Fránquiz, 2010). In their interdisciplinary text, Canú and Fránquiz argue that what happens to one of the groups marked with *Latinaness* affects the others in the United States and elsewhere. They also note that forging bridges across *Latinidades* with an inclusive agenda as taken up by the three *Maestras* in the dissertation study will lead teachers and students to realize their potential as an ethnic group. Ultimately, *Maestras* can be considered as exuding empowerment drawn from affirming their identities and positionings of Brownness (Santa Ana, 2002).

#### *Bilingualism as a Strategic Tool*

Personal and educational experiences included devaluing, marginalization, or subtraction of the *Maestras* native language, Spanish, and their cultural identity in and out of school (Valenzuela, 1999). Interestingly, it was these adverse experiences that

exercised the *Maestras*' beliefs in bilingual education and in fostering *Latin@s* bilingual students' maintenance of bilingualism, biliteracy and the building of their self-esteem. Despite a continued devaluation of Spanish and the cultural practices of *Latin@s* in the educational system, bilingual education survives in places like Texas; however, in most programs across the United States the focus is on English (Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

Because language, even in Texas, is the most micromanaged element in education the *Maestras* often found themselves resisting program directives that were considered oppressive to bilingual students' learning. Realistically it was problematic to be culturally responsive and still strictly abide by fidelity to mandated teaching methods. Therefore, in a sustaining pedagogy, the *Maestras* continued to accept the everyday language practices from outside the classroom community as part of their classroom curriculum; the effect was the marginalizing of the required or mandated policing of language. For example, codeswitching was not accepted by program directives, particularly in its use by teachers; nevertheless, it was used to model the practice as a language resource for students.

These actions highlight practices used to counter deficit perspectives about bilingualism and the language varieties of Texan bilingual students. The *Maestras* noted that everyday language practices were imbedded in the cultural practices of their students' families, and influenced students' linguistic and cultural identity formations. Consequently, the *Maestras*' decisions to allow students to use all their language resources for learning and expressing themselves were strategic and not merely resistant to a prescribed bilingual model of instruction. Moreover, the *Maestras* had learned from

course work in *Proyecto* that linguistic practices were part of the community cultural wealth shared in *Latin@* communities.

### *Biculturalism as a Strategic Tool*

Cultural intuitiveness (Delgado-Bernal, 1998) and reflexivity influence a strong *Latina Maestra* identity. Understandings for the three teachers in the dissertation study came not only from their own biculturalism and family histories, but the *Maestras* also learned from their students. The bidirectional learning occurred as students and *Maestras* shared family stories and histories during daily classroom literacy events. The *Maestras* valued their identities as bilingual and bicultural beings, feeling a great achievement in retaining and maintaining their native languages, and in helping their students to do the same. In the development of cultural awareness through cohort conversations in *Proyecto* and through constant reflection of interactions in their own classroom community, the role as bilingual/bicultural advocate became clear. It is this consciousness that moved the *Maestras* to a social justice stance with a strong motivation to help students continue to position their own strong bilingual/bicultural identities at the heart and center of learning.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION TWO**

The second research question was, what are the challenges and affordances of these positionings? In the dissertation study I found that across campuses the bilingual *Maestras* dealt with unique obstacles on a regular basis and often felt marginalized.

However, culturally relevant practices that challenged subtractive positioning situated them in ways that advanced their agency.

#### **Finding 5: Taking on the Role of Advocate**

Drawing on Paris' (2012) notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as it focuses on the sustenance of students' bilingualism, biliteracy and biculturalism the study showed that the *Maestras'* positionings included the reclaiming of their own identity and culture. In many ways the *Maestras* needed scaffolding from their *Proyecto* classes to help their understanding of teaching for social justice and to become agents of change, Paris' (2012) notion of CSP assisted the *Maestras* to foster and sustain “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). CSP also emphasizes the need for explicit forms of resistance against a monocultural society and this was taken up by the *Maestras* in their campus leadership roles usually after discussion in *Proyecto*.

Programs like *Proyecto* can offer critical spaces needed to reconceptualize *Maestras* repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). I argue that as *Maestras* become confident and more self-aware about navigating obstacles in school and school districts, they recontextualize their pedagogical practices. Developing trust in cultural intuitiveness and a deepening of commitments to social justice projects further motivates and reinforces the value of sustaining *Maestras'* identities as *Latinas*, leaders and advocates.



### *Positioning in Professional Development*

Professional development provided by school districts often lacks a critical and relevant component for improving pedagogy. For bilingual teachers the training workshops are simply a translated version of the training for monolingual English. Further recent research proposes that PD for teachers needs two kinds of spaces, one for bilingual teachers and another for non-bilingual colleagues (Télez & Varghese, 2013). Because the *Maestras* in the dissertation study agreed they needed scaffolding, just as students do, they indicated a preference for collaborative PD with bilingual peers. In such PD experiences they could share ideas that would feel authentic and relevant in their classrooms. They also wanted to augment their strategies for connecting students with their families and communities.

In reconceptualizing their identities in the educational system, the *Maestras* chose to position themselves as mentors, sharing resources and information with colleagues whenever possible. The process of collaboration built as confidence and trust between and among the *Maestras*. Research has shown that providing safe spaces on campuses, where colleagues can dialogue and share ideas, is vital (Delgado Bernal, 1995). Presenting their challenges and successes at local, state, and national conferences provided important PD spaces to dialogue with and learn from other educators invested in social justice projects such as bilingual/bicultural education.

### *Cultivating Additive Practices in Bilingual Education*

The curriculum for the bilingual teachers in the study was restrictive because of language policies, such as, having to follow regimented lessons and a separation of

languages. The *Maestras* did not agree with these restrictions. Colleagues pressed the *Maestras* to follow the strict guidelines because it was important to maintain fidelity to the bilingual model selected by the district. The *Maestras* sometimes positioned themselves as resisters. However, they were strategic and chose various means to interact with colleagues, negotiating culturally relevant additions to grade level lessons and school events, for example, in order to maintain the inclusion of bilingual students and families in the mainstream.

Contacts made between the *Maestras* and students' families formed strong personal connections (Bustos-Flores, 2001). The relationships that emerged deepened the *Maestras'* understanding of the valuable community cultural wealth that families offer. Because *Maestras* demonstrated a strong desire to support student learning that includes their families' cultural knowledge and language, an important goal was for seeking meaningful ways to further involve the families in the school curriculum. The new positioning of families in the school curriculum has the potential for making strong, personal and lasting impressions on students, the *Maestras*, and parents in ways that enhance their *Latinidad*.

Empirical research (EK & Sánchez, 2008; Weisman, 2001; Weisman, Flores, Valenciana, 2007) documents teachers' loss of language, cultural identity and intergeneration connections. These losses are something the *Maestras* try to help their students avoid. Instead they cultivate practices in their classrooms to build student pride by repositioning their families' cultural wealth (Yosso, 2002).

## DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

The final question examined in the dissertation study was, How do *Latina* teacher's experiences influence professional identity and inform (or not) the (re)conceptualization of pedagogical practices?

### **Finding 6: Learning From Lived Experiences**

Lived experiences provide a knowledge base (Delgado Bernal, 2001), and the *Maestras'* drew from an ethnic identity as *Latina* to navigate life in their classroom and in their leadership roles. According to Solórzano (1998) experiential knowledge of is legitimate and important. Other researchers document the value of lived experience (Bernal, 2002; Bruner, 1986, 1996; Dillard, 2000). Often experiential knowledge challenges dominant discourse genres by elevating the use of narratives, biographies, family histories, proverbs, consejos and cuentos. A critical sociocultural awareness is continuously supported when *Maestras* share experiential knowledge with their students. Sharing this type of knowledge links the past and the present; moreover, creating possibilities for bidirectional learning.

Although the *Maestras* entered the education profession with different backgrounds and experiences as Latin@s, there were also similarities. For example, they reported biliteracy development supported by home practices. Exposure to language and literacy practices in the home contexts scan manifest in school as spontaneous biliteracy Reyes (2006). Reading *la Biblia* (the bible), *revistas* (magazines) and playing games like *la loteria* and *escuelita* are common literacy practices experienced by *Maestras* growing up (Fránquiz, Salazar, DeNicolo, 2011). Home literacy practices began the emergence of

*Maestras* as bililingual/biliterate individuals, which is repeated in the experience of their bilingual students.

Entering schools in the U.S. is challenging for *Latin@s* students because, even when entering school fluent in Spanish and English, a subtractive view and devaluation of Spanish in the educational institution (Delgado Bernal, 2002) ignores an emerging bilingualism and students are placed in English-only classrooms. A deficit perspective has historically persisted across the nation that places little value on bilingualism, and even less importance to developing students' biliteracy. In the case of the *Maestras'* memories of language usage at school were generally traumatic; in some cases memories were suppressed. These experiences inspired the *Maestras* to reposition the status of Spanish in their classroom and school. They also repositioned the status of bilingual parents in their child's education. Additionally, the repositioning of their professional identities as *Maestras Latinas* assisted them in enacting transformative pedagogical practices.

Drawing from lived experiences *Maestras* made commitments to cultivate their students' critical cultural awareness. A critical sociocultural consciousness that was deepened by experiences in *Proyecto* motivated the *Maestras* to challenge and resist a restrictive approach of educating bilingual students. Instead they were guided by a collection of scholarly work (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Gaitan, 1994; Fránquiz, Salazar, DeNicolo, 2011; Villapando, 2003) that acknowledges cultural and experiential knowledge as a valuable foundation for learning. By positioning the community cultural wealth of *Latin@s* as significant, I am confident that *Maestras* will maintain their

commitment to teach a culturally sustaining pedagogy that is mutually beneficial for them and their students.

There is a final element to the learning from lived experiences that emerged from this dissertation. In some ways, there was a moral imperative that sometimes accompanies bilingual educators reasons for becoming teachers, and reasons for resisting oppressive policies or deficit framings. Tracing teachers' motives for entering into the field seems to have added importance in bilingual education. Certainly there is the work of Richard Ruiz (1984) that points to the formulation of language ideologies. Likewise there seems to be a moral highground that teachers insert because of their understandings and lived experiences.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Cummins (1996) suggested, "good teaching does not require us to internalize an endless list of instructional techniques. Much more fundamental is the recognition that human relationships are central to effective instruction" (p.76). His message is even more important in the current sociopolitical climate of deficit myths that position *Latin@s* as disinterested in education and educational opportunities for their children (Valencia & Black, 2002). As verified by the *Maestras* in this study, the identities of *Latin@* teachers, students, and parents suffer from dominant discourses that malign their language, language variations, cultural traditions, histories and lived experiences.

A dismantling process that identifies the ways the dominant discourse shapes and distorts views of language, culture, and aspirations in *Latin@* communities can enable

teacher education candidates or in-service teachers to more clearly understand their own identities, motivations and goals as individuals and professionals. In the dissertation study, *Proyecto* provided the dismantling process for the three *Maestras* through specific readings, action oriented projects, dialogic encounters, presentations in classes and professional conferences, among other activities. In *Proyecto* broader visions of what it means to be a social justice educator required learning additional ways to garner *Latin@* community resources to link them to the school curriculum. In this way, a literate repertoire was inclusive of the language varieties and cultural traditions *Latin@s* utilize in their interactions. This study showed that *Maestras* benefit from access to this broad repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources and, in turn, they become committed to culturally sustaining pedagogy that benefits their students and their families. Additionally, the *Maestras* became leaders in their professional community.

Teachers should be prepared for the different bilingual education programs available. Colleagues reproached the *Maestras* in the dissertation study because they did not accept the use of strict separation of languages for teaching based on days or content area. The expectations teachers face when particular program models are adopted on a school campus needs to be addressed, as there are tensions and ideological stances of different program models that impact the lives of teachers, students, parents and administrators. These dialogic conversations must be revisited often.

This study showed the importance of repositioning parents as partners in their children's education. Teacher educators and professional development programs ought to be mindful of the knowledge and perspectives of *Latino* parents. Jiménez (2004)

stated that it is the responsibility of educators to find out “what they [students] want, and what their parents want for them in terms of schooling in the United States” (p. 23) in order to have effective and equitable educational outcomes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The data used for this study allowed me to provide a rich and holistic account of the lives of three *Maestras Latinas* who participated in the same Masters program and taught emergent bilingual elementary school students. In future research a larger sample could provide nuances related to a broader experiential base before, during and after professional development such as *Proyecto*. A larger sample could enlighten further what is known about culturally sustaining pedagogies in bilingual classrooms. After all, experiences alone do not ensure an affirming position toward the languages, language varieties, and cultural practices that present themselves in bilingual classrooms and diverse schools.

## Appendix A

### First Interview Protocol

1. What was school like growing up?
2. What was the most significant experience for you that contributed to your life (professional/personal)?
3. What did you find valuable in the masters program?
4. What are some new ideas you plan to implement in your curriculum due to knowledge gained from the Masters Program?
5. What made an impact on you after learning about bilingual history?
6. How or what, made a connection of the past and present of bil. ed. for you?
7. What readings or assignments influenced you, or led you to a new perspective?
  - (a) How does (or did) it help you as a teacher?
8. Have you implemented new ideas and how are you sharing these ideas?
9. How are you critically assessing your ideas?
10. How have you tried to create an environment of trust with colleagues, grade level team and/or parents of students in your classroom?
11. What have you done, or will do with the newfound trust?
12. If you now desire to include your parents more deeply in their child's learning what is one concrete way you can plan to do this (or have begun to do this)?
13. With whom do you envision taking a stand for your students?
  - (a) Can you identify one way you have, changed personally and/or professionally as a result of this insight?



## Appendix B

### Second Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe yourself as a teacher (philosophy, views, pedagogy)?
2. Were you able to implement new ideas?
3. What results have you observed as a result of new perspectives?
  - a. In what way?
4. Whom have you been sharing ideas with? How?
5. What motivated you to make changes?
  - a. What are some challenges?
  - b. What are some benefits?
6. What have you gained from your interaction with colleagues?
  - a. Students?
  - b. Families?
7. Can you describe one concrete way you advocate for your students?
8. How would you describe/define your pedagogical choices?
  - a. And how do you make the choices on these?

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## **Vita**

Guadalupe Domínguez Chávez spent her first six years in her native homeland, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico with her parents Francisco Domínguez and Higinia Sánchez Domínguez. As a transnational at the age of six, she has crossed physical and psychological borders, and exemplifies the rich and varied linguistic and cultural diversity of our expanding Latin@ population in American schools, in particular the Texas area. As a non-traditional student, she attended Texas State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood and a Bilingual certification.

Guadalupe's extensive teaching experience at the elementary level extends from 1996 to 2009. In 2005 she returned to school, attending the University of Texas at Austin where she received a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction before continuing in the Graduate School at UT a year later. In addition, she has acquired ample knowledge as a Teaching Assistant, Instructional Assistant, Student Interns and Student Teacher Facilitator, and Research Assistant in higher education at the University of Texas at Austin.

Contact Information: [drd\\_chavez12@utexas.edu](mailto:drd_chavez12@utexas.edu)

This dissertation was typed by the author.