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***Educar con compromiso: Chicana Teacher Identity and Activism
Through Comadrazgo in a Teachers' Association***

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Through Comadrazgo in a Teachers' Association***

by

Katherine Elise Espinoza

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Dedicatoria

Para mi Tía Yaya y mi angelito. Sé que desde el cielo me están guiando, vivo cada día con la esperanza de volver a verlos.

I love you with all of my heart.

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Abstract

Educar con compromiso: Chicana Teacher Identity and Activism Through Comadrazgo in a Teachers' Association

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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Abstract: This dissertation examines the process of identity and agency construction of bilingual teachers by exploring the experiences of three activist *maestras* involved in a teachers' association in a right-to-work state. I draw on a postpositivist perspective (Moya, 2002; Hames-Garcia, 2011) and LatCrit (Delgado Bernal, 1989, 2002; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) to highlight the knowledge we gain from exploring individuals' unique experiences. I frame my inquiry through theoretical frameworks that accentuate lived experiences of Chicana teachers – culturally responsive teaching (Valenzuela, 2016; Ayers and Kumashiro, 2015), funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 2001), and lived critical literacy curriculum (Vasquez, 2003, 2010, 2012). My study demonstrates the ways in which activist Chicana activist *maestras* find non-traditional ways of integrating pedagogical practices to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse Latinx students and how their pedagogical practices are informed by their advocacy efforts – inside and outside of the classroom – in their pursuit of a social justice curriculum. Specifically, I examine their life stories (childhood, teaching, and union

activism) to contextualize how these Chicana bilingual teachers have developed a sense of *conciencia con compromiso* (Prieto & Villenas, 2012) for their students, fellow teachers, and the communities they serve. Findings show that Chicana activist *maestras* reveal the stark reality of the daily lives of teachers. In turn, *maestras* develop the sensibility of *sobrevivencia* which enables to *educar con compromiso*. I define *educar con compromiso* as an obligation, both moral and ethical, that Chicana activist *maestras* possess to advocate for fellow teachers, students, and communities. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that previous experiences and the current spaces they encounter provide Chicana activist *maestras* with the opportunity to manifest different identities simultaneously. In studying activist Chicana bilingual teachers who are politically active, this study contributes to the larger body of work exploring non-traditional ways in which bilingual teachers develop an activist *maestra* identity by exploring how identity construction transpires within a teachers' association in a right-to-work state.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I have *comadres*, because I've stayed in the same district for so many years we have created pillars of friendship. I've developed strong relationships with the people that I've worked with and many of them I consider my best friends. I use them a lot as my sounding boards, for my opinions, or how I approach things. They are all activist *maestras* like me. I've developed a circle of trust with them; we have serious conversations about the issues affecting our students, school, and district.

Sonia, November 3, 2016

The excerpt above is from a pilot study I conducted prior to beginning my dissertation; actually, it was the starting point of my *compromiso*¹ to helping share the tireless efforts of activist Chicana² *maestras* like Sonia. Sonia describes how teaching in the same school for multiple years has enabled her to build a circle of trust with a few close friends; she describes her relationship with them as her *comadres*. Through the *comadrazgo*,³ Sonia has *comadres* that she relies on to be her sounding boards when it comes to receiving feedback on her plans for advocating, or for bringing up issues with her school and the district. Through these relationships built on trust, she is able to express her

¹ Throughout my dissertation, I weave together the use of Spanish and English as this is the most accurate representation of my linguistic repertoire. I choose to translate at certain times in order to provide clarification on discussions when necessary.

² In my dissertation the work Chicana is used in accordance with the definition Alarcón (1990), “The name Chicana is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with ‘Mexican,’ but rather it is consciously and critically assumed and serves as point of redeparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict and contradictions... (Alarcón, 1990: 250). Urrieta (2007) also describes a Chican@ identity as one that is “consciously assumed”.

³ I want to acknowledge the work of Elizabeth Villareal and her dissertation work on *Comadrazgo* and *comadres*, as a draw on her conception of the bonds and relationships formed by Latinas.

thoughts and opinions in order to get the affirmation she needs to carry out her advocacy and activist efforts for her Latinx⁴ students.

BACKGROUND

The knowledge for my dissertation study came from the *conciencia con compromiso* and *cariño* that I felt towards my bilingual students and the dedication to the teaching profession that I saw from my teacher friends who were more like *madrinas* to me. Prieto (2009) defines *con compromiso* as “a process by which individuals understand, nurture, and develop their commitment to communities” (p.247). Prieto and Villenas (2012) further develop *conciencia con compromiso* to include how educators develop cultural self-awareness through their recounting of lived experiences to reveal the responsibilities they have to their fellow colleagues, students, parents, and communities. *Madrinas* are, in Latino culture, women who take on the role of helping in the formation of a child’s life. In my study these *madrinas* often times provided me with *consejos* (wanted and unwanted advice); sincerity for my and their own well-being; and encouragement to continue to grow and develop my own Chicana critical consciousness. Based on their daily interactions at school, I witnessed firsthand how my Chicana *madrinas* themselves experienced *nepantla*. Indeed, Cortez (2001) tells us that,

“*Nepantla* in our classrooms signals uncertain terrain, crossings, moving between identities, and confronting and contesting power—precisely the agency of our everyday lives. Pedagogies within/from *nepantla* reveal fruitful tensions for exploring how we might experience transformative teaching and learning” (p. 225-226).

⁴ Salinas & Lozano (2017) use the term Latinx as a gender-neutral term to refer to Latinos and Latinas. I use the terms Latino and Latinx interchangeably as this is how they are represented in literature.

Through the continuous balancing of *nepantla*, I examined the ways in which these Chicana activists' *maestras* carry out their daily lives as members of a teachers' union in a right-to-work state while staying true to their own selves. Staying true to their own selves means displaying what you consider moral and ethically correct, acting as a living example based on your values, and carrying yourself with courage. Examining this further allowed for the uncovering of how Chicana *maestras* are able to transform restrictive practices that oftentimes marginalize the communities they serve.

Hailing from a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)⁵ for both my bachelor's and master's degrees prepared me to enter into the teaching profession with a keen eye and a commitment to working towards social justice for my students, parents, and community. Social justice in education is often described as a democratic process that affirms the diversity of different groups, while the goal of social justice education is to advocate and call for equitable opportunities for all students, regardless of race, class, and gender (Adams & Bell, 2016; Bell & Griffin, 2007). When I began teaching, I sought out individuals who had similar beliefs to my own regarding social justice and activism inside and outside of the classroom. I gravitated towards individuals who I heard and witnessed being strong, capable, and fearless during faculty meetings. One of the first faculty meetings I recall centered on engaging in constructive dialogue surrounding our dual language bilingual education program and an activist educator questioning the administration on their decision to change the curriculum. This incident led me to seek out more in-depth conversation with her, and as a novice educator, I was recruited and found the space for agency within the teachers' association.

⁵ A Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) provides first generation, and majority low-income Hispanic students opportunities to attend college. For me, this also provided me with the opportunity to learn from Chicana professors in my preservice teacher courses.

MOTIVATIONS FOR THIS STUDY

After finishing the majority of my PhD coursework, I decided to return to the classroom to help my family financially. Upon returning to the classroom, my interest in teacher activism increased and the journey of this project flourished. Working with members of the teachers' association allowed me the opportunity to see their commitment and dedication to the profession. This commitment was shown by the countless hours I saw them take into organizing meetings, attending school board meetings, and relationships based on *comadrazgo*. Villarreal (2012) dissertation describes that “*compadres/comadres*” are individuals, who may or may not be relatives that are very close friends” (p.130). As a novice teacher, I came to work in a suburban district located in Central Texas, Green ISD (pseudonym). Moving away from San Antonio was probably the most challenging transition that I had undergone in my entire life. Almost immediately, I became aware of the ways in which bilingual students within my new district were positioned in inferior ways. Personally, I remember attending district meetings and professional development opportunities where my students were constantly situated as having some type of deficit.

It was during one of these trainings that I came to know Sonia, one of the participants in my pilot study. Sonia was with two other teachers standing behind a table with a Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)⁶ banner at one of my first-year teacher trainings. During my lunch break, I passed by the table and amongst the flurry of people, I overheard her using words like advocate, community, activist, defending your rights as a teacher. I was immediately drawn in and wanted to learn more about the organization and the women who were so dedicated and involved within it. Initially, the women in the

⁶ Texas State Teachers Association is a local affiliate of the national organization National Education Association. TSTA was founded in 1880

organization intrigued me, because they all appeared to be Latina females. Their conversations mirrored those of my professors at UTSA. I felt great affinity and identification with the women of this organization because of the manner in which they spoke about advocacy with their students, parents, and the greater community they served.

I recall sharing with my mentor teacher that I had signed up for TSTA. I was taken aback by her reaction. She immediately warned me about associating myself with this group of women and positioned them as loud mouths, troublemakers, and defiant within the school and community. With regard to being a member of a teachers' association, her response was that it was a waste of money, and that, as a classroom teacher, I really did not need to be represented by an association because in Texas teachers could not strike anyway. My reaction to her comments was one of disbelief and shock because I realized that not all bilingual teachers had the same sense of advocacy and activism that I acquired through my teacher formation program. Throughout the remainder of the year, I felt drawn to the women and the organization as I admired the strength, courage, and commitment to their students, schools, and community.

Toward the latter part of my first year in my new district, rumors began to spread about the possibility of teacher cuts and of some teachers not receiving contracts. During this time, TSTA began working collectively to unite students, parents, teachers and community members in efforts to promote public education. In March of 2011, the TSTA chapter of Green ISD organized and attended the Save Texas Schools Rally at the State Capital. Through participation in this rally, the teachers of Green CISD, along with over 13,000 parents, teachers, and community members, established a collective voice and united to pressure legislators to close gaps in the State budget. Observing Sonia's commitment to this event caused me to become further interested in how teachers in Green

ISD work together collectively to enact change within their school district.

WHO ARE CHICANA ACTIVIST EDUCATORS?

The teachers' association provides the backdrop for my dissertation study. Specifically, I explored how Chicana bilingual teacher activists use their union in a right-to-work state to empower themselves and advocate for their communities in order to change the mentality of the passive nature of their profession. Urrieta's (2010) study on Chicana/o activist teachers defines activist agency as:

“Chicana and Chicano activist agency, as a daily moment-to-moment practice, is informed by a critical, always developing, and continuous state of consciousness. *Being* Chicana and Chicano in moment-to-moment practice is a way of life. Because Chicana and Chicano agency is contested by whitestream, it is constantly renegotiated in daily practice. To make identity a verb and more than a descriptive label, Chicanas and Chicanos continuously engage in moment-to-moment self-authorship and strive towards further developing a critical state of consciousness” (p.91).

Understanding Chicana and Chicano activist agency as verb allows identity transformation to emerge as an active springboard and individuals are able adapt and modify their ways being based on their current lived experiences. Chicana and Chicano activist agency allows us to understand how activism is a lived process and a way of being; activism cannot be dormant. Identifying as Chicana is directly tied to action and working for social justice. Flores (2011, 2017) describes the role of Latina teachers as “guardians of culture” who find ways of negotiating their own spaces in a typically white woman profession. Adapting an activist mindset enables individuals to remain abreast and participate in actions surrounding the social and political issues that impact public

education.

Identity in this study is defined through a postpositivist realist theory of identity, which binds individuals' experiences to their identities and further influences the ways in which they process information (Mohanty, 1993; Moya, 2002; Hames-García, 2011). Moya (2002) attests that it is from lived experiences that individuals mediate their worlds and align their ideologies. Meaning that our ways of knowing and being are shaped by our interactions with the worlds in which we engage in. We then react based on our schemas formed since childhood and renegotiated through adulthood. Understanding what Chicana agency looks like in the daily practices of teachers of bilingual education, who are actively involved in a teachers' union in a right-to-work state, is at the center of this research study because it will demonstrate how their daily lives impact their decisions to become involved in leadership roles within their union, school and community. Mohanty (2003) argues that through individual's experiences, we then shape our epistemic privilege based on our experiences and social location. Importantly, we must continue to unpack the ways in which Chicana teacher activists collectively unite in order to work towards change within their school district, because we can learn how the experiences of these Chicana educators developed their identities based on their personal and social experiences.

Often times in education, agency is linked to activism. Agency, in this study, is defined as the work of the collective effort to enact change within the district of the participants who are members of the teachers' association. Montañó, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, (2002) maintain that "in terms of their own agency, the teachers described a newly developed understanding that profound change transpires *not* as a result of a single, dedicated teacher who works 'their butt off' in isolation. But, rather from the organized efforts of communities who come together to struggle against broader

social, political, and economic injustices” (p. 271). Importantly reflecting directly on student outcomes for success, further revealing how taking on an activist role may lead to personal sacrifices and consequences for teachers who take on a Chicana activist identity. Particularly, this project aims to examine and explore the experiences and lives of three Chicana activists: two current bilingual teachers and two former bilingual teachers who have all worked within the same district. Illuminating the experiences of these Chicana activists seeks to explore how a teachers’ union creates such a space where teachers can network and foster relationships based on their dedication to their profession, their students, and the community they serve.

The participants in this study allow for the exploration of Chicana activist agency through their identification as Mexican American, bilingual educators, and Chicana activists because they are active members of their teachers’ union, their lived experiences are unique to individuals who have grown up bilingual and bicultural⁷ and most importantly have consciously decided to advocate for bilingual and bicultural students. This study builds on a pilot study conducted during the summer of 2016 with the support of a grant from the Community Engagement Center through the Activist Research Grant initiative. In that study I examined the intersections in which these Chicana activist educators orchestrated their identities to further situate the conception of identity as a verb. Intersections in this study refers to the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality impact how we see ourselves and the way we interpret and live the world around us. Identity orchestration in this study means the ways in which the participants of my study choose to draw from their multiple, fluid, and complex identities during different

⁷ Bicultural refers to an individual encounters “the process of socialization within two cultural worlds” (Weisman, p. 205).

interactions as members of their teachers' union to work towards change. The charge of this study is to witness how the Chicana educator participants engage in self-authorship and renegotiation of their identities, and to gain an understanding of how their state of consciousness as Chicana bilingual activist educators evolves and grows throughout the course of two years. Examining how my teacher participants enact their identities in spaces outside of their classrooms as members of their teachers' association is central to understanding how these women go about collectively working towards change within their school district.

Change in this study refers to multiple aspects of the teaching profession through the teachers' union: curriculum choices, materials used for lessons, salary negotiations, and the ways in which the teachers' union operates on a local level. Montañó and Burnstein (2011) state that "...a teacher activist is involved in community and social justice issues outside of the school context. Teacher activist are not only interested in advocating for the transformation of traditional curriculum, but in creating substantive societal change" (p. 40). My study compliments Montañó and Burnstein, because it heeds the call for more scholarly research in the area of teachers creating networks of friendship for coping and for the purpose of bringing Chicana teacher activists together. The work of Arce (2004) also notes that often time's bilingual teachers are forced to work in isolation, which further impedes and complicates their struggle for activism and advocacy for their students. The role that teachers' unions play as sites of activism in assisting veteran teachers' attempts to "defend public education" in Montañó and Burnstein's study is vital (p. 51). The veteran teachers sustained their commitment to the defense of public education based on their dedication to their students and communities, along with the relationships they formed with their colleagues in alignment of a common political agenda.

Recent and past research (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; McLaren & Baltodano, 2000) on teacher activism has noted that often times teachers turn to alternative communities of practice in order for their activist identities to develop, emerge, and flourish (Arce, 2004). Alternative sites include social meeting places: restaurants, public libraries, community venues. In addition, cultural gathering places such as church, their homes, and *centros culturales* also serve as sites for activism. In response to constraints placed upon them by administrators and district policies regarding curriculum, teachers turn to these alternate sites to discuss and plan action against restrictive practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Montaña et al., 2002). Restrictive practices are embedded and found in multiple aspects of teaching related to hegemonic practices that are pervasive in schools, including the hidden curriculum and top-down decisions that threaten teachers' professionalism and autonomy. Through their constant quest for autonomy, teachers seek out opportunities for academic freedom where they are able to make their own decisions.

Montaña et al. (2002) define a teacher activist as someone who is “involved in a transformative social movement, including but not limited to the immediate school community in which they work on issues related to education, healthcare, labor, the struggle for affordable housing, and other issues of political and social relevance” (p. 267). According to this definition, teacher activists are dedicated to enacting change in all aspects of the community, not just those related to schooling practices. Bilingual teachers in particular, often have an added layer of activist identity as they are forced to defend their programs (Arce, 2000; Blanton, 2007; Crawford, 2004). Throughout my dissertation project, I witnessed the advocacy efforts of the Chicana bilingual activist educators of Green ISD.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In an era calling for increased accountability for educators and students, stories of Chicana bilingual teachers provide insight into teacher activism. These stories highlight how teachers can act as change agents in public schools, even without the power of collective bargaining. Especially important is understanding the context in which these teachers negotiate their daily practices inside and outside of their school setting. Through exploring such spaces, we can gain insight as to how bilingual educators transform and take on their Chicana activist identities.

Teaching has often been described as a political act (Bartolomé, 2004; Freire, 1998a, 1998b, 2000). Cochran-Smith (2006) and Zeichner and Cochran-Smith (2005) attest that the political nature of the teaching profession begins with the construction and maintenance of teacher preparation programs. Preservice teacher education is important to consider, because as in my case, it allowed me to develop myself as a critically conscious educator. Bartolomé (2004) examines how teachers' ideologies inform practice and how in addition to this, teachers must develop a critical consciousness which will allow them to seek to understand political and ideological clarity. In exploring the political and ideological underpinnings of Chicana teachers who are active members of their teachers' association, we can begin to understand the role that unions play in right-to-work states such as Texas. Once teachers have grown into critically conscious educators, they are further able to identify and work against conditions found in schools that are discriminatory. Still, not all teachers decide to become critically conscious; studying this further would be beneficial to understanding the characteristics of teachers who do. Freire (1998a, 1998b) establishes that teachers, in addition to acquiring technical skills, should also be armed with courage in order to rebuke inequalities and inequities in schools that

discriminate against populations that have been marginalized by dominant society. Freire (2000) reiterates,

“The fulfillment of humankind as human beings lies, then, in the fulfillment of the world. If for a person to be in the world of work is to be totally dependent, insecure, and permanently threatened if their work does not belong to them-the person cannot be fulfilled. Work that is not free ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit and becomes an effective means of dehumanization” (p.145).

In turn, teachers must continuously search for means to engage in their work in order to retain autonomy and to gain fulfillment in their profession because often times the decisions teachers are able to make related to their independence as professionals is restricted by administrators and district personnel. At times, this fulfillment comes about through their engagement and interactions with fellow colleagues who hold similar beliefs as theirs. Galindo’s (2007) work with a Chicana teacher and her trajectory from the time she was a college student to a bilingual teacher demonstrates how she authored and reauthored her identities according to different positions she found herself in: daughter, college student, and teacher. This study also notes how, at times, teachers take up an activist identity; in this case, the teachers advocated for parents’ rights within a school district.

While teachers in Texas are prohibited by law to bargain collectively and strike, it takes the willingness of individual teachers coming together to assert themselves and their voice within their school districts to enable change. Compounded with the growing population of Latinos⁸ in Texas, it will take a combined and organized effort of Chicana and Chicano activists to ensure the highest quality of education for bilingual students. This

⁸ The 2010 Census defines anyone who can originate from “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin”, as Hispanic or Latino. For this dissertation, I choose to use the word Latino.

holds especially true given that the shifting racial and ethnic demographics of the State of Texas reflect that it is now a majority minority state. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 52% of the population is comprised of various racial and ethnic groups. Within this, Latinos account for 35% of the state's population and 31.2% speak a language other than English in their homes (U.S. Census, 2010). As such, the growing number of Latina/o students in public schools in the United States is also increasing at an astonishing rate. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported in 2012 that the Hispanic population accounted for more than 50% of students currently enrolled. Given these numbers, the impact bilingual educators could possibly make on the educational experiences of linguistically diverse students is of great importance.

Urrieta's (2009) work further extends research on the identity of Chicana and Chicano educators. His work provides insight on how individuals working with marginalized students can cultivate themselves as activist for their students. The extant literature focuses on teachers as change agents in the classroom. Without little regard to teacher activism within their school districts and communities. Researching such sites with possibilities for Chicana activist educators to develop their sense of voice is important. Tyack, Lowe and Hansot's (1984) work reveals the need for exploring communities of color who are engaged in political activism through teachers. My study examines how teachers utilize their teachers' association as a site for giving voice to a cause, establishing leverage with district personnel and school board members. Scholarly work would continue to benefit from research based on teachers of color who are active members of a teachers' union, possibly providing insight into how Chicana teachers form a collective activist identity.

Montaño and Burstein (2006) argue that through teacher unions, Chicana teacher

activists in California form a collective resistance, which manifests through their prolonged commitment and interactions with the communities and with the students that they serve. However, Montaña and Burstein (2006) note that, due to the climate found in current school culture, this does not always permit educators such as Chicana activists to enact a social justice agenda in overt ways.

My study highlights the ways in which identifying and maintaining strong allies is important for Chicana bilingual activist teachers. Through their teachers' association, Chicana bilingual teacher activists are able to form friendships that allow them to work collectively in order to enact change within their school district. This supplements Nieto's (2012) argument that stresses the importance of finding colleagues who can be allies to continue to develop and grow as educators. Teachers work for social justice issues. They believe in the power of the community to enact change, and they will take back what rightfully belongs to them and to their students. Activist teachers are more likely to respond to injustices in active ways. Bilingual students and teachers are often subjected to poor conditions and burdened with low expectations (Quirocho & Rios, 2000), while being expected to perform at a higher level without the benefit of resources afforded to non-Spanish speaking students and classrooms. Despite these barriers, activist bilingual educators have worked tirelessly to ensure that student outcomes are better than the outcomes of students in other programs.

Cordova (2016) heeds the call for finding ways to connect contemporary research and connect it to the needs of the continuously growing Latino community. By continuing to examine ways in which Chicana activist educators create space to enact change, my research will elucidate how the Chicana bilingual teacher activists in my study use networking to engage in political activism within their school district. The study will

demonstrate how this is a strategy by which these teacher activists sustaining themselves in the profession. Through their association, they create sites for activism, as such, bringing more teacher activists together. By highlighting the ways in which these Chicana teachers become political activists in their communities, I share their stories of struggle and progress. Their accounts reveal the ways in which they were positioned in positive and negative ways, and the dangers they face by being active members of an association in a state where they have no legal collective backing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This critical ethnographic study is about three Chicana⁹ activist bilingual teachers who are active members of their teachers' association in a right-to-work state (Weiner & Compton, 2008). Further, I explored what their membership in this organization provides them in terms of their activist identity development and the enablement of their activist agency both inside and outside of their classrooms. The following questions guided my inquiry during my research:

1. What does the collective knowledge of three Chicana bilingual activist members of a teachers' union reveal about the stark realities of teachers in right-to-work states?
2. How do the experiences and life histories of the three Chicana bilingual teachers influence their decision to join and be active members of a teacher union in Texas?
3. How does their participation in a teacher union influence their leadership roles in the union, their schools, and the community?

⁹ I use the term Chicana bilingual teachers because the women in my study have self-identified with this, as they see themselves aligned with many of the women in this movement (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981; Alarcón, 1997; Castillo, 1994, 2014).

4. How has their involvement in the union influenced their pedagogical practices?

To address these questions, I drew on the work of Moya's (2002) postpositivist realist framework because it highlights and legitimizes the epistemic knowledge of communities of color—in this case that of Chicana teachers who are active members of their teachers' association. This lens was important for my study because oftentimes the experiences of people of color including Chicanas is omitted or not told in its entirety (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Moya, 2002). The postpositivist realist framework guided me in understanding the epistemic knowledge that these Chicana teacher educators possess and the role their teachers' union has played throughout their teaching trajectories in a right-to-work state.

To complement Moya's framework, I employed Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain's (1998) conception of figured worlds as a tool to further explore the teachers' association as a transformative collective space for agency and activism. Holland et al. (1998) define figured worlds as spaces that are created through social interactions through participation; individuals come to know who they are and situate themselves in the world around them. Figured worlds are significant to understand the teachers' association because through spaces such as the teachers' association they interact with other educators and are able to negotiate who they are as members of a collective group.

ORGANIZATION OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1, provided an introduction of the research study. In Chapter 2, I begin with a review of the literature including: historical underpinnings of the role of Tejanos in Texas from its independence to statehood, the struggle for education, the similar schooling experiences of different marginalized

groups, a review of the Chicana/o movement, the role of Chicana/o teachers, teacher activism and teachers of color activism, the role of professional organizations from labor unions to teacher unions. I conclude Chapter 2 by grounding my project through Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Moya's Post-Positivist/Realist framework. Chapter 3 provides a description and rationale for the use of a critical ethnography, which I implemented to explore the lives, identities, and pedagogical practices of three Chicana activist *maestras* in a teachers' association. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are all dedicated to the findings of the study and Chapter 7 moves on to cover the conclusions, implications and the possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to conceptualize and develop an understanding of bilingual teachers who identify as Chicana, it is necessary to explore how existing literature frames *Mexicanos* and Mexican Americans in the United States. This includes their struggle for education, the trajectory of bilingual education in the United States and Texas, as well as the role of the Chicano movement in creating a space for change. The review of such literature will help establish how this subaltern group has been positioned by society, and the impact this has played in the realm of education.

Once this is reviewed, one must also consider the role of teacher identity in terms of how we come to understand what teacher activism is. The role that teacher unions and associations take in creating spaces for self-authoring Chicana bilingual teachers is key to this understanding. I conclude by reviewing how such scholarship will help to illuminate the possibility that through participation in these spaces, namely teachers' associations. Chicana bilingual teachers are able to collectively unite in order to enact change at a local level within their school district.

Bennett and LeCompte (1990) provide a theoretical and historical overview of the functions of schooling and the purposes of the institution of schooling. According to Bennet and LeCompte, education for political purposes has served “to promote the assimilation of immigrants” (p. 8). Understanding this is key to the Mexican and Mexican American experience in the United States, as it allows us to understand the discrimination they faced based on their race.

LATINOS IN TEXAS: THEIR HISTORY AND SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

“The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*”

(Anzaldua, 1987, p. 25).

Positioning and Exclusion of Latinos

Anzaldua’s (1987) work provides a point of departure to unpack the tensions that have existed between Anglos, Mexicanos, and Mexican Americans. “Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians, or Blacks” (Anzaldua, 1987: 25). By examining the historical scholarship available on Mexicanos, Mexican Americans, and Tejanos, we are able to understand the ways in which they have encountered discrimination, marginalization and othering for centuries. Often times, people of color and women are excluded from history and the discourse surrounding it because they are denied the proper space. Borderlands theory allows for those who have been marginalized by dominant discourse, in particular women-of-color, to take-up such spaces and reclaim their history. Anzaldúa (1987) examines discourse in this area thorough employing the use of Mestiza consciousness, which requires that these women negotiate two conflicting cultural identities at once (Mexican and American).

Through our lived experiences, whether we identify as Mexicanos, Mexican Americans, or Tejanos, our development of a mestiza consciousness becomes a survival strategy for reclaiming our history and interacting with the world in which we live.

Anzaldúa (1987) defines mestiza consciousness as “a consciousness of duality” (p.59) She describes mestiza as “learns to juggle cultures” and as such, operationalizes herself in a pluralistic mode: working within oneself with a constant duality to heal the transgressions of our past (p. 101). By constant juggling, we then become accustomed to functioning between worlds and spaces; we adjust our ways of knowing and being based on the people with whom we are interacting. By understanding our past and the struggles, commitments, and social and political movements Mexican Americans and Chicanos fought for, we are able to move forward and work towards progress.

Historically from 1821-1836, the land we now consider Texas was referred to as “Mexican Texas” by Texas history scholars (Acuña, 2015; De León, 1997; Tijerina, 1994). In fact, we can date this back to 1821 with Mexico’s victory over Spain. In 1824, the General Colonization Law was established to allow heads of household, regardless of immigrant status, to claim land in Mexico. In 1830, under Bustamante’s administration, the outlawing of immigration into the United States was established. In 1832, United States colonists held a convention to demand access of immigration to Texas and, in the subsequent year, it was proposed that Texas become a separate Mexican state. This culminated with the battle of Velasco, which is documented as one of the first cases of bloodshed due to tensions between Texas and Mexico over Tejanos in their quest for independence. Through this history, we witness how tensions began to rise between the United States and Mexico based on race and socioeconomic status.

In 1836, the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed. Tijerina’s (1994) seminal work grounds the Mexican form of Tejano life as it provided a “code” for society and daily functions. However, during this time the subaltern identity of Mexicans and Mexican Americans was formed. De León (1983) writes,

“Once set in the notion that Mexicans had inhuman emotions, that they were not equal of white people, that they were more like blacks and Indians, Anglos dispensed with Mexicanos as if they were no more than animals” (p. 66).

From sentiments such as these, Anglos justified their acts of oppression by the taking of their land and through the premise that Mexicans are subservient to White Anglo society. Acuña (2015) further attests that Euro-American ideologies often attributed native Mexicans to be the intruders and thus established a “legacy of hate” amongst Mexicans and Euro-Americans. During the nineteenth century, we see how overt discriminatory practices were inflicted upon Mexicans and Tejanos through segregation, public abuse, and racist comments. “The hue of one’s skin color played a huge role initially in the relations between the two peoples. Often their acceptance depended on whether Mexicans look Caucasian or ‘colored’” (Acuña, 2015, p. 63). By establishing such pretensions based on race relations, Mexicanos undertook the ascription of being a conquered people.

Through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans should have been granted certain rights. Article IX states that Mexicans be assured that they would not be infringed upon. “The enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime, shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction”. However, through history we come to know how these rights were negated through assimilating practices particular to language, education and unethical treatment.

Acuña (2015) presents the case that similar to African Americans; Mexicans also experienced barbaric discriminatory practices including lynching in an effort to remove Mexicans, as in the case of the Fort Davis area. During this time, Texas Rangers, whose

purist ideologies reflected a desire for extermination, subjected Mexicans to daily lynching's. Negative perceptions continued for Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest from 1910-1930. Throughout history, we witness how members of the white Anglo Saxon Protestant norm marginalize minority groups that deviate from their group.

Access to Education

The history of bilingual education in the United States is one that can be dated back as early as 1694, when German-language schools were established in Germantown Philadelphia to educate the children of immigrants. Parents advocated in their communities so that their children would have access to instruction in both English and German. After Germantown, native language programs became a common model for instruction including French in Louisiana in 1847, Native American languages in 1864 and Spanish in New Mexico in 1870. Crawford (2004) provides a historical backdrop for the understanding of language diversity across the United States in the nineteenth century. Initially, throughout the country, there was not an adoption of an official language, and instead it was opted to allow individuals to choose their own language rather than impose one. As a result, the education of bilingual children was left to the decisions of individuals at a local level. "Bilingual education was likely to be accepted in areas where language-minority groups had influence and to be rejected where they had none" (Crawford, 2004, p. 85). Pai and Adler (1997) state that by the end of the 19th century, an ideological shift emerged, and the vast majority of education for immigrant students centered on the goal of assimilating students in order to "Americanize" them.

In addition to this, the acquisition of English also became equated with being considered a "good American." Congress passed an English-speaking federal language law in 1906, requiring individuals to speak English for naturalization purposes, and by the latter

part of the 1930s, most bilingual schools throughout the country had been eradicated due to xenophobia. Such thoughts further lead to the spread of English as a tool for “civilizing” subaltern groups such as Native Americans and African Americans (Ogbu, 1999).

The Schooling Experiences of Mexicanos, Mexican Americans, and Tejanos

The segregation of Native American schools and the discontinuing of the practice of native language instruction and the experiences of African Americans had punitive consequences in relation to the preservation of language, culture, and religion of both marginalized groups. Unfortunately, the realm of bilingual education in regards to Spanish speakers has historically also always been under surveillance. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) alleged that the Spanish language in the United States should be protected and maintained by Spanish-speakers without restrictions. However, the rights implied through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) have rarely been respected. Throughout the United States in the 19th century, we see how some states, such as California, implemented more restrictive language practices and others, such as New Mexico, had a much more positive experience. The vast majority of Mexican Americans settled in five southwestern states including Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California (Acuña, 2015).

Miguel and Valencia (1998) give a historical commentary of the struggles of Mexican Americans in the Southwest in “From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to Hopwood”. The authors establish that there are two different types of Americanization through school, “additive” and “subtractive”. In the “additive” model, schools choose to draw from the richness of a child’s ethnic, cultural and language diversity. In a “subtractive” model, the erasure of students’ ethnic, cultural, and language diversity are core and the push towards assimilationist ideologies prevail. The discriminatory practices

and the oppression of people of Mexican and Tejano descent provide insight to the injustices they received in their quest for an education while encountering “subtractive” Americanization in public schools. Historically, Mexican Americans were increasingly given access to public education in the early twentieth century through compulsory school attendance laws, but they were still subjected to inequitable access. Poverty and discrimination based on race are cited as reasons for a lacking number of students attending schools, especially for students who worked in migrant farm labor. When they did attend, they often were relegated to segregated schools (Miguel & Valencia, 1998). As a result of segregated facilities, Mexican American students received an inferior quality of education, which lead to a pattern of low performance in school. Gonzales (1999) also exposes the history of discriminatory practices that Mexican children endured in their quest for an education. Mexicans primarily occupied the Southwest and they provided a cheap labor force of adults and in many cases children. As a result, many migrant children did not have access to an education. Through segregated schools, Mexican children were forced to attend inferior schools. They were assimilated, and even tracked into specific professions through industrial schools. Second generation parents who had lived through these injustices fought these oppressive practices. Legal action was achieved in the *Mendez v. Westminster* case. Although legal desegregation of Mexican schools was attained, many school districts either ignored the ruling, or continued with discriminatory practices.

Texas Bilingual Education

In the early nineteenth century classroom, bilingualism in the education sector was for the purpose of assimilation. “Classroom bilingualism, whether used in the Mexican period of governance or later when Texas was a state, was attempted in an effort to bring immigrant or ethnic children into the dominant culture” (Blanton, 2007, p. 11). A primary

means for the segregation of Mexicans and Tejanos was through education. “Mexican schools” began to sprout in 1902, with the opening of a Mexican school in Seguin, which was established to maintain separate and subordinate boundaries between Anglo and Mexicano and Tejano children (Montejano, 1987). Coinciding with this notion, Crawford (2004) notes that often times Mexican American children were discouraged from attending school altogether because of their positioning as inferior people. Historically, bilingual education in Texas has been implemented with loose interpretations; it was implemented, eradicated, and many times ignored. Similar to Mexican American students across the United States, students in Texas were often times punished for their use of Spanish in schools. Acuña (2015) reports that: “The 1950 U.S. Census showed that San Antonio Mexicans continued to suffer from a lack of education; less than half had gone beyond the fifth grade” (p. 278).

The struggle for equity and for education opportunities for Mexican Americans is documented by the Supreme Court decision, *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954). In this case, Mexican Americans challenged the discrimination they faced on the basis of race, the court agreed that Mexican Americans were “a class apart” and protected under the 14th amendment. Subsequently, in the same year, the landmark *Brown v. the U.S. Board of Education* (1954) ruled against the “separate but equal” segregation of schools based on race. However, both cases had little ramifications for public education policy in Texas. Additional literature exists that reviews how Mexican American families in South Texas collectively joined and created their own *escuelitas*, “little schools” for the instruction of pre-school aged children in reading and writing in Spanish (Barrera, 2006; Blanton, 2007; Salinas, 2001). In fact, it was not until 1970 that Judge William Wayne Justice issued Civil

Order 5281, which required the Texas Education Agency to uphold the *1954 Brown v. Board* decision, and schools were integrated.

Given this history, Mexican American students in Texas continued to struggle for educational equality. Through grassroots efforts, litigation, advocacy organizations, and individual activists who furthered the advancement of educational opportunities for Mexican American students, Mexican Americans resisted. Anderson and Boyer (1976) document how the Laredo United Independent School District created the state's first bilingual education program before the 1968 Bilingual Education Act. Given the fact that the Bilingual Education Act (1968) was an unfunded mandate, the majority of districts were unable to implement programs because of the disparity of funds. Rising up against the injustices encountered in schools was an aspect of daily life for this new generation of Chicana@s and they believed that access to bilingual education provided a space for celebrating and incorporating ethnic diversity and pride. Crystal City, Texas had segregated schools. Trujillo (2005) reveals that the Anglos had access to more resources and better schools and qualified teachers. As a result, in the 1960s Crystal City schools became the central point for social and political change in schools (Navarro, 1998; Trujillo, 2005). Recent scholarship, Zavala (2014) dissertation work uses Chicana Feminist epistemology to share how the stories of four women to expose a counter narrative about Crystal City. Her findings contribute to the Chicano movement by documenting the stories of women. Her findings reveal how women and their decision to become active during the Chicano movement depended and varied based on circumstances.

In 1968, President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act. He had formerly been a bilingual teacher in Cotulla, Texas. After the signing of the Bilingual Education Act, Texas became one of the first states to legitimize bilingual education;

however, this was not without controversy. The 1918 English Only law continued to be enforced throughout school districts in Texas and was not ratified until May 1969. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Texas, similar to the rest of the United States, encountered opposition to bilingual education through the persistence of English Only initiatives.

Bilingual programs, which largely serve Latino students in the United States, are still often in need of resources (both academic and financial), support staff, and community support. It is often times out of pure necessity that bilingual teachers emerge as advocates, and moreover as activists, for their students in order to gain access to resources and support. However, minimal work has been done to examine how bilingual teachers operate outside of the classroom to advocate for their students, schools, and communities, especially in right-to-work states where collective bargaining is outlawed.

One of the central debates surrounding the defense of bilingual education programs is often embedded in issues related to hegemonic practices surrounding debates around language (Ruiz, 1984). This then affects the number of quality bilingual education programs to which emergent bilingual students have access.

The federal government passed the Bilingual Education Act (1968); however, the types of programs adopted by districts was left to local school board policy. Often times the programs implemented were known as ‘sink or swim’ models and were aligned with the English-Only Movement in the United States (Hakuta, 1990; Dueñas-Gonzalez & Melis, 2000). These traditional notions of bilingual education did not have clearly defined goals and were not supportive of bilingualism or biliteracy (Blanton, 2007). Content based English as a Second Language (ESL) models provide instruction to students in math, science and social studies and utilize second language acquisition skills to foster English

language learning. Instruction could be taught either by the classroom teacher or by a team teacher who speaks English only. In Pull Out models, students are taken out of the classroom, are taught English language arts in, then return to their mainstream classroom, and continue the rest of their instruction in English. Transitional early exit bilingual education is a theoretical model where students acquire a second language by utilizing their native language to speak, read and write in primary grades, transitioning students into English language instruction as soon as possible. Students are also receive English language instruction as early as pre-kindergarten. Transitional late exit bilingual education instruction also utilizes native language instruction to transfer students into English language instruction typically by fourth grade. Both early exit and late exit ideologies surround the promotion English only.

As a result, committed bilingual educators have taken on more active roles in advocating for programs that are supportive of bilingualism and biliteracy (Arce, 2004; Blanton, 2007; Crawford, 2004 ;). Thomas and Collier (1997) define Dual language models are additive program models that promote bilingualism, biliteracy and biculturalism. One-way models are only for native Spanish speakers; these students are taught the majority of their content areas in Spanish. One content area is selected for English language instruction. Current neoliberal two-way programs models utilize the same framework for instruction as one-way models with the addition of native English-speaking students. Through this interest convergence, monolingual English speakers gain access and acquire Spanish as their second language. Valdés (1996) problematizes two-way dual language programs because they could potentially hinder native Spanish speakers by taking away the edge of their bilingualism.

HISTORY OF CHICAN@S

Understanding *El movimiento: El poder del Chican@*

Perez (2007) and Miguel and Valencia (1998) provide insight into how Chicana/o activists collectively united during the 1960s and 1970s for the social movement known as *El Movimiento* to pressure policy makers for equity in classrooms for Mexican American students. Acuña (2015) asserts, “Every political movement is driven by moral outrage and symbols that inspire unity” (p. 318). The Chicano Movement has its roots in the U.S. Southwest as a response to increasing segregation and conditions where rights to education and self-determination had been systematically stripped from a large segment of the population. Upon return from service in World War II, the happiness soldiers and their families felt was short-lived and tempered by the fact that the world and the freedoms they fought to protect would not allow them participation. The unification of Chicana/os were soon replicated in communities throughout the U.S. Southwest. Additionally, researchers in cultural studies have documented the Chicano movement and provide a chronology of the events that transpired throughout the 1960s and 1970s regarding specific movements, during the Vietnam war and how Chicano youth were affected during this time period. (Oropeza, 2005; Chávez, 2002; Muñoz 1989). For example, Muñoz (1989) work centralizes that the experiences of Chicano youth during the 1960s have often times been omitted in literature. Having lived through the era, he is able to recant key factors affecting youth during the Chicano movement such as how a cultural identity was denied to them. Chávez (2002) explains how individuals ethnic identity impacted the way in which insurgency leaders in the Chicano movement living in Los Angeles, California came together to form what is now known as the concept of Chicano nationalism. The work of Oropeza (2005) further solidifies the role Chicanos held in the opposition to the Vietnam

war, and specifically on how upon their return from the war and serving the country they demanded equal rights and desegregation of communities and schools.

Government can be used for insidious reasons such as the implementation of Jim Crow segregation practices and systems of oppression. For years, people have used city planning to increase and preserve property values. Less apparent, planning has also been used to segregate minority populations. For instance, in Austin, the placement of State Highway 81 in 1919 and its expansion as Interstate 35 in the 1950s created an East-West divide. This divide has provided a definitive barrier to minority populations with regard to housing, education, and employment. Previously, the Mexican American population resided along the north bank of the river where city hall now sits. Anglo businessmen sought to obtain the land. The population was relocated to an area further to the East by using intimidation and buyouts. When these tactics did not work, businesses used foreclosures and eminent domain in concert with local government officials to accomplish their goal. Busch (2013) documents the history of segregation in Austin between 1950 and 1973. His essay exposes how during these times Austin was viewed nationally as a progressive city. However, segregation remained pervasive in the housing market because of the covertness of federal supported policies. This scenario played itself out time and time again until the Mexican American population found itself on the opposite side of the interstate with little or no opportunity to move west other than as servants in households on the west side of town.

Conditions in San Antonio were much the same. Areas north of town established predominantly Anglo municipalities and school districts rather than be subject to the taxes and control of the larger city. As San Antonio expanded, Mexican Americans were relegated to the west and south of town; meanwhile African Americans occupied a small

area to the east. As enticement to relocate away from real estate near the inner part of the city, developers offered inexpensive land at low rates for the establishment of predominantly Mexican American neighborhoods. Many of these neighborhoods would not have sufficient drainage or infrastructure and, as a result, would suffer from substandard roads, poor utilities, and inadequate drainage, giving rise to flooding. By the late 60s, these neighborhoods would organize and demand attention of city officials, but their issues would not be sufficiently addressed until the next decade. Through protest and walkouts, Chicana/o activists were able to enact change in schools. Blanton (2007) documents the El Paso 1965 conference where “Mexican American participants presented papers advocating the elevation of Hispanic culture and language in schools to an equal status with Anglo culture” (p. 130). Despite the efforts of Mexican Americans and African-American activists during the civil rights era, veterans from these minority groups faced the same prejudiced and discriminatory practices that they thought they had left behind. The society they fought to preserve seemingly did not value their contributions, nor did it recognize their sacrifices. Additional scholars Rivas-Rodriguez & Olguin (2014) and Rivas Rodriguez & Zamora (2009) use ethnographic methods to historicize the struggles faced by Latino Americans in WWII.

Their contributions illuminate the fact that a disproportionate number of young people of color fought for or lost their lives during this and many other conflicts was lost on mainstream society in the United States. The right to vote, access to education, and employment were still major issues facing minorities in this country. Through such efforts, what we have come to know as modern day bilingual education was envisioned and developed. In recent work, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez’s *Texas Mexican Americans & Postwar Civil Rights* (2015) further illuminates how discriminatory practices in education

further segregated Mexican-American Students. From its inception, bilingual education was an integral part of the Chicano movement. Urrieta (2010) argues, “The Chicana and Chicano struggle for equal education is far from dead, and both the Chicano and Chicana movements continue today” (p. 24). As such, continuing to explore ways in which Chicana/o activist teachers navigate and collaborate is critical to understanding their continued progress as a majority minority group.

Acuña (2015) states that *El movimiento Chicano* initially emerged as part of an effort to speak out collectively against the injustices based on race and class that were pervasive in U.S. society. Delgado Bernal (2001) established that combating white supremacy was a mindset taken on by *Chicanismo* although this in and of itself manifested differently for individuals, but encompassed a sense of “pride of identity, and self-determination” and a “community commitment”. For this reason, students and teachers enlisted the help of union and Brown Beret activists. By 1968, California activists, teachers, and high school students organized protests and walkouts after asking the school board to rectify conditions that existed at their campuses. In these cases, the school board responded by asking for assistance from law enforcement to quell the unrest, but this only served to exacerbate the situation bringing national attention to the complaints from the students. Many of the principal organizers were targeted by police and arrested, as were many students. Often times the term Chicano became associated with a gender and centralized on males, more specifically, a hyper-masculine image reflective of manhood and power.

Delgado Bernal (1998) finds that the leadership that Chicanas took on during this time went highly unnoticed because of the male-centered orientation of the movement. Pesquera and Segura (1997) and Hurtado (2003) documented how the Chicano movement

omitted women because of the intentional focus on male dominance in terms of leadership, activism, and participation in the movement. Hurtado (2003) and Castillo (1994, 2014) further write that the Chicana Movement resulted in a separate discourse related to issues surrounding gender. Blackwell (2003) reiterates this by explaining how Chicanas typically had taken on gendered and racialized political identities.

Chican@ Teachers

Changes in America's economic sector as well as the expansion of social services influenced modern day social movements. As such, the connections between involvement in social movements and Chicana and Chicano identity are important. Castells (2009) contends that as a result of the shifts in the global context we must take time to explore Chicana and Chicano identities in modern times. Calhoun (1994) situates cultural and identity politics as the epicenter of social movements, in essence the Chicana and Chicano identity established in the 1960s and 1970s was a result of the discrimination Chicanas and Chicanos felt during this time based on their race, class, and gender. Rios' (2008) work examines how the social and political movements have implications for identity, ideology and issues, and imagination toward the development of a critical consciousness for Chicana/o activist educators. Organizing gave Mexican Americans a unified voice with local political systems, even if these systems were slow to take action. Having attended established, separate but equal, Mexican schools, the population was under no illusion that their schools and the quality of their education was equal to that, which was available at Anglo schools. Recognizing a fundamental unfairness with the system, parents and teachers petitioned local school boards for more resources and better educational opportunities at their schools. What they found was organized resistance to any assistance

and an attitude that improvements were not warranted, as they would not affect learning at predominantly minority schools.

Urrieta (2010) argues that the vast majority of problems faced by Chicana and Chicano activist educators in school derive from ongoing struggles they encounter working in whitestream schools. Urrieta (2007, 2010) examines issues of identity and agency as taken up by his twenty-four participants through Holland's et al. concept of figured worlds and formulates a deeper evaluation of how these individuals managed to become activists in schools in the United States. This work reflected the need for examining Chicana teacher activists in their own light especially by showing the transitions regarding how some Mexican Americans become Chicana and Chicano activist educators. The purpose of Urrieta's work then highlights how Chicanas and Chicanos manage to work from within educational settings, from colleges to elementary schools, in order to achieve successful student, teacher and community outcomes. The narratives provide insight on how individuals working with marginalized students cultivate themselves as activists for their students through daily interactions. In relation to the Mexican American population, this work is important because it gives insight into the identity shifts undertaken by Mexican Americans in their journey to become urban educators. Urrieta goes on to explain how figured worlds play a crucial role in the identity formation process of Chicana and Chicano activists. A concise explanation of how Chicana and Chicano activism transpires at the micro and macro level of figured worlds is developed. Similar to Chicana and Chicano social movements of the past, many who identify as Chicana and Chicano teacher activists desire to join *la causa* to push for equality in U.S. society and in this case, to champion for equitable educational opportunities.

Similarly, recent studies conducted Lara and Fránquiz (2015) and Ek and

Domínguez Chávez (2015) demonstrate that examining the identity of bilingual teachers through the construction of figured worlds provides a space for understanding their role as activist bilingual educators. Lara and Fránquiz found that through the construction of a figured world of *Proyecto Bilingüe*, a Master's program, "both male and female teachers gained tools to identify and challenge hegemonic norms at their schools" (p. 223). In regards to identity construction, the figured world of *Proyecto Bilingüe* created a space for male teachers to author their own masculine identities. Through this Master's program, the participants encountered a space that served to validate their identity as bilingual and bicultural activist educators. In another study of the same program, Ek and Domínguez Chávez (2015) find that *Proyecto Bilingüe* also provided a space for self-authoring to occur. Importantly, Ek and Domínguez Chávez note that through the process of self-authoring, Latina/o bilingual teachers shift from "teacher" to "social justice teacher." Their work further extends previous research by Fránquiz, Salazar and DeNicolo (2011) on working with bilingual teachers and preservice teachers to deconstruct deficit views of bilingual students by challenging majoritarian tales. They draw the conception of a bicultural identity from the work of Darder (1991) who developed a framework for understanding the role of bicultural identity formation. This framework based on historical and political events that individual's face and the ways individuals chose to react to these cultural tensions. They argue that by engaging preservice teachers in opportunities where they reflect on their own lived schooling experiences we can engage in the construction of counterstories. Through the telling of these counterstories, preservice teachers engage in the creation of new curriculum that is meaningful and in turn aligns with teaching for social justice and equity. In order to understand the experiences of bilingual and bicultural individuals we must explore their interactions in various context. Weisman (2001) explains

why it is necessary to do this,

“The concepts of biculturalism and bicultural identity cannot be understood simply by studying the impact of the home culture on the individual’s development or by examining the process of socialization within two cultures. Bicultural existence must also be considered in terms of the continuous struggle among Latinos and other subordinate groups to survive in a society that exerts extreme pressures to assimilate to the standards of the dominant group and to discard the values of their primary culture” (p.207-208)

Other scholarship notes that oftentimes Latina teachers build and sustain relationships drawn from feminist ideologies surrounding *respeto*, *conciencia*, and *cariño*, which they then adapt and extend into what they consider working towards social justice (Berta-Avila, 2004; Guardia-Jackson, 2010; Prieto, 2009a; Prieto & Villenas, 2012). Through the use of *testimonio*, Guardia Jackson (2010) provides a trajectory of a veteran teacher who self-identifies as Mexican American, and how she developed her activist identity through her teaching practices and the leadership roles that she took on within her school. Through the use of ethnographic methods, an understanding is reached regarding how the lived experiences of the teacher in turn allow her to develop a critical awareness of how she can support her students and community. Similar studies centered on novice teachers note that Latina teachers are able to build relationships based on the commonalities between their upbringing and that of their students (Prieto, 2009). An area less tapped into is how teachers who identify as Chicana/o work from spaces outside of their classrooms for social justice. The work of Montañó and Burstein (2006, 2011) reveals the important role that social networks played in assisting Chicana teachers navigate the educational systems of which they were a part. Furthermore, Lei (2003) provides an additional example of how identity

construction takes place in an ascribed setting and through different discourses. The construction of who we are takes into consideration our positionality. “Identity construction encompasses an active and dynamic process through which an individual identifies himself or herself in relation to how he or she is constituted as a subject by dominant discourses and representations” (p. 159).

The schooling experiences of Chicana and Chicano teachers as well as bilingual and bicultural students mirrors that of other marginalized groups including Native Americans and African American. Reviewing their histories serves to establish the commonalities found among minority groups.

The History of *Compadragos y Comadrazgos*

Latin@ communities have drawn on their friendships to help sustain communities of color has been documented for some time now (Kemper, 1982; Van den Berghe, G. & Pierre, L. Van.1996; Villarreal, 2012). Originally, our conception of *compadrazgo* derived from the ways in which religious traditions of picking grandparents for children were established (Foster, 1953). Carlos (1973) describes *compadrazgo* as a “fictive kinship”. “*Compadrazgo*, literally co-parenthood, establishes a ceremonially- sanctioned alliance among individuals. The persons who are bound by *compadrazgo* into a fictive co-parenthood relationship are the god- parents (*padrinos*) and the parents of an individual for whom a religious ceremony is held at the time of a life-cycle event” (p.76). However, the scholarly work of Whitefor (1964) was one of the first to describe how the role of “compadres” and “*comadres*” could be extended to strong friendships. He writes,

“Finally, the terms “*compadre*” and “*comadre*” are even loosely extended to friends with whom one has no ritual, ceremonial, or consanguineal relationship, a practice also reported for other parts of Mexico” (p.181).

These friendships are built across a long period and are based off mutual respect and trust. Kemper (1982) described the trust as “*confianza*” (p.82). In her dissertation work, Villarreal (2012) describes individuals who are in a *comadrigo* relationship as one that is built on co-dependency. “The co-dependency that initially may exist within the group as individuals develop and count on one another for knowledge and support, promotes trust, honesty, and care” (p.133).

SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF OTHER MINORITY GROUPS

The Schooling Experiences of Native Americans

Initially successful in their quest for bilingual education, the Cherokee tribe had schools where students were able to achieve a 90 percent literacy rate in the Cherokee language while also learning English. Adams (1988) gives a historical account of the schooling of Native Americans. During the mid-nineteenth century, United States policymakers held two conflicting visions regarding the future of Native Americans (1) Indians were doomed to extinction; and (2) Indians were capable of being civilized and assimilated into American society. In order to accomplish this goal, the move towards assimilating Indians into White Society was done through public schooling. One tactic used was forcing Protestant ideologies upon the Indians. Such practices centered on Protestantism, Capitalism, and Republicanism. The civilization-savagism binary paradigm, also explained in the article, shows that Indians were dismissed as a group of savages. Dominant society viewed Indians as being less civilized than they are.

Scholars on American schooling experiences have dedicated their work to providing historical data that is often times omitted in mainstream literature (McCarty, Romero, Zepeda, 2006; Nicholas, 2005; McCarty, 2002; Lee & McLaughlin, 2001)

Connected to Protestant ideology, Anglo-Americans believed that by Christianizing Natives they would also become civilized. Initially, Native Americans pushed back by not sending their children to schools. However, this would only prove to be a temporary fix. In 1891, Congress would declare schooling for Indian children mandatory. Congress would even go as far as withholding rations, clothing and other amenities to those who refused to send their children to school. Efforts to school Native Americans in the nineteenth century were done for purposes of assimilation to the ways of the White dominant society. Lomawaima & McCarty (2006) document this through efforts of how through Colonial schooling efforts attempts were made to eradicate Native languages. The Native American story shows how Anglo-Americans positioned them as different from the norm. Being labeled as different allowed those in power to displace Natives of their culture, land, and language. In current times, efforts to revitalize what was once taken away from Native Americans are now in place through Heritage programs. Nichols (2005) work with Hopi youth and their language choices are based on the constructs of family and community-based schooling efforts. Similarly, Lee and McLaughlin (2001) study with Navajo young adults realize that their languages are at risk of being lost. How they then began to speak more in their native language in greater efforts to preserve their language.

African American Struggle for Educational Equality

Of similar fate was the further marginalization of communities of color, which is clearly evident in the case of African American children in public schools in the United States. Public schooling in the United States for African Americans has also been a history reflective of limits and boundaries set forth by Anglo-Americans. The burden of race for African Americans was a clear and unfair struggle. African American children were often cheated out of an education because of their race. The segregation of African American

students in the United States subjugated them to inequitable and unequal access to education. Tyack (1974) describes the account of an African American leader in 1857: “A costly piece of injustice which educates the white scholar and the colored pupil in a hovel” (p. 119). Anderson (1988, 1989) also who brings to light the Hampton Tuskegee model of black industrial education, another example of inferior access to education. In this model of education, the ultimate benefactors were Anglo Americans because this system perpetuated the status quo in which Anglos remained the dominant beneficiaries in education. Through this gatekeeping mechanism, Anglos maintained their superiority in the work sector as well.

Although in theory, the practice of educating African Americans may seem as though it would open the doors to equality, this system of schooling was set up to actually do the opposite. The Hampton model promoted racial hierarchy by teaching African American youth how to work with their hands, how to have few wants and how to stay in their natural environment. These factors limited the aspirations of what African American students could achieve through the tactic of tracking. Anglo-Americans believed that Black industrial education was a means for making the best out of African Americans through what they described as a philanthropic opportunity. Still, by limiting the type of instructional opportunities that African American students received, the Black industrial model limited the access African American students had compared to their Anglo counterparts.

As an oppressed group, African Americans lacked political presence and power. In order to push back against and challenge the harsh conditions that they were experiencing in public schools from the nineteenth through the twentieth century, African Americans relied on boycotts, sit-ins, petitions, and court cases and grassroots organizations to voice

their beliefs. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1909 as a grassroots-based civil rights organization that stood for the political and civil equality of African Americans. The NAACP continued working for the betterment of their community by providing social services and legal support to members of their community as seen in their efforts to provide assistance in the landmark case of the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930's when several young black men were falsely accused of raping two white women. In the 1940's this organization led the effort to desegregate the armed forces, which benefitted African Americans and other minorities.

In the area of education, the NAACP led efforts in the landmark case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), is often times cited as a major victory in the quest for educational equality. Guinier (2004) in her article gives a commentary in which she critiques the case. She argues that in order to understand fully the range of radicalized inequities, racial justice advocates need to move beyond the early presumptions of racial liberalism to racial literacy. Racism, as she sees it, encompasses race, class and geography. Furthermore, she states that social, political, and economic problems that *Brown v. the Board of Education* served to eliminate are still deeply rooted in our society.

In addition to the NAACP, African Americans also organized themselves into other groups. One such group founded the Black Panthers. In the 1960's the Black Panther Party emerged and played an integral role in the reformation of the schooling experience of African American students. One solution that came about as the result of this movement was an increase in community control of schools. Through this, members of the community were able to advocate for policymaking decisions and shift education based on African American experiences. This made their teaching experience more relevant. Panthers

incorporated two styles of teaching: teacher-centered and student-centered. In 1968, the Panthers initiated the adult political education class, which had internal goals such as efforts to build a successful political party, as well as external goals like teaching the community about capitalism, Panther goals and objectives, class struggle, as well as basic reading and writing skills. By evoking transformative resistance, the Black Panther Party was able to unite and bring forth change in efforts to maintain their faith in the power of education.

Carter and Goodwin (1994) explore racial identity, and the implications it has on minority groups. Specifically, their argument centers around examining why there is a need for exploring race and the history it has in the United States. “Race is a topic that should not be subsumed under culture or diversity but needs to be confronted directly because, today and throughout the course of the U.S. history, it is and has been a critical factor associated with who does and does not benefit from available social, economic, and educational commodities” (293). In order to present their claim, they appropriately integrate a literature review that covers the historical perspectives on race using social scientific paradigms. Within this cluster, there are three paradigms the authors describe: inferiority, cultural deprivation, and cultural difference. The main purpose of presenting these different paradigms is to reflect on how social scientists have historically used the premises of race as the determining factor of educational abilities. The article then goes on to describe race and racial identity implications for education. Here a historical overview is given on Black and White racial identity. Fittingly, the authors then move on to explain the schooling experiences of visible racial/ethnic group members. Particular attention is given to developing an understanding of how children of color have received inferior differential treatment in school. The authors end with presenting implications for

practice, policy and research. The implication I found most promising is, “This policy intends to encourage a teacher workforce that is equipped to deal with diversity, yet implicitly emphasizes differences and “otherness” (p. 325). Exploring policies that deal with the differential treatment of minorities, we must first look at the inequalities found historically and presently in our schools.

ACTIVISM IN EDUCATION

Teacher Activism

In research and in practice, teacher activism is typically defined as an educator’s commitment to teach and work towards social justice. “Rather, learning to teach for social justice is a matter of all the participants in teacher education (beginning and experienced teachers alike, school- and university-based educators alike) working together as teachers but also as learners, and as educators but also activists within inquiry communities that extend over the long haul and across the professional life span.” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 12). This commitment to becoming a social justice educator to work with their communities for an extended period becomes a lifetime endeavor. The work of social justice educators is further extended when we explore the concept of critical educators. Social justice and activist teaching has been described as teaching in a fashion that promotes equity and equality of education for all students, in particular by keeping in mind the lack of allocation of resources for students of low socioeconomic status who are often times minority students in comparison to their white peers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). Montaña Lopez-Torres et al. (2002) define a teacher activist as someone who fully accepts and in turn works towards social justice and considers it a further call to

action. In order to unpack the role of teacher activism more, it is important to consider research that stems from culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ladson-Billings' (1990, 1992a, 1994, 1995) work emphasizes the characteristics of successful teachers who work with African American students as those who engage in culturally relevant pedagogy. Often times, these teachers took on a commitment to the communities they served, to the families, and to the student they taught as part of their responsibility to be activist educators. Ladson-Billings (1990 and 1992) found that culturally relevant teaching also facilitates instruction that draws on students working collectively towards goals that promote academic and cultural excellence. Ladson-Billings (1995) then describes the fluid nature of the classrooms, the extension beyond the boundaries of the classroom, the connectedness of all those present in the classroom, the community of learners, and how they learned from each other. Becoming a part of the community is an integral part of becoming an activist educator.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2004) also indicate that social justice teachers also hold activist roles. "Teachers' roles as co-constructors of knowledge and creators of curriculum are informed by their stances as theorizers, activists, and school leaders." (p. 276). Porfilio and Malott (2011) engaged in research where they guided preservice and in-service white teachers to teach for social justice by recognizing the injustices that occur in schools based on social, political and economic tensions. In order to become activist educators, white teachers involved themselves in organizations, demonstrations, and promoting curriculum that was responsive to the needs of their diverse students. By engaging in these practices, the White teachers were able to take on an activist identity. To examine further social justice in the classroom, Johnson, Oppenheim, and Suh (2009) incorporated the use of a multi-case study approach- ethnographic methods, semi-structured interviews, and

observations to examine what social justice teaching looks like in action. They found that when a teacher compares her idealized views of social justice with the forms of social justice that she enacts on a daily basis in her classroom, they may be better able to determine what situational factors impact social justice teaching. Young (2011) explains the complexities of interactions between the identities of preservice teachers, how coursework enabled them to draw a parallel between their schooling experiences and the setbacks that they face.

Connected to this work, Yosso (2005) examines the community cultural wealth of students of color and how this can be an asset to their education. Yosso explains how incorporating the experiences of students of color can be a tool to work against deficit knowledge that has marginalized students of color, their language, and experiences. One of Yosso's arguments is that the knowledge that people of color possess is not valued and is often times ignored in education. Asher (2007) argues that teacher education should take on opportunities for teachers to engage in self-reflective practices where teachers are able to engage in critical dialogue of issues related to race, culture, and beyond to develop a critical consciousness. Johnson (2002) found that when white teachers are given the opportunity to share their stories about race, they can at times develop a stance to teach for social justice in their classrooms: "Narrating their life experiences helped the White teachers in this study to clarify both their views on race and their own racial identity" (p. 10). Picower (2012) found that teacher activists committed themselves to questioning and to working towards changing practices in their schools, which often reproduced inequalities. By working with teachers with similar views, activist educators were able to affect school wide changes in ideologies by beginning a collaboration with a small group. Her findings indicate that activist teachers commit to finding opportunities to deconstruct

the oppressive practices their students face and to provide an emancipatory space for them in which to learn. Similarly, Rottmann (2012) analyzed social justice activism in a teacher union over the span of four decades. Findings of this study showed the pivotal role that teachers' unions have in promoting and supporting socially just educational change by providing a space for teacher activists to work together collectively. In this qualitative study, participants shared their life histories and career histories through interviews. Through these interviews and surveys members found that, some teachers were subjected to working in substandard conditions that affected their instructional capacity to teach and their students' abilities to learn. In response to this, members of the union began to submit formal grievances to the district, which resulted in the mobilization of resources to enhance and improve the quality of teaching and the academic achievement of the students. An additional finding to this study revealed that the recruitment and retention of members was pivotal to their ability to become more visible at the district level and in turn gave them access to the power to bargain.

Teachers of Color Activism

Picower (2012) states that, “teacher activists commit to working “two full-time jobs”—to make the most of the liberatory potential of education while fighting against its reproductive and oppressive tendencies” (p. 572). Picower explains that a unanimous definition does not exist for teacher activists. In fact, the definition and interpretation may be complex. Often times, teaching has been described in research as a vocation, or a calling, that is aligned with teachers' personal moral values (Ayers, Hunt & Quinn, 1998; Collay, 2010; Nieto, 2003).

Further, Collay (2010) examines how the professional identity of teachers is formed by a complexity of personal experiences. Nieto's (2000) work suggests that as a result of

inequalities that teachers of color have encountered in their own educational trajectories, they can better relate and become activists for their students of color. Matias' and Liou's (2014) research examined an urban teacher who identified as a teacher of color and expressed that her students felt that their histories were not represented in their learning. This work argues for a communities-of-color approach to teacher activism that engages in struggles related to racial injustices in schools. Lee's (2012) findings with a majority of African American participants also suggest that teachers of color come together collectively because they share similar struggles and experiences in their past education and current teaching. Nieto (2012) further discusses the importance of creating these friendships to continue to develop as educators. As teachers enter the workforce, they begin to create a working group of professional colleagues whom they rely on for support and orientation (Curry, 2008; Franzak, 2002).

Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests that stock stories and master narratives are developed by dominant groups to justify their actions in relation to education inequities. Ladson-Billings (1995, 1999) and Brown (2010) pay particular attention to teacher preparation programs and their ability to prepare teachers to serve students of color. Ladson-Billings problematizes how teacher preparation programs typically serve to prepare White teachers to be successful teachers of White students without paying attention to the skills needed to teach students of color. The seminal work of Ladson-Billings and current work of Brown brings to surface the intersections between teaching and culture and problematizes the participant-observer role for researchers within education. Brown (2010) presents that culturally competent educators had positive conceptions of themselves and others, built and maintained positive social relations with their students, and had fluid

conceptions of knowledge, which led them to take on roles of social justice activist educators.

Similarly, Valenzuela (1999, 2002) argues that a shift towards additive schooling and culturally relevant pedagogy is also needed in teacher preparation programs, and evaluation of teacher quality research in schools is needed. The author believes that an even greater impact is needed for educational policy to reflect additive schooling and culturally relevant pedagogy in an effort to work towards social justice in schooling. As suggested, identities are a central factor in the development of Latina/o bilingual teachers. These identities are dynamic and shifting through their daily practices. It is essential that we create a space in which we can explore how such identities can be developed.

Fitts' and Weisman's (2010) qualitative study conducted interviews and observations that examine the development of bilingual and bicultural pre-service teachers' beliefs and attitudes about social justice and the role these play in the education of language minority children. They discuss the results of a study of bilingual and bicultural pre-service teachers and their conceptualizations of social justice and the role of social justice in teaching. In their findings, they identify several key factors regarding teaching and instilling in bilingual preservice teachers a desire to teach for social justice. The professors recognized and actively used their own funds of knowledge to connect with and legitimate the unique perspectives, knowledge and skills of the bilingual-bicultural participants. To capitalize on this, professors frequently used life stories and narrative to illustrate concepts, pose problems, and to initiate reflection and dialogue. Through these reflections, societal constructs, such as relationships to power and language, were legitimized. In addition to creating an authentic space for life stories and experiences in the university classroom, the professors cultivated strong personal and caring relationships with their students. Their

findings indicate that university professors need to be able to legitimate the experiences and perspectives of bilingual/bicultural teacher candidates. Professors need to be able to guide their students to recognize and reflect upon instances of misrecognition as well as existing inequities of resources.

Clark and Flores (2001) found that for Latina/o preservice teachers there is a relationship between strong ethnic identities during the teacher preparation program and a positive teacher self-concept in the profession. In order to continue working toward preparing Latina/o bilingual preservice teachers, we must continue exploring areas related to defining identity, which leads to a social justice teaching orientation, social justice teaching in preservice teacher education, teaching practices that are reflective of social justice teaching. By incorporating culture, language, and heritage into bilingual teacher preparation courses, the literature shows how teacher preparation programs are equipping preservice teachers to become future activist educators who work towards social justice. It is through these emancipatory practices that Latina/o preservice teachers will experience the opportunities to foster teaching for social justice into their own lessons as they have had the chance to explore their multiple identities. By engaging in research related to identity formation and furthering the scope and complexity of what this area encompasses, we can aid in the development of bilingual preservice teachers and their abilities to teach students who have been historically marginalized by dominant discourse. As seen, research has tended to focus on the preparation of preservice teachers to enter into classrooms and take-up a stance towards teaching for social justice. By valuing the Funds of Knowledge, preservice teachers possess and drawing from this in their coursework, preservice teacher preparation programs are equipping their teacher candidates to enter into the teaching profession to do the same for their bilingual students. Because they were able

to establish caring relationships, professors and preservice teachers were able to build bridges to address gaps found in the preservice teachers' own educational backgrounds.

Franzak (2002) observed an undergraduate student in her student teaching phase during which the critical friends' group enabled the teacher to push through the last semester and to cope with many of the struggles faced by beginning teachers. At its core, a critical friends group is formed in an effort to bring educators together to provide opportunities for them to grow in their profession. In fact, it was the critical friends group that was formative in her experience, compared to the cooperating teacher or mentor. In a study with in-service teachers, Curry (2008) concludes that critical friends' groups enhance collegiality, school-wide knowledge, and research-based knowledge. This work brings to light the importance of networking in teaching and finding others who have similar attitudes and beliefs in order to develop into activist teacher educators. Tyack et al. (1984) present findings on African American teachers who are members of a teachers' union. These findings support that teacher unions discover power through collective voice and being members of a union presents teachers with the opportunity to express their voices in a safe space. They attribute teacher involvement in professional organizations to the local circumstances teachers are faced with in their districts. These findings support that depending on what is happenings locally in districts directly impacts teachers' choices when becoming members of professional organizations because through their teacher unions find power through collective voice in a safe space to advocate for change. The current research project would serve to extend the previous work by Tyack et al. (1984) by looking at another community of color.

Professional Organizations

Picower (2012) and Urrieta (2009, 2012) forefront the importance of networking in teaching and finding others who have similar attitudes and beliefs in order to cultivate activist teacher educators. Nieto (2012) likewise advances the importance of creating these friendships to continue to develop as educators and to find networks that help sustain teachers in their profession. Professional organizations, such as teacher unions and associations, have often become alternative sites for teachers to come together and collaborate for improvements in their working conditions. Literature on unionized teachers and their ability to mobilize together to push for educational reform has been well documented (Barber, 1992; Rousmaniere, 2005). Other research on teachers' unions has focused on recruitment and how to engage members successfully. (Chaison & Bigelow, 2002; Popiel, 2013). The literature here suggests that through active membership in teacher unions, teachers are able to work collectively for change when the union presents itself as a strong united front.

Historically, unions in the U.S. date back to 1866 with the creation of the National Labor Union (NLU) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) whose greatest efforts centered on the safety of the workspace and increasing wages. Alarcón (1990) documents how, because of their intense presence in the market of labor, Mexican workers often united and created small unions in the early twentieth century in order to collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions; however, antiunion sentiment and the fear of deportation often times halted early efforts to create larger union sectors. Early union organizing focused primarily on the mining and agricultural industries. Below is a map that depicts labor unions and right-to-work states taken from The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation (2018). They explain that state laws regarding right-to-work

they were able to organize and work towards improved working conditions. Zamora's work goes on to describe how the first Federal Labor Union (FLU) came to be the first independent Mexican workers' union based in South Texas to align with the AFL.

Moreover, Rosales (1997) differentiates between the focus of Mexican American civil rights and Mexican American union efforts. The unions brought a more practical focus to the table; the objective was one of more immediate benefit to their members; namely a better life through better wages. Rosales broadens the discussion by indicating that as the children of workers, Mexican American union members were more concerned with the promotion of equal opportunities and access to higher education. Throughout the Southwestern United States, Mexican Americans came together through unions to continue to push towards better economic and educational opportunities. It was through such spaces that Latina women also began to take-up voice in such arenas.

A potential alternative site for activist identities to emerge is within teachers' unions, or associations. Loveless (2011) maintains that similar to labor unions, teachers' unions have rallied around issues affecting education including race, class, gender and ideologies. However, research regarding the influential roles of teacher unions tends to focus on political campaigns, bargaining tables, and educational reform (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006; Hargreaves, 2009; Rousmaniere, 2005). Teacher union sites provide a space for teachers to explore their activist identities alongside other teachers with common and diverse experiences. In the United States, the roots of teacher unions date back to the early 19th century; however, Ravitch (1983) historicizes the rise of leverage, political power, and influence of teacher unions within school districts to the mid-1970s. In the United States, two teacher union represent the vast majority of teachers, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Educators Association (NEA). The shift

and increase in teacher unions in the 1970s can be attributed to how local and affiliates of AFT and NEA began working collectively at local and community levels to enact change.

According to Texas Law, Texas is a right-to-work state (Government Code Sec. 617.004). As such, public officials are not obligated to join, and cannot not be denied work, based on their affiliation with a union, organization, or association. Moreover, employees cannot be forced to join a union. Texas Education Code prohibits Texas administrators from recruiting/dissuading teachers to become a union member. A second factor influencing teachers' unions is the collective bargaining law in Texas. Texas law prohibits collective bargaining for its public employees (Government Code Sec. 617.002). Third, public employees in Texas are banned from striking. In restricting the collective bargaining rights and striking as a means to bargain, Texas severely limits the ability of teachers to negotiate for their and their students' best interests. Thus, teachers must find alternative means of "bargaining" or "negotiating" for their rights and their students' rights. In Texas, this is often done through teachers' associations who are affiliates of national teacher union organizations. Although collective bargaining is not an option for teachers, the quest for democracy in the workplace persists in Texas public schools. Coinciding with the Chicano movement, the Teachers' organizations in Texas in the 1960s centered their campaigns on equity and equality in education, specifically bilingual education (Weiner & Compton, 2008). This was documented through a symposium held by the NEA, at which the Superintendent of the Laredo Independent School District brought the community, parents, and teachers together to successfully advocate for bilingual education in 1964. In fact, in 1966, Texas teachers collectively organized and created their own bilingual education conference. During this conference, teachers came together and attended sessions on professional development related to the needs of bilingual students. It was during this

conference that teachers pressed for more quality bilingual education programs and the need for resources.

Right-to-work laws in Texas are set forth by the attorney general's office. According to Texas Labor Code Ann.SS101.001, (1993) "All persons engaged in any kind of labor may associate and form trade unions and other organizations to protect themselves in their personal labor in their respective employment." Given this, joining a professional organization with union affiliation is a personal choice made by an individual. According to the National Educators Association, in right-to-work states, unions are not allowed to include "union security clauses" when employees receive their contracts. As a result, individuals are not required to join a union or pay any mandatory union dues. In response to this, individuals see the roles that unions play in right-to-work states as weak because they do not have bargaining rights. For the most part, those who oppose unions do so based on their political ideologies, because unions purportedly support Democrats over Republicans, in particular around discourses surrounding wages, pension protection, and working conditions. Other reasons for anti-union sentiment stem from philosophical reasons related to the individual's opposition to being forced to pay union dues without having the option not to.

Teachers in right-to-work states take on similar struggles through their associations as do states who are able to join unions. Many of these include the ability to bargain for wages, smaller class sizes, benefits, and resources for teachers. However, in right-to-work states teachers are still able to gain legitimacy through the use of active associations that mirror the beliefs of the unions with which they are affiliated. For example, the mission of the National Education Association (NEA) is centered on advocating for quality public education, educators, and students. NEA prides itself in its efforts to empower parents to

be active stakeholders, to improve the quality of teaching, and providing a safe environment conducive to learning. Its sister association, Texas State Teacher Association (TSTA) mission also emulates NEA and is focused around uniting advocates to enhance public education and to prepare every student to succeed in a global society. In particular, teacher associations strive to increase membership within school districts in order to advocate for teachers', students', and parents' rights. Without strong associations, many decisions that affect the daily lives of teachers and students are left up to school boards and district and campus administrators who can often times make decisions that are biased or based on political affiliations. These decisions affect teachers at all levels, from the lessons they are expected to teach through district curriculum and their salaries.

My dissertation serves to extend the previous work of professional organizations by looking at another community of color, in this case a group of former and current Chicana bilingual teachers who identify as active members of their local teacher union. By exploring how minorities have come to utilize unions to their favor in order to work collectively towards access to ethical treatment in works spaces and elsewhere is important. Through such research we can discover: how their ideologies and their bilingual bicultural backgrounds influence their activism, how their membership helps them become active members in their schools, families and communities, and most importantly how being members of a teachers' union impacts their daily classroom interactions and practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Race Theory and LatCrit

The central focus of this study is on the ways in which bilingual teachers who identify as Chicanas go about orchestrating their identities in different spaces to enact

change within their school district. Matsuada (1991) establishes that Critical Race Theory (CRT) is derived from critical legal studies and radical feminism, which provides for us the basis for beginning to understand the ways in which race operates within our society and in different institutions such as schools. Crenshaw (1988) and Delgado (1989) were some of the first scholars to take what had been learned on the omission of race through critical legal studies and apply it to the educational setting. Crenshaw's work on intersectionality provides a basis for understanding how gender, race, and the experiences of Black women shaped their experiences. Through intersectionality, we witness how issues surrounding race and gender coincide and ultimately impact the ways in which women's identity. Importantly this work reveals that when conducting research with women of color we must move beyond a single-axis analysis. Delgado Bernal (2001) argues that students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, but they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings and argued for the development of a Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) lens. Further, Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) present five themes that inform our perspective when engaging in the exploration of research through a LatCrit framework in education:

1. *The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination.*
2. *The challenge to dominant ideology.*
3. *The commitment to social justice.*
4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge.*
5. *The interdisciplinary perspective.*

The work of Bernal (1989), Delgado Bernal (1998, 2001, 2002), Solórzano (1997), Solórzano & Delgado Bernal (2001), and Solórzano & Yosso (2002) questions and challenges how racism intersects with subordination in many cases to silence people of color and their ways of knowing and being. The authors argue that many times, researchers present their work through an objective stance, which serves to silence the communities they work with, and their work serves to continue to enhance deficit thinking and radicalized notions of people of color. Villenas & Deyhle (1999) argue that by using a critical race theory lens we are able to uncover the ways in which people of color are marginalized by society. More research is needed on how teachers of color explore their identities. Through exploring the opportunities to develop and reclaim their lost identities, Latina/o preservice teachers engage in the process of constructing their identity as *maestr@s*. Research in this area will allow us to examine how bilingual teachers engage in the process of self-authoring and self-making (Holland, et al., 1998). As examined in the previous literature, LatCrit scholars have often placed crucial importance on the counter narratives constructed by people of color. LatCrit provides such a space for the exploration of Latina/os by examining the intersections of individuals who often have been marginalized based on their immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, phenotype, identity, and sexuality (Arriola, 1997; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The use of a CRT and LatCrit framework is important to my study for numerous reasons. One being that through exploring Chicana activist educators I will add to previous research on intersectionality by investigating how being women in addition to identifying as Chicanas has affected them in the work place. Additionally, exploring how these women have chosen to be active members of their teachers' association could reveal their

commitments to social justice through the partnerships the form with other teachers, parents, families, communities and other stakeholders.

Moya: Postpositivist and Chicana Feminism

Historically, Chicana feminists have had to create their own spaces to address their own issues that are not fully taken into consideration through movements such as the Chicano movement. The Chicana movement emerged from the Chicano civil rights movements; in particular, their departure was based on their challenge to conforming to cultural nationalism and the connections this had to the promotion of family values and the roles women. Anzaldúa (1987) notes that through building coalitions with men and systemically investing in the creation of a new masculinity, Mestizas can collectively unite with men, sexual minorities, and whites. In contrast, Alarcón (1990) reveals that Chicana identity is an identity that is critically assumed by an individual and is oftentimes associated with their diverse experiences dealing with race, class, and gender. Her work situates Chicanas in a postmodernist lens, which she argues is a binary model; this process situates women through subject of consciousness. Such efforts allow individuals to reclaim their identities as women of color. When an individual identifies herself as a Chicana, she commits herself to raising awareness against injustice and to becoming activist within their communities.

In an effort to further the study of women of color, Moya (2002) argues that we must examine the identity development of women in nonessentialist ways. She contends, “A realist theory of identity thus provides women of color with a nonessentialist way to ground their identities. It gives of a way of knowing and acting from within our own social location or flesh” (p. 57).

Moya's work explores the influence of postmodernism on Chicana Feminism and argues that the subject is often decentered in the goal of a politics of liberation, suggesting a politics of difference instead. Moya critiques Alarcón's argument because, "The subject: in Alarcón's framework becomes a free-floating site of consciousness with an unspecified relationship to those social categories" (p. 71). The categories here are formed around race, class, gender, and sexuality. Moya argues that the problem herein lies in that Alarcón does not provide a space for women of color to become "sites of consciousness" because she does not separate them from the discourse with which they interact. Moya instead argues that people are "subjects-in-process", and that because of this the discourses they interact with can be multiple at different times (p. 71). Moya further suggests that through the lens of a realist perspective, women of color, feminists such as Chicanas, can engage with the conflicts they encounter, work through them, and ultimately create a space for a "new and better social order" (p. 78). Moya's postpositivist framework provides a lens for the study of identity while earlier Chicana scholars such as Alarcón do not fully address the issue.

Another Chicana feminist theory reviewed by Moya is Chela Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness, which is based on "a new kind of subjectivity developed under conditions of multiple oppression" (p. 79). This type of "oppositional consciousness" is found in U.S. Third World Feminism, which calls on women to adapt their identities in order to react to situations where power-surrounding issues related to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation are at play. In terms of identity, Sandoval's interpretation of differential consciousness becomes somewhat blurred as it calls for a shift in identity as opposed to a realist identity which allows for different aspects of identity to emerge more according to time and space. Moya's main critique of Sandoval's work is that while she

draws on the same realist framework, her postpositivist views “limit her project of apprehending and representing the experiences of women of color” (p. 82).

In turn Moya argues that, “Identities are politically and epistemically significant because they reveal the links between individuals and groups and central organizing principles of the society” (p. 99). Through a postpositivist lens, Moya situates the influential role the identity of minorities play in having the possibility of unpacking in order to create a space for change within a social setting. Stating, “Those with a social location that places them in a subordinate position within prevailing relations of domination have a personal stake in knowing “what it would take to change [our world, and in] ... identifying the central relations of power and privilege that sustain it and make the world what it is” (p. 96). As such, we must continue to explore the ways in which minorities continue to challenge and change the status quo. Connecting identity to experience further allows us to understand the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and further informs how it is that we come to orchestrate our identities in such spaces. By taking into consideration a realist perspective we can further examine how social location and identity formation are interconnected with each other because they build upon each other and the experiences individuals face take on these multiple intersections. Issues related to education oftentimes are not based solely on one of these, however many of them are active at once. Through unpacking identities, we can begin to understand and unpack how oppression is manifested and the role identity production takes in combating oppression. According to Moya,

“The most basic claim of the postpositivist realist theory of identity is that identities are both constructed and real: identities are constructed because they are based on interpreted experience and on theories that explain the social and natural world, but

they are also real because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world” (p. 86).

This quote reiterates the ways in which one’s identity and experiences are interweaved and inform each other. Social location plays a pivotal role here, as it will further continue to shape the experiences of an individual. Hames-García (2011) adds that in order to understand identities we must take into consideration that social identities are present within us at all times. The lived experiences of individuals further shape our realities including our social and political affiliations.

Merging CRT and LatCrit with Moya

Merging CRT and LatCrit with Moya’s contentions for a postpositivist realist framework grounds the importance for the study of identity in terms of place and social location. This is central to my study because working with both frameworks will provide participants the opportunity to use their narrative voice to express themselves regarding issues they take on through their teachers’ union. CRT and LatCrit specifically will assist in unveiling how issues surrounding race have impacted the careers of these Chicana educators. Additionally, incorporating a postpositivist realist framework will further allow me to explore the multiple identities these Chicana educators have and how these identities impact their experiences. Through learning about these Chicana bilingual teachers and their teachers’ union I will learn more about how they have come together to work to transform and make a difference within their school district. Identity is often times viewed as an important element when understanding schools and society.

Gee (2000) focuses on performance identity of individuals in different context. “Being recognized as a certain “kind of person” in a given context is what I mean here by “Identity”. In this sense the term implies that; all people have multiple identities connected

not to their “internal states” but to their performances in society” (99). Based on context leads to the appropriation of identity in an ascribed setting. Viewing identity in such a manner leaves little room for agency. The ascription piece is placed upon the individual, unless the individual chooses to exert their own agency as a form of resistance to these ascriptions of identity. The author describes four ways to view identity production: nature-identity, institution-identity, discourse-identity, and affinity-identity. These different lenses offer understanding and insight into how the process and power relations found in viewing identity are complex. The author describes how discourses provide different spaces where individuals produce their own identity. The author then examines the areas of viewing identity formation in modern and postmodern ways. The author ends describing how new capitalism focuses on the access individuals have to wealth and power. These societal conflicts are indicative of the limited access of mobility that minority groups face in relation to areas of poverty and inferior schooling experiences.

Moya (2002) outlines postpositivist realist though four claims: (1) Our social identities are impacted by our location and these will further affect the experiences and encounters we have; (2) the way we identify culturally is influenced by our current and past experiences; (3) how we position ourselves can lead us to possibly misinterpret events we encounter; (4) individuals can have different identities and depending on their social location some of our identities may hold more epistemic privilege than others. Reason being that I believe that our past experiences in conjunction with our present experiences impact and influence the ways in which we interact in different sociopolitical contexts.

Another facet of the postpositivist realist paradigm is multiplicity. This is important to my study because it will provide a space for understanding the experiences of Chicana bilingual activist teachers in a teachers’ union based on the multiple identities they possess:

gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Hames-Garcia (2011) revisits multiplicity and describes it in a group context stating that, “social group identities are also made up of relationships among people, who instead of sharing one thing in common, share various different kinds of commonalities and resemblances” (p.21).

Moya further argues that examining and conducting research through a post-positivist lens allows for the interpretation and exploration of the oppositional identities formulated by social location. By drawing from CRT and LatCrit as well as a post-positivist realist framework, this study will explore the ways in which three bilingual teachers who identify as Chicana educators go about enacting their activist identities and work towards change within their school district.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For my study, I employed the use of qualitative research methodology to explore the experiences of three Chicana bilingual activist teachers involved in a teacher's union. Qualitative methods are beneficial to my study because they lend themselves to examining a phenomenon within a given context (Mertens, 2009). Using a qualitative methodology allowed me to draw from the experiences of my participants and examine how these experiences have influenced their lives. Specifically, an ethnography was appropriate for my study because it allows for the exploration and treatment of participants as "experts" who collaborate with the researcher during the entire study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In ethnographic studies, researchers commit themselves to conducting prolonged fieldwork in communities. The goal of such research is to not only identify how individuals come to understand the world, but also describe the participants' perspectives of utmost importance (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). I will utilize critical ethnography: "Put succinctly, critical ethnography is a well-theorized empirical study with a serious political intent to change people's consciousness, if not their daily lives" (Foley, 2002, p.140). Researchers who use critical ethnographies as their methodology address and explore issues related to the methods of oppression inherent in hegemonic practices (Crotty, 1998). I began my research within this community in 2016 with my pilot study and I continued to engage in research with them ever since.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To conduct this study, I implemented the use of a critical ethnography because it is a useful methodology to explore Latina/o and Chicana/o agency and cultural production (Duncan, 2005; Foley & Valenzuela, 2008; & Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Villenas and Foley (2004) for example, situate ethnographic work done with Chicano and Latino

communities as a form of critical ethnography. Duncan (2005) explains, “A critical race ethnography seeks to engage the multiple ontological categories that give meaning to lived experience” (p.106). Duncan (2005) employs the use of critical race ethnographic research to examine the ways in which race impacts the experiences of schooling for Black children in America. Based on their lived experiences, Duncan found that racism in society served to dehumanize Black children. Similarly, Villenas and Deyhle’s (1999) critical ethnography revealed challenges Latino families face in schools based on negative stereotypes found in society. In essence using a critical ethnography as my methodology is appropriate for my study because they, “tend to be more interested in producing focused, well-theorized accounts of a particular institution or subgroup that reveal oppressive relations of power” (Villenas & Foley, 2004, p. 226). Having worked in the same community as my participants has allowed me to develop relationships with them on a personal level, I am aware of their struggles within the school district and the various issues that they advocate.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to incorporate the use of Moya’s (2002) postpositivist realist framework to highlights and legitimizes the epistemic knowledge of communities of color—in this case that of Chicana teachers who are active members of their teachers’ association. Crotty (1998) explains that a researcher’s epistemology is based on an understanding of how we move to interpret and explain what we know. A postpositivist realist paradigm is important for my study because oftentimes the experiences of people of color including Chicanas is omitted or not told in its entirety (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Moya, 2002). This was important to my work because postpositivist realist value the knowledge

individuals possess and how it intersects with individual's social location and their multiple identities.

Furthermore, I sought to explore what their membership in a teachers' association provided them in terms of their activist identity development and the enablement of their activist agency. I used these focal questions to help guide me:

1. What does the collective knowledge of three Chicana bilingual activist members of a teacher union reveal about the stark realities of teachers in right-to-work states?
2. How do the experiences and life histories of the three Chicana bilingual teachers influence and shape their decision to join and be active members of a teacher union in Texas?
3. How does their participation in a teacher union influence their leadership roles in the union, their schools, and the community?
4. How has their involvement in the union influenced their pedagogical practices?

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Working alongside bilingual teachers for the past ten years, I decided to conduct my research project within the community that helped form me as a bilingual educator. I have dedicated my entire teaching profession to serving elementary students in the same suburban district in Texas. I have witnessed firsthand the injustices based on race and class that bilingual students, their families, and their teachers face on a daily basis. My commitment to my students and colleagues is what led me to continue my own education. The district that I worked for had a strong presence and membership within one teachers'

association, TSTA. I admired the women who lead the organization at that time for their courage to stand up to district policies and bureaucratic practices. Their commitment to working in the best interest of teachers and students is what captured my attention. Attending association meetings and seeing their activism on social media sparked my interest and curiosity to understand how and why some educators become socially active in the best interest of their students, fellow teachers, and community. Ultimately, these experiences in my own life are what have guided me and motivated my aspirations to conduct a study based on Chicana teachers in a teachers' union.

In the sections that follow, I described the community I observed during my study. I include information on the district, participants, and community. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and the school district in which they work.

School District Demographics

Green Independent School District (Green ISD), in which the study takes place is located in central Texas along the ever-growing Interstate 35 corridor between San Antonio and Austin. The district currently has over twenty campuses from elementary through high school and serves over 20,000 students. The Texas Education Agency in their Texas Academic Performance Report in the 2016-2017 school year reports that the district serves nearly 4,000 bilingual/ESL students, which equates to 15% of their student population. As such, they currently employ over fifty bilingual educators in grades prekindergarten through fifth grade. The school district website boast about their dual language one-way and two-way program in their elementary campuses. Middle school and high school students participate in English as a Second Language pullout program and students who are new to the country attend the new arrival center.

Teachers within the dual language program are recognized on a monthly basis by the possibility of being awarded the district's English Language Learner advocate certificate. Bilingual educators in this district receive a \$4,000 stipend and English as a Second Language educators receive a \$1,500 stipend for serving culturally and linguistically diverse students.

GAINING ACCESS TO THE SITE

In order to study the lives of Chicana activist bilingual teachers in an ethnographic manner, it was critical that I gain access to educators who identify as Chicanas. Foley (2002) describes the commitment of critical ethnographers to conducting field work in at least a year or two of “participant observation, key informants work, and extensive interviews” (p.140). I meet this descriptor because I began studying the lives of these Chicana activist *maestras* in 2016 with a pilot study and continued collecting data for this project through the fall of 2018. Working with these same women while I was a teacher and a member of the same teachers' association afforded me with the connections necessary to gain entrance into their teachers' association. Loftland, Snow, Anderson, and Loftland (2006) argue that when conducting research in social settings researchers are familiar with the context they can use these connections to their advantage. I used my status as a former teacher and association member to help my insider status when I left the profession and returned as a researcher.

OBTAINING CONSENT

After obtaining consents from the teachers' association, I went and spoke with the current members at a meeting about my research project and provided them with the information about the study in the fall of 2017. By December of 2017, I presented them

with a PowerPoint presentation in which I explained my experience as a bilingual teacher, my involvement with the teachers' association, and the goals of my study. I shared the topic of my study and the reasons why it was important to them and to me. I also outlined and explained the process of the Institutional Review Board forms and answered questions they had about the study and their anonymity. I specifically chose to open the possibility to of participating in the study to all women who identified as bilingual teachers and who were members of the teachers' association.

PARTICIPANTS

To select the participants for my project I used purposeful sampling. The three women who have agreed to participate in the study all identify as Chicana activist educators. Two of them currently work for the school district at different elementary campuses. One of the participants is the current president of the local TSTA association and the other serves as the treasure of the association. The third participant is a member of the local school board for the past two years and was a former bilingual teacher in the district; she also served as the local union president for seven years and is still pays dues to the association. Based on the questions I explored and the insight I would like to gain, Merriam (2009) explains that purposeful sampling allows researchers to choose participation I a study based off specific criteria. The women I chose for this study all fit the following criteria, (1) they all have ties to Green School District, (2) they all identify as bilingual activist *maestras*, (3) they are all active members of their local TSTA, (4) they all identify as Chicanas. The participants were Sonia Lopez (pseudonym), Maria Melendez (pseudonym), and Esmeralda Sanchez (pseudonym).

As women who identify as activist *maestras*, they are exposed to everyday interactions that impact their advocacy efforts, their life histories, and their pedagogical practices. In this critical ethnography, the families, the teachers’ association, and the community they served also played an integral part to understanding the broader context of these Chicana activist *maestras* lives. In the next section, I provide a brief description of each of participants. Below table 3.1 describes the participants years of experience as bilingual educators and their years of membership in their teachers’ association. I then provide a short biography about each of the participants.

Table 3.1: Positions, years of experience and years in union

Teacher	Positions in Green ISD	Years of Service	Years in union
Ms. Sonia Lopez	Pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, second, 9 th grade	Eighteen	Seventeen
Mrs. Maria Melendez	Pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, third and fourth grade	Eleven	Twenty
Mrs. Esmeralda Sanchez	Third, fourth, School board member	Eleven years teaching two years on school board	Ten

Sonia Lopez

Sonia is a Chicana activist educator, who was born in Uvalde, TX, both of her parents came to the United States in the 1950s as young children. Sonia grew up speaking primarily Spanish to her parents. The youngest of five children she learned English at an early age from her siblings. Her father is now deceased and she along with her siblings take turns taking care of her mother. Sonia has dedicated nineteen years to teaching in Green ISD. She has taught multiple grades including prekindergarten, kindergarten, second, and ninth grade. She has been an active member of TSTA for eighteen years and has served in different capacities including secretary, treasure, and vice president. Most recently, she has served as the local association for the past four years.

Sonia currently lives about forty-five minutes away from the school where she teaches. She wakes up every day around 5:00am to get ready and ensure she arrives to work on time. Association meetings, community events, and district meetings typically occur after the school day has ended. Often times Sonia does not arrive home until after 11:00pm she will occasionally spend the night at Esmeralda's house to avoid having to drive home.

Esmeralda Sanchez

Esmeralda was born and raised in San Antonio, TX. Her mother came to the U.S. from Mexico and her father was born in San Antonio, TX, and is of Mexican descent. As a young child, she remembers speaking some Spanish to her mother, but her parents wanted to ensure that she along with her sisters learned English. Esmeralda shared a story with me about how in first grade she was silenced by her teacher for speaking Spanish at school. She shared that the teacher called her parents to report what had happened in school and that the teacher encouraged her parents to promote their children's use of English. After

this, Esmeralda remembers that her father would only speak to her in English and forced her to do the same. As a result, Esmeralda lost much of her ability to communicate in Spanish.

As a teacher, Esmeralda worked in Green ISD for eleven years. She was a bilingual teacher, but because she lacked Spanish language proficiency, she felt most comfortable teaching third and fourth grade where most students had already transitioned into speaking English. Esmeralda was an active member of TSTA throughout her teaching career. She served in positions both as a local and state representative for the organization. Esmeralda was also a member of the Texas Association of Bilingual Education Board (TABE). In 2013, Esmeralda left her position as a bilingual teacher to dedicate herself to raising her newborn child. She continued working with TSTA as a legal counselor. The following year she decided to run for a member of the local school board in Green ISD, where she won and has continued serving in that capacity. Esmeralda still identifies herself as a *maestra*, and is a community member of TSTA.

Esmeralda currently lives on the west side of Green ISD with her husband and her son Isaac (pseudonym). Isaac just began kindergarten and attends one of the local school within Green ISD. Esmeralda dedicates her time to volunteering in the classroom, serving on the school board, and being an active member of the city by serving in several local organizations, which I list below in table 3.1.

Table 3.2: Esmeralda’s Community Service Memberships

Name of organization	Years of service
Green City (pseudonym) Child Protective Board	2 years
Rotary Club	2 years
Ladies of Green	3 years
Friends of Green Library	5 years

Maria Melendez

Of all of the participants, Maria has the longest tenure with Green ISD where she has served as a bilingual teacher for the past twenty years. Maria was born in Jalisco MX, but she came to the United States when she was nine years old when her mother passed away. Maria is a native Spanish speaker and she would often times talk about the troubles she encountered learning English and the obstacles she had to overcome in her own education. As a result of the barriers she encountered she decided she wanted to become a bilingual teacher, so that she could help students who come from similar backgrounds to her own.

Maria has an extensive teaching background, she has taught pre-kinder, kindergarten, first, third and fourth grade. Of all the grades, she is most fond of teaching third graders. Maria has also taught at multiple elementary schools within Green ISD and has had the opportunity to work with various teachers, principals, and district administrators.

Maria also lives on the west side of Green ISD with her husband and two children. Maria has two adult children, her daughter, Victoria who is in her junior year at Texas A&M University at College Station and her son Manuel who is twenty-three and is autistic.

Before and after school Maria has to manage her schedule in order to care for Manuel who leads an active life style, currently works for Texas State University, and volunteers at the local hospital.

Throughout her teaching career, Maria has always identified herself as a Chicana activist *maestra*. She shared with me that her activist identity developed during her undergraduate experience at St. Edward’s University in Austin, TX where she was a member of Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A), a student organization that was set up to promote higher education, *cultura* and *historia* of Chican@s. This prompted her to want to join TSTA as soon as she began working as a bilingual teacher. Maria has been an active member of TSTA for twenty years now. Maria is also an active member of various organizations within Green, which are listed below in table 3.2.

Table 3.3: Maria’s Community Service Memberships

Name of organization	Years of service
St. Cecilia’s (pseudonym) Altar Society	10 years
St. Cecilia’s (pseudonym) religious education teacher	5 years
Ladies of Green	3 years
Friends of Green Library	5 years

DATA SOURCES & PROCEDURES

For this dissertation project, I began collecting data from August of 2017 until November of 2018. During this period, I dedicated my time and efforts on: (1) continuing to build my established rapport with the participants as well as the local TSTA of Green

ISD, (2) conducting interviews with the participants, and (3) attending school board meetings, community events, and observations. Included in these next sections are a description of how and when data were collected. I then go on to explain the analytic play I followed to interpret findings. I end with my own positionality statement in order to build my case for trustworthiness.

Building Rapport

I already knew Sonia and Maria because I worked with them in the same school for five years. Based on this established relationship I would ask Sonia and Maria to introduce me to the members of TSTA organization of Green ISD. I would then use my experiences as a teacher to help me connect with the other members. I did this in order to make them feel at ease during the time that I was attending the meetings so that they would not see me as an outsider. I also used my connections with Sonia and Maria to help introduce me to Esmeralda who also attended the TSTA meetings as a school board member. Throughout these meetings, I had conversations with all of the members of TSTA, not only the participants in my project. I would use this time to tell them about the goals of my project and my reasons for attending their events.

Observations

Another rich source of gathering data in critical ethnographic studies is through participant observations. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) identify the different types of observations researchers can use: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. I foresee that the majority of my observations will take on an observer-as-participant approach. For my dissertation project, I observed Chicana bilingual teachers in different settings for a total of forty hours including: union meetings, school board meetings, informal gatherings, and in other places in their

community (i.e. rallies, library, and church). During these observations, I took field notes on what was happening. At times throughout my study, my role as an observer will shift to a participant-as-observer. During these times, I will form part of the group and share in the different activities they are engaging in.

Patton (2002) identifies several reasons why qualitative researchers should employ the use of observations in their studies. Through observations, researchers can provide details that allow readers to visualize the program setting. Observations are also useful because they can provide a vast amount of information regarding the human and social environments of groups. Such observations are helpful because they illuminate several key details such as the gender of group members, ethnicity (although this can be based on presumptions), and age ranges. Through observations, researchers can also note which individuals make decisions for groups. This is particularly appealing to my study because I can observe the characteristics of the Chicana bilingual teachers who take on leadership roles within the teacher union. During my observations, I collected fieldnotes to describe the events I was witnessing. Examples of field notes are located in (Appendix A).

Life-Histories

One of the sources of data collection I also used in my study were the life histories of the participants. Conducting life-history interviews, journal reflections and autobiographies allowed me to understand better, how the lived experiences of my participants have impacted their lives. Luken and Vaughan (1999) inform us that life-history methods can be used to inform social science research because of their ability to lend themselves to spaces of transformation. Woods (1985) situates the method of life-history as “a natural extension to ethnography” (p.13). In addition to this, other scholars have noted that life-histories serve as emancipatory practice because they are centered on

valuing participants' individual lives, this holds particularly true for marginalized populations (Carry, 1999; Goodley, 1996; Thompson, 1988, 2017). Thompson (1998, 2017) further explains the usefulness of life history and situates it as a transformative process because individuals give accounts in their own words and through this process; they validate their past experiences and the possibility to transform their futures. Using life-history was important because it serves to provide a link between culture and an individual's lived experiences in very personal ways. Through reading life-histories of individuals who identify similarly in terms of race, culture, ethnicity and gender we may find similarities that can be used as a tool to inform future decisions.

Furthermore, life histories are beneficial in reporting patterns and trends regarding women who identify as Chicana activist educators. In fact, life-history methods have been used by several scholars to document the lived experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers (Bybee, 2015; Galindo & Olguín, 1996; Gomez, Rodriguez & Agosto, 2008). Gomez et al. (2008) used the method of life-history to share the stories of two pre-service teacher candidates. Their life-history research findings show commonalties in the lived experiences of the two pre-service teacher candidate's lives regarding their experiences with bilingualism, the ways they were treated in school based on their racial background, and struggles they encountered with their families. Cary (1999) argues that through life history research we can examine unexpected stories that produce counter narratives to traditional literature. Similarly, Bybee's (2015) dissertation work incorporated life-histories in the form of journals and educational autobiographies to explore how the experiences of his Latina/o teacher candidates to better understand the challenges and successes they encountered in their teacher preparation program. Through their written life-histories, Bybee found that his participants shared unexpected stories that

affected their educational trajectories related to immigration and language. Galindo and Olguín (1996) also used autobiographical writing in their study with bilingual teachers. They see it as a tool, a transformative opportunity for teachers to reflect on their cultural resources and how they intersect with their teaching philosophies. Participants in my study will be asked to share journal reflections based on current issues they are facing within their teachers' association and journal reflections based on student work samples. Participants will also be asked to write an autobiography about their own experiences in school.

Procedures for Life-Histories

Drawing on the work of Galindo and Olguín (1996) and Bybee (2015), I collected journals and autobiographies to gain information regarding the lived experiences of three Chicana bilingual teachers and how these influenced their decision to join and to be active members of a teacher union in Texas. I asked the participants to write journal reflections after three board meetings I attended during the spring of 2018. After their life-history interview (procedures explained below), I asked them to write about a memory they had of someone in their family related to their activist identity. Sample questions, and the writing reflective question used for life-history are located in (Appendix B). These written works were taken in order to document the *testimonios* of Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria. Yúdice (1991) describes that *testimonios* can be used a method in which individuals engage in self-construction and survival (p.19). The work of LatCrit scholars (Arriola, 1997; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) has established that we have much to learn from and about minorities through their experiences. The use of *testimonios* assist by providing counterstories Yúdice (1991) explains, “The modern institution of literature has traditionally functioned as a gatekeeper, permitting certain

classes of individuals to establish standards of taste within the public sphere and excluding others” (p.20). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) presents the use of *testimonio* as a methodological tool to examine understandings of identity and community. Thus, *testimonios* serve as methodological tool for feminist research and praxis as it allows individuals to share, confront, and celebrate their personal stories of *sobrevivencia*.

Semistructured Interviews

An additional method of data collection I used in my study was interviewing. Mertens (2014) reports that mostly all qualitative studies incorporate the use of some type of interview between the researcher and their participants. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) describe an interview as two people engaging in a purposeful conversation. Interviews in qualitative research can take on various forms such as structured or unstructured, they can also be done in person or electronically, and they can be conducted with an individual or in a group setting. Interviews can be particularly insightful when working with marginalized populations because they hold the possibility of producing counter-narratives (Mertens, 2014). In my study, I will employ the use of two semi-structured interviews to guide my conversations with my participants. Chilisa (2012) explains that, “the sequencing of questions is not the same for every participant as it depends on the process of the interview and answers from each individual participant” (p. 205). As such, semi-structured interviews take on a fluid nature and allow participants the opportunity to elaborate or address topics they see as important. During semi-structured interviews researchers use interview protocols to ensure that the information they are collecting is similar when interacting with more than one informant. Semi-structured interviews allow space for participants to be autonomous in their responses while still being guided by topics related to certain areas. This was beneficial to my study because I wanted to explore decisions

related to pedagogical practices and the roles they take in their teacher unions of Chicana teachers.

Procedures for semi-structured interviews

I conducted two semi-structured interviews for this project. They were based on different points and times during the study and were based on the available time of the participants. During the spring of 2018, I conducted the first interview with all of the participants between March and April. This interview was done to focus on the life histories of the participants. Some of the sample questions I asked were, “What do you remember about growing up? And Who do you remember about school when you were little?”. In the summer of 2018, I conducted a second interview that focused on the teaching trajectory of the participants. During this interview, I asked questions regarding their motivations for becoming bilingual teachers, their experiences in schools, and the reasons why they became members of TSTA. Examples of questions asked are located in (Appendix C).

Artifacts

Merriam (2009) justifies the use of artifacts as providing evidence to support other sources of data. Artifacts in qualitative research can include an array of different objects including photographs, documents, songs, poems, and audio recordings. The artifacts I collected were extensive and focused on documents used during school board meetings and association meetings, classroom work samples, photographs from community events and social media postings.

Procedures for Artifacts

During some of the interviews, the participants reflected on certain aspects of their

teaching, for example specific lessons they taught with their students. During these conversations, they shared pictures with me, I then collected these pictures, as examples of artifacts to use to help me further understand the stories and experiences that they were sharing. Examples of artifacts I gathered are listed in (Appendix D).

ANALYTIC PROCESS

Qualitative researchers employ a variety of techniques to increase trustworthiness when interpreting data (Mertler, 2009). For my study, I initially analyzed data from the various methods I employed (life-history, interviews, observations, and artifacts) separately through the process of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Some of the initial underpinnings I noticed were related to “similarities in childhood”, “activist efforts”, “identity construction”, “classroom practices”. I was witnessing these similarities occur while I was collecting and transcribing interviews and observations.

After this, I then engaged in analytic coding to reflect on the information found and categorize emerging themes. Some of the initial categories and themes were trauma, defending, protecting, and advocating. I started to see how these *maestras* were finding ways of articulating their experiences in their education careers. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain that analytical coding moves beyond open coding because researchers engage in the process of interpreting and reflection on their observations. During this time, researchers also draw on their own experience to help them interpret data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) elaborate by suggesting that “When we share a common culture with our research participants, and sometimes even if we don't share the same culture, we, as researchers, often have life experiences that are similar to those of our participants. It makes sense, then, to draw upon those experiences to obtain insight into what our participants are describing” (p.80). I used my previous experiences as a bilingual teacher and as a member

of the teachers' association allowed me to find patterns that appeared across different data sets. Some of the patterns were aggressions inside school, outside school, methods of protection, and support. I was then able to triangulate data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts to find multiple examples from the data to support emerging themes and their correlation to my research questions. For example, when describing a traumatic experience Sonia felt in school she described the techniques she used to support sustain herself including, friends, family, religious artifacts, and prayer. I was then able to see through the same sources of data collection that Maria drew from these same techniques to sustain herself too. Examining teachers at a micro level within a school district gave me the necessary data needed in order to explore the emergence of teacher activist identity through membership in a teacher union and it helped facilitate my findings through multiple sources.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

When analyzing qualitative research, it is important for researchers to do everything possible to ensure the validity and reliability of their findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe "trustworthiness" as the ability of researchers to ensure "credibility" within their finding. I have already described my process for analyzing data. To further my case for trustworthiness of my research I will now explain (1) member checking process, (2) rich, thick descriptions, and (3) my positionality as a researcher.

Member Checking

Throughout the process of collecting and analyzing data, I engaged in the process of "member checking" with my participants throughout my analysis of their life-histories, interviews, and my observations. Mertens (2009) notes that member checking can be done in formally or informally, they are important because they serve as a way to verify if

findings are accurate. To achieve this, I shared the transcriptions of the interviews I collected with Sonia, Maria, and Esmeralda. Together we looked at the transcriptions and made adjustments as necessary in order to give an accurate account of their feelings, stories, and memories.

Researcher Positionality & Reflexivity

It is imperative that as researchers, we consider our position, and acknowledge epistemic forms of knowledge (Mertens, 2009). To inform and guide my own research project taking time to reflect on my own educational trajectory helps to keeping me grounded while also making the intents I have in conducting research with Chicana teachers as transparent as possible.

Personal Trajectory: ¡Callate y nomas pon atención!

My mom was a working parent, and as a result, the rearing of my brothers and I became a family responsibility. This is the first memory that I have about my bilingualism, as a child. My great-aunt, *tía* Yaya, took on the commitment to co-parent with my mom. I was the middle child, and the only girl in the family. My two brothers, Michael and Manuel, had the luxury of going out to play while I was stuck inside. At the time, I remember being furious and engaging in heated debates with Yaya about the reasons why I, too, should be able to stay outside after dark and play; of course, these arguments were to no avail. As a result, we spent countless days together cooking, cleaning, and watching *novelas*. I remember as a young child, probably five or six, asking her about the *novelas*: “What are they saying?!” and “¡Quiero saber!” Her response to me was simple, direct, and to the point: “¡Cállate y nomas pon atención!” so having no other choice, I did. My greatest accomplishment as an eight-year-old was being able to go to the *panaderia*, about a block away from our house by myself to *recojer el mandado*. During my walk, I would

rehearse what I was going to ask for: “*Dos campechanas y un jelly donut por favor,*” and the sense of accomplishment I would feel when the little white bag was handed to me from the other side of the counter was exhilarating. From an early age, I engaged in conversations in Spanish and English with my family. As time progressed, I ended up living with Yaya permanently; as the youngest of ten brothers and sister, she sacrificed her life to take care of her parents and had no children of her own. I became a daughter to her.

My family’s history of their journey to Texas dates back to the early 1900s. The period of unrest in Mexico that began in the 1890s led to my great-great grandmother Juanita's decision to bring her family to the United States in search of a better life. As my great-grandma Manuela told the story, great-great grandma's husband had left one day in search of others who wanted to stand against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, and he never returned. Her oldest son, my great-uncle Miguel, was only twelve when one day he voiced a desire to want to do the same in the hopes of maybe finding his father. In 1908, just two years before the revolution began; she decided to leave Mexico with the assistance of a *crusadero* named Riojas. He helped her and her four children to the United States via Piedras Negras to Eagle Pass. She took on his last name, crossed as his wife, and kept the name. Even though in Mexico their last name had been Carrillo, they were raised with the last name of Riojas. She and her children worked the spinach and cotton farms from Eagle Pass over to Sinton and made their way to San Antonio, where they settled east of the downtown area; the area we still call home today. My great-grandmother Manuela, her sister Juanita, and my great-great-grandmother Juanita worked as maids in homes and took on washing and sewing jobs, while my great-uncles Mike and Filomeno eventually found jobs with the railroad. Because of the large Hispanic population in San Antonio, it was easy to continue to speak only Spanish in the home, in the neighborhood, and in stores as

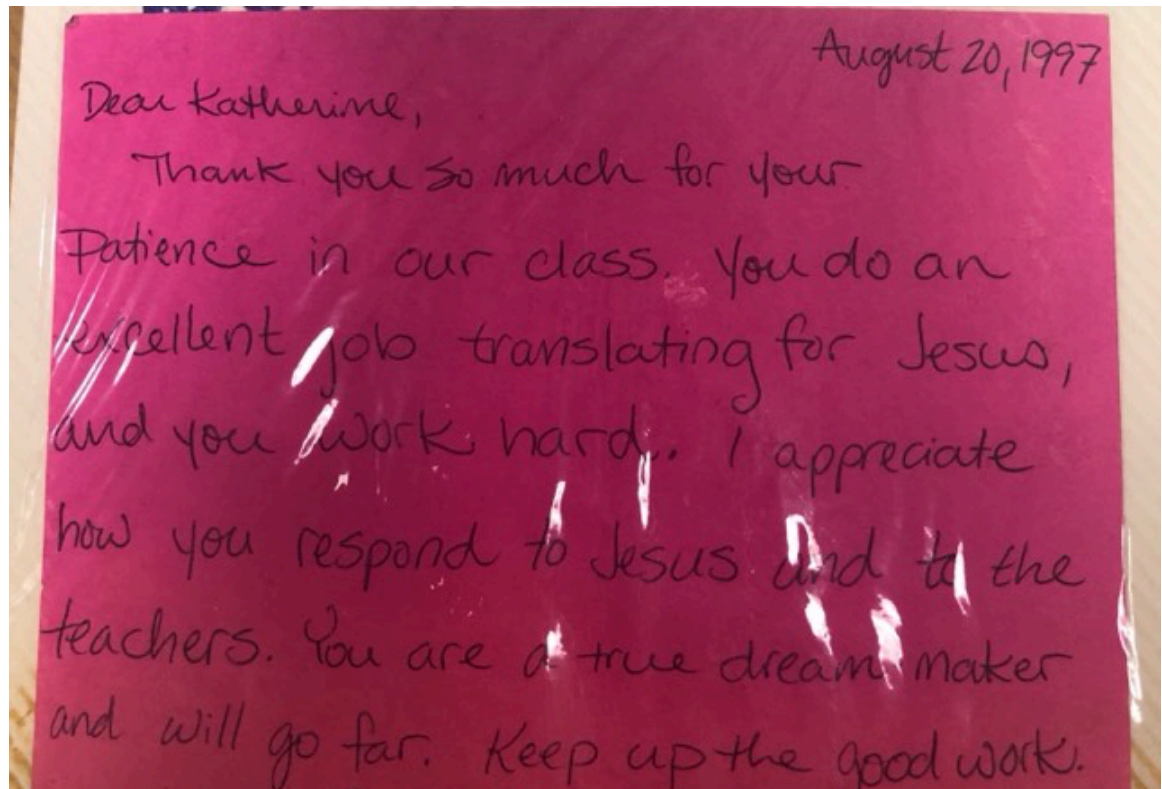
well. Where it was different was in the schools; in those days, it was actually frowned upon to speak Spanish. The ridicule, and harsh treatment of my grandmother and tía, along with the need to help provide for the family, caused them to leave school at an early age. As a result of this, education became a motivational tool instilled in me.

Growing up on the east side of San Antonio, I attended public schools. Although I was a bilingual child, I was never “labeled” bilingual. I was in English as a Second Language classroom. In elementary school, my teachers did not see me as smart. I was a struggling reader by the time I entered into third grade; I knew that I was not as smart as some of my peers. Taking the standardized test for the state that year, TAAS, further labeled me as a failing student in both reading and mathematics. I soon became the quiet, shy, and reserved little girl who was the complete opposite of her rambunctious and social older brother. However, I was drawn to the teaching profession at an early age. In fact, my fifth-grade memory book reveals two things about me: (1) my favorite movie was *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and (2) my dream in life was to become a teacher. In elementary school, I remember watching my teacher cut laminated papers and thinking to myself, someday I’m going to get to do that in my own classroom little did I know that teaching required so much more.

It was not until I went into middle school that the perceptions that teachers had of me began to change. In seventh grade, my math teacher, Mrs. Walsh, had us write down our goals for the year. I still have the piece of paper where I wrote: I want to pass the TAAS test. Her response to me was, “You will pass!” That same year we got a new student in our class who had recently come from Mexico. Mrs. Walsh asked if anyone spoke Spanish and could help her. During the entire year, I would listen carefully to Mrs. Walsh’s instructions and then I would translate it to my friend, Jesus. Mrs. Walsh was the first and

only teacher to tap into my bilingualism as a resource, and her positioning me as an expert that year completely change my academic track. At the end of my seventh-grade year, there was an awards ceremony; I took home thirteen academic trophies including Student of the Year. This was also the first year I passed the academic portion of the TAAS test. Throughout the years, I have stayed in contact with Mrs. Walsh; to this day, I do not think she truly knows the role that she played in saving me and setting me up for the future. I kept the letter Mrs. Walsh gave me that year and I included it below in figure 3.1. When I got this letter, I remember feeling proud to be bilingual. When I took the letter home Yaya put it in an album where she saved all of my information from school. With Mrs. Walsh's guidance, I was able to apply and I was accepted into a magnet program during high school.

Figure 3.1 Letter written by Mrs. Walsh



Although I still attended an inner-city school during high school, being part of the magnet program divided and tracked the students within our school. Those of us who were part of the magnet program wore different uniforms, ate at a separate time, and entered and exited the building through a different set of doors. The only interactions we had with students who were not part of the magnet program was during our extracurricular activities, in my case, band. During this time, I was able to see how many of my peers were not given the same opportunities to excel as I was. While I was being taken to hospitals for clinical rotations, I would hear stories of how they were subjected to copying items from a book. By sophomore year, several of the people I considered to be close friends were either pregnant or had already had encounters with the judicial system. As was the case for my older brother, who by this time had been in and out of the juvenile detention system at least

ten times. Seeing the pain on the faces of my mom, Yaya, and little brother when my brother messed up made me work harder and stay focused throughout school. When I would go out with some of my friends, Yaya's parting words to me would be *¡Vale mas que no te me salgas con tu domingo siete!* Loosely translated to mean, "Don't do anything that will get you in trouble." Her words of caution and wisdom shook me to my core enough that I went the entire time in high school without a boyfriend. When the topic of going to college came up, Yaya made it clear that her expectations were for me to stay in San Antonio, so I did.

Attending The University of Texas at San Antonio was probably the smartest decision I have ever made. I knew entering that I wanted to be a teacher, and meeting with an advisor about teacher shortages in areas such as bilingual education made my decision easy to follow, although I was a bit apprehensive about my academic abilities in Spanish. Through my undergraduate program, I had many opportunities to learn from Latina professors. During my foundational courses, we engaged in topics related to identity, agency, and sociopolitical factors that affect bilingual education. It was during these classes that I was able to engage with the reclaiming of my own identity and the coming to terms with and acceptance of myself. Being the only Iranian/Latina student in the class made me feel awkward and at times unfit (unworthy) of being a bilingual teacher. I would go home and talk to Yaya about what I was feeling and tell her that maybe I should just be a regular (monolingual) teacher and not a bilingual teacher, and she would tell me: "*¿Y por qué no?*, your Spanish is good." Her encouragement as well as my mom's helped me get through. My professors at UTSA also encouraged me and the others in my cohort to become strong *futuras maestras bilingües*. Engaging in projects such as language mapping, culturally relevant and social justice teachings, all prepared me to work with

bilingual bicultural students. Exposing the owned injustices that we experienced in our education allowed us to reclaim and author ourselves. The mentorship that I received from the professors I had in my undergraduate experience was extended even beyond graduation. In this journey, I learned about how the complexities of my own identity would also play a role in forming my identity as a future bilingual teacher (*maestra*). During this time, I struggled with the fundamental question of who I was because of my Persian and Latina background. On my graduation day, I still remember one of my professors embracing me and saying, “¡Y ahora, el Ph.D.!” At the time, I do not think I fully understood what she was saying, nor did I comprehend what the process to obtaining my Ph.D. would entail, but nonetheless she delivered a message and a task to me that I knew I wanted to accomplish.

In the years that ensued, I worked as a bilingual teacher in a suburban district in Texas. During this time, I was able to witness firsthand the injustices based on race and class that bilingual students, their families, and their teachers face. My commitment to my students is what led me to continue my own education. I obtained my master’s degree in bilingual education, also from UTSA. During this time, I would commute twice a week to San Antonio to continue learning from and with my professors from my undergraduate program. It was also during this time that I became involved in my local teachers’ association. The district that I work for had a strong presence and membership within one association. I admired the women who lead the organization at that time for their courage to stand up to district policies and bureaucratic practices and for their commitment to working in the best interest of teachers and students. Attending association meetings and seeing their activism on social media sparked my interest and curiosity to understand how

and why some educators become socially active in the best interest of their students, fellow teachers, and community.

My Positionality Statement

As a former bilingual teacher, being a member of a teacher union influenced my past and present experiences and molded my identity as a Chicana activist. Working in a district with an active teacher association shaped my professional development and my involvement with the community in which I taught. Hence, as an educational researcher I am committed to conducting research with Chicana activist *maestras*. I seek to highlight how other teachers interact within their own teacher unions because it is possible that their experiences will be somewhat similar to my own. After attending association meetings, school board meetings, and marches, I became more critically conscious of the institutionalized racism that profoundly impacted my daily practices and those of my fellow teachers. Including but not limited to, being subjected to rigid curriculum that would align to state standards that omits students of color and their cultural knowledge; the overt control of teachers and their lack of autonomy present in our teacher contracts; and the rigidity and political power held by members of campus as well as district administrators and school board members. The political nature of teaching and the struggle to continue to work to transform and break down these hegemonic structures is what motivates the Chicana teachers in my study to organize and form part of a teachers' association in a right-to-work state. Teacher activism in a right-to-work state has to be consciously assumed by an individual as it poses potential risks and consequences to those teachers who choose to take on the role of active members of a teachers' association.

Limitations

One limitation regarding the use of ethnographic research is how researchers gain or receive access into the communities they intend to explore. Other problems that can arise from being an outsider are related to barriers between researchers and communities including language and culture practices (Enslin, 1994; Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Ntseane, and Muhamad (2001) attributes one of the limitations of ethnographic to the epistemic privilege researchers possess. Researchers are often viewed as having higher positions than their subjects because of the construct of power relations found in our society. “The more one is like the participants in terms of culture, gender, race, socio-economic class and so on, the more it is assumed that access will be granted, meanings shared, and validity of findings assured” (Merriam et al., 2001, p.406). The participants in my study know me well; I worked alongside them for many years. However, removing myself from the classroom and no longer being a member of the union may cause some instances of disconnect.

A second limitation to this study deal with the methodological constraints. By choosing to highlight the experiences of Chicana bilingual activist *maestras*, the number of participants was reduced because not all bilingual educators identify as Chicana, and some choose not to identify as activist either. However, in future studies I could possibly choose to explore the differences between bilingual educators who identify as Chicana activist and those who do not to examine their similarities and differences.

CHAPTER 4: SOBREVIVENCIA: CHICANA EDUCATORS SURVIVING THE TRAUMA OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“Many times she wished to speak, to act to protest to challenge. The odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame”

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p.45).

Teachers, such as Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria who identify as Chicana activist, oftentimes feel ostracized and isolated. They experience bullying from peers and administrators because they choose to question procedures and authority. As a result, they in turn seek opportunities not only inside, but outside of the classroom to advocate for teachers, students, parents and their community. In the journal reflection below, I include a portion of Sonia’s written reflection on a traumatic experience she has with a previous principal. Her story provides us a glimpse into the hurt and emotional toll teacher bullying can have.

Sonia's Written *Testimonio* February 7, 2018

Now I can reflect and say that this was one of my largest growth spurts as a teacher leader. And now, I can say that I learned a lot about who I am and my tenacity. I had a principal think that I wasn't worthy of my dyslexia position and really she had a friend that she wanted to put there. I already had my training and a few years of experience and she just wanted to get me out. She basically harassed me by doing walkthroughs sometimes twice a day and several times a week. She would critique and pull my lesson plans, she arranged to sit in with the district person in charge to observe me for an entire day. She was trying to dominate me by breaking me down mentally. I knew that something was wrong, but I didn't want to think that she was doing this. It didn't make sense, I was a bilingual teacher and I had the experience. The other teacher was monolingual it just didn't make sense to me. She wasn't my evaluator and I had done my evaluation in October and had gotten great reviews from the assistant principal. I had great days when she wasn't there and when she was there I was physically sick sometimes. It was so hard I couldn't show any of that on campus. She was putting so much pressure critiquing everything, lesson plans, student set up and even my dress code. I would even doubt myself, I would ask the other teacher am I just a bad teacher and I just didn't know it. And the other teacher said no, it feels like she just like she has a personal beef with you. After that I really felt like I was constantly attacked. She didn't like that I was part of the union because I would speak at open forum at meetings and she said that it would draw negative attention to the school. The AP came to my room one day after school and said, What happened to you?, the principal said that I have to put you on a TINA plan (Teacher In Need of Assistance Plan). I said for what, and then he said I'm going to have to change your scores. Now I had trainings from the union and talking to the union and they told me you have to be able to prove harassment. He said we are going to talk about your post observation and I could tell that she had made changes. And I told him no, you are not going to do that you are my evaluator. There has never been any feedback. If I was going to be placed on a TINA then I should have gotten some type of feedback about my teaching. And we got up, went to her office, and told her that I wasn't going to sign it. I told her I don't trust you and you haven't given me any indication that I should. This is wrong, and I've done what you've asked me to do. So you need to fix that and change my evaluation back to what it was. I told her if she didn't fix it that I was going to contact my union. I remember praying so hard that night to God and to the *Virgen* to help me get through this. This was not the first time I prayed to her. I had her image with me in the classroom too, she was always there to protect me. I knew she would get me through this. So then, I left and the next day the AP told me that he wanted to meet with me. So she changed it back to the original, but then she gave me an option and asked me if I would go back to the classroom or get placed on a TINA for the next school year. So I moved to second grade and within a week of me having that meeting they ended up moving her to another campus.

Almost on a daily basis, Sonia was subjected to feeling as if she was being targeted by her administrators. The work of Burstein and Montaña (2011), depict the stark realities that public school activist educators encounter on a daily basis. They refer to the commitment and dedication teachers have to their profession makes them “*maestras dedicadas*” (p.38). In their depiction of Latina teachers who also struggle, they highlight the importance of these stories in assisting us with understanding the role that teacher unions play in providing public educators with assistance during tumultuous times during their careers. Anzaldúa (1987) provides us with tools for understanding these moments of trauma,

“Her first step is to take inventory. *Pero es difícil* differentiating between lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto. She puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women have been a part of” (p.82).

In this chapter, I explore the everyday interactions of Chicana bilingual activist teachers through their personal accounts and stories. I explore the ways the, in Anzaldúa (1987) fashion battle with understanding the traumatic experiences they encounter. I argue that the unique interactions and events that these teachers’ experience on a daily basis have motivated them to become active members in their teachers’ association. Flores (2011) research highlights that oftentimes Latina teachers become racialized token teachers in a white woman’s profession. In order to survive, Latina’s find ways of negotiating and networking within these constraints. In this case, these Chicana bilingual teachers have joined an association in which fellow Chicana activist educators with whom they can relate surround them.

The question guiding this chapter is, what does the collective knowledge of three Chicana bilingual activist members of a teacher union reveal about the stark realities of teachers in right-to-work states? I begin this chapter, by reviewing the three theories I draw from. I then move to the section *Comadres*, which is the understanding of the bonds of friendships these Chicana bilingual activist educators have formed. I provide examples of the various interactions in which these women have partaken in. I provide examples from various data sources to illustrate their experiences. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on how these experiences have impacted and changed the lives of these Chicana bilingual activist educators.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To guide my study, I drew from different theoretical frames: (1) LatCrit (Delgado, 1989, Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2002), (2) Postpositivist (Moya, 2002; Hames-Garcia, 2011) and (3) Identity (Mohanty, 1993; Moya, 2002; Hames-García, 2011, Urrieta 2010). In this section, I explain my reasoning for using these frameworks and I discuss how I used them in interpreting the lives of Chicana bilingual activist teachers.

I begin by drawing from LatCrit lens (Delgado, 1989, Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2002). By centering the stories of these Chicana bilingual activist educators, we are able to witness the ways their experiential knowledge of the teaching profession is aligned to their commitment to social justice. I use examples from their everyday lives in teaching to illustrate these concepts.

Postpositivist theorist, Moya (2000) argues that we must understand the space and location of individuals by examining their experiences and interactions in a sociopolitical

context. Further, Moya argues that our identities emerge from both political and epistemic realities we assume and that by understanding these interactions we can challenge the status quo. Moya describes individuals as *focalized objects*. She describes this as “*focalization* refers to the mediation (the prism, perspective, or angle of vision) through which a story is presented by a narrator in the text” (p.186). Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria are the “focalizers”, we learn about the daily lives of activist *maestras* through their lived experiences.

By examining the intersections of race, class, and gender of these Chicana bilingual activist educators, I uncover the ways in which they organize collectively as a group. I use the concept of self-authorship established by Holland et al. (1998) to examine the ways in which the identities of these educators are alive and lived throughout their experiences in their schools and in their teachers’ association. I discuss how based on their different experiences the teachers in my study constantly struggled with their identities as educators because of the hardships they endured.

THE PERSONAL FILE

While working in schools the Chicana bilingual teachers in this study encountered moments where they felt harassment from their supervisors. Many times, as a result, they faced retaliation in different forms including reassignment, public humiliation, and hostility from their peers and administrators. The excerpt below shows a portion of an interview with Sonia.

Sonia: So then, I learned that you have a campus file and a district file and it was the first week of school and I was already getting walkthroughs. By the first month, I had at least two per week.

KE: Like the principal was going into your room that often at the beginning of the year?

Sonia: Yes, it was crazy. I would ask the people next to me if they had gotten walkthroughs and they would say no. I was getting really annoyed.

KE: So what happened?

Sonia: It just so happened that I facilitated that meeting and I helped the new principal translate for parents. The next day he sent me an email that he wanted to meet with me after school.

KE: And what happened at the meeting?

Sonia: I was nervous; I got that same ugly feeling in my stomach. I thought I had done something wrong. I met with him and he took out a memorandum that said that I was an instigator that I defied authority and I created a hostile environment for administrators and that I caused trouble. She had an entire personal file of notes she had written against me. She even wrote that I took an excessive amount of time off when my dad died. He asked if I had ever seen it and I said no, and umm my feelings were hurt I had such a bad year that year. I told him that I was there for kids and he was very receptive to that and we were fine. I never had any issues with him. Everything was ok. He knew that she had those issues with just me. She had done things to sabotage me.

KE: How did this make you feel?

Sonia: This is when I really realized that this was a personal attack on me as a teacher and that made me want to protect people even more than I already do. I couldn't believe she wrote that I took too much time off when my dad died, I was in disbelief and total shock.

In this portion of the interview transcript, Sonia realizes that she has been personally attacked. Although others had told her that her previous principal had something against her, she never wanted to believe it was true. Through this meeting with her new administrator, Sonia describes the anguish she felt as a result of the yearlong harassment she felt with her previous principal by creating a memorandum in a personal file Sonia did not know existed. As Sonia is telling me the story about her principal, I can see she is visibly shaken. In the beginning she seems hesitant to share, I tell her if she does not want to talk about it right now, she can choose not to. Her eyes begin to water, she is clenching her fist. We had music playing in the background, but about a minute into her story, she turns the music off. Prieto and Villenas (2012) document the struggles between Chicana/Latina educators encounter in predominantly white institutions of higher learning, such as universities. Similarly, Sonia's story depicts the tensions she feels in an elementary school when she had a white administrator. In the excerpt from her *testimonio* at the beginning of this chapter Sonia shows us the internal struggles she feels. She does not understand how her principal could possibly want a monolingual English teacher to fill her position.

In the above interview, Sonia conveys how she felt when she finally came to the realization that she had been targeted by her previous principal. Anzaldúa (1987) refers to this as an internal struggle and battle individuals have distinguishing between “*lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto*” (p.82). Through her own words, we see how she battles

internally with understanding that her previous principal had targeted her. She says, “She had an entire personal file of notes she had written against me”. Sonia also describes her disbelief in her written *testimonio* when she wrote, “I would even doubt myself, I would ask the other teacher am I just a bad teacher and I just didn’t know it. And the other teacher said no, it feels like she just like she has a personal beef with you”. Although Sonia shows how visibly shaken this entire experience has left her, she demonstrates her commitment to help fellow educators who might be in the same position as she once was. Urrieta (2003) describes how through experiences with trauma identities manifest,

“Identity for anyone does not come in a unisex one-size-fits-all way. It is more profound; it is physical and psychologically painful and emotional, and not just as an analytical and academic intellectual analysis. It is not an attempt at yet another metanarrative for a culture or a story line to present, or the fulfillment of a stereotype or an expectation for a labeled being. It is many stories, not just political strategizing, but human pain and sometimes death” (p.165).

Sonia’s *testimonio* illustrates multiple stories; we learn not only about the persistent harassment she felt by her administrator, but also about the loss of her father. In her interview, she says, “. I couldn’t believe she wrote that I took too much time off when my dad died, I was in disbelief and total shock”. Sonia allows us to experience the pain she felt during this time of her life. As a result of this experience, Sonia’s sense of awareness in regards to teacher targeting was heightened. She says, “This is when I really realized that this was a personal attack on me as a teacher and that made me want to protect people even more than I already do”. Living through this experience required Sonia to develop *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa (2002) explains that individuals develop *conocimiento* through their testimonies when they allow their mind, body and spirit to heal. Pérez Huber and

Cueva (2012) explain that through testimonies we learn personal experiences from individuals in which they experience “a sense of academic self-doubt; they questioned their own abilities” (p.398). The principal initially made Sonia doubt her abilities as an educator, but by enduring the bullying from her administrator Sonia’s commitment to other teachers going through similar situations was strengthened.

The excerpt at the beginning of the chapter from a *testimonio* reflection Sonia wrote about the traumatic experience with her previous principal also provides us with the important role spirituality plays in her life. “Testimonial writing, as the word indicates, promotes expression of personal experience” (Yúdice, 1991, p.26). An additional portion of the *testimonio* written by Sonia is provided below.

I remember praying so hard that night to God and to the *Virgen* to help me get through this. This was not the first time I prayed to her. I had her image with me in the classroom too; she was always there to protect me. I knew she would get me through this.

Through her writing, we see the important role of *La Virgen* de Guadalupe in the life of Sonia. She describes how her faith in *La Virgen* provided her with the faith she needed to sustain her throughout tumultuous times in her teaching. Castillo (2014) explains this devotion and faith to *La Virgen* as a tool for sustainability. She writes,

“ But she is not divine. She is mediator for her followers. It is through God’s doing that she performs miracles and answers our prayers. We, her devotees, sometimes forget the protocol. We are drawn to her because she, unlike God, takes human form and is the ultimate figure of unconditional human love and protection: mother” (p. 171).

Sonia describes how she felt she was protected and that *La Virgen* interceded for her and

granted her request. She also reveals that praying was something she did on a regular basis to help her cope with the stress she was encountering as an activist *maestra*. In addition to writing about *La Virgen*, Sonia and Maria also shared pictures during a conversation at a board meeting with me about how they have religious artifacts present in their classrooms. These pictures are below in figures 4.1 and 4.2.

Figure 4.1 Picture of cross and drawings from share by Sonia



Figure 4.2 Picture of cross shared by Maria



Before the board meeting Sonia and Maria are talking. Maria talks about how one of her students drew a picture of her of *La Virgencita*. She talks to Sonia and says that she showed the picture to another one of her team members and that the team member told her “That’s too religious”.

Sonia asked Maria what she did and Maria told her that she stapled the picture next to the cross in her room. She said that the next day another student drew another picture of *La Virgencita* for her too and that she placed it next to the other one. Sonia tells her that she has a cross up in her classroom too that a student gave her as a gift at the end of the year.

I then ask them why they put these things up in their classroom and they both respond simultaneously “for protection”.

I then asked them to explain what they meant by “for protection” and Sonia say for our students, to help us make it through everything. Maria adds that students like to see those types of things (religious symbols), and that she remembers her kids would bring in small religious objects for good luck and protection when they took the STAAR.

I asked her what types of objects and she tells me they bring in Rosary’s to put on their desk and hold during the test.

I then ask them if they can share the pictures with me of these objects.

Fieldnote August, 12, 2018

I included the fieldnote describing the conversation I heard between Sonia and Maria to provide another example of how their spirituality transcends the figurative border of the classroom. When one of Maria’s fellow teachers tells her “That’s too religious”, she decided to place the picture where all students in the classroom and anyone who enters her room can clearly see it, she is not afraid. Maria adds to the conversation by stating, “Students like to see those types of things”. By those types of things, she is referring to religious objects that students who come from her same cultural and religious background understand the importance and symbolic representation of *La Virgen*. Similar to the *testimonio* in her written reflection, Sonia and Maria describe how they use these religious artifacts as representations of protection for themselves and their students. Maria goes on

to describe how her students' also use religious images during stressful times to help them, she mentions that her students have brought in Rosary's to the classroom. Specifically, she mentions them bringing these types of images in during state standardized test like STAAR to help them cope with stress and test anxiety. Artifacts are "mediators of human identities and actions" (Urrieta, 2007, p. 110). The religious artifacts displayed by Sonia, Maria, and Esmeralda are an example of not only their religious affiliation, but also the representation of an image of protection.

Sonia's experiences describe how elementary schools also function under structures of hegemonic whiteness. In order to protect themselves, the Chicana bilingual activist teachers discuss how they would often times turn to their local association for guidance, support and professional backing. Below is a portion from a journal entry from Maria, where she reflects on how the teachers' association helped her during a difficult time in her teaching career:

From the very beginning, I would always call them for advice. When I felt like the principal was harassing me, I called the union. I filed a grievance, you have to be strong you have to have the courage to stand up for what you believe in and not let them intimidate me. That principal even sent the superintendent to meet with me, but I told them I wouldn't meet without a union representative. When the union came with me they told me do not be afraid if anything you will open the door for others not to be afraid and share their story and speak up. My principal wanted to reassign me, but they cannot do that out of retaliation. I spoke up at a faculty meeting and it really upset her. There is power in unity because when you advocate together, they listen to you. I have always counted on my parents and I think that has been my biggest support. Even right now the principal knows that I'm too loved to be messed with.

Maria, August 13, 2018

Maria describes how she was able to count on the union to support her with legal advice

during her meetings. She writes, “That principal even sent the superintendent to meet with me, but I told them I wouldn’t meet without a union representative”. Through her writing, we can see how Maria viewed the union as a way to defend herself when she felt like her administrator and even the superintendent was harassing her. When she describes how she had to advocate for herself against her administration in the school who had more power initially than she did. Maria also discusses how when teachers unite they form a more powerful voice; she describes this as power in unity, she writes, “There is power in unity because when you advocate together, they listen to you.” Maria argues that when teachers advocate together they have to be listened to. Through the example provided by Maria, we can see how the teachers’ union has also helped other teachers and recognizes that there is a possibility that other teachers are dealing with the same issues. Nationally we have witnessed how unions are able to help teachers with their rights through examples of teacher strike.

Recently, in January 2019 the teachers of Los Angeles Unified School district collectively came together to strike. According to the Los Angeles Times, over 32,000 teachers and staff united in the strike over crowded classrooms, funding, and charter schools (Kohli, 2019). What makes Maria’s and the other women in this project particularly interesting is that they are in a right-to-work state where they do not have the right to strike. However, in the above excerpt Maria acknowledges that even still, teachers do have collective autonomy and together they can still form a powerful voice. Maria also describes the importance of fostering relationships with the parents of the students in her classroom. She presents them as allies for her in the education system. This in turn places bilingual parents in a position of power, one that they typically do not assume. The work of Delgado-Gaitan (1991), Valdés (1996), Delgado Bernal (2002), Valencia (2002) and Moreno and

Valencia (2002) has shown that Latin@ families in relation to schools in the United States are oftentimes marginalized and their involvement in school is minimal and their interactions with schools do not align with traditional notions of parental involvement. By forging these bonds with her parents, Maria positions her parents as powerful stakeholders in not only their children's education, but as powerful allies of her own.

PROTECTING THEMSELVES & OTHERS

In both their experiences Sonia and Maria discuss how they have relied on their teachers' association for leverage during difficult times in their teacher profession. They both describe how the teachers' association has protected them from administrators and district staff whose intent was to intimidate them. Sonia specifically discusses at the end of her first interview how she sought protection from TSTA and how she intends to make sure other educators know how to protect and advocate for themselves. Social media has provided an outlet for many organizations to network and keep their members connected. The members of Green ISD TSTA all have access to their local association's Facebook page, which is depicted below in, figure 5.1. While looking on the social media page for the districts union, I came across this post from October 2018, and saw that it was a training event that was provided to the teachers from not only this district but from surrounding areas as well. I asked Sonia about the training. She told me there were over 80 teachers who attended. I was shocked because the training was on a Saturday. Sonia mentioned that they provide this training every year to teachers because the teachers request it when they fill out their surveys at the beginning of the year. I asked her why she thought that teachers that were so interested in the union were always interested in this particular training. Specifically, she said, this is how we protect ourselves; we have to know the

system. So that when they come after us, we are informed and know what to do.

Figure 4.3 Picture of online post from Facebook



The examples of what Sonia and Maria endured with their previous administrators and principals illustrate how Chicana bilingual teachers who identify as activist are targeted and harassed by those in positions of power. We see how they have overcome such obstacles in their teaching career and how instead of allowing these individuals to take control over them, they instead choose to advocate for themselves. They also relate how they share their knowledge based on their experiences with other teachers through trainings. Sonia and Maria express that many teachers do not know that there are rules and rights for teachers. They mention issues such as, time allotted for planning and prep, how to remove disruptive students (severe behavior issues), and the process of how to advocate for yourself on T-TESS and how to document your goals and how to do a rebuttal or ask

for another evaluation. They describe how they conduct monthly meetings and socials to recruit new members and educate all members about changes or issues within the district and education in general.

COLLECTIVELY ORGANIZING

Bartolomé (2004) and Freire (1998a, 1998b, 2000) have described teaching as a political act. They encourage educators to take on and embrace their political power as educators, and that through our interaction as teachers in the classroom and in our communities, we are transmitting messages to our students, their parents and communities. The Chicana bilingual teachers in my study understand the importance of organizing collectively to advocate for educational goals. They understand how schools and politics intersect and how their activism moves from one collective space to another. Below is a portion of a *testimonio* written by Esmeralda:

Esmeralda's Written *Testimonio* September 21, 2018

When I was organizing the rally for Red for Ed, I wanted to make it a family friendly event. In addition, I had asked one of the middle school mariachi groups to come play and he didn't want to. "Oh no we can't that's political we are going to get in trouble I can't." I remember I was overwhelmed with stress it was supposed to be all of the surrounding districts coming too. I was trying to get people to make signs, super overwhelming. Then getting push back from teachers – it's too political. I just couldn't believe so many people did not want to get involved.

In this piece, Esmeralda reflects back on a time when she was organizing an event for her local teachers' association. She describes how some educators view teachers' association as being political and are afraid to be associated with them. Esmeralda has since left the teaching profession and now serves as a member of the local school board. In the example

below, she describes what occurred after one of her candidate forums in an interview:

Esmeralda: Then I had a candidate forum and then afterwards I spoke to a Hispanic man; you were so great, but you came across too passionate. Your voice was too loud, you sounded way too aggressive.

KE: What did you tell him?

Esmeralda: That pissed me off to no end, you're too passionate. If you're a woman you're speaking confidently and you truly believe in your message and it's done in a demeaning way. I was talking about real things; the stuff teachers deal with on a daily basis that the public doesn't know about.

KE: What do you mean by demeaning? And what stuff that they don't know about?

Esmeralda: How he was saying I was too passionate. He even touched me on my shoulder, like he was trying to calm me down. Like I need a man to do that for me. And you know, like big classes, all the paperwork we have to do, the never-ending meetings, all the red tape we have to deal with on a daily basis.

KE: What did you do?

Esmeralda: I remember I had to take a deep breath and compose myself. I told him I would think you would want someone who is too passionate and has lived their life for public education representing you, students and teachers on the

school board.

KE: Did he say anything else to you after that?

Esmeralda: Not really, you see though, there's that double standard even at the local level. Even totally worse because you see people who know you on a personal level and perpetuate that myth. Women can't be too passionate because we seem like we are crazy or something, I don't know. I don't understand it.

KE: So how did you go on to win the election?

Esmeralda: Thank goodness for my people, you know everyone in the association. They endorsed me and got other people to vote for me. You know, we block walked together, talked to teachers, community members, we got people on our side. I would not have been elected if it hadn't been for everyone from the association helping me out. That's why I work so hard to do right by them.

The above selection illustrates the political climate of the community in which Esmeralda lives. Although she is no longer in the classroom, Esmeralda still takes her commitment to public education, students and teachers very seriously as a school board member. The experiences she encountered during her campaign for the local school board demonstrate how members of the community saw her as deviant. Past research has depicted how women of color are often times viewed as loud and deviant because of their voices and the ways they engage in conversation (Fordham, 1993; Cordova, 1998; Villenas, 2010). The seminal work of Anzaldúa (1987) speaks to the ongoing tensions Latina women encounter

on a daily basis, to be submissive or strong-willed. Anzaldúa writes: “Which was it to be strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming” (1987, p. 18). In Esmeralda’s encounter with a man at her public forum speech, the man subjects her to the positioning as defiant. The man says to Esmeralda “Your voice was too loud, you sounded way too aggressive”. Castillo (2014) explains that like the exchange that Esmeralda had Chicana woman are labeled by society as being “*macha*”. In the past, the label *macha* was meant to be derogatory and referred to a woman trying to “do” man” (Castillo, 2014, p.111). In this example, Esmeralda describes how she has moved away from the performance of being a girl or woman, she illustrates how by being “too loud, and way too aggressive” she was instead manifesting what she considers her true self. I agree with what Castillo (2014) presents as a woman with “*ánimo*”,

“When she moves away from the performances of being girl, doing girl, resisting girl, and subverting girl, the “concentricized” woman with *ánimo* works at becoming woman. Until she defines herself on her own terms, we have yet to know her” (p.111-112).

When Sonia unapologetically identifies herself as being loud and passionate she reveals herself to be a woman with “*ánimo*”. Through reflecting on this experience, Esmeralda reveals her understanding of the role that the members in the teachers’ association took in her successful campaign for school board at a local level.

The previous example shows how Esmeralda was able to capitalize on her relationship with members of the teachers’ association to assist her in her campaign for school board member at a local level. However, there are also examples of how the teachers’ association chooses to educate and endorse candidates at state levels and in political endeavors in general. Below are two artifacts taken from the local association

page that deals with political campaigns: Figure 4.2 is an example of a post from the Facebook page during the midterm elections of 2018. The local TSTA page posted several post surrounding candidates and voting which are shown below in figure 4.2 and 4.3. I asked Sonia why they posted so many images about the elections if they were not local elections. She seemed to get frustrated with me when she responded. She told me that it had to do with the bigger picture and getting teachers informed about who to vote for and why. She also talked about Beto's campaign; how we are experiencing such an exciting time right now, and that even though he lost, it was still a big win for Latin@s. Specifically, figure 4.4 shows how the O'Rourke campaign appealed to teachers by addressing the continuous debate on teacher compensation. This post was originally posted on O'Rourke's campaign Facebook page, but were then also shared on the Green ISD TSTA Facebook page by Sonia.

Figure 4.4 Facebook post regarding Beto O'Rourke's stance on education

Name of organization ...



Beto O'Rourke
September 18 · 🌐

👍 Like Page

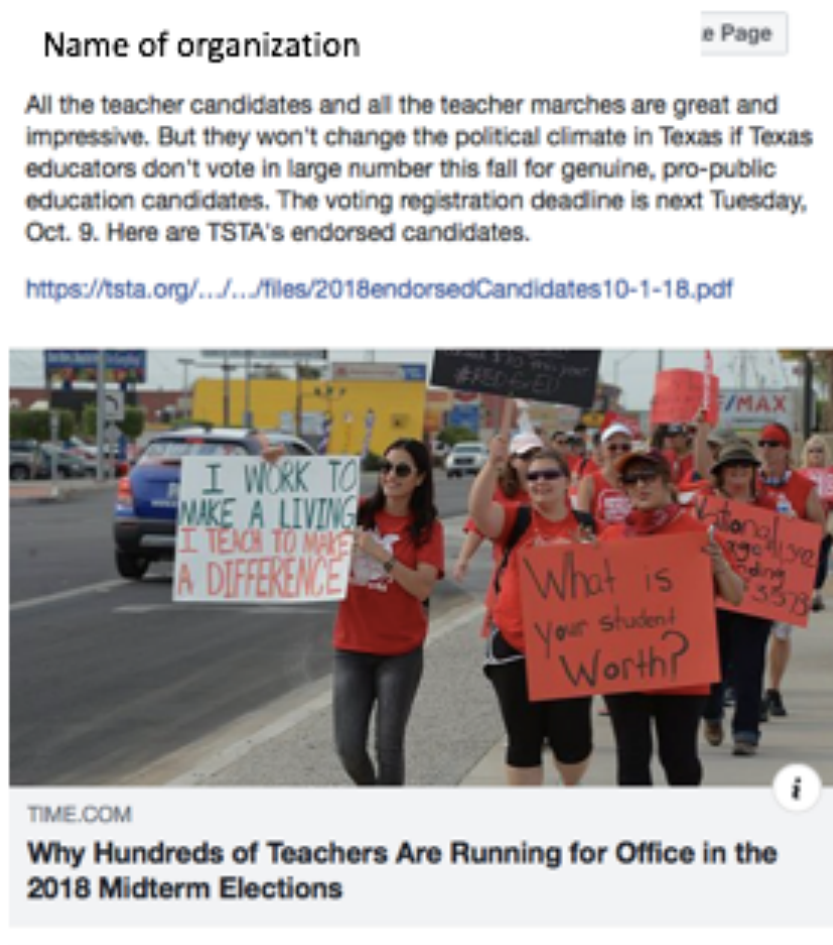
4 in 10 Texas school teachers have to take a job outside the classroom during the school year to meet family expenses. Considering everything they do for our kids, let's finally start paying teachers a living wage.



TPR.ORG👤

Is Texas Taking Care of Its Teachers?
About 40 percent of Texas teachers expect to take on other jobs...

Figure 4.5 Facebook post depicting a march during a teacher strike



The majority of endorsement from political campaigns for teachers' associations are aligned to issues impacting blue-collar workers. Teacher union history reveals that issues mostly surrounded issues related to wages, teaching conditions, and educational reform (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006; Hargreaves, 2009; Rousmaniere, 2005). Figure 4.4 provides an example of the financial burdens public educators in Texas face regarding their wages. By positioning himself as a teacher ally, Beto O'Rourke gained the support and endorsement of public school educators because he appealed to teacher's needs. Via social

media, he was able to highlight parts of his debates and the stance he took on specific issues that affected teachers. In the example provided by the TSTA Green ISD post, we see how the O'Rourke campaign addressed teacher compensation. His Facebook post copied by TSTA Green ISD pinpointed the issue regarding teacher pay, and he appealed to teachers by acknowledging that Texas falls short when compensating teachers for the work that they do. As a result, Beto O'Rourke was formally endorsed by TSTA on a state level. Figure 4.5 also depicts how the local association chooses to transmit information regarding voting to local members. Although the image depicts a teachers' march, the actual post was written to inform members about upcoming deadlines for voting regulations.

As Green ISD has continued to grow in size, reaching members through different mediums has recently become a primary focus for the association. During an interview, Sonia describes how the association uses social media for endorsement of candidates:

KE: So how do you stay in contact with members who don't work at your school?

Sonia: A few years ago, we started using Facebook and it has worked really well for members. You know sometimes the last thing teachers want to do is go to another meeting after school so we use Facebook to keep everyone informed.

KE: What else can you do with Facebook in terms of the teachers' association?

Sonia: The main thing we use social media for is to endorse candidates. People are aware of the fact that we are involved in the community.

KE: How does this work?

Sonia: There is a process in place to seek endorsement. With that endorsement, we support local candidates who are running for school board. We vet candidates through interviews to see if their educational philosophy aligns with what the union's mission is. We hold public forums where candidates are questioned about the district and their involvement and what they know about school board policies, finance, and our local community and schools. We ask questions about school budget, programs such as dual language, bilingual education, advanced placement courses, athletics. During these events the entire community is invited to get the teacher perspective and so that the community at large gets to know the candidate.

KE: What else do you do for candidates?

Sonia: When we endorse a candidate, we block walk with them, we do phone banks and produce mailers and flyers for them working off a voter's registration list. We target specific neighborhoods and individuals to solicit their votes.

KE: How does Facebook help with this process?

Sonia: We post so much on there and it's open to the public so they see everything. We also make public appearances with them, for example at school fundraisers, PTA meetings, and booster events. We post all of those events online. We also hold public forum meetings where candidates' debate.

Thanks to Facebook we are able to livestream the videos where members and community members can view them if they cannot attend. Most importantly, we also make sure people know where to vote and who to vote for through Facebook.

Figure 4.6 Facebook post information on voting ballots and voting locations



Sonia provides a description of what the vetting process looks like when the local association endorses a candidate. Figure 4.6 shows the commitment they take in ensuring association members know who to vote for both at local and state levels. Through their engagement in political campaigns, Sonia and Esmeralda demonstrate the intersections between teaching and politics. Using social media, such as Facebook, has allowed the teachers' association in Green ISD to keep members and people in their community

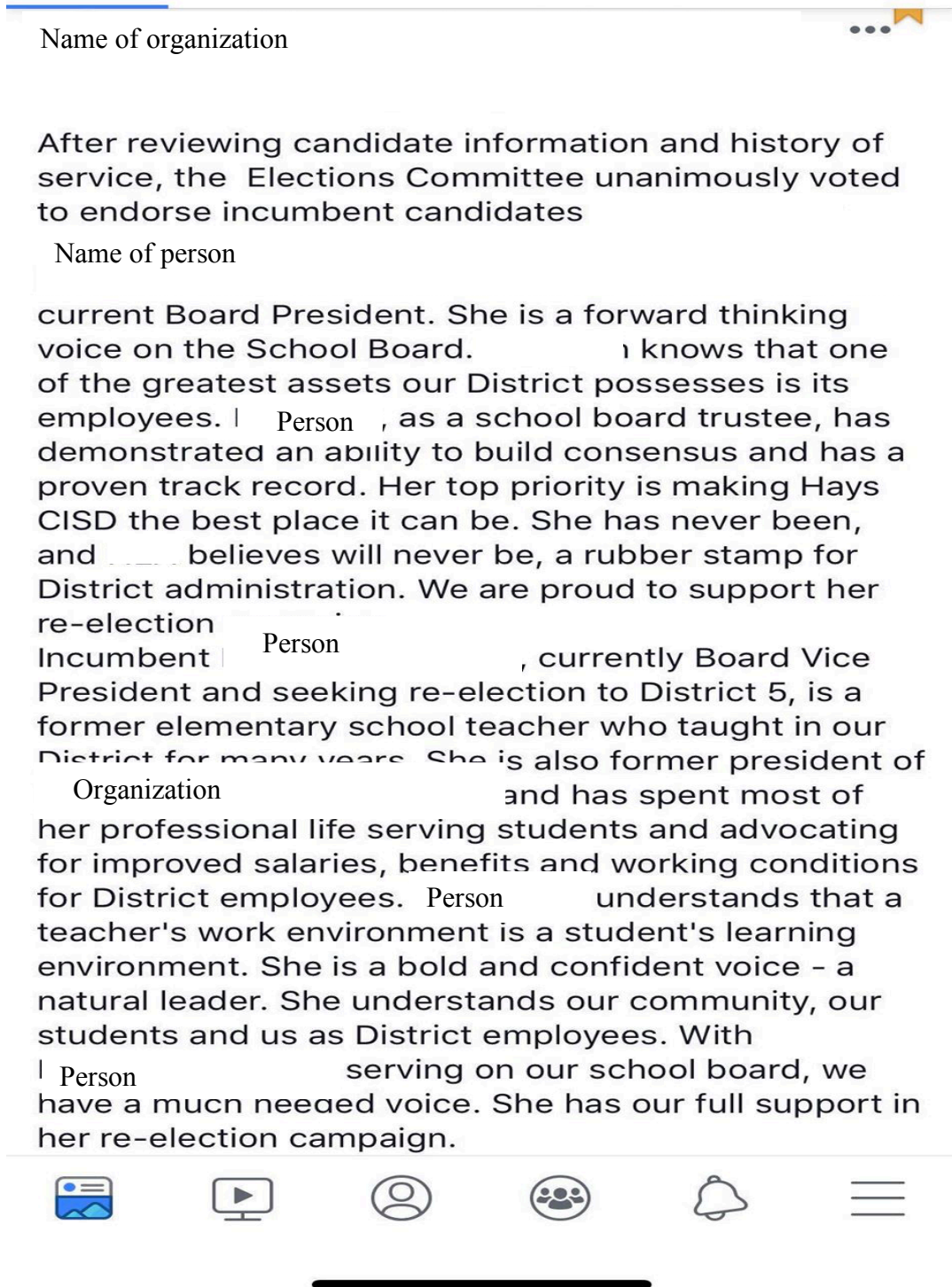
involved in what is happening within the association and up to date on important information regarding elections. Outreach via social media has helped Sonia reach fellow members of Green TSTA, teachers, and individuals from the community. Below in figure 4.7 is an example of the amount of people who were able to access a video of a live streamed candidate forum for Green ISD.

Figure 4.7 Facebook post of livestream from a candidate forum



As you can see in figure 4.7 over four hundred individuals were able to watch the response to potential candidates for Green ISD school board. The question posed was, “In your view what is an appropriate starting salary for a novice teacher and what is an appropriate salary for a teacher with thirty years of experience?” This question is reflective of concerns teachers have regarding years of service and compensation. By live streaming the videos, the TSTA association of Green ISD appealed to a larger audience. Individuals were able to watch the responses from candidates at their leisure. The post indicates that over six hundred people watched the response to this particular question. Sonia and the teachers’ association wisely embraced social media, capitalizing on its ability to make them to widely visible and amplify their voice. Recent research reflects that many young people now turn to social media in order to inform their political decisions. (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018; Boulianne, 2016, Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014). A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that 62% of adults in the U.S. turn to social media to get their daily news (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). Sonia describes how she uses Facebook as a platform to endorse candidates. She writes about she views the social media outlet as a space where she can convey messages of truth. She expresses, “We post so much on there and it’s open to the public so they see everything”. Below in figure 4.8 is a post Sonia posted on Facebook where Green ISD TSTA endorsed Esmeralda as a candidate for their local school board.

Figure 4.8 Facebook post endorsing school board candidate



Green ISD TSTA demonstrated their support for candidates by endorsing them publicly via social media. Figure 4.8 provides a description of the qualities possessed by the candidates they selected. The second endorsement is Esmeralda, Green ISD TSTA endorsed her on based on her previous experience and her reputation with current teachers and members of the association. Explicitly, the post states, “She is a bold and confident voice –a natural leader. She understands our community, or students and us as district employees”. In Esmeralda, the teachers’ association perceive a voice for themselves in which they feel they are being well represented and protected on the school board.

POWER IN NUMBERS

The Chicana bilingual teachers in this study realize that the union provides leverage for them as teachers. In turn, they find ways of advocating for themselves by increasing recruitment efforts, interacting with district officials through their union roles, and honoring labor union history. In a reflection piece, Esmeralda describes how she filed grievances at a district level. She wrote:

Esmeralda's Written *Testimonio* September 8, 2018

One of the bravest things I did as an active president of the local association was file grievances. One year we did it for technology. They were trying to make teachers adhere to different levels of technology and they were tied to deadlines and you had to do it on a timeline. It would require teachers to finish online trainings during Christmas break, which was completely unfair. So the outcome was the day that we came back from break; it became the technology day. This was a big win for the association and the members were pleased with the outcome. Another grievance I filed was regarding compensation and how our district had the least paid employee's from several surrounding districts. The union actually helped me create a presentation for the board meeting and they even presented alongside me. We were trying to get it on the board members agenda. And the president of the board said that he would give it to us during the open forum. We did our presentation and when I was speaking the president started cutting me off. And I was like wait you told me you would give me the time. So then I put the superintendent salary on there and out of all of them in Texas he was in the top and the teachers were at the bottom. That was the first time the board started to take us seriously. We were able to raise the paraprofessional salary and the teacher salary. And we got a bilingual stipend. All employees got an increase in salary. After this happened we went from about 100 members to over 300 members. Several of the teachers were happy because we were keeping them informed and because we were the only organization that spoke up for them. After this, TSTA was the largest association in the school district and it still continues to be. As a board member now I still see how active the association is and how they still advocate tirelessly for kids, teachers, and district employees. One of the perks of being the president of the association is that I was privileged enough to get a private meeting with the superintendent every month. During these meetings, I would get the chance to speak to him and bring up concerns regarding employee rights, curriculum and instruction, testing, and district wide initiatives. Being part of the teachers' association is a very important part of my life, I see it as part of my legacy and what I will leave behind when I am no longer a part of the district. As a member and especially as president I have had access to so many opportunities to help the district, students and especially teachers.

Similar to Rottman's (2012) findings on the benefits of teacher unions providing leverage though the number of active members, Esmeralda's entry demonstrates how

through filing formal grievances the association was able to actively change things within the district. By advocating for an increase in pay and fair exchange for work, Esmeralda was able to gain the attention of non-association members and recruit them. Esmeralda attributes the growth from one hundred to over three hundred members because Green TSTA was able to actively show teachers that they were able to produce change locally within the district. Picower (2012) and Rottman (2012) both unpack how teacher unions focus on changing things within their districts when they felt that issues were related to inequalities regarding quality of education, and issues impacting the daily lives of teachers including: compensation, work duties, and hours. They demonstrate how teacher union members come together collectively to bargain at district and state levels. What makes the teachers' association in Green ISD unique is that, as Texas is a right-to-work state they do not have the access to bargaining rights. However, individuals like Esmeralda and Sonia still understand the value of collectively organizing through grassroots efforts within their local district. They understand through the epistemic privilege they have gained as union members they can achieve change by showing school board members and district administration that there is power in numbers. Similar to Esmeralda's reflection on the advantages of being an association member, Sonia also showed how she enacted the power that comes along with being a visible and active association member.

This past year on Labor Day Sonia posted figure 4.9 and 4.10 on the teachers' association Facebook page.

Figure 4.9 Facebook Labor Day post

Name of organization ...

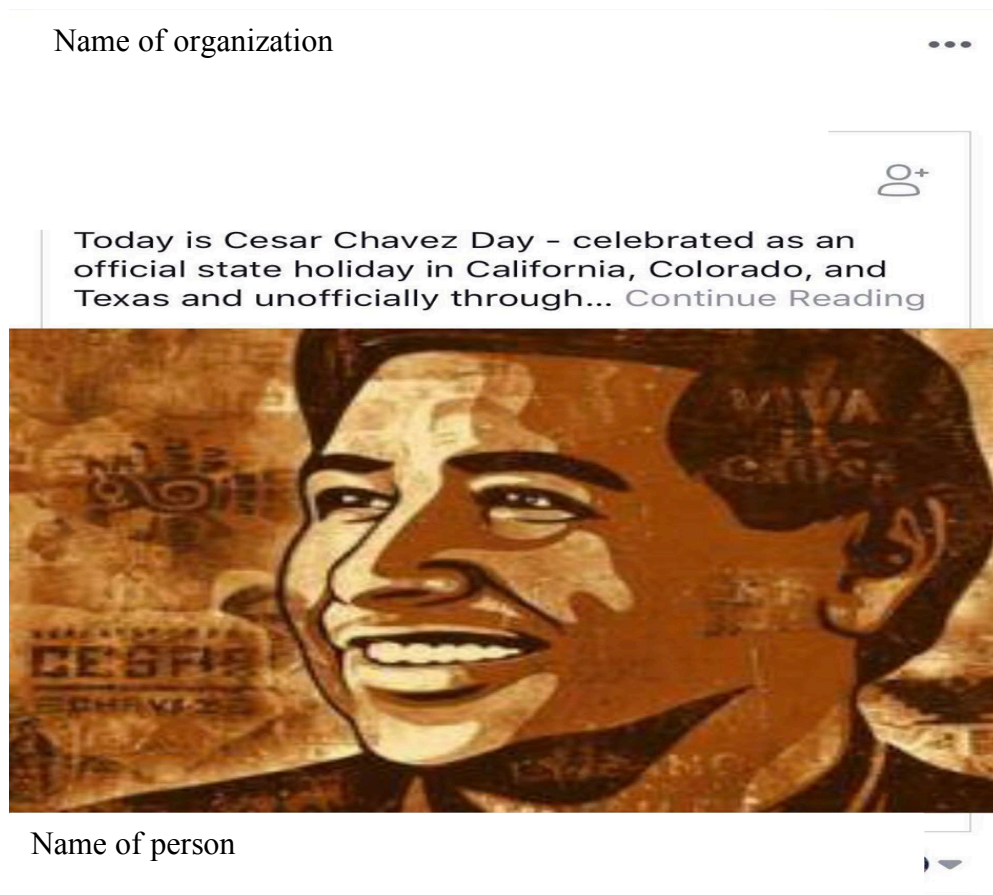
Wishing a well earned day off.

Unions built that.

Happy Labor Day from the folks
who brought you the weekend and so much more.

A message from United Food & Commercial Workers, UFCW 8-Golden State
UFCWS.ORG | Facebook.com/UFCWS

Figure 4.10 Facebook Labor Day post



Labor union history dates back to 1866 when the National Labor Union was created to promote greater safety and to increase wages for blue-collar workers. The picture Sonia posted on Facebook depicts the central values on which labor unions were established. During a follow-up interview, I asked Sonia to explain what the picture in figure 4.9 meant to her:

KE: So why did you post a Union picture and César Chávez on Labor Day?

Sonia: To remind people what the union did for them, and what it continues to strive for today. And who our leaders were.

KE: Why do you feel like that is important?

Sonia: Because so many of us take those things for granted. *No sabes lo que tienes*, you know it's like we expect all of these things. We need to realize that even though these movements were so long ago, what they did impacted us forever. When I went through all of that crazy stuff with my principal that wanted to move me out of my reading specialist position, the association helped me maintain my dignity as a teacher. She may have moved me to another grade level but you know what, *el que es buen gallo en cualquier gallinero canta*.

[You don't know what you have] [A good rooster will crow anywhere]

KE: Tell me what you mean by that?

Sonia: That she may have moved me, but at the end of the day I am an excellent educator and I will shine wherever they put me. The union helped me remember that.

Through her post on Facebook and in her interview, Sonia demonstrates her commitment to the union and speaks about how she has become a benefactor as an active member. Her membership in the union served as a shield to protect her from the politics and the injustices within her district and school. The ways in which Sonia and Esmeralda talk about and post images regarding the teachers' association is reflective of a union and not just an association. She also explains her reasons for putting a picture of César Chávez on the

Facebook page too. To Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria their teachers' association is a union and it reflects an epistemic way of knowing and being. Sonia says, "We need to realize that even though these movements were so long ago, what they did impacted us forever." In this example, she discusses how her understanding of union history and *el movimiento* has influenced her active participation in a union today. Importantly, she provides us with an example of how the union helped her maintain her dignity as a Chicana *maestra*. She writes, "They may have moved me to another grade level but you know what, *el que es buen gallo en cualquier gallinero canta.*" By saying this, she reveals that she understands that her principal had the power to move her to another grade level, but that she knew she could still be a successful educator. She writes, "The union helped me remember that."

CONCLUSION

This chapter illuminates the stark realities of Chicana bilingual teachers in right-to-work states. Through the *testimonios* of Esmeralda and Sonia, we witness instances in which they have been ostracized, judged and reprimanded because they were seen as being too vocal and not fitting into traditional cultural norms. For Chicana activist teachers like Esmeralda and Sonia we can say that such events are possibly inevitable because of the colonial matrix of power. Mignolo (2007) describes how in the colonial matrix of power gender is placed on one end of the spectrum. Being female, Sonia and Esmeralda battle to engage within this matrix in their district without fear of retaliation. They understand that as members of a teachers' association they are provided with leverage within their district and in their school. Teachers are confronted with traumatic experiences throughout their daily interactions in schools. In order to cope with these events, they form collective groups of support in order to create a safe space where they can share their experiences with others without fear of being judged, their *comadrazgos* with their teachers'

association. Villenas, Delgado Bernal, Godinez and Elenes (2006) posit that, “A group identity and group marginalization continues to exist in academia even when we have attained a relatively privileged status” (p. 111). Similar to Latinas in academia, Chicana activist *maestras* have also had to develop spaces that deconstruct the marginalization and negative stigmas that is attached to activist educators. These groups foster a positive environment for the Chicana activist and in turn help the members deal with these traumatic events and seek advice for moving forward. By seeking membership in her local teachers’ association, Sonia has also found a way to protect herself from wrong doing by the district through legal backing from union members and legal representatives.

I argue that being a teacher in a right-to-work state has in essence created a burden that these Chicana bilingual educators have had to endure throughout their professional careers and beyond. Instead of being intimidated by those who intend to do them wrong, Chicana activist educators form a collective group within their district by joining a local teachers’ association. In this group, they share community wisdom that they possess based on their previous experiences. They find innovative ways of disbursing information to their members and local community via social media. Both Sonia and Esmeralda have over a decade of experience within this same district. As a result, they have developed a wealth of knowledge regarding the ways in which the district functions. They choose to share this knowledge as community wisdom with the members of their teachers’ association and the local community. Through networking with district administrators and school board members, they are able to inform changes that affect teachers in a positive way at the local level.

As the political climate of public education continues to remain a center stage, teacher unions and associations will serve to promote a safe haven for politically active

educators like Chicana *maestras*. Arguments surrounding educational standards such as curriculum, student learning, teacher qualifications and expectations will inevitably continue. By joining together in their teachers' association these Chicana bilingual activists have gained access to collaboration with decision makers in their district. Social media spaces such as Facebook serve as a space where activist *maestras* like Sonia can transmit messages and reach a vast number of individuals. Social media provides an added dimension to political campaigns and Green ISD TSTA has realized the immense possibilities that come along with it. Now more than ever, individuals are continuing to seek information regarding news and political campaigns (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Boulianne, 2016, Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014). Some scholars of color have also explored the important role of social media for Chicanas/Latinas. Revilla (2007) found that Chicanas/Latinas also use social media as a new space for activism. Findings report that Chicana/Latina groups politically organize marches, meetings, protest and fundraisers through social media spaces. Sánchez and Ek (2013) initially entertained the immense possibilities that the role of technology and social media play in the development of Chicanas/Latinas identities who are involved in online communities. They pose that we “(re)define what is meant by community, culture, and identities” (p.184). In the same way, Facebook became an online community which afforded Sonia, Esmeralda, Maria, and the association with a space for networking in various ways. Through their online social network community, they were able to organize general meetings, recruitment efforts, professional trainings, and political campaigns, to appeal to teachers within Green ISD. Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria also received affirmation through individual comments and likes on their post. These positive affirmations through social media also served as an outlet for them to express themselves which contributed to the further development of their

Chicana activist *maestra* identities. Through networking with these individuals, the local teachers' association has been able to play a first-hand role in making decisions that impact teachers and students.

CHAPTER 5: DIME CON QUIÉN ANDAS Y TE DIRÉ QUIÉN ERES, CHICANA ACTIVIST TEACHERS EXPERIENCES

“Chicana and Chicano activist agency, as a daily moment-to-moment practice, is informed by a critical, always developing, and continuous state of consciousness. *Being*

Chicana and Chicano in moment-to-moment practice is a way of life”

(Urrieta, 2010, p.91).

In *Working from Within* (2010), Urrieta uses the intersectionality of issues related to identity including race, class, and gender to examine the impact of social movements on Chicana and Chicano activist educators in the U.S. He describes the struggles they encounter in their daily lives as activist agency, moments in which these educators continue to affirm their identities as Chican@ activist educators. Individuals who identify as Chican@ need to understand the role in history the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s played in shaping what we have come and in understanding and identifying with what it means to be a Chican@ in today’s society. Delgado Bernal (2001) defines individuals who identify as Chican@ as those who collectively take on a sense of “pride of identity, and self-determination” as well as a sense of “community commitment”. Chicana educators such as Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda, not only share the commonality and they identify as Chicanas, but they also share lived experiences. They also demonstrate these characteristics through the stories they share of their lives that have played an integral part in shaping their current Chicana identities. In this chapter, I focus on the lived experiences from their past and present which have created moments of consciousness for them. In particular, I highlight how Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda have developed the capacity to self-author themselves as Chicana activist *maestras*. The question that guided

my inquiry for this chapter is: How do the experiences and life histories of the three Chicana bilingual teachers influence their decision to join and be active members of a teacher union in Texas?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will draw from the work of Holland's et al. (1998) concept of self-authoring to examine the ways in which Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda describe agency. Holland, et al. (1998) theorizes that individuals assume identities according to their social positioning within certain spaces. As a result, individuals choose to enact certain identities dependent on what is happening during a specific time. Therefore, using this principal of self-authoring as described by Holland, et al., (1998) I recognize that self-authoring of Chicana activist educators transpires over the course of time and is constantly changing and being shaped based upon the different encounters these teachers face in their daily lives. Urrieta (2007/2010) further clarifies that individuals self-author their identities through relations of power they establish with individuals who are with them in the same setting. He describes these settings through the concept of a *figured world* Urrieta (2010). Holland and colleagues (1998) argue that as individuals, we form a collective space of "cultural forms" and "social relations" in which we can self-author ourselves to those around us. In this study, I use the concepts of identity, self-authoring and figured worlds to understand the ways in which Chicana activist educators have used their prior knowledge based on experiences to author themselves, in their schools and in the teachers' association.

The concepts of identity and self-authoring are interconnected; I then take examples from these to demonstrate how Chicana activist educators find ways of working from within the constraints placed upon them from traditional schooling systems to network together within their teachers' association. In a postpositivist realist framework, one

examines identities based on the experiences individuals share and then has them reflect on the impact these instances in their lives had played (Mohanty, 1993; Moya, 2002). In 2011, Hames-García, further expanded on the postpositivist realist understanding of identity formation through experience by connecting the concept to a personal pursuit of social justice. He connects the lived experiences of individuals to the construction of social identities, and how individuals experience moments of exploitation to manifest their pursuit of social justice as opposed to being victimized. Further, Moya and Hames-García both center the construction of lived experiences to our identities particularly surrounding our social and political identities. By examining the histories of Chicana *maestras*, we can understand the ways in which they intersect “identities are politically and epistemically significant because they reveal the links between individuals and groups” (Moya, 2002, p. 99). I use the concepts of self-authoring and the pursuit of social justice to specifically highlight how Chicana activist educators are continuously in a process of identity self-evaluation. A situation in which they reaffirm themselves independently and to each other in the figured world of their teachers’ association. I do this by exploring their individual backgrounds and by examining the events that link them together through their teachers’ association

Sonia's Written *Testimonio* October 12, 2018

My dad served as a translator and helped negotiate for people and a lot of people depended on him because he was bilingual. I think that's why I'm so into social justice because it has always been so important to my family. My sister was supposed to be the valedictorian, but she didn't get to be because she participated in the walkout. My mom was pregnant with me, so they said that I was born with it. My sister went to college and set the example for all of us, I knew this from a very young age. We grew up poor, but my parents always placed a huge importance on education. This was our way out. I remember my dad saying that the great equalizer was your education. After working hard all day at work we would see how tired he was from doing manual labor. My dad always said they can take everything away from you but not your education. My mom would always say *los burros no van a la escuela*. My mom and dad would tell me my sister's story over and over again as a kid.

NUESTRO PROPIO MOVIMIENTO

I started with this excerpt from a written *testimonio* from Sonia because it illustrates the impact that her family has played in her own formation of a social justice identity. Her writing demonstrates how even in utero she felt what her mother was going through dealing with her older sister participating in a walkout. In the 1960s, Mexican and Mexican American students participated in organizing school walkouts in order to demand school reform. Although the most well-known documented walkouts occurred in Los Angeles, CA, these walkouts were found throughout communities in the southwest including Brownfield, CA, Houston, Crystal City and Edcouch-Elsa, TX. In, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*, Donato (1997) historicizes the schooling of Mexican American students in the southwest and argues that schools functioned as a form of societal control in an effort to groom students of color to become disciplined workers. Sonia's written reflection demonstrates how her parents instilled in her the importance of education as a gateway to having a better life. Her family's history of participating in walkouts provided her with the

opportunity to learn about the lived histories of her siblings. Sonia's sister went to college in the late 1960s. During the late 1960s, Muñoz (1989) documents the rapid growth of Mexican American's who enrolled in college as first-generation students. Prior to this, the educational system in the U.S. had been set up in such a way as to keep minority students out. Miguel and Valencia (1998) also attest to the discriminatory practices faced by Mexican Americans in the southwest. They describe the struggle Mexican American people have endured in their struggle for educational equality as "resolute". They confirm the determination and advocacy efforts Mexican Americans took to ensure equality and equity in education. Sonia's story illustrates a firsthand account of struggle for education a Latino family confronted. When Sonia's older sister enrolled in college she opened a gateway and path for her siblings to follow. Growing up listening to these stories played a major role in shaping who Sonia is today. During an interview, Sonia also shared a story of her paternal grandmother's political advocacy:

KE: Is there anyone else in your family who you remember growing up?

Sonia: My grandma on my dad's side of the family, my *abuelita* Mendez. She was a very strong-willed woman.

KE: What do you remember most about her?

Sonia: Honestly, I don't remember a lot about her because she died before I was born. But I do remember the stories my mom would tell me about her and how strong she was. She was one of the only women who owned land in Uvalde in the 1950s and she would organize gatherings as a political

advocate in Uvalde. She would always make all of the town vote.

KE: Do you remember why she would tell people to vote?

Sonia: It was important to them because back then they had to pay a poll tax (this was a way to control the vote) She made sure she had the money to pay the tax so that they could vote. And people would come and ask her who they needed to vote for and she would tell them. She would also help raise money so that other people could vote too. You know everyone says that I am so much like her.

KE: How so?

Sonia: I'm independent, I advocate for change, I'm not afraid to do things and get things done. I think about her a lot, especially when I have to do things with the union, when I have to speak I try to channel her energy.

Sonia uses the stories she remembers hearing as a child to share about the impact her *abuelita* Mendez has had on her today. She shares her family history, and how this family history was tied to voting rights. Acuña (2012) describes how historically the U.S. has placed restrictions on voting and created a system of unequal access to voting. Poll taxes in the early 1900s required eligible voters to pay in order to register to vote. Acuña explains that this was done in order to limit the vote in the 1890s and the early 1900s. During this time, paying a tax in order to vote was limiting to Mexican Americans because they could not afford the fee. Sonia describes how her *abuelita* would manage to educate those in her community and help them find ways to vote. Hearing these stories as a child, Sonia was

able to connect and learn from her *abuelita*; these stories also exposed her to the injustices that Mexican American's faced. As a result, she was able to internalize the courage displayed by her *abuelita* and is now able to draw from her strength and wisdom in her own times of need to sustain her.

Christensen (2003) refers to the values we learn by the elders in our families as “elder epistemologies”. Specifically, she describes this exchange as “knowledge that is embedded in peoples’ daily lives, embedded in languages, daily diet, stories and narratives, not necessarily in books or monuments” (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 81). Sonia’s *abuelita* shared her knowledge of the ways she confronted injustices by educating those around her. The scholarly work on *abuelita* epistemologies by Gonzales (2015) describes that although there are bodies of work that highlight community and nuclear family research, the powerful role of the knowledge possessed by *abuelitas* like Sonia’s grandmother are still missing. Such knowledge according to Gonzales could help us to expand our understanding of how the roles of *abuelitas* contribute to “(a) positive self-efficacy, (b) expanded social, emotional, and cognitive capabilities, and (c) a healthier lived context for Mexican American children and families” (p.43). The story Sonia shares describes her *abuelitas* effort to “expand social, emotional, and cognitive abilities” of those in her community by educating those around her, knowledge that would not be found in traditional text. In turn, by sharing these stories of activism with Sonia she contributed to the development of Sonia’s activist identity.

Chicanas like Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria draw from the knowledge they have learned in their homes, many times through stories to help them understand the world in which they live in. They use their families “elder epistemologies” to construct their own ways of navigating the world around them. The lives of elders who identify as Mexicans,

Chicanos, or Latinos are full of first hand experiences, which in many cases they are ready to share with their families. In fact, Anzaldúa (1999) wrote, “Nudge a Mexican and she or he will break out with a story” (p. 87). Similarly, Esmeralda shares a story during an interview she remembers from her childhood.

Esmeralda: I remember my dad telling me stories about him, César Chávez, when I was a little girl. I felt like I could close my eyes and be right there too. My favorite one was about how he and his brothers sitting around the radio listening to him talk about boycotting the grapes.

KE: What else do you remember?

Esmeralda: My dad would tell me these stories before I would go to bed at night. I would go to bed thinking about these things and you know because of that I feel like that sense of unity has always been in my blood, even though I wasn't born yet I still feel like I was a part of it.

KE: How would you incorporate that into your classroom?

Esmeralda: I had a huge portrait of César Chávez, but if you see it has people picking cotton. It has like the *huelga* sign and I would always refer to it with my students and talk about how people sacrificed so we could

have a better life. I think it was important, I kept it up all year long.

[Strike]

KE: what does that mean to you?

Esmeralda: I always felt like it was my responsibility to share these stories with my own students.

KE: What about now that you are not in the classroom?

Esmeralda: Oh, it's hanging in our office space now here in the house. I look at it a lot when I'm doing things for the school board. It gives me a sense of pride in what I'm doing, but most of all it reminds me of my dad. You know it takes me back to when I was a little girl laying down in bed and listening to his stories. Now that I'm not in the classroom it hangs in my house and I teach my son about it.

In Esmeralda's response, she also uses an example of the importance that her family, specifically her dad, played in teaching her about César Chávez. In this portion of her interview, she reflects on how by hearing these stories she was taught the history of boycotts through oral narrations from her father. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Tillman (2002) attest to the importance on using stories to share history with others. They argue that through sharing stories we engage in culturally sensitive approaches, which allow participants, like Esmeralda to share their cultural knowledge and experience with others. In her interview, Esmeralda explains how growing up she listened to stories from her father

and then took these stories and shared them with her own students, and now her son. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) would describe this process as sharing stories from experience. In Esmeralda's case, her father was a transmitter of knowledge. He shared personal oral histories of firsthand accounts of his memories growing up as a child hearing César Chávez on the radio talking about boycotts and he shared them with Esmeralda. Her father is considered an eyewitness to what happened during the boycotting of grapes and he shared his story with his daughter through his own words, and thus provided her with an understanding of what happened based on his own experience. During this portion of the interview, Esmeralda also describes how she felt responsible for sharing the stories she heard with others. Although Esmeralda's father passed away in 2001, she has managed to keep his stories alive by sharing them with her students and now with her son. She explains, "I always felt like it was my responsibility to share these stories with my own students". After our interview, I asked Esmeralda if I could take a picture of the painting she had in her office of César Chávez. While I was in the office her son, Isaac approached me to ask what I was doing.

Isaac: Why are you taking that picture Ms. Katherine, do you need it for school?

KE: Yes, I need it for a paper that I'm writing.

Isaac: I know who that is, its César Chávez, he's a hero.

KE: Why is César Chávez a Hero?

Isaac: Because he helped a lot of people who were being treated badly at work.

KE: Where did you learn that?

Isaac: My mom. She talks about him all the time.

Through this short exchange in dialogue with Esmeralda's son Isaac, you can see how she

has continued to share the stories from her father. Isaac at the age of three has some understanding of who César Chávez is and his legacy. By continuing to share the stories of her father, Esmeralda engages in keeping personal history alive. Embry (2013) argues that the oral histories shared by families provide a dimension of research that has been overlooked and is often omitted in written works. Through Esmeralda's father's story of listening to César Chávez on the radio and through his sharing of this story with his daughter, he has in a sense made history. Esmeralda's diligence in sharing his stories mean his memories will continue to live on. She understands the importance of the preservation of her father's stories. Valenzuela (2016) concludes her appeal for "growing critically conscious teachers" with her interpretation of *El Árbol*. Metaphorically, *El Árbol* represents the roots of our ancestors, our *abuel@s*. By continuing their stories, we use their experiences as a living legacy. To carry on this great task of educating our youth, we need the wisdom of our elders. Valenzuela (2016) writes,

"We need them to help us recover and apprehend this ancestral memory of their powerful, enduring presence, as well as their whisper[ed] words of warning, that issue from the innermost depth of our being" (p.107).

Typically, the information provided when sharing stories like Esmeralda's father is done so by older family members. Without Esmeralda continuing to share the bedtime stories told by her deceased father, his memories would be at risk of being lost over time. Now that Isaac is also hearing the same story, he can one day in the future continue to share his grandfather's stories and carry on his legacy.

Maria is more than ten years older than Sonia and Esmeralda, as such; her experiences are different from theirs. She is able to identify with firsthand knowledge as a participant in a boycott of grapes during the early 1970s. She discussed this during her

interview:

KE: Why did you join the teachers' association?

Maria: The union?

KE: Yes

Maria: I became a member the first year I started teaching. I have always been a part of a political organization. Even when I was in college, I was a migrant student in undergrad and our organization supported the boycott of grapes, I was part of *M.E.Ch.A.* I have always been outspoken and very vocal. But, by being a part of *M.E.Ch.A.*, I began to become active on another level. This was just where I got started.

KE: So why did you decide to join the union during your first year?

Maria: I needed to belong to an organization that had the same beliefs and values that I had. I have never left the union in twenty-nine years and I was always very involved. I was the building rep at several schools, I would go to the meetings, and I would host meetings to encourage teachers to become part of the union and to encourage them to vote.

In the interview above, Maria reflects on her participation in *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A)* and on how through her involvement in this organization she took on a political identity and participated in the boycotts of grapes. Later I asked Maria if she remembered what year this happened in and she stated in 1974. Typically, throughout the history of Chicano/as, boycotts highlighted the movement of the early

1960s, specifically the Delano Grape strike and boycott. However, documentation notes that the initial Strike of 1965 paved the way from other boycotts in the decades to follow (Dunne, 2007). Maria's story illustrates how she participated in these boycotts. By becoming involved in *M.E.Ch.A.*, she began to construct her identity as an activist. Esmeralda also shared that she was a member of *M.E.Ch.A.* as an undergraduate student she said, "*M.E.Ch.A.* is where being politically active all started". *M.E.Ch.A.* is a student organization found in colleges that "promotes higher education, community engagement, political participation, culture and history". Their involvement as undergraduate students in this organization provided them with the opportunity to surround themselves by other individuals who had similar backgrounds and mindsets.

Although Sonia and Esmeralda are too young to have participated in *el movimiento* of the 1960s by Chicanas/os, they have reconstructed a retro fitted memory based on the stories from their families. In turn, they have taken these experiences and have chosen to write their own *movimiento* through their activism in the teachers' union. Delgado Bernal (2001) describes this as "cultural knowledge". Specifically, Sonia draws on stories from her *abuelita* and Esmeralda draws from the stories she heard of her grandfather to negotiate the spaces they navigate today. Blackwell (2012) defines retrofitted memory as a "form of countermemory". In this case, Sonia and Esmeralda take their family stories and are able to reconstruct a history that highlights the relentlessness of their family members thus providing a countermemory to combat the traditional stories heard through colonial literature. Growing up listening to these stories also motivated them to join organizations to become politically active. In essence, they wanted to continue the work that their ancestors left for them. In turn, they continuously strived to surround themselves by individuals who held the same ideas and values as them.

POWER IN NUMBERS, *JUNTAS PODEMOS HACER MAS*

Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria all shared memories they heard from their childhood and moments in their lives that changed them and contributed to their *maestra* activist identity. They demonstrate how Chicana bilingual teachers who are active members in their association surround themselves with individuals who they can identify with. These friendships evolve into *comadrazgos*, which are built on respect, partnership, and love. The work of López (1991) defines such relationships as *compadrazgo*, a social support system that evolves out of friendship. Villarreal (2012) clarifies the relationship by describing the relationship as a friendship that may or may not be blood related. Sonia describes how her *comadrazgo* with Maria and Esmeralda has developed overtime.

Sonia's Written *Testimonio* July 6, 2018

You have to have friends that have the same philosophy and feelings that you do. You surround yourself by the people that have the mentality and work ethic that you do. That's how we connected. I remember the very first time we met and we went to address the board we were told that we could not do it. We gathered first together as bilingual teachers and asked for a stipend increase. That's when Maria and Esmeralda and I became *comadres*, this was back in 2009. We can count on each other through thick and thin. When the stuff about the stipend happened, we put a speech together and we spoke and we made change. There were like twenty teachers there, but only three of us had the guts to open our mouths. We were *Chingonas*, and unafraid. We were successful because they listened to us. You know people thought we were crazy, too loud and making trouble all the time. *Pero después de esto todas querían andar con nosotras. Y ya sabes como dice el dicho el que se ríe al último se ríe mejor.* But still, I know that I have to choose my friends wisely.

Close friends

And then after this everyone wanted to be with us. And you already know how the saying goes; he who laughs last, laughs the best.

Through Sonia's written reflection after a school board, meeting you can see how she has selected her friends based on specific intentions. She writes, "You surround yourself by the people that have mentality and work ethic that you do. That's how we connected". Through her writing, we see the common bonds these Chicanas share. In addition to these characteristics, Sonia also relates how they have shared lived experiences together that have also solidified their bond and created a system of *comadres* through which they can rely on each other. Findings on the effectiveness of the use of *comadre* groups to create a bond based on sisterhood, trust and support has been analyzed by Rayle, Sand, Brucato, Ortega, (2006). Rayle et al. (2006) found that, "In addition, the awareness the women experienced in the group may help them deal with oppression as it continues to occur in their lives" (p.20). Sonia describes how her relationship with Maria and Esmeralda evolved

from a situation in which they were advocating for a bilingual education teacher stipend. She reflects on how during this time the members of the association were seen “people thought we were crazy, too loud and making trouble all the time”. Border theorist Anzaldúa (1987) first described what Sonia, Maria, and Esmeralda experienced as the emergence of an alternative hybrid identity, a *mestiza*. She theorizes,

“The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . She learns to be an Indian in a Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality. She operates in a pluralistic mode . . . not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (p. 101).

In Sonia’s entry she describes how while advocating for the bilingual stipend those who were active in voicing their opinions were marginalized by members of the community and by fellow teachers within their same school district. As a result of this, Sonia learned how to operate within the systematic structures of the district to evoke change. Specifically, she mentions being isolated because she was being seen as too loud and vocal. Anzaldúa (1987) attributes this to Chicana’s having to overcome the tradition of silence. “*Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don’t answer back” (p.54). By speaking up initially, the three were seen as being deviant, and others did not respect them. However, after they were able to gain the attention of the school board and got the bilingual stipend increase they were then seen as influential and valuable. She writes, “*Pero después de esto todas querían andar con nosotras*”. It was only after getting the increase in the stipend that other teachers valued her voice. Although in this situation the view of others changed in a positive manner, Sonia realized that she needed to be careful in who she chooses to confide in. Specifically,

she wrote, “But still, I know that I have to choose my friends wisely”. Maria speaks similarly during her interview about her choices on making friends:

KE: So how do you choose the people you form friendships with?

Maria: You know, we gravitate towards people who we have things in common with. We are all very strong opinionated women who aren’t afraid, we are Chicanas and *maestras*. We bring to light issues we are having as teachers in the district. We speak up for our kids and public education. Sometimes because of how passionate and emotional we are, we are misunderstood.

KE: Why do you think you are misunderstood sometimes?

Maria: We stand very much for social justice and for making changes for everyone who has a part in public education. I see all of us as courageous women who are not afraid to speak their mind. Sometimes we are told that this is not socially acceptable, and we still spoke up for ourselves. It was not something that was culturally acceptable, or it was part of our personality that people find offensive and intimidating because we are not the norm.

KE: How do you feel about that?

Maria: We are far from the norm but we still have very traditional views and roles I’m still a wife and a mother, but when it comes to advocating for our students and community we are not in the norm. We stand up and we speak out. And I don’t

really care what they think. Everyone who lives in this town knows who we are, they know who we are connected to and the influence we have. As long as we have each other, the union, that's what matters.

Just like Sonia, Maria also describes how she breaks the tradition of silencing of women. By being vocal in their advocacy efforts, she explains how she views herself and the other Chicana activist teachers as being deviant. Maria says, "We are far from the norm but we still have very traditional views and roles". Here she acknowledges the significance of the traditional roles that Mexican American women have been ascribed, in her view, the role of being a wife and mother. However, she also says, "We stand up and we speak out", meaning that she understands that Mexican American women rarely voice their opinions. Maria also states that by standing up and speaking out other individuals pass judgement on her, but she does not allow the opinions of others to affect her. Finally, this example also demonstrates the importance of being a member of the teachers' association. Maria recognizes the impact and influence that being a member of this teachers' association has in her community. Through being connected to the community, they are able to negotiate space and create change through their part in decisions that are made. The kinship the members of the teachers' association have made with each other allows them to rely on each other during their times of need.

In the above interview, Maria also identifies herself as a Chicana and *Chingona*. She says, "We are all very strong opinionated women who aren't afraid, we are Chicanas *Chingonas*". Before this, Maria also describes the different qualities she has in common with Sonia and Esmeralda. She feels that their similar characteristics include strong and opinionated, unafraid, *maestras* in the pursuit of social justice. Urrieta (2005) writes,

“Becoming Chicana/o thus involves an identification shift in the process of identity production that is important to understand, especially as it relates to the reasons why many Chicana/o Activists decide to become urban educators” (p.118).

In her interview, Maria describes how throughout advocacy efforts many times she as well as other Chicanas are misunderstood because they come across as defiant and too passionate. The work of Villenas et al. (2006) explains that Latina activist identify as *mujerista* or *feminista*. The epistemic knowledge held by women who are “*mujeristas* and *feministas*” are those who are committed to struggles within the community. (Castillo, 1994, 2014) argues that when we work from a feminist perspective we are committed to issues that address injustices affecting those who are most vulnerable, including women and children’s issues.

Through her identification as a Chicana *maestra*, Maria describes her role as a public-school educator and the reasons why she chooses to align herself with others who think and act in a similar fashion. Through her expression, Maria provides us with another *testimonio* of the development of a Chicana activist *maestra* identity. Anzaldúa (1987) shares,

“When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart - a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving; birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live with la *Coatlicue* that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else” (p. 73).

THERE ARE MORE OF US

Often time’s teachers who identify as activist educators have had to turn to alternative sites in order to continue to develop their activist identities. The work of

Montaño et al (2002). establishes that “Becoming an activist social justice teacher is conceptualized as a process that engages complex yet distinct forms of learning that emerge through participation in activist organizations and practices” (p.268). The Chicana teachers in this study made the conscious decision to join a teachers’ association in order to create a safe space to continue to grow as activist educators. Holland et al. (2002) would explain the space of the teachers’ association as a figured world because Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria are able to make choices and changes based on their participation in the association. Urrieta (2007) explains that in a figured world,

“Figured worlds are therefore processes or traditions of apprehension that give people shape and form as their lives intersect with them. In figured worlds people learn to recognize each other as a particular sort of actor, sometimes with strong emotional attachments, value certain outcomes over others, and recognize and attach significance to some acts and not others” (p.108).

Sonia, Maria, and Esmeralda all attended a state conference for TSTA where all members of the region gathered in November, 2018. Here is a snapshot of my fieldnotes from my observations of the conference.

Fieldnote, Car Ride to TSTA Conference October 20, 2018

We met at Esmeralda's house at 5pm to begin the drive to Driftwood, TX where the conference would be. Sonia is a bit annoyed by some of the other members of the association who said they were going to attend the conference but cancelled at the last minute. She mentions that she doesn't know if she will be reimbursed the cost of the room.

On the way to the conference, they are listening to Tejano music on the radio. They talk about how regardless of how much time passes Tejano music never changes and never dies. Maria sings the song by Ram Herrera, *Rosas para Una Rosa* in its entirety. Esmeralda asks her if her husband was upset that she was going to the conference, she responds to her, "*El no se mete en mis cosas*".

[A rose for a rose]

[He does not get involved in my business]

Sonia sees me shake my head and smile and asks why I did that. I explained that I thought it was interesting that Maria's husband doesn't mind that she will be gone for almost 3 days. Maria then talks about how her husband has always been very supportive of her career and everything that goes along with it including being part of the teachers union; I was an activist before I married him. She also says, "*El se saco la loteria cuando me escojio a mi. Mujeres como yo, ya no existen*". The other ladies laugh and I ask her to explain.

[He won the lottery when he picked me. Women like me no longer exist]

Maria then talks about her busy schedule, how she goes to adoration at church twice a week and teaches religious education too. She also talks about her commitment to herself and going to Zumba on a regular basis. Then she says that in addition to teaching, she works on things related to the union almost on a daily basis. Maria ends with explaining that although she does all of these additional things she still manages to keep a very clean and organized house as well as preparing a home cooked meal for her family every night. Then she says this conference is "me time".

Esmeralda then talks about how she remembers going to her first conference over ten years ago and how this opened her eyes. She said she "realized there were more people like her". Sonia then talks about how this is their time to network with other people across the state who see themselves as activist and advocates for public education. She describes the conference as a time for her to be surrounded by people who think and act like her. She specifically says "I love that I can just be myself and not be judged".

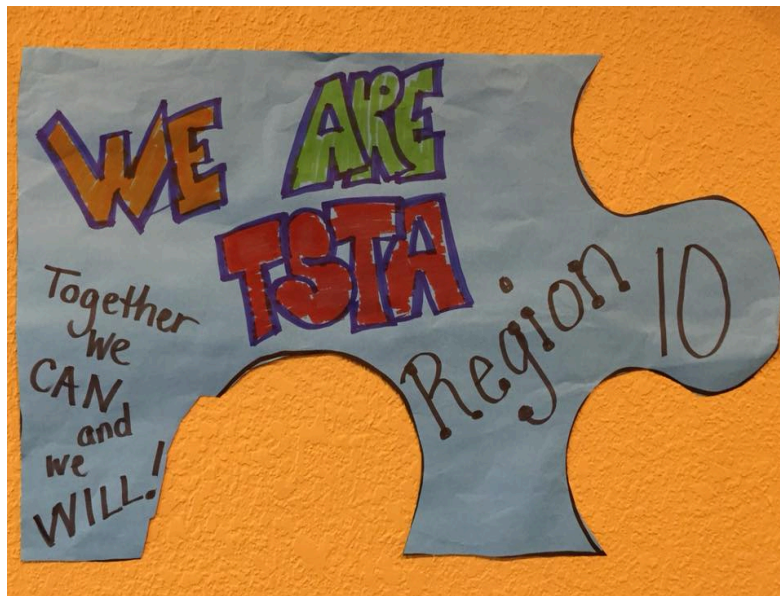
I incorporated this fieldnote because it illustrates how the role teachers' association plays in the lives of Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda. Maria describes her commitment to the association and how it takes time outside of her full teacher workday to conduct association business. Urrieta (2010) describes how figured worlds are socially organized and performed. This field note illustrated how Esmeralda takes the opportunity of attending the conference to perform her identity as a Chicana activist in a space where she will not be "judged". Sonia reiterates these feelings too by describing how she makes networks during these conferences and finds individuals who exhibit similar beliefs to her own.

This fieldnote also provides information about the relationship Maria has with her husband and the respect he holds for the work she does with the union. She says, "*El no se mete en mis cosas*". The literal translation of this is he does not get involved in my business. One would think by reading this that Maria's husband does not care or is indifferent about what she does. However, Maria goes on to explain that her husband has always been supportive of her activism. She also states that her activism was part of her identity even before she became a wife or a mother. In this fieldnote, Maria also describes how she is able to manage and negotiate time for her different identities simultaneously on a daily basis. She describes her identity in different forms including, religious, teachers, wife, mother, *Chingona* and union activist. She says, "Although she does all of these additional things she still manages to keep a very clean and organized house as well as preparing a home cooked meal for her family every night". Even though Maria is involved in and has many commitments, she takes on the traditional role of being a wife and mother seriously. However, she believes that women like her are few and far between. She articulates this by saying, "*El se saco la loteria cuando me escojo a mi. Mujeres como yo, ya no existen*", she believes her husband is extremely lucky to have a wife like her. These same sentiments

are also present in literature. Castillo (2014) writes, “The nuclear family is under pressure due to the demands of employment” (p.143). Castillo draws attention to how traditional roles of women in Mexican-American families are changing. Maria acknowledges the pressure she has given all of her commitments, but she is still able to do her duties as a wife and mother.

During the conference, there were opportunities for the members of the various regions of TSTA to come together and collaborate with each other. Monañó et al. (2002) describes this process of collaboration as a strategy for developing “collective consciousness”. Developing a collective consciousness requires members of a group to engage with each other in discourse to facilitate dialogue surrounding common ideas. During this conference, I was able to observe a collective conscious building activity that the different association groups participated in as depicted below in figures 5.1 and 5.2.

Figure 5.1 Beginning of Puzzle Building Activity



Fieldnote TSTA Conference October 20, 2018

Sonia is the president of her local TSTA chapter. She was asked to lead a team building activity icebreaker for the conference.

Prior to coming to the conference Sonia knew how many different TSTA chapters would be attending the conference and she created a specific amount of puzzle pieces.

Sonia introduces herself to the other members of the group. Many of them know her from years past. She explains the activity and holds up the first piece of the puzzle. The first puzzle piece contains the words We Are TSTA.

Sonia then explains to the larger group that they will take time to create their own puzzle pieces describing what TSTA means to them and to their local.

All of the groups choose different symbols words and phrases to describe their thoughts about what TSTA means to them, their responses are seen in Figure 5.2. When you look closely at the image you can see the words the different local associations chose to use to describe the significance to TSTA, and what their focus is in their local chapters. These are seen in the fieldnote below.

-Together we can and we will
-Kick Ass Exciting Advocates
-We're Here to Support Kids
-We Will Fight For Education
-We will, Unite, Advocate and Empower!
-We Do Whatever it Takes!!
-Stronger United
-From the bottom up!
Fieldnote (October 20, 2018)

The sentiments expressed in the puzzle pieces above demonstrate the commitment the members of TSTA have to being activist and advocates for public education. In addition to words, several of the different chapters chose symbols to identify with. Two of the groups used the heart. When they explained their reasoning for choosing the heart the members of one of these organizations stated, “The heart is connected to our passion for advocating and being activist for our students”. The other group stated that in addition to “our students, we advocate for teachers and our community”. What the members of these organizations chose to write also demonstrates their understanding of mobilization through their teachers’ association. In their puzzle pieces the association chapters wrote words such as, together we can and we will, stronger united, and from the bottom up. This puzzle building exercise provided the opportunity to the smaller chapters to come together and find common ground. They created a “collective consciousness” by choosing things that they felt described their local associations. During their explanations of their puzzle pieces to the larger group, they were able to create connections amongst each other. This process of reflection allowed them to understand the ways in which they are connected to each other through their membership in the association, and to their greater communities. The sense of interconnectedness and interdependence was demonstrated through this activity

and throughout the conference, especially the notion of being “stronger united” and “Together we can and we will”.

THAT’S MY *COMADRE*

The sense of being able to achieve more together through the teachers’ association was also expressed by Esmeralda in one of her interviews where she describes how her friendship, *comadrazgo* with Sonia has developed over time. A portion of the interview is below:

KE: Tell me about your best friend.

Esmeralda: Sonia is my left hand and we have had a lot of disagreements throughout the years, but I know she is always there. I think all of the situations that we have been through and fought for through the union have solidified our friendship and commitment to each other. In the beginning, it was based off our similar backgrounds and interest, but now it’s deeper.

KE: Can you tell me how this has happened?

Esmeralda: She and I would talk about things that no one else went through. It has happened over time. Sometimes we both falter and now more than ever I have to be clear with her. Are you meeting with me as a board member or as a friend?

KE: How do you balance that?

Esmeralda: Honestly, I just listen, whether I am listening as a friend or as a board member I still have her back, she’s my *comadre*. But we both have that understanding that things are confidential and how she is reporting things, or if she is just

venting to me is important.

KE: Do you think your relationship has changed now that you are a board member?

Esmeralda: Even though I'm not in the classroom she knows, and the other active union members know that I am here for students and teachers. I bring that teacher voice that no one is used to hearing to the board. And you know I'm still active in the union, I still go to the meetings, gatherings and conferences. That's just something that will never go away and it bonds us together.

KE: Is there anything else you want to share about your relationship with Sonia?

Esmeralda: Sonia and I have learned how to value each other and to depend on each other. Sometimes when times are hard all we have is each other. Being a *comadre* is thicker than being just a best friend.

KE: Are there any other words or ideas you can think of to describe your friendship?

Esmeralda: Well, you know we also call ourselves *Las Chingonas*. We live our lives unapologetically, we are not afraid to be who we are. We have learned how to survive and thrive.

In this transcript, Esmeralda explains her relationship with Sonia. She describes it as one that has “happened over time” and that the different events they have been through together as part of the teachers’ association have solidified their friendship. Esmeralda

clarifies that initially their friendship was based on their similar interest and backgrounds. Aligned to the work of Nieto (2000) and Prieto (2009) the response Esmeralda initially gives to explain her friendship with Sonia is based on the commonalties of their upbringing and their experiences as bilingual teachers. Their work as activist in their teachers' association further developed their friendship and they now view each other as *comadres*. Typically, the word *comadre* is used when describing the Latino familial relationship between a child and a godparent (Lopez, 1999). Sonia also described Maria and Esmeralda as her *comadres*. However, the way in which Esmeralda explains her *comadrazgo* with Sonia is articulated as a stronger form of friendship not connected to the role of a godparent to a child.

SOMOS CHINGONAS AND UNAFRAID

In addition to using the word *comadre*, *Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria also refer to each other as Chingonas*. Cano (2001) constructs a working understanding of the word Chingona by historically contextualizing the term. She describes the transition and juxtaposition of women through her explanation of the transformation from “*chingada to Chingona*” (p.49). Here Alcalá highlights the similarities between the myth of La Malinche and the legend of Malinalxochitl. She elaborates on how these compare to how women are always placed in subordinate positions to men. Moraga (1983) also contributes to the working definition of a *mujer Chingona*: “Nobody wants to be made to feel the turtle with its underside all exposed, just pink and folded flesh. In the effort to avoid embodying *la chingada*, I became the Chingón” (p.125). However, Moraga's definition is through her experiences as a lesbian woman. Anzaldúa (1987) also recognizes the inferior positing of women in her writing. “Women are at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants. The Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance.

Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants” (p.40). Both Sonia and Esmeralda use the word *Chingona* to describe who they are in addition to the way they perceive each other. Esmeralda says, “Well, you know we also call ourselves *Las Chingonas*. We live our lives unapologetically, we are not afraid to be who we are.” Esmeralda in essence creates her own definition of what a *mujer Chingona* is to her. A woman who lives her life unapologetically and is confident in her abilities as a survivor. She says, “We have learned how to survive and thrive”. The words “survive and thrive” allow us to understand through the stories Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria have encountered in their teaching careers that they have had to face many adversities, they have made conscious efforts together through their union and as individuals for themselves, teachers, students, and their communities. The stories shared by Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria are a testament to their own journeys from “*chingada* to *Chingona*”.

CONCLUSION

Chicana activist teachers, such as Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria come from similar backgrounds, their past and present experiences play an influential role in shaping them into the educational advocates they identify themselves to be today. In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which Chicana activist teachers have in essence written their own Chicana teacher activist movement. LatCrit scholar Delgado Bernal (1998, 2001, 2002) describes such knowledge as in terms of pedagogies of the home. I provided examples based on their unique experiences to demonstrate how their activist identities have developed and changed over time.

The findings show that within their teachers’ association, what I explained as their own figured world, Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria were able to recognize moments in their past in which they were able to connect with the Chicano movement. I argue that although

they themselves may not have actively participated in the movement they still experienced moments of connectedness to the movement which in turn influenced their decision to become members of a teachers' association in the future. By growing up hearing stories of activism from their parents and grandparents, they themselves have come to identify as activist. Drawing from these elder epistemologies Chicana activist *maestras* construct their own working activist identity. Anzaluda (1987) writes "*Respeto* carries with it a set of rules so that social categories and hierarchies will be kept in order: respect is reserved for *la abuela, papa, y el patron*, those with power in the community" (p.40). In this same way Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria hold high regard for their elders and the oral histories they have learned from them. As a result, they chose to join a teachers' association, a space they have created where they can enact these activist identities. Holland (1998) and Urrieta (2010) both contend that individuals construct identities around relevant activities that are particular to time and space. Through their membership in the teachers' association Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria engage in activities that promote their growth and enrich their experiences as Chicana activist educators.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen the multiple identities assumed by Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda including those of granddaughter, daughter, *maestra*, religious, activist, wife and mother. Urrieta and Noblit (2018) explain that oftentimes individuals possess identities that serve different purposes. "Different identities do different things and have different functions" (p.250). Through the stories, artifacts, and field notes we come to understand how Sonia, Maria, and Esmeralda negotiate and use these identities, how these identities intersect, and importantly how they impact their daily lives.

By their active membership in the teachers' association Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria have constructed a deep bond which they describe as deeper than a friendship, what

they define as a *comadrazgo*. By relying on each other to sustain themselves in times of tribulation, they have created a system of support within their organization. Bettez, Lopez, and Machado-Casa (2009) explain that women of color come together to form a sisterhood of support to navigate struggles, they define this as *hermandad*, the Spanish word for sisterhood. Their research focuses on how faculty women of color bond together to support each other. I add to this previous body of research by finding that Chicana teachers also form a relationship based on *hermandad* with each other. In the following chapter, I present examples of the classroom practices used by these Chicana activist teachers, how they draw from their experiences in their teachers' association and from culturally relevant pedagogical practices used with their students.

CHAPTER 6: UNA CABEZA BIEN FORMADA SERÁ SIEMPRE MEJOR: MAESTRAS COMPROMISO TO STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITY

“Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element.”

(Anzaldúa, 1987, iii)

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa, intricately describes how individuals can inhabit multiple identities due to their location and space. A pioneer in border thinking, Anzaldúa explains the metaphorical element of borders and margins that we encounter on a daily basis. She goes on to describe these different spaces as *intersticios*, the places in which our identities intersect within the different worlds we inhabit. Chicana bilingual teachers such as Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria are tasked with not only learning how to operate within these margins but teach their students how to negotiate their identities as well. Burstein and Montañó (2011) argue that Chicana teacher activist encounter difficulty in their teaching because “they believe that current curriculum practices negatively impact the learning of their students” (p.38). Along with this, they are tasked with finding ways that challenge the colonization of schooling practices that oftentimes omit the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students and find ingenious ways of preparing their students to understand the history of Chican@s and preparing them for the future.

In this chapter, I focus on the pedagogical practices of Chicana activist bilingual teachers in Texas. In particular, I highlight how Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria navigate curriculum spaces that must contain stringent alignment to state standards, by integrating content that is culturally responsive and sensitive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children. The questions that I use to address this are: How does Sonia,

Esmeralda, Maria participation in a teacher union influence their leadership roles in the union, their schools, and the community? How has the participants' involvement in the union influenced their pedagogical practices?

THORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will use the funds of knowledge framework (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992) to focus on the pedagogical practices incorporated in the teaching of Latinx students. Moll et al. (1992) establish that culturally and linguistically diverse students bring with them an abundance of knowledge that can be tapped into in order to help them learn new academic concepts which they coined as “funds of knowledge”. I connect this to the postpositivist realist thinking of Moya and what she conceptualizes for a multicultural curriculum. “The study of culture as a concept should be an integral part of multicultural curriculum”. It is argued that by using funds of knowledge, the skills and experiences of minorities can be tapped into in schools. This in order to promote the community, family life, and culture of students by using everyday life examples. In particular, by highlighting literacy, the practices across culturally and linguistically diverse students can be built upon by teachers in order to help children construct their ethnic identities.

Therefore, I connect the concept of funds of knowledge (Moll et al.) in conjunction with the use of culturally relevant practices (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Quijano & Rios, 2000) to explore the teaching methods of Chicana activist teachers. In the 1990s, Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the three pillars to enacting a culturally relevant pedagogy: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Collectively, teachers drawing from a culturally relevant pedagogical perspective use these pillars to guide their instruction in order to connect with their students and to help them grow as

learners by connecting their learning to their own lives. Metaphorically, the use of a mirror is used to explain how culturally competent educators find ways to incorporating curriculum practices that allow children to see themselves reflected in what they are learning. Finally, educators use their teaching as an opportunity to raise sociopolitical consciousness with their students. They find ways of teaching them how sociopolitical issues have shaped their past and presents experiences. Importantly, teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogical practices understand how to empower their students to not only contemplate what they are learning, but to also brainstorm ways in which they can become agents of change within their communities.

Third, I use the concept of critical literacy, which stems from the work of Freire and Macedo and the role teachers take on in their classroom to help students understand and read their worlds (Freire & Macedo, 1987). They argue that when teachers work from a critical literacy perspective, they relinquish power and in turn assume the role of a facilitator of learning in which they guide students towards new learning. Operating from a critical literacy approach requires educators to engage with the following concepts: disruption of the commonplace, interrogation of multiple viewpoints, engaging in teaching that addresses sociopolitical issues, and finally taking action through the promotion of social justice curriculum (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Vasquez (2014) further extends the previous work done on critical literacy by looking at how teachers use their students' background knowledge as a resource to bridge learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

NUESTRA TRADICIÓN

When teaching their bilingual students, Chicana activist bilingual teachers find ways of incorporating the cultural practices common to the daily lives of children. They

do this in order to validate the experiences of the students in their classrooms and find ways of building bridges for the learning of new content knowledge. Specifically, the use of read-alouds provide Maria and Esmeralda opportunities to engage their students in learning. In what follows, they recant experiences that they have had with their students and they provide examples to show how they integrate the use of their students' culture and religious backgrounds to draw from their students' own funds of knowledge. In an interview, Maria discusses the way she began her lesson on *Día de Los Muertos*:

Maria: One of my most favorite times of year is teaching my students about *Día de Los Muertos*. *Pues no debería de decir* teaching them about it, many of them already know about it because they go to church, but I spend about two weeks going over symbols, vocabulary words, and traditions with them.

[I should not say teaching them about it]

KE: Why is this your favorite time of the year?

Maria: *Y sabes que, a ellos les encanta aprender sobre su cultura.* You can feel the difference in the classroom when things like that are happening.

[You already know that they (the students) love learning about their culture]

KE: What's the difference?

Maria: All of the excitement, you see their faces light up when they bring in pictures of their family members, when they talk about the things that they already know and see in their homes, and their church. They feel so proud. Then we take

the concept of the altar and extend it to writing opportunities, where the students bring in the pictures of their deceased loved ones and also write about them.

KE: What else do you do with *Día de Los Muertos*?

Maria: *Terminamos la unidad haciendo un desfile donde cantan canciones con movimientos sobre Día de Los Muertos, y vienen los padres y hasta diferentes personas de la comunidad. Se ha convertido en una tradición, no es algo que hacemos nomas por un día. Todos saben que en ese día me voy a vestir como Catrina y todos mis niños tendran sus caras pintadas como calaveritas. ¿Si yo no les enseño, entonces quien?*

[We finish the unit by having a huge parade where we sing songs with movement and parents and even people from the community come. This has turned into a tradition and it is not something we do for just one day. Everyone knows that on that day I will come to school dressed like a *Catrina* and all of my students like little skeletons. If I don't teach them this, then who will?]

In this portion of the interview transcript, Maria recognizes how important it is for her to make connections with her students. She discusses how she uses what they already know to capture the attention of her students and set the stage for learning. She states, "Many of them already know about it because they go to church". By drawing from what they already know, Maria taps into the funds of knowledge of her students. Moll and his

colleagues argue that when teachers use students' funds of knowledge, teachers position themselves as co-learners with their students and create an environment where the learning process becomes reciprocal and everyone learns from each other. Maria also recognizes the benefits and importance of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students about their culture. She understands that students are able to form deep connections to their learning because it is based off their lived experiences. In this example, Maria is able to relate what the children are seeing in their church to what they are learning about in school. She describes how the children recant their experiences about mass on Sunday and the altar that they are building at church and relates it to the altar they are building at school. She extends the concept of the building of an altar to incorporate written literacy practices. Traditionally, *altares* in church only incorporate photographs of deceased loved ones. By starting with pictures, Maria positions her students as experts; she draws on what they already know. She then extends the concepts by having students write about their loved ones. She provides them with the tools they need to be successful by introducing new vocabulary words and the symbolism of certain items used in the celebration of *Día de Los Muertos*. Figure 6.1 illustrates how Maria teaches the word –*Catrina* to the students in her classroom.

Figure 6.1 Picture of altar



Figure 6.2 Picture of altar with Maria and students



Figure 6.3 Image of Catrina by Jose Guadalupe Posada



Fieldnote Community Parade October 31, 2018

Students are seated around the teacher and she is dressed up as a *Catrina* for their *Día de Los Muertos* celebration. One student says, *la maestra esta disfrazada como una bruja*. Immediately Maria corrects him and say: *no soy una bruja, hoy soy La Catrina*. She then goes on to show them the image created by Jose Guadalupe Posada of La Catrina. She talks about the history behind how the image has become an iconic symbol of *Día de Los Muertos* and she shows them a handcrafted *Catrina* that they will put on their altar.

[The teacher is dressed up like a witch]
[I am not dressed like a witch, I'm a *Catrina*]

Today is also Halloween; several of the students in the class are dressed up in their costumes. Maria explains to the students that even though they are celebrating Halloween they are also celebrating *Día de Los Muertos*. She tells them “*Es la dicha de ser bilingue*”. One little boy responds “*Que suerte tenemos*” he then takes off his Iron Man mask and starts coloring his *calaverita* mask (Fieldnote, October 31, 2018)

[It's the blessing of being bilingual]
[We are so lucky]

If you look closely at the picture in figure 6.1 you will notice that several of the students are dressed in Halloween costumes and they have *calavera* masks on too. On this particular day, students were celebrating both Halloween and *Día de Los Muertos*, in my fieldnote, Maria explains this to her students as being- *la dicha de ser bilinüe*, the blessing of being bilingual. She positions this as an opportunity for the students in her classroom to embrace and celebrate their biculturalism. She presents this to her students in a manner that is positive and embracing of diversity, in turn her students react enthusiastically and one of them responds by removing the mask from his Iron Man costume and beginning to color his *calavera* mask for the parade later that day. “Teachers, as well as the learners, have much to gain from using these ‘funds of knowledge’ in the classroom, not only to make the classrooms more inclusive but also to engage in real-world meaning-making and identity exploration, which are crucial yet often neglected aspects of learning” (Wei, 2014, p.162). Maria takes this opportunity to expose her students to and introduce them to what it means to be bicultural. She promotes the establishment of their bicultural identities by relating it to a blessing and encourages her students to embrace who they are. Maria also describes her commitment to teaching her students about their culture, she says: “*Se ha convertido en una tradicion, no es algo que hacemos nomas por un día*”. She reflects on how her teaching of *Día de Los Muertos* has become a tradition at her school, and that it is not done simply for one day. In her interview, Maria also reiterates her commitment to not only teaching the children in her class about this cultural celebration, but she extends this to the entire school, parents and even the community. Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, (2012) argue that oftentimes schools omit students’ families and communities, in this example,

Maria describes how she draws from the students' funds of knowledge and works to promote culturally relevant pedagogical practices that embrace students, their families and their community.

Maria ends with sharing her mentality of *—¿Si no yo, quién?* If she fails to teach her students about their culture, she fears that they will not learn this elsewhere. Likewise, Moya (2002) states, “if schools are to serve as a vehicle through which we promote the creation of a better world, we must insist that schools be actively involved in training students and teachers to interact in culturally sensitive ways with peoples whose cultural traditions differ from theirs.” (p. 174). Maria describes this as the lack of cultural competence and of respect by some teachers when teaching culturally sensitive curriculum. She discusses this when she mentions that learning about cultural holidays take more than one day, and how she dedicates an entire month to teaching *Día de Los Muertos* to her class. Moya describes this process as learning how to learn from others, in essence sharing our cultural knowledge with those around us. Maria does this by having her students share their learning with the entire school, parents and community.

LA LECTURA- CULTURALLY RELEVANT BOOKS

Esmeralda also mentioned in her interviews how she would teach her students about *Día de Los Muertos* when she was a classroom teacher. She specifically discussed how she would incorporate the use of read-alouds with her students to teach them about this cultural holiday. In this section, I focus on the pedagogical practices Esmeralda used to connect the funds of knowledge of her students to what they were currently learning about in school. Below is a portion of an interview with Esmeralda:

Esmeralda: One of my favorite books to read with my students during *Día de Los Muertos* is *Rosita y Conchita*.

KE: Why do you like this book in particular, what's so special about it?

Esmeralda: I love seeing how my students are able to make connections with this book. So many of them are able to talk about the *altares* they have seen in their homes, at school, and at church.

KE: What would you use this book for?

Esmeralda: I would do a lot of phonics, grammar, writing and reading in Spanish. I always made sure I did phonics every day and then I integrate the other areas. I also make sure I do a lot of comprehension. I would model and I explain how they place their mouth. I use visuals like sound boxes to develop their phonemic awareness.

KE: Can you remember any examples from this book?

Esmeralda: Let me try to remember...I use a lot of read alouds that are culturally and linguistically relevant to our students. I would do it in parts, I would preselect vocabulary that I'm going to use to teach to my students. Then I would use nonlinguistic approach to vocabulary. I also connect this to their daily lives. When I read the story the students provide the word.

Escuchar- place both hands up to their ears

Oler- wave their hand in front of their nose.

Altar- where students build the altar with their hands

KE: Why is this important to you?

Esmeralda:

The most important part is that they can connect to it and they are part of it. It's important to them because it's part of their lives. The best part was when we took them on a field trip to the Children's theater and they got to see the play *Rosita y Conchita*. They were able to see the words we read on paper in the book come to life. So many of them were able to recite parts of the book because they had memorized it.

Figure 6.4 Cover of children's book *Rosita y Conchita: A Rhyming Storybook in English & Spanish*



Figure 6.5 Picture of former student of Esmeralda



Similar to Maria, Esmeralda would also begin the study of *Día de Los Muertos* by building off the funds of knowledge of her students. She began this initial inquiry by also having students reflect on what they had already learned and seen in their church about this special day. Esmeralda specifically describes her approach to teaching student's vocabulary words specific to *Día de Los Muertos*. In her description, she provides details about how she would teach students movements to remember the words they were learning. By incorporating physical movements in her teaching, Esmeralda was using the strategy of total physical response (Asher, 1984). When teachers integrate ways of including movements into the learning of new vocabulary terms, teachers provide a space for students to express themselves kinesthetically (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018). Physically acting out the vocabulary words: *escuchar*, *oler*, y *altar*, give students a cue in order to remember

what the word signifies. Asher (1984) and Ferlazzo and Sypniewski (2018) state that when teachers do this they create an environment conducive to learning because it focuses simultaneously on learning the vocabulary word and teaching them movement, which appeals to young learners.

In figure 6.5, you can see the approach Esmeralda took to teach her students about rhyming words in Spanish. To introduce these words, she found a culturally relevant book to help her students connect what they already knew to new concepts. The benefits and use of read alouds to teach young children about reading, oral language, and vocabulary development has been documented through research for some time now (Heath, 1983; Sipe, 2000). However, the work of DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) has extended the benefits of read-alouds and has applied them to teachers who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students because it provides an opportunity for teachers to develop critical literacy opportunities. Through read alouds, children make connections to their worlds and through questioning and learning in a whole group setting they further extend what they have learned by drawing connections to their lived experiences. Additionally, Salinas, Fránquiz & Guberman (2006) research further explains how bilingual students learn by doing activities that focus on key vocabulary. In the picture Esmeralda provided we can see how she taught her students rhyming words in Spanish by focusing on the final syllable in Spanish—*Rosita/ Conchita*, *celebracion/ rincon* and *encontrar/ celebrar*. She then extended this learning by having students create pictorial representations of the words by the creation of their own books, with the example of the book on the right. Esmeralda explains how she extended the learning of her class by going on a field trip to see the children's book: *Rosita y Conchita*, acted out in real life. She reflects on the impact for the

children in her class to have the experience of seeing the story they had read many times in school acted out for them.

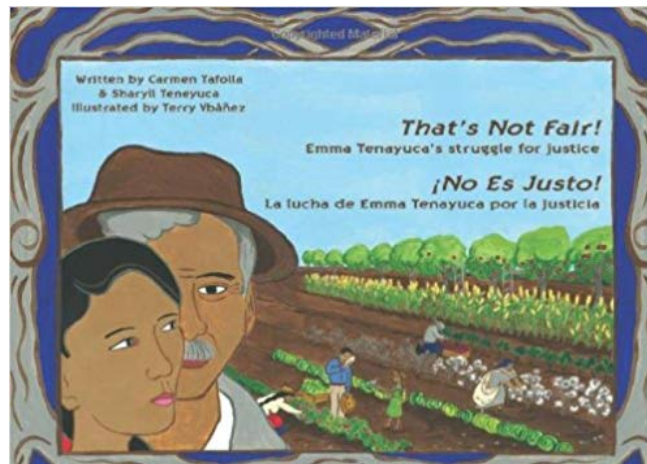
INTEGRATING CONTENT

One of the daily challenges teachers face is being tasked with teaching their students the state standards for grades K-12 which are outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The State Board of Education (SBOE) adopts and establishes the TEKS that are required to be taught in public schools throughout the state of Texas, these standards reflect what students should know and be able to do in each grade level. Beginning in third grade, these students are then tested on this knowledge through state standardized tests. These standards include specific information that students must acquire and demonstrate their mastery of; they are explicit and include specific descriptors, which indicate mastery. Districts, schools, and teachers take the TEKS and then design their curriculum in ways to ensure that students are acquiring the knowledge and skills they need in order to be successful on standardized test. The problem with the TEKS is that, if taken too rigidly, they omit the experiences of people of color and are not sensitive to the backgrounds of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Although the TEKS are available in Spanish, they are literal translations of the English version. Terrones (2017) describes how through the use of picture books that are culturally relevant can be used as a method of “resilient resistance” (p.137). Chicana activist bilingual teachers like Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria understand the need to not only teach their students the standards outlined for them by the state, but to also educate and expose them to the history behind Latin@s and Chian@s in the United States. Maria describes how she did this during the previous school year when she was teaching third grade in one of her teaching *testimonio* reflections.

Maria's *Testimonio* September 1, 2018

I also love teaching my students about important Hispanic figures that have done so much for our community. One of the TEKS in 3rd grade is centered on teaching the kids about biographies. I always took this time to bring in books about important people to us. I can tell you about two of them. One was *Cosechando Esperanza: La Historia de César Chavez*. I love, love, love this book because it is a Children's book and it teaches about the story of César Chávez from when he was a young boy to how he became an activist for migrant farmworkers. Have you seen it? The pictures are really amazing they are by that artist who now writes books too, what's her name? – Yuyi Morales, it's like she makes those pictures come to life. Like you could actually be there in the book too. I would use that book to teach my kids about the characteristics of a biography and then I would also teach them about his contributions to us, peaceful protest, fighting injustice, and being a leader. Before we would read it, I would always ask my kids to share what they already knew about him and most of them would say the common stuff you always hear, his motto – *si se puede*, I would take this and then expand it to so many new opportunities to learn. When we would reflect at the end on our new learnings, they always showed such growth, yes, they now knew that a biography is used to tell about the story of someone's life, but in this case, it was so much more. They knew about how César Chávez transformed from being a shy boy at school to an amazing leader who helped thousands of individuals fight for justice. Another book I would use after that one was: *That's Not Fair! / ¡No Es Justo!: Emma Tenayuca's struggle for justice/La lucha de Emma Tenayuca por la justicia*. This book is really important to me because it was about Emma Tenayuca and after reading about César Chávez I wanted to show my girls that women also play an important part in our history here in Texas. You know so many people don't know about her story and what she did for factory workers right here in Texas. This children's book tells the story of Emma Tenayuca and how she overcame so many obstacles, from poverty to hunger and became a leader for the pecan factory workers. This book was so powerful for the girls in my class because they could see how they could become leaders too. After we were done with the two books, we would do a compare and contrast activity where they would be able to find the similarities and differences between César Chávez and Emma Tenayuca.

Figure 6.6 Children's book Covers



Maria wrote this when I asked her to tell me about some of the resources she uses in her teaching. Through her writing, we see how she is able to teach social justice through content area instruction during language arts block. Maria discusses the TEKS she has to teach her students regarding the characteristics of reading comprehension related to biographies in third grade. Below is the actual TEK listed for third graders from the SBOE, which requires students to make inferences and draw conclusions based on structural patterns they observe in texts. Upon reading, the TEK on biographies and autobiographies

there is no mention of what individual's teachers should use in order to teach this concept. If one reviews the citizenship TEKS listed for third grade that relates to the contributions of historical and contemporary figures the options listed are Helen Keller, Clara Barton and Ruby Bridges.

Third Grade TEKS

3. (9) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Literary Nonfiction. Students understand, make inferences, draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction, and respond by providing evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the difference in point of view between a biography and autobiography.

3. (11) Citizenship. The student understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical and contemporary figures. The student is expected to:

(B) identify historical figures such as Helen Keller and Clara Barton and contemporary figures such as Ruby Bridges and military and first responders who exemplify good citizenship; and

(C) identify and explain the importance of individual acts of civic responsibility, including obeying laws, serving the community, serving on a jury, and voting.

In her lesson, Maria integrates and extends the TEKS for language arts and social studies by providing examples of good citizenship where students can see examples of historical figures who are relevant to their community. She writes, "I always took this time to bring in books about important people to us". Thus, acknowledging the importance of providing Latinx students with individuals who are significant to developing an awareness of their own diverse cultural backgrounds. The work of Salinas (2004) on teacher advocacy efforts highlights the roles educators assume when working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. "First, the advocate promoted a critically conscious agenda that was inherent to the relationship between Chicana/o high school migrant students'

educational opportunities and the social justice ideals of *el movimiento*” (p.63). Research by Acuña (2015) also outlines the history of Chicanos through events that shaped the Chicano Movements of the 1960s. He briefly summarizes the contribution of Emma Tenayuca, a social justice activist who led the pecan shellers’ strike in San Antonio in the late 1930s. The work of LatCrit scholars highlights the omission of women of color from history. Besides the short account listed in the Acuña text, little is known about the contributions of women of color such as Emma Tenayuca. Similar to the findings of Salinas (2004) and the integration of a “critically conscious agenda”, Maria understands her *compromiso* to the young girls in her class, she writes, “Woman also play an important part in our history here in Texas”. She sees this as her responsibility to educate them about the history they would not otherwise learn. Anzaldúa (1987) defines this as operating from a mestiza consciousness, where women understand that they are operating from the transfer of cultural and spiritual values. Maria sees the need for educating her students, in particular her girls, about women who were leaders in their communities to empower themselves. Both of these picture books allow students to learn about the past struggles of their communities through a child’s vision. Terrones (2017) argues that, “Through their eyes, we see our histories and relate to the familiarity of their sights and struggles, as indeed, these memories mirror present-day struggles for equality, access and cultural affirmation” (p.155-156). Terrones draws our attention for teachers to integrate the use of picture books in helping teach students how to develop their own ethnic identities.

COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

The Chicana teachers found ways of empowering students in the classroom by finding ways to allow them to feel successful both inside and outside of the school setting

and by fostering relationships that extend beyond the school year. This was demonstrated by the commitment they spoke about and reflected on during their interviews in the personal stories they chose to share. During an interview, Sonia describes the relationship she maintained overtime with a student and her family she had during pre-kindergarten:

KE: What's one of the most fulfilling aspects of being a teacher?

Sonia: When kids come back and recognize you and see you in the streets and come up to you and say thank you –thanks for not giving up on me.

KE: Why do you think that's so special to you?

Sonia: I get emotional when I say those things. Because kids that were my kids in my classroom they kind of become part of me. Right, that's a common thing the emotional connection that I get.

KE: Are there any stories you can think of?

Sonia: So, I had a really great special kid, her mom and dad were really hard working and they really valued education and wanted her to do well. She came and she was a little sponge and she had a light in her, she loved school I could just see it. When she first came she had a speech impediment. She was so good at art. I made a special connection with her and her family. Her mom would text me a few times a year to check in, and they would always ask me questions about school stuff. Then last year when she was a senior in high school she sent me an email.

KE: What did she say?

Sonia: She invited me to an awards ceremony where seniors who are part of the top 10% get to invite a teacher who was part of their schooling career and honor them. It meant a lot that she picked me, I know she had other great teachers, but she picked me. And that was a huge honor for me, I felt like she was and still is a great kid. She graduated 3rd in her class. She went to UT and now she's a junior, I'm so proud of her.

In this interview, Sonia reflects on her relationship with a student she had in her pre-kindergarten class. Importantly, she discusses how she developed and maintained a relationship with the student and her parents. Sonia also describes this student's parents as being committed to her education, she says, "her mom and dad were really hard working and they really valued education and wanted her to do well". Typically, in U.S. schools Latino parents are often times misjudged and viewed as being uninvolved and not caring about the educational success of their children. Suarez-Orozco (1988) attributes the misconceptions that educators have of Latino families to the disconnect Latino parents experience in schools based on language, race and socioeconomic status. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) explains that schools oftentimes stereotype Latino families because they do not ascribe to the traditional values associated with "whitestream" notions of parental involvement. Moreno and Valencia (2002) also contribute to the growing body of research dedicated to understanding the needs of Latinx parents and families. They attribute the concept of Latinx lack of parental involvement to the deficit ways of thinking that have been previously perpetuated through literature. Some of these traditional notions of parental involvement include attending school conferences, being involved in school

organizations, and being physically present at school. They argue:

“Furthermore, the myth of lack of concern about education is effectively disassembled by literature documenting the high expectations for children’s education and positive beliefs held by Mexican American families” (p.95).

Sonia’s interview also adds to the growing amount of literature that supports and values the contributions of Latinx parents in their schools. She says, “So I had a really great special kid, her mom and dad were really hard working and they really valued education and wanted her to do well”. Sonia chose to immediately position the parents of her student as dedicated individuals who truly valued education. The example Sonia provides to us demonstrates the commitment that Chicana activist educators have to not only their students, but to their families as well. The relationship Sonia built with this family extended beyond the school year, as the child’s teacher she formed a bond that lasted throughout the K-12 schooling and she continued to help this family navigate and answer questions they had related to schooling in the U.S.

Maria also gave an example of how she forms bonds with the students in her classroom that extend beyond the school year. In a journal entry, she writes about one of the students she had in third grade over fifteen years ago.

Maria's Journal Reflection September 1, 2018

The dream as a teacher is to see your kids become even greater than you are. Marisol was one of my students in third grade and now she is going to be a pediatric brain surgeon. She was my student in third grade over fifteen years ago. I became really close to her and to her family. I was even one of her *madrinas* in her *Quinceañera*. They were new to this country and so scared; it was my duty to help them and their families. When they come back and tell you how they are doing and where they are in their life *es la recompensa mas grande de ser maestra*. I have always felt like when the school year ends this is not the end of my *compromiso*, it keeps going and as long as the parents stay in touch with me I stay a part of my kids' lives and I help their families too.

[It is the greatest payback you can get as a teacher]

In the first line, Maria writes, "The dream as a teacher is to see your kids become even greater than you are". My initial interpretation of this was that she was referencing her own biological children. As you read further, you realize that indeed she is talking about the students in her class. Similar to Sonia, Maria describes how she also developed a relationship with Marisol's parents that extended beyond the school year. She refers to the experience of immigrant families and children and how entering into the school system in the U.S. could be a very traumatic event for them. In fact, Machado-Casas (2012) research attest that Latino families find coping mechanisms to help them survive. "They make conscious, situational choices in terms of language and behavior with the ultimate goal of going unnoticed and blending in" (p.546). Sonia saw it as her "duty" to help Marisol and her parents learn how to navigate the schooling system. Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba

(1991) research finds that Latino students develop a “commitment to succeed” through their family practices. Maria says, “I have always felt like when the school year ends this is not the end of my *compromiso*, it keeps going and as long as the parents stay in touch with me I stay a part of my kids’ lives and I help their families too”. Maria shows how she also forms part of this commitment to her kids’ success and describes this as her “*compromiso*”, the role of responsibility she assumes as a teacher. Flores (2011) explains that when Latina teachers help their students’ family’s they do not see it as doing additional work, rather they view it as caring for their community and perceive it as a social responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Chicana bilingual teachers, such as Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda find ways of integrating pedagogical practices that are sensitive to the needs of Latinx students. These teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into their teaching so that their students are able to see themselves and their own experiences reflected in their learning. As bilingual activist educators, they see exposing their students to their cultural heritage as part of their commitment to their students, their *compromiso*. Prieto (2009) describes, “These strategies form *maestras’ conciencia con compromiso*, a process by which they understand, nurture, and develop their commitment to community” (p.38-39). Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda described ways in which they developed their *conciencia con compromiso* to their students and their students’ families through pedagogical practices inside the school and events outside of the school as well. Chicana activist bilingual teachers find ways to expose students to cultural practices that are important to their communities. Maria and Esmeralda understand how to integrate culture into their lessons. Moya (2002) describes culture through a postpositivist mindset as,

“Culture” should not be understood merely as that which expresses a foreign national heritage (complete with anthem, cuisine, language, music, and food), or something that designates the artistic and social practices of the socioeconomic elite in our own society. Rather, “cultures” should be understood as set of practices involving habits of interaction, communicative codes, norms of behaviors and expressions –all of which express in distinct ways relatively coherent systems of meanings and values” (p.158).

Maria and Esmeralda teach “culture” in nurturing and sensitive ways that are specific to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Prieto’s work on *conciencia con compromiso* goes on to explain that *maestras* develop this sensibility out of an urgency for “*sobrevivencia, esperanza, amor, coraje, cariño y conocimiento*” (p.134). Chicana activist *maestras* experience these feelings and transmit them to their students through the lessons that they teach. Growing up Latinas and identifying as Chicanas has provided them with the cultural knowledge to engage in teaching their students about their heritage in meaningful ways. Incorporating an entire unit on *Día de Los Muertos* allowed Maria and Esmeralda to build bridges of learning for their students. Fránquiz, Leija, and Garza (2015) acknowledge that when teachers engage in pedagogical practices that are “bidirectional”, which consists of creating connections to curriculum between homes and school, they foster spaces for self-authoring for their students. During this unit, they begin by positioning their students as experts by appreciating their own funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992) which have a tradition of being left out in schools. These *maestras* explain how they further extend this learning into making it into *una tradicion*, a tradition in their schools. The culminating event, the parade is something that students, parents, and community members look forward to year after year. By doing this they demonstrate *amor*,

their love for their culture and how they teach it to their students. Valenzuela (1999) describes this type of *amor* as “authentic caring”. This type of *amor* is focused on teachers building relationships with students. Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria have demonstrated *amor* or authentic caring of their students, their families and the community they serve.

Being active members of a teachers’ association has given these women a unique perspective and in turn has afforded them with knowledge regarding individuals from their own backgrounds who were involved in shaping union history. They develop *esperanza*, a sense of hope for teaching their students about social justice through examples of community leaders important to Chicanos. They use the stories of César Chavez and Emma Tenayuca to instill a sense of *esperanza* in their class. Their hopes are that their students’ will achieve more than they ever did through learning the stories of these social justice leaders. Prieto and Villenas (2012) argue that it is pivotal for teachers to find ways of making connections between their students’ culture and the school curriculum. They find that when connections are not made, that children lose interest and this negatively impacts their success in school. Critical literacy scholars argue that schools must find ways that challenge students to not only read, but to critique and rewrite dominant discourses through pedagogical practices that challenge dominant discourses (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004 and Vasquez, 2014). Chicana activist *maestras* find ways of doing this even with the constraints placed upon them by state standards and curriculum guidelines. They find ways of guiding students through making connections with the world around them. Sipe (2000) describes this process as students engaging in text-to-self and text-to-world moments of learning. By using historical figures such as César Chávez and Emma Tenayuca, Chicana educators provide moments for their students to engage in critical encounters in their reading. As active members of a teachers’ association, Sonia,

Esmeralda and Maria chose to educate their students about César Chávez and Emma Tenayuca, both of whom were leaders of labor unions. DeNicolo and Fránquiz (2006) explain that when this happens in classrooms students are able to challenge their own preconceived notions and beliefs about what they are learning. DeLissovoy (2010) describes this process as the abilities educators possess to engage in emancipatory pedagogy. “Teaching, then, is a work on being and the invention of the possibility of an authentic encounter between beings outside of domination” (p.208). This is particularly beneficial to the young girls in these *maestras*’ classrooms because they are able to see how women have been able to take on leadership roles. They learn and gain exposure to cultural awareness that they may not have gotten in another general education classroom.

Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria have learned how to use *–la ingeniosidad*, their own ingenuity and resourcefulness to create culturally relevant lessons for their students. Wallowitz (2008) explains the crucial role that critical literacy has in schools today in regards to implementing a social justice curriculum,

“Critical literacy is a vehicle through which educators teach for social justice. [It] interrogates texts in order to identify and challenge social constructs, ideologies, underlying assumptions, and the power structures that intentionally and unintentionally perpetuate social inequalities and injustices” (p. 1–2).

Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria used their knowledge as Chicanas as a vehicle to extend curriculum requirements and to teach lessons that are also focused on social justice. Urrieta (2010) refers to this ability as “agency embedded in daily practice” (p.162). He explains “daily practice can be highly influenced by innovation and improvisation, rather than merely following prescriptions or protocol” (p.162). The ways in which Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria actively resisted their daily practices was because of their identity and agency

as Chicana activist *maestras*. Rather than taking the standards set forth by the state through the TEKS, they chose to find their own resources to integrate. Oftentimes educators view their TEKS as a “protocol” or a “prescription” that they have to abide by, however Chicana activist *maestras* choose to use their *ingeniosidad* to carry out lessons differently.

CHAPTER 7: COLORÍN COLORADO: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

*Humildes yet proud, quietos yet wild, nosotros los mexicanos-Chicanos will walk
by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business.*

(Anzaldua, 1987, p.86)

For this final chapter, I will review my findings presented in chapters four, five and six. Then, I will move on to discuss what *conciencia con compromiso* means to the lives of Chicana activist *maestras* based on their lives and experiences, and my theoretical contributions. I will then explain the policy and practice implications of the findings in regards to education in right-to-work states. To accomplish this, I offer recommendations for public education teachers, schools, administrators, teacher educators, and policy makers to advance their understanding of the experiences of Chicana activist *maestras* in order to improve their working conditions and their needs. Finally, I will discuss future directions in research that can continue to grow and support Chicana activist *maestras*.

FINDINGS REVIEW

Educuar con compromiso: Chicana Teacher Identity and Agency Through Comadrazgo is a representation of the lived experiences and pedagogical practices of three Chicana activist educators: Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria; and what they go through, inside and outside of their classrooms, in Texas, a right-to-work state. My dissertation was a critical ethnography that examined how the three *maestras* constructed, continuously negotiated and orchestrated their Chicana activist identities. There were four research questions used to guide my study: (1) What does the collective knowledge of three Chicana bilingual activist members of a teacher union reveal about the stark realities of teachers in right-to-work states? (2) How do the experiences and life histories of the three Chicana

bilingual teachers influence their decision to join and be active members of a teacher union in Texas? (3) How does their participation in a teacher union influence their leadership roles in the union, their schools, and the community? (4) How has their involvement in the union influenced their pedagogical practices? I was able to examine these questions by investigating their everyday lives in different contexts as members of a teachers' association.

In chapter 4, I explain the trauma that Chicana activist *maestras* face in a right-to-work state and how they have learned –*sobrevivencia* through their lived experiences. Through their stories, Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria explain how they were ostracized and isolated by their peers, administrators, and district officials. I provided examples of how, throughout their educational careers, they have built a system to protect themselves and other activist teachers through their teachers' association. Particularly, they explain their methods for collectively organizing and placing one of their own on the school board—Esmeralda. Their experiences demonstrate that, although Texas is a right-to-work state, they were able to prove that through their own grassroots efforts they gained leverage within the district at different levels because of their advocacy and number of members their association holds. Through their efforts, they deconstruct the marginalization and negative stigmas, which are often attached to educators who identify as activist. I explain that instead of viewing their struggles as a burden, they have developed a sense of –*sobrevivencia* to sustain them in their profession by relying on each other and their *comadrazgo*.

Chapter 5 continues to expand on the lived experiences of Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria. In chapter 5, I examine the life histories of the Chicana participants and I present how they have constructed – *nuestro propio movimiento* (their own movement) because of

the stories they heard as young children, through the organizations, they formed a part of as young adults like *M.E.Ch.A.*, and through their overall commitment to social justice. Their *testimonios* reveal that although they themselves were too young to form part of the Chicana@ movement of the 1960's they did hold strong ties to the history of the struggle for Chicana@ civil rights. Sonia's in-utero experiences as well as the stories they all heard from their parents and their *abuelas* played an integral part in shaping them into the Chicana activist *maestras* they identify as today. This explains how Sonia may not have been able to participate outwardly, she was most certain there vicariously to experiences *el movimiento* in-utero. I outline how epistemically they view their association as a union, although they work in a right-to-work state, because they see it in the same way as the union efforts done in the 1960's within the Chicana@ movement. I move on to explain how they have constructed their own retrofitted memory, which helps them with their own advocacy efforts. Through collaboration within their association, they have constructed a *comadrazgo*, where they are able to continuously negotiate and orchestrate their activist identities, which include Chicana, *maestra*, activist, and *Chingona* without fear of being judged. I then define their friendship of *-comadres*, which the participants describe as a circle of trust within their association. Their *comadrazgo* is a relationship which extends beyond the boundaries of their school district to members of other teachers' associations in Texas, a right-to-work state.

In chapter 6, I move on to explain the pedagogical practices implemented by Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria three Chicana activist *maestras*. I examine how they include lessons based on a funds of knowledge approach to teaching (Moll et al. 1992). I explain how through their lessons they incorporate sentiments of—*orgullo* and pride in students for their bilingualism and biculturalism. Their commitment to culture has evolved into creating

thematic units like *Día de Los Muertos* that are taught throughout a month's long process, not only one day. I describe their mentality of –¿*Si no yo, quién?* (If not me, then who?) that Chicana activist *maestras* develop, which is a sense of obligation and urgency, what they describe as a *compromiso*, to educate and empower their students. I further expand on this *compromiso* of culturally relevant pedagogical practices by providing examples of children's literature used by Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda that include cultural celebrations and historical figures in the Chican@ community. I elaborate on this concept and provide examples of how these Chicana activist *maestras* used their cultural knowledge to integrate content into the standardized lessons they are required to teach. I describe the *ingeniosidad* used by Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria to transform and expand TEKS, which omit the experiences of Chicanos, to include them. I further expand on the concept of *compromiso* felt by these Chicana educators to expose the young girls in their class to historical figures such as Emma Tenayuca. I end with describing the long term *compromiso* Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria develop with their students and families that extends beyond the classroom and school year. I provide context as to how these Chicana activist *maestras* construct bonds with these families and engage in legitimizing the knowledge and experiences of Latino families in U.S. public schools (Suarez-Orozco, 1998; Gaitan, 1994, 2004). I also end by connecting my work to the work of Prieto (2009) *Conciencia con compromiso*, what she described as a commitment *maestras* develop towards their students and the communities they serve. I describe the characteristics developed by Prieto (2009) of “*sobrevivencia, esperanza, amor, coraje, cariño, y conocimiento*” (p. 134) exhibited by Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria. I further these characteristics by adding – *la ingeniosidad* (ingenuity) possessed by Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria to transform their curriculum and their relationships with their students, their students' families and the communities they

serve.

CONCLUSION

The personal *testimonios* and experiences of Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria reveal the stark realities that Chicana activist *maestras* encounter on a daily basis within their schools and their communities. Indeed, it has been argued that *testimonios* allow us to observe a more accurate portrait of the oppressive systems experienced by women in schools (Pérez Huber and Cueva 2012). The impact of the ways in which they are marginalized and ostracized by their peers has led them to find ingenious ways of networking and advocating for themselves. The findings reveal that although Texas is a right-to-work state, Chicana activist *maestras* can use a teachers' association as a platform for themselves and as a safe space for orchestrating their activist Chicana *maestr@* identities. Although they are attuned to what is traditionally expected of Latina women they choose to set themselves apart from the norm. They define themselves not only as Chicanas, *maestras*, activist, but also as *Chingonas*. They see their responsibilities as bilingual educators as what I define as the ability to *educar con compromiso*. This is what Chicana activist *maestras* do by using *–la ingeniosidad*, their ingenuity based on their lived experiences to advocate within their district for issues important to themselves as bilingual educators and their students. These include, include bilingual teacher salaries, teacher accountability systems, voting rights, curriculum practices, and even getting a former teacher elected to the school board.

In addition, Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria use *–la ingeniosidad* in their classrooms with the students they teach on a regular basis by taking standardized TEKS and transforming them into culturally relevant lessons for bilingual and bicultural students.

They are able to find ways of integrating content that is aligned to state standards while also educating culturally and linguistically diverse Latin@ students on important events and individuals who have contributed to the development of Chican@s in schools. In doing this, they make their lessons two-fold, (1) to have students master the skills set forth by the state, and (2) to educate students on the history of their own people. This is their vision of *–educar con compromiso*. Critical literacy scholars present this as a vehicle that educators use in order to teach for social justice (Freire, 1970, Giroux, 1993; Wallowitz, 2008, White, 2009). According to White (2009),

“A critical literacy stance holds that it is the teacher’s job to both teach students basic literacy skills and help them build critical literacy so that literacy itself serves the purpose of helping to create a more just world” (p.55).

By engaging students in lessons that also address issues of social (in)justice and power struggles, Chicana activist *maestras* are engaged in critical literacy that supports the basis for transformative pedagogy. Kumashiro (2000) argues that teachers who are dedicated to educating in an “anti-oppressive” manner which promotes social justice. Burstein and Montañó (2011) explain that bilingual educators have an added layer of activism and consciously assume the role of “*maestras dedicadas*”. Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria are Chicana activist educators understand that there is a problem with the TEKS, which they are required to teach, they are “*maestras dedicadas*”. Therefore, they adapt what Freire (1972, 1998) describes as a “transformation” in teaching with their elementary school children. They become problem solvers by actively implementing their own strategies into teaching curriculum while still meeting state standards.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This critical ethnographic study incorporated an array of sources used for data collection. Through the collection of observations, semi-structured interviews, field notes and artifacts, we can better understand the lives of Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria. As my dissertation project began with a pilot study, I was able to foster and maintain an ongoing relationship with my participants. Throughout these two years, I have had the privileged of visiting with these activist *maestras* in different context, which in turn helped guide my interpretations and understanding of the observations I was making. Observing them in different contexts, in their association meetings, school board meetings, in their schools, and communities all contributed to the orchestration of their *maestra* activist identities. In addition to a commitment to conducting prolonged field work, critical ethnographers are committed to “producing focused, well-theorized accounts of a particular institution or subgroup that reveal oppressive relations of power” (Villenas and Foley, 2002, p.226). By engaging in a project over an extended period, I was able to connect what I was observing in association meetings to greater issues I knew were happening in the personal lives of Sonia, Maria and Esmeralda. The rapport established with my participants, facilitated a space for the fluidity of dialogue to be exchanged in a safe space. Engaging in a critical ethnography allowed me to collect a vast amount of information to use as part of my fieldwork and experiences with Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria related to cultural patterns, identity orchestration in different context, shared lived experiences, and classroom pedagogical practices of Chicana activist *maestras*.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

On March 11, 2019, thousands of teachers and professional staff joined outside of the State Capitol in Austin, Texas to advocate for the rights of teachers and professional

staff members. The contribution and resiliency of these activist educators in Texas, a right-to-work state should be further investigated. It takes an immense amount of courage, strength and *sobrevivencia* to identify as a Chicana activist teacher, especially in Texas. Activist teachers engage in their own activist pedagogy. We have much to learn about how these inspiring individuals become agents of social change and especially about their classroom practices. By engaging in research that focuses on sharing their moments of political clarity and how they developed their sense of *conciencia con compromiso* we can learn about the ways in which Chicana activist *maestras* network, disrupt power relationships in their schools, and their ability to continue to teach in tumultuous times through sharing their *testimonios* of *sobrevivencia*. Although literature exist documenting the efforts of activist teachers in teacher unions (Montaño and Burstein, 2006; Rottman, 2012), much is left to be said about the advocacy efforts of teachers in right-to-work states. Weiner and Compton (2008) describe the privatization occurring in public school in the U.S. as an assault that affects the daily lives of teachers which, in turn affects their teaching practices.

Using the teachers' association for the context of the figured world for my study allowed for the understanding of how information is disbursed within the group. Teachers' unions and associations are safe spaces for activist educators. Where they can collectively organize in both union and right-to-work states. These organizations provide members with a community of like-minded educators to share their experiences with both triumphs and tribulations. Unions and associations provide a place, especially for Chicana activist *maestras*, to meet and further discuss and prepare advocacy efforts related to education matters within their schools, districts, and communities.

The use of figured worlds as a tool for conducting ethnographic research allows for the exploration of how the world of a teachers' association works in a right-to-work state within a school district,

"By 'figured world', then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents [...] who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state [...] as moved by a specific set of forces ..."

(Holland et al., 1998, p.52).

Within the teachers' association Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria were able to see how they perform their identities depending on time, space, and location. Using the concept of figured worlds, I was able to see the ways in which the participants chose to enact their identities at different times, those of *maestra*, activist, Chicana, and *Chingona*.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Through the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, right-to-work state laws were put in place to protect individuals against unionization. It also states that, individuals cannot be forced into joining unions. Texas further explains its justification for non-unionization by legislative findings from 1993 listed below,

“§ 101.102. Legislative Findings; Policy

(a) The legislature finds that because the activities of labor unions affect the economic conditions of the country and the state by entering into almost all business and industrial enterprises, labor unions affect the public interest and are charged with a public use.

(b) Workers must be protected without regard to whether they are unionized. The right to work is the right to live”.

Because of this legislative action individuals living in Texas, including teachers, often feel that they do not need to be members of teachers’ associations. However, the highly political climate of teaching in Texas informs us otherwise. With increasing efforts by legislators regarding accountability standards for educators, the over use of standardized testing, and the increasing numbers of charter school’s teachers need the political knowledge, backing, and protection provided to them by associations. Salinas (2004) attest that curriculum and policymakers would benefit from listening to the voices of Chicana@ educators in designing and creating curriculum. Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria all confirm that based on specific incidents within their schools, with peers, or with administrators they have all benefitted from union (association) membership and guidance. Teacher unions and associations also provide trainings at local, state, and national levels to further inform and educate activist teachers on their rights as educators. The professional development workshops provided to Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria in Green ISD informed them on how specific objectives changed in their teacher evaluation system and how they could protect themselves.

Policy makers in Texas and other right-to-work states should heed the call to listen to what activist teachers are saying. Their advocacy efforts center on issues affecting the socio-political climate of teaching in today’s society, specifically, the issue of funding cuts to public education. The Austin American Statesman reported,

“Teacher groups say they don’t trust the Texas Education Agency to work in their members’ interests. They fear the agency would require that teachers be measured based on how well their students perform on the State of Texas Assessments of

Academic Readiness” (Chang, 2019).

Highlights that tensions between The Texas Education Agency and public schools exist and are an inherent problem faced by public school educators today. Clearly, there are other issues related to decisions made by lawmakers regarding the over use of standardized testing, the debate on performance pay, and teacher retirement all of which need to be addressed. The voice of teachers who serve public school children should be valued and heard by those who implement policies that affect the education of children. Teachers’ associations such as TSTA, which Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria were involved in, should be actively sought out to form policies that impact educational practices.

In March 2019, the Texas legislator and the senate voted and unanimously approved the HB3 and SB 3 regarding school finance and property tax reform. HB3 specifically addresses the need for the funding of public schools in Texas. Some of the major areas it covers are lowering school property tax, increasing funds to higher needs and underserved students, and increasing the minimum teacher salary schedule. SB3 has also unanimously passed which increases teacher pay across Texas by the senate. A portion of the bill is listed below,

“S.B. No. 3 Sec. 21.4023. Classroom Teacher and Librarian Salary Allotment. (a)
Every full-time classroom teacher and full-time librarian is entitled to an annual salary allotment in the amount of \$5,000”.

Collectively, HB 3 and SB 3 were passed with the interest of teachers in mind. The voices of teachers’ associations backed by teachers’ unions were heard. These reforms to public education were only approved after the merit pay provision were removed. Initially, the senate bill stated that teachers pay would be connected to students’ success on standardized test. However, an outcry from teachers and their teachers’ association gained the attention

of the media and politicians. Further resulting in a modification to the bill and removal of merit pay. Instead, teachers who working in high needs areas and more rural areas could receive incentives for their dedication and service to these communities.

TSTA provided a national platform for the concerns of teachers' in Texas to be heard on a national level. Changes to teacher salary are to take effect September 1, 2019. Although Texas is a right-to-work state, teachers still actively choose to join teachers' associations who can represent them. Their efforts were clearly recognized here in Texas when they showed up on the steps of the Capitol.

As the landscape of public education in Texas continues to shift, teachers' associations should continue to serve as a sounding board and protection for public school educators. Often times, those in charge with making decisions that affect children in public schools lack the educational expertise to make sound decisions, and in turn, run public education like a business. The stories shared by Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria are a testament to the effectiveness of a teachers' association in a right-to-work state. Now more than ever, with the continuous increase on pressures on teachers regarding, accountability, standardized testing, and hostile work environments, teachers are in need of protection that teacher unions and their association affiliates can provide through their legal backing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Schools must take the opportunity to listen to the pedagogical needs of their activist educators. Chicana activist like Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria vocalize the issues they see facing their students, fellow staff members, and communities. Fostering an environment of collaboration with teachers' associations based on respect and *compromiso* from district school board members, district administrators, fellow teachers, students, parents and

community members is extremely important. When districts, schools, and teachers come together and collaborate with each other there will be an increase in achievement at all levels. Chicana activist *maestras* exist in right-to-work states like Texas, but oftentimes they are seen as taboo. Their activism and advocacy efforts go unnoticed or are silenced by other individuals. I recommend opportunities where activist teachers from across schools within a district can come together to share concerns with each other and district administrators during school time or professional development days. The only time Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria were able to speak with other activist *maestras* was after school during association meetings or if they attended association conferences. Sonia explained that many times other teachers were unable to attend association meetings after school because they had obligations to their families or were tired after working all day. This could be remedied by providing opportunities during professional development days to address issues important to teachers within the district.

We also have much to learn about the pedagogical expertise possessed by Chicana activist *maestras*. Their commitment to *educar con compromiso* is a reservoir of knowledge that should be tapped into by schools. The scholarly work of Fránquiz and Salazar (2004) argues for a humanizing pedagogical approach to teaching that is driven by the transformative potential of developing the academic identities of Chican@ and Latin@ students. They share that by teachers engaging in curriculum practices that include the stories of non-violent leaders, such as César Chávez and Emma Tenayuca, teachers engage in a “humanizing pedagogy and present(ed) opportunities for students to strive for academic resiliency” (p.48). We still have much to learn from the epistemic knowledge Chicana activist *maestras* like Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria hold. For example, schools could seek out the expertise of Chicana activist *maestras* to share their knowledge with

other teachers. Esmeralda explained how, when she decided to use books to teach about the characteristics of a biography, the other members of her team were not interested because of their loaded schedules. *La ingeniosidad* that Chicana activist *maestras* possess that allows them to align with state standards while also incorporating lessons that are sensitive to culturally responsive pedagogy should not go to waste. They should be provided with a platform and ample opportunities to share their ideas with others. Valenzuela (2016) describes such efforts as a “grow your own” approach. Valenzuela clarifies that “critically conscious educators are developed and nurtured rather than automatically predisposed by virtue of a shared race or ethnicity” (p.18). To achieve this, Valenzuela argues that by “returning to the root” we must validate and reclaim the wisdom of our elders through our pedagogical practices. As such, schools have the moral obligation to continue to provide bilingual educators with professional development opportunities where they can nurture their “critical consciousness” or, what I define as their willingness to *–educar con compromiso*.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Clearly, there is more work to be done in the realm of Chicana activist teachers. Specifically, conducting research that acknowledges the epistemic knowledge activist *maestras* incorporate into their pedagogical practices. Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell (2018) in their work, *Chicana Movidas New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* provide documented “herstories” that, until now not have not been told,

“Hallways, passages, kitchens –places in-between or outside of the main events – these are the spaces of transit and possibility where Chicanas mobilized strategies to challenge of internalities of power and form new networks of resistance” (p.12).

Chicana activist are still finding spaces to “mobilize strategies” that continue to challenge the power relations they are confronted with in their daily lives. Research must continue to highlight the knowledge held by Chicana activist educators that use their *ingeniosidad* both inside and outside of the classroom. By continuing this body of research, we contribute the understanding of how Chicanas work together and find networks that support their activism. Especially in the field of education, Chicana activist *maestras* find ways of resisting curriculum practices that do not meet the needs of their Latinx students because of their tendency to marginalize and omit their experiences. Given our current geopolitical climate and the increasing number of Latinx students in public schools, we must continue to find ways of integrating the funds of knowledge possessed by these students into our classroom practices. Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria provide us with an example of the ample epistemic knowledge possessed by Chicana activist *maestras*.

Social media has also afforded them with an additional space for organizing and advocacy efforts. Sánchez and Ek (2013) explain that “older generations of Chicanas/Latinas who are adopting new technologies to create new spaces for connecting, re-making, teaching, and learning” (p.184). We must continue exploring the impact of social media in the daily practices of Chicana activist *maestras*. “The epistemic value of particular identities can be revealed by seeing how well they “refer” to verifiable aspects of the world they claim to describe” (Moya, 2002. p.87). Committing to engaging in prolonged ethnographic work with Chicana activist *maestras*, will continue to provide information about their multiple identities.

Continuing to examine the ways in which activist *maestr@s* form relationships with each other to help sustain themselves in their profession is key. Specifically, we should expand on the previous work of *hermandad* by extending the work that has been done at a

collegial level and using it as a tool for understanding the sisterhood developed by Chicana educators in public schools. Bettez et al. (2009) established that *hermandad* is a relationship created and cultivated by women of color in academia to sustain them throughout their struggles. Chicana activist *maestras* in public schools also foster and are true to the principles that are true to a *hermandad* relationship. They explain,

“It is a way to recognize that as women of color in academia we are here together, and each other’s cause is a shared cause for voice, visibility, sustainability, and empowerment in academia. It is the legacy of the struggle of those who came before and paved the way for us, which we will leave here in this world as Latina women (p. 60-61).

Extending the concept and using it as a tool for investigating the advocacy efforts of Chicana activist *maestras* is beneficial to understanding the issues most women of color face on a daily basis. Sonia, Esmeralda and Maria all provided examples of how they relied on each other and their *comadrazgo* to give them the tools, for their *sobrevivencia* in their teaching careers. Connecting *hermandad* to research guided by the methodological approach, “history in person” will also provide another resource for counter stories that highlight transformative struggles that Chicana activist *maestras* endure. Holland and Lave (2001) attest that history in person is a useful tool as it is grounded in the struggles of individuals and their communities they suggest,

“All of the multiply authored and positioned selves, identities, cultural forms, and local and far-reaching struggle, given together in practice, are bound up in making history in person” (p.30).

Applying this to Chicana activist *maestras* would extend our conception of the discourses these women engage in to self-author themselves.

MI PROPIO COMPROMISO

As a young girl, a typical evening included sitting on the couch with my *tía* while we watched *novelas*. Our talks were surrounded by *dichos* of advice that would eventually help sustain me from childhood to my adult life, my own *sobrevivencia* that I draw from on a daily basis. Throughout my doctoral program, I have continued to navigate and balance multiple figurative and physical spaces. These figurative spaces included multiple identities as a daughter, *maestra*, and doctoral student. The physical distance between San Antonio and Austin is about an hour. However, at times this could seem to last *una eternidad*, as I am constantly being tugged in different directions by multiple actors that guide and motivate me to continue this arduous journey: my family (both living and *los que me guian desde el cielo*), my former students (*mis niños*), my fellow *maestra amigas*, and *mis profesores*. Each actor playing an integral part in shaping my trajectory, the *compromiso* I have for those relationships is something I do not take lightly.

Many times, the spaces that I have navigated and inhabited seemed to consume me; often I would struggle with feelings of betrayal to one of these identities over the other. Cortez (2001) describes these conflicting thoughts as *nepantla*—a word originating from the Aztecs that is often described as a potential site for agency. Prieto and Villenas (2012) affirm that, “*Nepantla* speaks to and informs the difficult and often overlapping spaces of cultural dissonance, *conciencia con compromiso*, and *cariño*” (p.424). Being in these spaces influenced me to continue working with bilingual students and teachers because of the *compromiso* and *cariño* that I felt for them. The agency Cortez (2001) asserts often times manifests itself as magic. Had it not been for the magic I felt on a daily basis when I was a Chicana activist *maestra*, then I would have never developed the *ganas* (willpower) to conduct my dissertation. I remember the feeling of being bombarded, as a classroom

teacher, with stress to teach stringent state standards. However, when I would see the faces of *mis niños* staring back at me, I knew they deserved more. To me, and surely to all teachers who identify as Chicana activist *maestras*, they were more than what their standardized test scores reflected.

My hope is that through the *testimonios* that Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria have shared we gain a greater sense of respect and admiration for the efforts of Chicana activist *maestras* in right-to-work states. The life histories of Sonia, Esmeralda, and Maria reveal the common experiences they encountered both as children and adults. Their teaching experiences reveal the stark realities Chicana activist *maestras* face in schools. However, their tireless efforts both inside and outside of the classroom demonstrate the extent of their *compromiso* to their students, their students' families, and the communities they serve. Throughout my doctoral program, I have had the privileged of collaborating with bilingual preservice activist teachers. Teaching courses within the bilingual teacher preparation program has developed my sense of *compromiso* to future activist *maest@s*, to engage them in pedagogy that will prepare them to enter into their future classrooms with the ability to teach for social justice and to grow as critically conscious activist *maestr@s*. Moving forward, I am fully committed to continuing to work with activist *maestr@s* and to engage in research that continues to provide a platform for showcasing their *ingeniosida* both inside and outside of the classroom.

Appendix A

Example of Fieldnotes

Fieldnote: 8/14/2018

Context: Green School Board Meeting

Description

Today I attended the school board meeting which started at 5:30pm at one of the local high schools. This is the meeting before the school year begins. Several members from TSTA are present and they are all wearing their red shirts. Esperanza is also wearing a red dress to mirror the colors of TSTA. Sonia filled out a green sheet to be able to speak during the public forum portion of the meeting.

At 5:30pm everyone stands for the pledge and the meeting is called to order by the board president. I see that several district administrators are seated looking at the board with their backs to the audience. The public forum portion of the meeting begins and there are five individuals who have filled out green sheets.

One parent from a local elementary is furious that the district suspended the school bus route that would pick up his students and take them to school. Their reasoning behind suspending the bus service is because of the proximity of the school to the family's home.

I ask Sonia what the board members are going to do. She explains that during public forum individuals do not get answers. Usually what happens is that if the issues are important, the board will either discuss it in closed session, or they will put it on the agenda for the next meeting. Sonia goes on to say that the man has come to several meetings and that his

house is across the street from the elementary school and she does not understand why he refuses to walk or drop off his students.

Sonia is the third person to speak during public forum. Today she is only thanking the board for their willingness to listen to issues brought up by TSTA. She expresses her excitement for the beginning of the school year and all the possibilities that come from starting over. She ends with thanking the school board members and tells them that she looks forward to collaborating with them in the future for the betterment of Green ISD.

After Sonia speaks all of the members of Green TSTA stand and applaud her.

Appendix B

Example of Life History Interview Questions and Testimonio Journal Prompts

Example of Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about one of your favorite childhood memories.
2. What do you remember about your parents growing up?
3. Tell me about your siblings.
4. What things do you remember learning at home?
5. Can you describe the neighborhood you grew up in?
6. Were there any phrases that were popular when you were a teenager? Do you remember any *dichos* growing up?
7. What do you remember about being in school?
8. Did you go to university or college? How did you decide what you wanted to study?
9. How did you decide what you wanted to do with your life?

Example of Testimonio Journal Prompts

1. Can you tell me about a time you struggled with teaching?
2. What is your favorite memory from your teaching career?
3. What would you like to share about your experience as a Chicana activist *maestra*?

Appendix C

Example of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Example Teaching Interview Questions

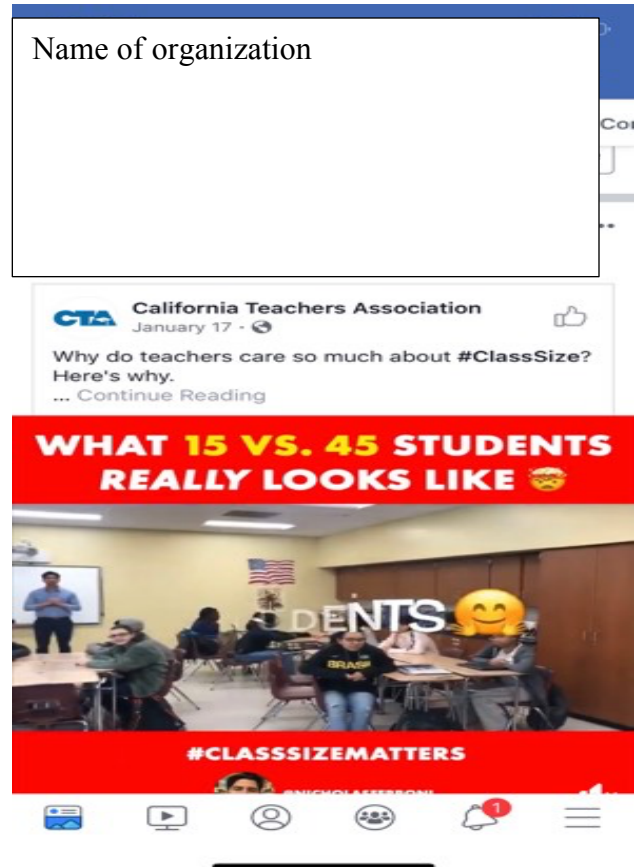
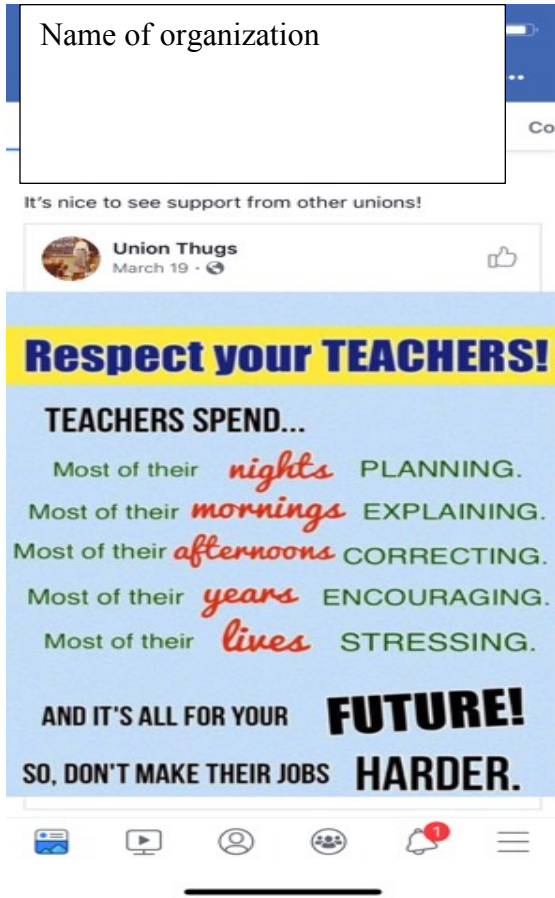
1. How many years have you been in education?
2. What do you like most about being a teacher?
3. Can you tell me about some of the struggles you have encountered throughout your professional experience?
4. What grades have you taught? Which grade is your favorite and why?
5. What types of resources do you use when you teach language arts?
6. How do you choose these materials? Why do you choose them?
7. What do you remember most about your students?
8. What do you remember most about their families?
9. What advice would you give to a future bilingual teacher?
10. What else would you like to share about teaching?

Example Identity Interview Questions

1. What are your best qualities?
2. Who would your friends say that you are?
3. If you had to describe your identity in words, which words would you choose?
4. Can you explain what you mean by those words?
5. How did you get involved in TSTA?
6. What roles do you have within the organization?
7. How long have you been in TSTA?
8. Why is TSTA important to you?

Appendix D

Example of Artifacts



Name of organization

Name of organization

What is your overall assessment of the job the district's leadership team has done in the last year? Do you feel that there needs to be improvements? Please give specific examples.



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