

Recuerdos, Expresiones y Sueños en Nepantla:

Identity Journeys through Spoken, Written, and Artistic *Testimonios*

by

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Recuerdos, Expresiones y Sueños en Nepantla:
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ABSTRACT:

In this study, I argue that Latinx students' lives, culture, and language are not adequately valued in our educational system, resulting in a need for more in-depth relationship-building and preparation and education for our mostly White and monolingual teaching pool of candidates. I experienced these inequities in the public education system, as both a bilingual Latinx student and as a bilingual elementary teacher. Based on my previous role as a teacher, I designed a qualitative study with auto-historic and arts-based methods re-engaging with a group of my former elementary school students, now teens in high school. Grounded in four combined conceptual frames of Chicana feminism (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Godinez, 2006; Yosso, 2005), *acompañamiento*¹ (Sepúlveda, 2011), love and care (Freire, 2008; hooks, 2000; Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999), and *nepantla*² (Anzaldúa, 2015), we engaged in *pláticas y encuentros* revisiting our past, present, and imagined future. When coming together, we shared *testimonios* through spoken, written, and visual expressions. Findings showed how youth participants understood their language learning experiences and linguistic identities within their English language development classes. They expressed critiques in what they perceived as low-quality methods of instruction, which led to impediments and hindrances to their linguistic identity, fueling resistance to the injustice. By revising past poems written in fourth grade, findings

¹ *Acompañamiento* is not merely a simple translation to accompaniment, but an integrated means of walking alongside, loving each other, to fully humanize one another (Sepúlveda, 2011).

² Anzaldúa (2015) reconceptualizes the Aztec idea of *nepantla*, a metaphorical and transformative location understood as the in-between space framed by borders.

revealed students embodied various emotions as they shouldered their loved ones' encounters with racist nativist and sociopolitical border-crossing realities. By revisiting multiple time periods in our lives and by providing artistic tools, the bilingual Latinx youth trans/formed their identities into visual expressions. My perspective as “artist/researcher/teacher” (De Cosson, 2002) and my conceptual framework both facilitated my understanding of the potential of trans/forming public education system in becoming more humanizing for bilingual Latinx students.

Dedicated to:

To my students and families, I thank you from the bottom of my heart
for our years together, *acompañando uno al otro*.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Transformative Migrations

Together again remembering

Relationships, experiences, joys, and pains

A border crossing journey, moving along together

Now and then, past, present, and future

See our potential?

For we started small, we awkwardly crawled

Opportunities to validate our language and culture

Reminiscing, nourished together, strangeness fades

Making a space, encompassed with love and care

A protective mask camouflages

The chrysalis protecting us

Identities trans/form – resisting, growing and changing

Opening the windows and breaking through

New Knowledge emerges, we fly forth to tell, write and tell

Stories of our existence

The *testimonios* in this dissertation honor border crossing Latinx knowledge, emerging from students' experiences and identities, expressed through speaking, writing, and art. As an “artist/researcher/teacher (a/r/t)” (De Cosson, 2002) this investigation involved reconnecting with my former elementary students, now in high school. We met again to revisit and discuss poetry written in the fourth grade, while using artistic tools to generate visual expressions about their lives. My students and I shared *testimonios* granting us new perspectives to reimagine education. Through their stories, I learned about individual encounters and those with others, at home and school. I put forth their collective *testimonios* as legitimate Latinx experiences contributing essential knowledge in transforming educational practices.

In this chapter, I began with the poem above to outline and introduce the study. Then, I provide a rationale and purpose for this investigation, followed by the research questions illuminating the entire study. Then, I present the social, political, and ideological context highlighting questionable practices that marginalize bilingual Latinx populations. Also, I situate

my background and positionality as a bilingual Latinx (a/r/t) rationalizing a creative, poetic, and visual study examining identities. Furthermore, I explain how this research, grounded in four conceptual frameworks of Chicana feminism (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Godinez, 2006; Yosso, 2005), *acompañamiento* (Sepúlveda, 2011), love and care (Freire, 2008; hooks, 2000; Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999), and *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 2015) converged. I describe my use of metaphors, grounded in theory, illustrating collective conceptualizations. Then, I provide a chapter overview. Lastly, the conclusion at the end of this chapter is not the end, but the beginning – an invitation to engage in our spoken, written, and artistic *testimonio* journey.

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Students in our classrooms bring with them brilliantly varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although the diversity of our student populations continues to increase, the teaching workforce remains mostly White, female, and English monolingual (Milner, 2005). Over four and a half million students come into our schools knowing another language other than English at home (NCES, n.d.). Of these bilingual students, nearly 79% are of Latinx descent (Kindler, 2002). Conversely, 45% of Latinx students in our schools are bilingual (Lazarín, 2006). On another note, as of 2014, over 11 million unauthorized people were living in the United States of America, over half of them of Mexican descent (Krogstad, Passel & Cohn, 2016). Importantly, four million students, born in the United States to immigrant mothers, are “citizen-children” coming from mixed-status homes (Taylor, Lopez, Passel, & Motel, 2011; Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon & Rey, 2015). In the United States, mixed-status relationships are multidimensional; there are families made up of any number of combinations of immigrants – documented and undocumented – and citizens born or naturalized (Fix & Zimmermann, 2001; Zayas et al., 2015). Moreover, almost half of those born in this country to Latinx immigrants

become fluent in English in adulthood (Hakimzadeh & Cohn, 2007). It is essential to separate out the intricacies in the various subsets of people residing in this country, as not all Latinx people are immigrants or bilingual. Also, not all immigrants are Latinx or undocumented. Despite all of the complexities of Latinx identities and physical border crossing experiences, there continue to be politicized ideas of who belongs in this country (Perez Huber et al., 2008). The truth is a vast number of bilingual Latinx students are in fact citizens belonging to this country and have the right to be a part of our classroom families (Guerrero, 2003).

In creating this study, I used principles underscoring how we should treat students with love in our schools. Committing to our students should not be a job; instead, teachers should stand in like family members. Moreover, like family, my former students and I spent years watching and learning from each other, subscribing to the idea of *in loco parentis* [in the place of the parent]. A teachers' charge is to act like non-biological parents to students in our care, while making decisions in their best interest, and celebrating their lives (M. Espinoza, personal communication, April 13, 2017). To adhere to these standards in public education, we must push for adequately trained teachers with the loving, ethical, and legal motivation to accompany and protect students from harm on transformative journeys (Sepúlveda, 2011).

Strength-based and critically-oriented research disrupts negative narratives about Latinx students by adopting approaches that center their voices, build loving and caring relationships, and explore practices using *testimonios* across time and space. However, the majority of studies focus on shorter-term relationships (less than four to five years) and do not employ both written and visual media. Some studies use poetry and *testimonios* across time (Sepúlveda, 2011), cultural artifacts (Pahl, 2005), and art (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012). Other scholars illuminate the need for loving and caring relationships (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Flores

Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012). Scholars indicate that establishing long-lasting relationships, connecting with students, and welcoming their personal lives in the classroom, creatively disrupts limiting boundaries and dismantles deficit perspectives of Latinx community members (Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011; Sepúlveda, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Conducting humanizing and decolonizing studies and pedagogical practices, following the scholars mentioned above, positions Latinx students through asset-based and positive approaches. However, a limited number of studies explicitly describe long-term relationships and student work created in the past as tools for generating conversations.

These critical researchers invite us to carry out studies to witness the potential in students' academic trajectories. I acknowledge these inspirational scholars who have come before me, challenging dominant research perspectives and practices, by highlighting Latinx knowledge and experiences in my study. Regardless of identities related to their sociopolitical encounters and realities (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012), including their race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, heritage, ancestry, and language, educators should treat students in loving and humanizing ways. Latinx students' lives deserve to be legitimized, heard, read, and seen, as they grow and transform over time in our classrooms. The findings presented in this dissertation study, which stem from bilingual Latinx students' *testimonios*, are vital contributions to the scholarship to growing and transforming the educational system as well.

Research Questions

This study is a response to the invitation for conducting humanizing and decolonizing research. Hence, I used pedagogical and research approaches to disrupt negative views of Latinx students, valuing their complex cultural and linguistic experiences. I assembled a study capturing

a glimpse into a profound journey between students and an a/r/t. Thus, the following research questions guided this study, each of which I address in three separate findings chapters:

RQ1: What do bilingual Latinx students express in their spoken *testimonios* about their linguistic identities and language learning experiences?

RQ2: What emotions do bilingual Latinx students embody in their present spoken *testimonios*, individually and collectively, when revisiting written expressions from their past?

RQ3: How did bilingual Latinx students' memories and dreams of their identities trans/form into visual expressions?

In answering these questions, I explain how my former students and I creatively spent time and made spaces to witness each other's lives. We met in the summer for four weeks, during their ninth and tenth grade school years, helping us make better sense of schooling and home experiences as bilingual Latinx students. Together, we revisited the past by reading poems written in elementary school. Also, we imagined their future using art. Allowing students, the ability to present how they see themselves and how they wish to be seen, honored their complicated lives. This act positioned them in a favorable light, while students' exposed problems associated with social, political, and ideological contexts.

Social, Political, Ideological Context

The United States of America has a historically racist past (Donato, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2002). Unfortunately, racism continues into the present. This problematic context situates the study, justifying the dire need for positioning Latinx lives as valuable, bright, and enriching. I divide the following section into descriptions of the social constructions of race, racist nativism, and linguisticism. I provide how these beliefs and practices impact Latinx students.

Social constructions of race. Ever since the first European settlers (read as the first undocumented immigrants) colonized the native inhabitants and their land, racism has been part of everyday political, economic, cultural, and linguistic practices in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Race as a social construction cannot be untangled from any other social structures, intersecting with ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, heritage, and language. Historically, the notion of race has played the role of "master category" – becoming an underlying model in designing generations of inequality (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. viii). These social structures should not be conflated, but related. Furthermore, race and racism are not the same, but connected concepts (Perez Huber, 2016). Racism has been fashioned by those benefiting from White supremacist ideologies, legitimizing White ideas and knowledge (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Rodriguez, 2006). Consequently, racism positions White standards as superior, thus generating discrimination, segregation, and stigmatization (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Racist nativist beliefs and practices. Through power, borders were created and politically defined (Pérez, 2007). The imposed Mexico/US border established negative perceptions and anti-immigrant sentiments, marginalizing the Latinx communities because of racialized assumptions of inferiority (Pérez, 2007). These geographical boundaries divide humans, producing suspicion and negative perspectives based on people's position in relation to this border. Thus, racist nativism emerges – a discriminatory view tying race and immigration status together – establishing a perpetual construction of “non-native,” excluding specific racialized groups from thoroughly belonging to this country (Perez Huber et al., 2008, p. 39) or in classrooms. These racist and racist nativist ideologies attached to the border, translate into practices determining whose knowledge counts and who matters, impacting Latinx students.

The most recent racist iteration, during the time of the study, reared its ugly head before and during the study, with the current 2016 presidential campaign, election, and administration. Donald Trump has made damaging, racist, and malicious references towards the Latinx community and immigrants (Reilly, 2016). Some studies have shown the narratives of threats and actual deportations and detentions that have had terrible consequences on Latinx communities, include physical, emotional, and mental trauma (Brabeck et al., 2014; Dreby, 2012; Talavera, Núñez-Mchiri, & Heyman 2010; Zayas et al., 2015).

Linguicism beliefs and practices. Racism informs linguicism or “linguistic terrorism,” translating to internalized beliefs of inferior language abilities, (Anzaldúa, 1987). Moreover, these racist ideologies also undergird language status (Kubota & Lin, 2006). This language discrimination and marginalization stem from a perceived superiority of White speakers, perpetuating the hegemony of English (Shannon, 1995). Racism and linguicism have historically devalued Latinx communities and their Spanish language (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Consequently, this has positioned White speakers with a higher language status than that of others (Kubota & Lin, 2006). These beliefs impact language education for bilingual students as they are segregated and stigmatized because of their identity (Callahan, Wilkinson, Muller & Frisco, 2009; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Katz, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). Also, societal perceptions of superiority based on being a White English speaker grant these individuals the benefit of a “monolingual bias,” or as Ortega (2014) iterates as an “assumption that monolingualism is the default for human communication” (p. 32). This monolingual bias has, often, prohibited the use of native language supports, while research shows the importance of the first language in second language acquisition (Escamilla, Hopewell, Butvilofsky, Sparrow, Soltero-González, Ruiz-Figueroa, & Escamilla, 2014; Shanahan, MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006). Prohibiting

native language supports or devaluing Spanish, unfortunately, leads to the loss of native language, increasing the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Fillmore, 1991; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Rumbaut, 1995). These dehumanizing practices should be collectively defined as educational neglect, harming our Latinx students (E. Sepúlveda, 2018, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

Furthermore, learning a foreign language is deemed superior because of the race of the speaker, who is connected to lower stakes and requirements than those learning a dominant second language (Kibler & Valdés, 2016), in this case, English. In other words, a White person acquiring Spanish is perceived as honorable, while a Latinx community member learning English is not. Other problematic practices include assimilation through erasure of language and culture (del Carmen Salazar, 2013) and the rejection of native language use (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). There is also a lack of funding and inadequate resources (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006), and overcrowded schools with unqualified teachers (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003) in schools with predominantly Latinx populations. Furthermore, specific categorizing labels stigmatize students, such as English Language Learner (ELL) or long-term English language learners (LTELL), segregating them into lower level classes (Menken & Kleyn, 2010; Oropeza, Varghese & Kanno, 2010). This separation in classrooms positions them to receive less than adequate instruction (Kibler & Valdés, 2016), causing feelings of inappropriate placement (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Even more so, compared to monolingual English speakers, bilingual students are subjected to higher and double standards with excessive testing (Menken, 2008; Flores, Kleyn, & Menken, 2015). These systemic inflexibilities prevent students from achieving their full potential (Delgado Bernal, 2002; E.

Sepúlveda, 2018, personal communication, February 19, 2018), and often time educators overlook their abilities.

As their legal right, Latinx students enter classrooms with hopes of transforming academically and socially in positive ways. However, the legislation does not protect bilingual children from covert problematic societal and schooling practices indoctrinated with racism, including messages of inferiority tied to identities. Many students are degraded because of these extensive national systems of racism and linguicism, stripping away valuable resources related to their culture and language (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). This study positively positions bilingual Latinx knowledge, disrupting broader social, political, and ideological racist narratives and practices. The problems mentioned above highlighted above, related to these societal and educational practices of not adequately attending to Latinx students, pushed me to wonder like the scholar, Duncan-Andrade (2009), “How did I get to a place where I [prioritized] lesson plans over a healing child in pain?” (p. 191). I asked myself a similar question, “How do we change an educational system to centralize, love, and care about Latinx student’s lives?” In essence, the problem is that the education system does not sufficiently value Latinx students’ lives and knowledge. This study centers Latinx students’ lives. Below, I describe my personal and professional circumstances as it relates to this macro-social context.

A/R/T’s Background and Positionality

I present a detailed background situating my positionality in the investigation as I experienced some of the problems mentioned above while navigating U.S. public schools as a Mexican bilingual student. I also encountered many of these problems professionally in my seven years of teaching bilingual Latinx elementary school students with mixed-immigration-

status families. At one point in my teaching career, I moved up with a group of students from second to fifth grade, giving me the opportunity to teach some of the same students two, three, or four years. During the study, I organized *pláticas y encuentros* (informal talks and encounters) with eight of these former students, now teens. Together, we expressed ourselves through speaking, poetry, and art, imagining our lives through *testimonios* about our past, present, and future. With shared histories of knowing each other for years while students were in elementary school, and additional years after they moved on to middle and high school, our long-term relationships facilitated the development of new and unique perspectives about how bilingual Latinx students navigate the world around them. Below, I unpack my personal experiences as a documented bilingual Mexican alongside my professional accounts of teaching as they relate to my work as a Chicana feminist researcher.

Personal History. I was born in the Sonoran Desert of Tucson, Arizona to Mexican parents. At the age of two, my mother and father crossed the border, moving our family south of the border to Sonora. My earliest *recuerdos* [memories] stem from time in Arizona and Mexico, which included my loving mother's *enseñanzas y consejos* [teachings and advice], my caring father's *chistes y cuentos* [stories], and playing with my brother, sister, and extended family. I would search for art in the world around me, finding images in the rocks or the trees, often painting their shapes with colors. Also, I first learned *la lengua de mi mamá* [my mother's tongue], Spanish. *Platicando* [chatting] with my great aunt, *Tía Emilia*, while eating sweet little breads she made in her kitchen established fond memories. All of these conversations and encounters, and many others, shaped my personal and overlapping identities.

At the age of five, my parents once again zig-zagged back north, crossing the border because of my father's academic opportunities. He ultimately landed us in the cooler climates of

Colorado. In kindergarten, my cultural and linguistic worlds collided, as my parents stressed the importance of speaking Spanish and Mexican pride at home, while teachers demanded English-only at school. I was only one of three bilingual students in the class – the other two were Erica from Mexico and Joanna from Poland. Because of our shared language, Erica and I became close, but the teacher prohibited us from speaking Spanish. Unfortunately, Erica and her family moved back to Mexico early in the year, leaving Joanna, a Polish speaker, and me, a Spanish speaker, to learn our new shared language. Despite linguistic restrictions and differences, in kindergarten, I met an inspirational teacher who positively impacted my early schooling experiences. As an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, Ms. Cynthia, pulled the two of us out of class to learn English. She lovingly treated Joana and me like “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 121), supporting the development of our English. This teacher accompanied me metaphorically in my heart when I became an educator myself.

Professional History. Moving forward in time, I went to the University of Colorado Boulder, majoring first in painting and drawing, then switching to art history. During those years, I worked as the work-study student at the Office of Diversity and Equity for Dr. Ofelia Miramontes. She was a leader in bilingual education, linking equity efforts on campus. Through my degrees and my work, inspirational people mentored me and shaped how I saw the world through artistic and critical lenses of social justice. After my college graduation, I worked at the Denver Art Museum in the education department. I had the opportunity to connect families and youth to art. My border-crossing experiences, my artistic expertise, and working under the guidance of equity and social justice, inspired me to become a bilingual elementary school teacher. I returned to the school district where I learned English. I positioned my students as experts in their lives and knowledge, following in my ESL teacher’s footsteps. I worked at two

very different schools. At both places, students were predominantly bilingual and Latinx, born in the United States to mainly Mexican and Central American parents.

School of Love. My teaching career started as a fourth/fifth-grade teacher at a transitional bilingual school converting into a two-way dual language program. This school community prided itself on lovingly committing to families. This school based this practice on “funds of knowledge,” a research-based approach of inviting and bridging family knowledge in the school through home visits, community walks and having an openly kind and welcoming environment (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006). It was there where I learned the value of a deep long-lasting relationship with students, families, and staff.

In my second year, the job to teach fourth grade Spanish became available, as the school was rolling out a dual language program each year. In my third year, as the elementary school was finishing the dual language transformation, there was an opening for the Spanish fifth-grade position. As a collective school team, we proposed becoming fourth and fifth-grade teachers, focusing on dividing and compartmentalizing subject areas. I applied for the position to teach literacy to a new group of 4th graders, while simultaneously moving up with the same group of kids from the previous year. With this encounter of looping up with students, I quickly learned the benefits of teaching children for two consecutive years. Looping up would begin my experiences of *acompañando* [accompanying] the same students on an academic journey. This included building deeper relationships, as we had previous experiences of knowing each other, freeing up planning time. For example, it was fascinating how after three months off for summer, when the same students walk into the classroom from the year before, felt like only a couple days had passed. I already knew their personalities, their needs, and their strengths, making more time

for creating lessons tailored to their unique dispositions. While looping up, I quickly learned that working with the same group of kids for two years were gifts of time (Grant, 1996).

School of Transformation. After three years of teaching, I made an incredibly difficult decision to leave my loving community for *una escuela desconocida* [an unknown school]. This new opportunity, was a predominantly Latinx school, with a transitional bilingual education model, called Rhopalocera Academy³, opening initially as a kindergarten through second grade. The school would open one new grade each consecutive year until it was a full kindergarten through fifth grade. I applied for the second-grade job, wondering if I could move up with each new grade for four years. At my interview, I suggested this possibility. The hiring team met my proposal with encouragement. However, they announced I would have to re-apply for the new position each year. The potential of teaching a similar group of students for four years was enough incentive for me to take the position, starting as one of the second-grade teachers in the fall of 2009. Like a butterfly, moving to this new school meant a transformative process of growing and changing over time.

A contrary metaphor of butterflies emerged. I was changing schools, which signified trepidation. My professional shift to a new territory activated anxious butterflies in my stomach. However, I knew the benefits of *acompañamiento* (Sepúlveda, 2011) from my previous school outweighed the nerves. This change was a real opportunity, as I moved up with students for more than just two years. From 2009 to 2013, some students came and went, while others stayed, creating a dynamic group of children. Although not without its challenges, I made an excellent professional decision to change schools as I got to know students for several years.

³ I use pseudonyms for all any participants and locations. Students chose or approved pseudonyms and spellings for their names.

On my first day as a second-grade teacher, the students and I were all new to the school, coming together in an unfamiliar space. Many students' parents *acompañaron a sus hijos* [accompanied their children] on a real trek from the cafeteria, up the stairs, and down a long hallway to our new classroom. I opened the door, symbolically inviting them to be a part of our space. Like butterflies leaving their eggs, each parent said goodbye, leaving me their precious children in my hands. We had initial awkward moments of “firsts” and “getting-to-know-yous,” which naturally come with the earliest stages of new relationships. By confiding with students, sharing my life with them, we broke down barriers connecting our stories. We moved past the strangeness to closeness, as I fondly got to know students over that first school year.

As I had in my previous school, when each second grader took off for summer and came back as third graders, there was a sense of familiarity. We did not have to start over, as I knew them, and they knew me. Some students did not return, flying off to new places, while we embraced new students into our third-grade classroom community. Through regular *pláticas y encuentros*, like caterpillars on a leaf, we voraciously fed off each other's knowledge and grew our relationships. We repeated this process in fourth and fifth grade, constructing and building a loving and caring cocoon made up of our collective experiences and identities. Also, in fourth grade, students felt safe enough to write incredibly powerful poems about their lives. They described heart-breaking *testimonios* of their encounters and fears of racism, language loss, and deportation of loved ones. The migration through each of the four years culminated with a fifth-grade final farewell celebration in the spring of 2013. All in all, we had grown into a vibrant and brilliant community. I cried on our last day of school, as I publicly wished I could follow them through high school. In this imaginal stage, students attained levels of maturity, ready to emerge and fly off to middle school, high school, and beyond.

Every child came to class with their unique kaleidoscope of backgrounds and histories, but collectively we shared similar cultures and languages. Our shared stories bonded us like a butterfly superfamily, a taxonomy categorization containing related families. Not only were the students in my classroom extensions of my own family, but their parents, siblings, and friends also became an integral part of our community as well. In Figure 1, I drew a visual representation of how the butterfly metaphors aptly create a timeline of our journey, including students' grades after our time together. After 2013, I stayed connected with many students and families as they traversed to their new schools. A group of students from Rhopalocera Academy became the participants joining me in the study in 2017.

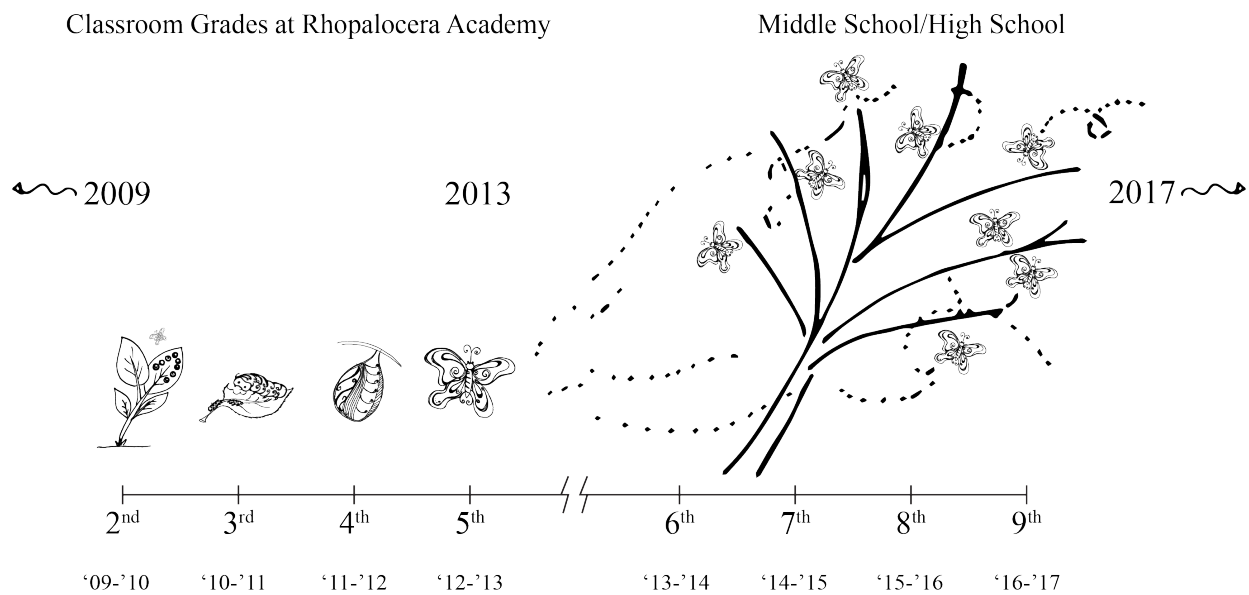


Figure 1. Timeline of our Journey, Past and Present

In Figure 2, I visually show how we gathered together with an opportunity of “looking back” to the past and “looking forward” to the future. Moving up each grade with my students disrupted traditional time and space structures in education. Usually, students interact with their teacher for one academic year or about nine months. I had the opportunity to know students for

several years, in addition to getting to know their families as well. Moreover, once students left to middle school, I continued maintaining and growing relationships with students and families. As I developed these non-traditional and alternative relationships, I had an array of dissenters. There were colleagues who disapproved of building such close relationships with students and families. They criticized home visits as invasive and moving up with students for more than two years as inappropriate. I had read the literature available to me at the time. While at School of Love, I had learned the contrary, that home visits were influential in bridging home and school (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006). I had also read a book describing looping up with students, which discussed the benefits and disadvantages of teaching the same children for more than one school year (Grant, 1996). To establish whether or not parents wanted me to move up with their students, I sent a survey each year asking parents to anonymously let me know what they thought

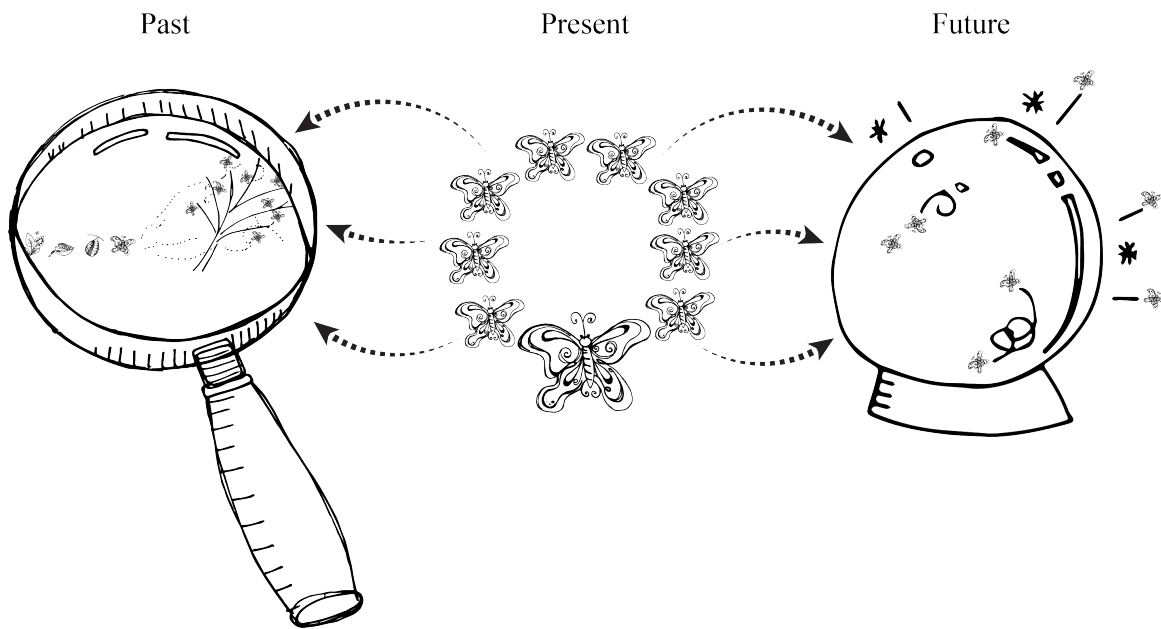


Figure 2. Looking Back, Looking Forward – Present *Pláticas y Encuentros*

of having me, as the same teacher for their children. The response was overwhelming; the parents approved of my moving up with students each year. We had repeated formative encounters, sustaining bonds over multiple years that not every teacher or group of students get in school. I also had the opportunity to know some of them again as teens. A group of former students and I collectively gathered again, this time for a dissertation study.

Each moment in our classroom was not perfect. I experienced conflicts over the years in the classroom, which included resistance from colleagues in moving up with students, challenging relationships between myself and students, and pressure to perform based on the state and district standards with a lack of time and resources. As a teacher required to meet the stringent requirements curriculum and standardized tests, there was stress that trickled down from the administration, to myself, and onto my students. There were times where the demands to have students perform through dominant schooling practices, that I lost my patience with students. I insisted they sit still longer and work harder. However, as I got to know my students, I more I realized that sitting still and remaining quiet did not always equate learning. I quickly rejected the deficit frames used to position our Latinx families, learning they were actually hardest working people I had ever met. Not accepting these negative views positively impacted my abilities to teach, opening my instruction methods and pedagogies to involve humanizing ways of teaching. Listening to students' and families' stories, while moving up from 2nd to 5th grade, helped me establish deeper connections based on patience, forgiveness, trust, love, and care. In our classroom, I tried to reframe the deficit narrative, using asset-based and loving ways to provide my students and their families space and time to witness their cultural and linguistic lives. I saw the students and families through positive lenses, which was contradictory to the negative beliefs and disruptions in schools and society.

Although not without challenges and tensions, the students and I resisted the negative views of our class, while some teachers began to label us as “too close.” However, we grew and changed together, learning so much about each other in our classroom. My students showed their academic potential through their writing, and I saw them as brilliant. As is mentioned above, my personal and professional experiences were multidimensional and deeply connected to my position and how I imagined this study. Together, in our class for four years and during the study, we lovingly and caringly created a transformative space, accompanying each other, seeing ourselves as agents of change and as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 121).

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative, arts-based, and auto-historic research study grew from my four years as a teacher at Rhopalocera Academy. Eight of my former students joined me the summer of 2017 in an investigation involving reframing the deficit and negative views of Latinx students, revisiting their past, witnessing their present, and imagining a new future. The findings and arguments were informed and examined by figuratively linking conceptual frameworks emanating from the community from which my students and I belong. I drew from our Latinx cultural scholars and their knowledge to best make sense of our lives, articulate our community’s sensibilities, and transform the education system. Using the same metaphor of the four stages of a butterfly’s cycle to explain our four years together, I drew parallels to illustrate a quartet of conceptual frameworks. I combined these four stages figuratively and visually in Figure 3. I connected Chicana Feminism, the pedagogy of *acompañamiento* [accompaniment], love and care, and *nepantla* to illustrate the complexities in of our communities because of the social, political, and ideological injustices plaguing Latinx bilingual students. The intertwining of these

concepts into four stages, seen in Figure 3, is an effort to circumnavigate theories with symbolism and imagery stemming from our Latinx knowledge. Below I present how our perspectives and experiences as Latinx scholars and community members shape our identities and positions in designing scholarly investigations through metaphorical explanations (Anzaldúa, 2015; Godínez, 2006; Quiñones, 2015).

The “first stage” or the eggs of a butterfly are explained through Chicana Feminism (Delgado Bernal, 1998), as this concept holds our ancestral Latinx knowledge. Furthermore, Anzaldúa (1987) describes a *mestiza* as someone open to or of mixed races, ethnicities, nationalities, citizenships, heritages or ancestries, and languages. Latinx experiences are

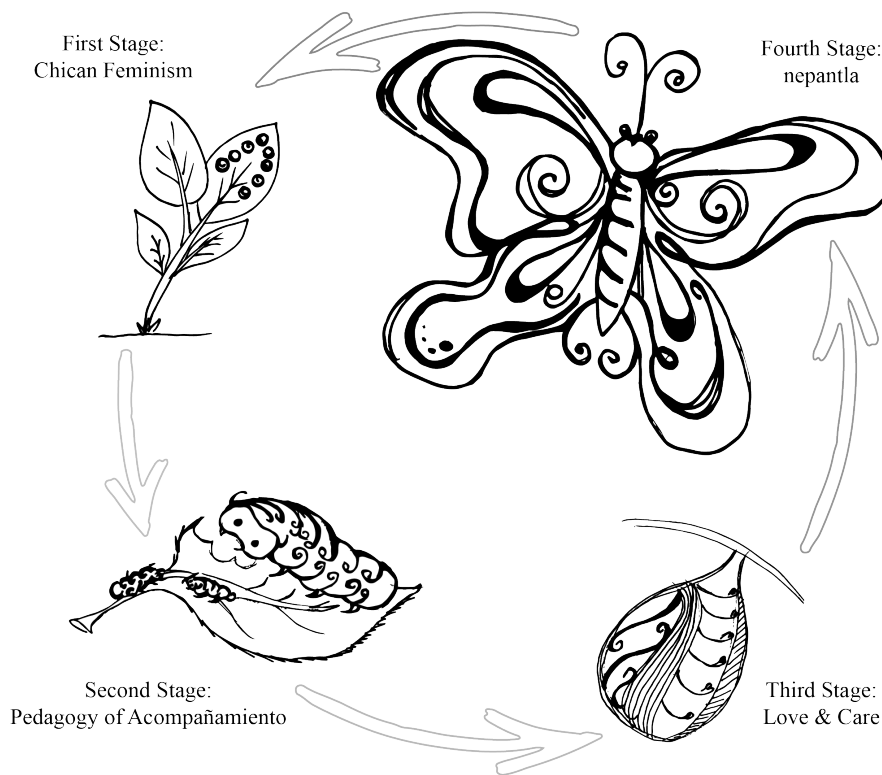


Figure 3. Four Stages of Conceptual Frameworks

connected to living in and straddling the borderlands (physically and metaphorically), immigration, migration, and these *mestizo* identities (Calderon et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Accordingly, Anzaldúa (2015) describes a *mestizaje* consciousness as our heart and core, stating we bleed, eat, and cry our *mestizaje* identity. Our Latinx knowledge and our *mestiza* roots are passed down, generation after generation in our blood. I wrote “first stage” in quotations, as it is not truly the beginning, but part of a cycle. Then, I explain the second stage of the conceptual framework through metaphors of a caterpillar representing *acompañamiento* [accompaniment] or walking and standing together on a journey (Sepúlveda, 2011). I describe the third stage of the framework as a cocoon signifying the conceptualizations of love and care (Daniels, 2010; Freire, 2008; hooks, 2000; Orellana, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). I illustrated the fourth of “final stage” of the conceptual framework as a butterfly indicating Anzaldúa’s (2015) reconceptualization of *nepantla*, a metaphorical and transformative location and state understood as the in-between space framed by borders.

The four stages cycle and inform each other over space and time. Similarly, the butterfly is not the “end” of the progression, as butterflies lay tiny eggs containing the knowledge of our ancestors, restarting the next generation. These carefully placed pieces, or eggs, are also explained as our identities conveyed through *testimonios*; a new life and breath in *nepantla* – the offspring and expressions growing out of *nepantla*. Furthermore, I outline how the concepts of Chicana feminism, *acompañamiento*, love and to care imaginatively relate to one another and *nepantla*, continually circle back, steadily maturing, and gradually aid in reimagining changes through metamorphosis or transformation. Latinx community members span across generations making sense of our lives through our memories, present realities and imagined futures. My

motivations for designing a metaphorical, artistic, humanizing, decolonizing research study are grounded in these conceptualizations of physically, metaphorically centering Latinx lives.

First Stage: Chicana Feminism. Certain premises under Chicana Feminism (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Elenes, 2013; Latina Feminist Group, 2001) gave me the ability to construct and understand this study. Delgado Bernal (1998) explains that our Latinx knowledge and connections to our ancestors are valid and legitimate. She contends that over time, pedagogy and research have spawned from White, middle-class male perspectives (termed as dominant perspectives and dominant practices hereafter), incubating and dismissing social factors impacting the Latinx community. These dominant notions devalue Latinx knowledge and language. Delgado Bernal (2002) pushes for legitimizing us as “holders and creators of knowledge” (p. 121). In fact, Delgado Bernal (1998) states we must acknowledge the dehumanizing approaches used in classrooms are direct results of historically dominant perspectives which have positioned dominant perspectives as legitimate and supposedly universal bodies of knowledge. Additionally, Delgado Bernal explains that White liberal feminist scholarship attempts to disrupt these dominant practices, but fail to acknowledge the fact that not all groups benefit equally based on how social factors interact. Now we, Latinx community members, have become the researchers, describing our lives through our lenses (Behar, 1996; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Thus, Chicana feminist epistemologies have multilayered means of decolonizing and humanizing education by validating long silenced Latinx knowledge, as we bring a unique hereditary perspective into the research based on our experiences, collective memories, and histories (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Relatedly, Yosso (2005) describes how Latinx community’s social, familial, navigational, cultural, linguistic and aspirational capital possess incredible resources. For example, we bring

diverse Latinx traditions, our bilingualism, and our future dreams for ourselves and our families. Our communities also come together through *pláticas y encuentros* or communing, living, and learning together generating knowledge (Godinez, 2006; Villenas, Godinez, Bernal, & Elenes, 2006). These practices, coming out of Latinx communities, were fundamental in my study as a way to disrupt these dominant educational practices.

Delgado Bernal (1998) also puts forth the idea of cultural intuition, building on the work of Strauss and Corbin's theoretical sensitivity (1990), in which researchers use the literature available and analytical approaches integrating individual, personal, and professional experiences while designing a study. Delgado Bernal (1998) adds collective and community memory in design a study. Our lives have long been examined and explained through dominant perspectives, and I now contribute to the growing body of Chicana Feminist scholars exploring our own lives. Moreover, Chicana Feminist epistemologies provide new views of understanding and breaking cycles of oppression, decolonizing dominant research methods.

Second Stage: *Acompañamiento* [Accompaniment]. Sepúlveda's Pedagogy of *Acompañamiento* (2001) contributed to constructing and analyzing this study, in which he combines frameworks of theology, anthropology, and literacies to illuminate necessary steps in decolonizing education. *Acompañando* (accompanying) students help educators better understand Latinx identities and their "border crossing realities" (Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 555). Sepúlveda's approach employs critical literacies to support students in liberation from the historically dominant educational perspectives and practices, by reflecting and creating written work to examine intimate moments and collective realities. In constructing a lens of walking alongside students over time, Sepúlveda joins together *testimonios* of "dramas and traumas" and poetry writing as a way for students to reflect and examine their everyday social experiences (p.

555). Sepúlveda describes *acompañamiento* as a commitment to building relationships, nourishing each other, offering support, and establishing a place for the development and imagination of a more empowered self. Furthermore, Sepúlveda drew from theologian Goizueta's (2001) ideas of serving others in a "life in community," understanding interactions between each other, acknowledging and elevating each other's humanity. *Acompañamiento* is not merely a simple translation to accompaniment, but an integrated means of walking alongside, loving each other, to fully humanize one another (Sepúlveda, 2011). Therefore, in this second stage, I ground my study through *acompañamiento* (2011), playing a role in the continued call for metamorphic transformation in education by legitimizing accompanying Latinx experiences in the "liminal spaces of schooling" (p. 550).

Third Stage: Love and Care. I use a quote from bell hooks (2000) to ground the reasons for the utilization of love and care as a lens for this study: "There can be no love without justice. Without justice, there can be no love" (p. 30). hook's beautifully strong sentiment inextricably links love and justice which relates to the urgency of honoring Latinx students. There are too many problems plaguing Latinx communities, so we must foster an environment nourished with love and care. I ground my understandings of these emotions through various scholars' profound conceptualizations of seeing, hearing, and feeling others.

Pioneer scholar of ethics and theories of care, Noddings suggests schools' goals should be to produce and nurture loving people (1992; 2015). In her seminal work, "Subtractive Schooling" Angela Valenzuela (1999) built on Nodding's work, finding that when educators establish emotional and humanizing connections with students, they feel accepted and affirmed. These actions become reciprocal, flowing back positively towards the classroom and the

community. She also found the lack of care, through perpetual messages of cultural and linguistic inferiority, negatively impacted Latinx youth.

Researchers have long examined dichotomies between emotions and cognition, casting feelings as subordinate or altogether dismissed as non-educational work (Ahmed, 2013; Dutro & Bien, 2014; hooks, 2000). Moreover, dominant perspectives have positioned cognition as superior to a more holistic and embodied experience (Ahmed, 2013). We have been taught to believe and accept that emotions are weak, and that the mind, not the heart, is the medium for learning (hooks, 2000). As we genuinely open ourselves to witness and listen with our hearts, we feel the emotions of others (Ahmed, 2013; Dutro, 2013; Dutro & Bien, 2014; Valenzuela, 2018). When collapsing boundaries and using approaches of critical witnessing, we can make better sense of students' lives (Dutro & Bien, 2014). Scholars explain how emotions and identity formation are both influenced by internal and external factors; in other words, sentiments are not just inside the individual but produced through the surfaces and boundaries collectively between people (Ahmed, 2013; Anzaldúa, 2015). Other scholars similarly add that emotions influence how we navigate and make sense of ourselves, each other, and our worlds (Ioanide, 2015; Orellana, 2015). Our feelings, stemming from our experiences transform our understanding of our identities. We know respectful and caring treatments position students as experts; creating feelings of value and having positive impacts on learning and academic achievement (Villenas et al., 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006). Thus, as we humanize our classrooms and our research, we not only nurture each other's spirits, but we build *confianza* (trust), patience, and listening (Flores Carmona, 2014) over time, developing future capabilities and potential of our students (Daniels, 2010).

While growing up, the word *coraje* meant anger and rage. It was not until I was older and teaching Spanish in elementary school that I understood the other meaning of *coraje* – courage. In Freire’s letter to teachers, he states the attributes necessary for education are courage, patience, and *lovingness* (2008). Educational research and pedagogies should be grounded in this heart’s rage, this *coraje* to stand up for what is right and love our students.

Fourth Stage: *Nepantla*. Anzaldúa re-conceptualized *nepantlism*, borrowing from indigenous Aztec’s Nahuatl concepts of *nepantla* or *ombligo* [belly button], understood as *tierra entre medio* [land in between] or *tierra desconocida* [unknown territory] (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 1). The borders that frame these unfamiliar spaces are not only geographical and physical, but metaphorical, spiritual, and emotional (Elenes, 2011). By traversing unknown areas, we can embrace tensions instead of having to pick one side of a border over another. We can blur boundaries and transform because knowing “requires a slight shift in perspective” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 24). Moreover, these tensions, which often stem from where borders meet, may activate survival strategies, which may be contradictory. For instance, someone might need to hide or mask their identity, or at another point, they might embrace their identity (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Montoya, 1998; Rodriguez, 2006). In other words, in one situation, a person might need to render themselves invisible and at another point, feel empowered to perform publicly and protest. This need to be seen or unseen depends on context, past and present circumstances, and the people involved. Below I explain the premises comprising *nepantla*, the conceptual metaphoric lens through which I designed this study.

Breaking down borders of time and space, blurring *recuerdos*, *sueños*, imagination, and reality, and transcending physical and metaphorical worlds in the past, present and future allow Anzaldúa to use metaphors to explain her conceptualizations. In one case, she used a *árbol de la*

vida [tree of life] as a representation for these notions of Borderlands, as its roots dig down crossing to the underworld and *cenotes* [natural wells]. The trunk rises out to the physical worlds, and the branches spread out to the unknown potentialities. Altogether, the trees' pieces are "interconnected and overlapping...occupying the same place" (p. 24) serving as an outline in explaining complicated situations. I use a colorful metaphor of butterfly cycles because this image provides a guide for the frameworks transcending between spaces, time, and transformation. Caterpillars and butterflies embody new perspectives in their life journeys, as first, they are grounded, looking up from the plants they inhabit. However, through transformation, they can see a new angle looking down while gliding around. They cross physical, geographical, and spiritual borders, understanding different views through metamorphosis and migration. Through Anzaldúa's (2015) conceptualizations, she pursues images and symbols, like the tree and the butterfly, letting possible interpretations of these images guide us in making sense of the world. At length, Anzaldúa (2015) states:

Perceiving something from two different angles creates a split in [an] awareness that can lead to the ability to control perception, to balance contemporary society's worldviews with [a] non-ordinary worldview, and to move between them to a space that simultaneously exists and does not exist...entering this realm of *nepantla*...[tunes us] into the 'other' mind or 'other' self, the creative unconscious taps into *el cenote* [natural wells], an inner underground river of information. By attending to the stream of mental experience, one becomes aware of the connective tissue, *nepantla*, the bridge between the compartments (p. 28, my italics).

By embodying all the complexities, acknowledging various perspectives, and drawing from all aspects of our bordered lives, we can utilize the richness flowing from the wells of knowledge

penetrated by digging at our roots or from limitless imaginations fluttering out from Latinx students' lives. Memories, dreams, and our imaginations are forms of realities (Anzaldúa, 2015). *Nepantla* is not only space and time, realities and imaginations, unconscious and the conscious,

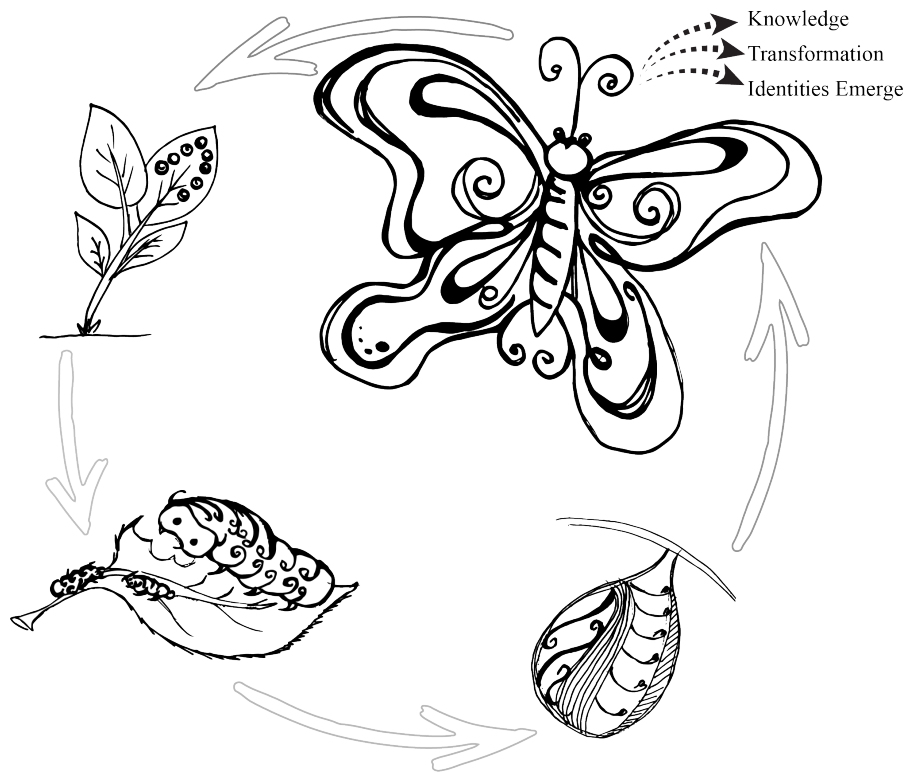


Figure 4. Knowledge, Transformation, and Identities Emerge out of *Nepantla*

but it also acts as a conduit and flight path where we can “see through” new points of view becoming aware of life’s circumstances and events (Anzaldúa, 2015). This colorful *nepantla* conceptualization underlying the study informed the approaches we used, validated Latinx knowledge from the earliest stages, how we walked and grew alongside each other, accompanied and care for Latinx students. In Figure 4, I visually drew how I conceptualized knowledge, transformation, and identities emerging out of *nepantla*; in the following sections I also describe how *nepantla* relates to Chicana Feminism, *acompañamiento*, love and care.

Nepantla and Chicana Feminism. The conceptual understanding of *nepantla* stems from Chicana feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa. She re-imagined indigenous Aztec knowledge of the *ombligo*, as a physical and metaphorical land in-between to understand moments in our bodies (2015). However, individuals are also connected, aiding in our sense-making through collective community memories (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In other words, not only are our encounters significant, but there is something to be said about experiences linked to a broader community narrative of the racialization and racism of Latinx members (Urrieta Jr., & Villenas, 2013). Members of the Latinx community have unique experiences surrounding this racism (Urrieta Jr., & Villenas, 2013) intersecting with ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, heritage, ancestry, language, and spirituality (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Perez Huber, 2016).

Our ancestors are connected to us in our Latinx knowledge and experiences. This connection also bonds us to our native lands, our parents' homes, and the natural world (Anzaldúa, 2015). These associated notions informed my study, as the students and I came together to remember not only individual experiences but also shared realities as Latinx community members. According to Anzaldúa (2015), these *conocimientos* [reflective consciousness; cultural knowledge], memories, and imaginations are also a reality.

Delgado Bernal (1998) drew on Anzaldúa's concepts of living at the borders and having a *mestiza* consciousness. Chicana Feminism elevates the knowledge, life history, and experiences of Latinx community members and ancestors (Delgado Bernal, 1998) which aids in understanding *nepantla*. Our lifeblood comes printed with the genetic codes of our ancestors - our race, ethnicity, heritage, and language - the inherent makeup of an egg. It is who we are and inseparable from our identities.

Nepantla and Acompañamiento. Anzaldúa (2015) describes the act of dreaming as a journey. She also conceptualizes *nepantla* as a middle world or an in-between space. The idea of residing and journeying *nepantla* is comprehensible through dreaming and imagination. As she intellectualized *nepantla* as shaky and unknown areas, the concept of *acompañamiento* is fittingly appropriate. Together, we "stand and walk with others," physically and metaphorically, hand-in-hand, enriching each other's lives and identities in this journey (Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 558). If we are going to traverse an unknown and unfamiliar space, who better than with someone else sharing in the experience. *Acompañamiento* in *nepantla* heavily informed the design of this study as we *stood* and *walked* in solidarity alongside each other. We spoke, wrote, and artistically created our *testimonios*, constructing and transforming our identities collectively. In each other's company, Latinx members can resist and critique the constant denigration and oppression from the restrictions in the educational system (Sepúlveda, 2011; 2017). Holding on and listening to each other's personal experiences, we call attention to others' perspectives, helping us make sense of our lives. Accompanying one another in our committed relationships and living in a community (Sepúlveda, 2011), we negotiated our dreams, imaginations, and experiences in *nepantla*. Making sense of our lives is a journey advancing towards transformation and empowerment, finding unrealized potential in the "cracks between the worlds" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 45). Together, we found ourselves accompanying each other in these liminal spaces. Like caterpillars crawling between leaves, we crossed one side to the other. *Nos acompañamos uno al otro* [we accompanied each other], comprehending this study and journey through critical moments of identity development.

Nepantla, Love, and Care. Walking alongside each other in our life journeys can result in brilliance, by learning from each other's stories, from nurturing, growing, and loving

ourselves and each other in this space. As Anzaldúa (2015) states, when we have imagined these inspirations, from ourselves and each other, crucial awaking, or metamorphosis, happens in what she calls *conocimientos* [reflective consciousness; cultural knowledge] and "love" (p. 40). This critical awareness encourages us to lovingly and creatively, tell, make, and reflect the stories of our lives (Anzaldúa, 2015). Moreover, "moving" back to the notion of feelings, I look to Ahmed's (2013) ideas that emotions move, using the Latin root word of *emover* – 'to move, to move out' (p. 10).

Ahmed (2013) tells us: "The sensation of pain is deeply affected by memories: one can feel pain when reminded of past trauma by an encounter with another" (p. 25). When we love and care, when we are open to others' emotions, we can experience each other's pains, joys, and traumas. Conceptualizing emotions of love and care with *nepantla* complement the ideas of moving in and out of embracing different borders, which could include those of our feelings, past and present. Like a caterpillar, moving towards transformation, it must encase itself in a chrysalis. I present love and care as explained by various scholars as necessary emotions in constructing this protective shell as identity development and transformation emerges in *nepantla*. I imagined concepts of wrapping each other and ourselves with love and care, which were necessary for understanding this study.

Comprehending the Collective Stages. Like a colorful swarm of butterflies coming together, I drew from combining various vital aspects of these four conceptual frameworks, which helped me design and examine this study. I explained how *nepantla*, as a metaphorical space established through love and care, accompanying each other over time, and the utilization of our Latinx knowledge serves as a conceptual and analytical tool for understanding Latinx students' lives. My students and I crossed borders in *nepantla*, disrupting temporal and spatial

lines in space, time, reality, and imagination while making sense of experiences unique to Latinx community members. Grounding my study through these frameworks disrupted the dominant practices, which have restricted and dismissed our Latinx students for far too long. Traditional education has historically missed opportunities of understanding Latinx cultural understanding, too often by comparing Latinx students to White norms and standards (Delgado Bernal, 1998). The education system judges Latinx students by their “final” products or test scores. However, we must engage in a cyclical process of embracing knowledge and identity transformation. Through different perspectives, we can come to understand that the “end” is only the “beginning.” When *only* looking at “final” outcomes in traditional education, we can miss the potential of our students; rather we can move towards an educational system that utilizes these conceptual frameworks, methods, and findings. We can shift towards an educational system, one in which learning, identity formation, and transformation are a process, and not just an end goal.

These combined perspectives guided this study, connecting past and present individual and collective experiences and imagined future dreams of Latinx students which are pivotal for our students’ identities. In *nepantla*, with our cultural sensibilities and while accompanying each other through courageous love, my students and I constructed new knowledge, which emerged through spoken, poetic, and visual *testimonio* expressions of our identities. These creative inspirations, imaginations, and brilliance hatch through the cracks of our realities, the spaces in between, letting potential shine through, as we examine our lives.

Key Terms

As the four stages of the conceptual frameworks intersected, I relied on key terms and ideas to guide the analysis of the data and the implementation of our *plática y encuentro* sessions that were foundational to the study. I grounded the following key terms through scholars’

conceptualizations above, and I imagined them as the pieces that emerge in and from *nepantla* from our identities, expressed through spoken, written, and artistic *testimonios* (see Figure 5).

Identities. The sites where borders “touch each other, and the permeable, ambiguous grounds lend themselves to hybrid images” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 49) is where identities rise up and out. Conceptualizing identity, through Anzaldúa’s words is imperative in understanding what came from the study. Our “identity keeps constantly shifting” (p. 60) as these blended images are continually in flux, impacted by the convergence of times, spaces, experiences and relationships in our borders lives. Throughout time, cultures at the borders influence each other reinventing and creating new cultures, “passing on its metaphors” or expressions of self (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 55). Together, these metaphors and images support us in making sense of ourselves assembling ever-changing and overlapping identities.

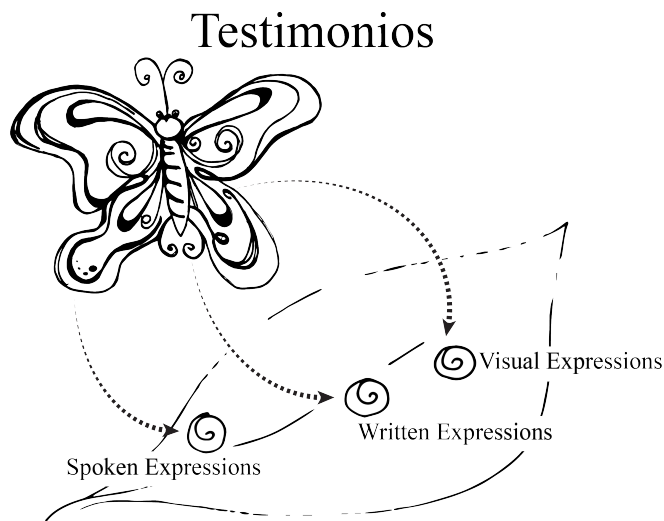


Figure 5. Identity Trans/formations: Spoken, Written, and Visual Expressions

Anzaldúa (2015) states "labeling affects expectations" (p. 59). By categorizing and labeling our identities, do we influence how others position us versus how we see ourselves? The

dominant culture does not have to use labels to self-identify; they are presumed White and male "unless labeled otherwise" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 59). Labeling with terms like Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx, there is the potential of perpetuating a denigration of our community, as "other," as it marks the body racially, ethnically, and nationally. On the same token, Anzaldúa (2015) states, "until we live in a society where all people are equal, and no labels are necessary, we need them to resist the pressure to assimilate" (p. 59). So herein there lies the contradiction, identifying markers are tricky. Does using the term Latinx, Mexican, Mexican American, Guatemalan, Chicana, *mestiza*, change how others see us and how we see ourselves? Is it possible that these images of ourselves, also position how others see us as well? As I am also in a complicated and messy state of *nepantla* as a Latinx scholar and community member, I understand the tricky nature of labeling identities. According to Anzaldúa (2015), "To be disoriented in space is to be *en nepantla*. To be disoriented in space is to experience bouts of disassociation of identity, identity breakdowns and buildups" (p. 57, my italics). Residing and traveling in this complex shaky ground can be perplexing (Anzaldúa, 2015). Accordingly, I labeled identities of students and myself in this study, knowing the tensions and contradictions involved.

In keeping with the metaphor of a butterfly, our identities change over time. Both long-term and quick relationships and experiences in our families, schools, communities, and society impact us. Some associations and experiences are loving and caring; other relationships and experiences may be harmful and oppressive, making up the fluctuating conglomeration of factors shaping our identities. Chicana scholars present *máscaras* [masks] through contradictory meanings, being rendered invisible by the dominant culture, masking our identities or hiding in self-protection and survival, or even un/masking to publicly perform (Anzaldúa, 1998; Montoya, 1998; Rodriguez, 2006). We have come up with survival tactics, some of which include using

the decorative patterns and colors of our identities to camouflage, blend in, and hide for protection; or, brilliantly shine, perform, and resist.

We emerge through individual and collective, past, present, and imagined future understandings. By *sharing testimonios, writing poetry and making art* from the personal and emotional moments that "make up our existence" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 24), in turn, make up how we constantly negotiate and make sense of our identities. Through our relationships and experiences, we are cyclically renewing, masking, unveiling, rebuilding, growing, changing, and resisting in our identities, how we view ourselves and how others see us.

Testimonios – Spoken, Written, and Visual. In this study, students expressed transforming identities through *testimonios*. Referring back to Figure 5, I show how I operationalized these *testimonios*, as transformed and manifested through spoken, written, and visual expressions, explained in greater depth in Chapter 3. According to Delgado Bernal, Burciaga and Flores Carmona (2012), the pedagogy, methodology, and social justice approaches of *testimonios* or “story of marginalization” emerging from Latin American culture, have increased in education “to produce unbiased knowledge...[challenging] objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by... oppression or resistance (p. 363). Latinx scholars suggest creating more social spaces using *testimonios* for self-reflection of individual experiences connected to these collective sociopolitical encounters (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Since historically race is entrenched in all social constructions (Omi & Winant, 2014), in essence, everything Latinx community members express could be considered a *testimonio*, especially when unpacking and making deliberate sociopolitical and economic connections.

In this study, I indicated personal histories, oral stories, or spoken expressions as *testimonios*, only when there was a critical conscious reflection of individual encounters connected to broader marginalizing sociopolitical realities (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012) mentioned in the problem above. In Chapter 3, I show examples of how I analyzed personal histories, narratives, and oral stories as *testimonio*, blurring roles as we acted as both interlocutor and *testimoniadora* [testifier, holder, writer, creator] myself, and the nuances between spoken, written, and artistic *testimonios* (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). *Testimonio*, as a method and data source, was useful in my research as it served as an instrument to highlight multiple perspectives of the silence and denigration of Latinx communities (Elenes, 2013). In this study, we used *testimonios* as tools for examining and acknowledging our cultural history and experience. Furthermore, the conceptual frameworks I used, supported the use and provocation of *testimonios*. The approaches grounded in *testimonios*, or “stories of marginalization” aid in the development of relationships situated in solidarity, showing a willingness to engage in knowledge production between researcher and participant (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Sepúlveda, 2011). The students in my study shared critical and urgent stories, or *testimonios*, about their fears and worries as bilingual Latinx individuals. They were willing to engage in constructing knowledge together.

Latina Feminist Group expands upon the construction of *testimonio* with the “desire to make visible and audible our *papelitos guardados* [little cherished papers]—the stories often held from public view. These little papers express a full complexity of our identities, from the alchemies of erasure and silencing to our passions, joys, and celebrations” (p. 20, my translation). These *papelitos guardados* evoke the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times. We keep them in our memories, we

write them down and store them for safekeeping, and we pull them out in the most opportune times after we have had a chance to process the moments (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). This study contributes to the knowledge of creating spaces for not only spoken but written and artistic *testimonios*. Building on these Latina feminist notions, I expanded the idea of *papelitos guardados* with my versions of *testimonios* as *poesía guardada* [cherished poetry] and *colección de arte guardada* [cherished collection of art]. Together, all of the students' spoken, poetic, and artistic pieces were called their *colección de arte guardada*. The students and I privately put away our cherished poems. The "*testimoniador/a*" – testifier, holder, writer, creator– needed time to process the relationships, experiences, or moments influencing their identity (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). For this reason, students read and discussed their poems individually, before displaying or relating publicly (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Anzaldúa (2015) claims that engaging in creative and artistic acts informs the process of transformation. Moreover, she iterates that artistic endeavors, like poetry and storytelling, support transformation, reconstruction, the growth of the self through symbols, imagery, and metaphors of our consciousness. With this conceptualization in mind, as other scholars have creatively played with dividing words by using a backslash (Anzaldúa, 2015; Isherwood & Althaus-Reid, 2009), I also artistically divide the term *transformation* into pieces; *trans/formations* because of the “in-between” tripartite definitions which I found in dictionaries: (a) the pre-fix *trans-* meaning across or through, (b) *formation* - to construct and frame and (c) *transformation* - to change in form, appearance, or nature. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Additionally, Anzaldúa (2015) describes artists, like *nepantleras* [those in *nepantla*], as occupying transitional spaces, *standing* and *walking* at the thresholds, perpetually “betwixt and between” (p. 31). Telling, writing, and making art creatively aids in how we identify and

examine how we make sense of our world (Anzaldúa, 2015). These forms of expression dig like tree roots down to the reservoirs of meaning (inside us) or like butterflies soaring limitless heights (outside of us). Artists create multiple and overlapping identities, acting as agents of their own lives, engaging in *nepantla*.

Dissertation Overview

In Chapter 1, I included the research questions of the investigation, contextualized the context and problem concerning Latinx communities, followed by the rationale of the importance of this study. I also briefly recounted personal and professional history as a backdrop to the study's design. I provided an extensive discussion of the collective conceptual framework, artistically mapping out a lens from which I drew inspiration and guidance. From these ideas, elucidated how spoken, written, and artistic *testimonios* support identity formation and explanation. Below, I outline the rest of the dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I present a literature review, dividing the scholarship into four areas: (a) disrupting negative narratives and deficit perspectives and practices, (b) centering Latinx students, (c) creating space and time, and (d) building caring relationships. I highlight critical ideas from scholars drawing from similar conceptual frameworks, employing long-term artistic and poetic methods, and learning in community with the Latinx community. However, I also show that few studies put together all of these ideas, emphasizing the uniqueness of my research. Chapter 3 describes my methods and links them intimately to the conceptual framework. These methods construct an artistic study capturing the knowledge necessary to transform educational research and pedagogies. I also provide information about how our study, built through *pláticas y encuentros* in *nepantla* with former students, was based upon memories and poetry written in

fourth grade and artistic tools for generating conversations. I describe these methods of inquiry as inspiration for future (a/r/t).

I present my findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. I make sense of Latinx *testimonios* using qualitative analytical tools grounded in the conceptual frames described above. Chapter 4 centers spoken *testimonios*, arguing a need for change in English Language Development (ELD) classes. Findings show bilingual Latinx students shared low-quality instruction in developing their English hindered and impeded their schooling experience. ELD also impacted essential aspects of their linguistic identities, while simultaneously revealing their resistance in these stigmatizing practices. I argue critical changes are necessary for the assessment and instruction of bilingual students; a need to transform ELD curricula and teacher training.

In Chapter 5, I focus on written and spoken *testimonios*, revisiting poetry from my students' past. We blurred notions of time, as students shifted between time periods articulating individual and collective forces on their cultural identities tied to race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, heritage, and language. They expressed deep emotions related to their mixed documentation status and the negative impacts of deportation in their communities. Students described feelings they carry, involving not only their own but those of their loved ones.

In Chapter 6, I elaborate on identity self-examinations and transformations emerging from the artistic, written, and spoken *testimonios* of four students. Although language and culture connect to change in identity, in this chapter, I pay close attention to students' memories and dreams, their artistic process in creating renderings of self, and how students dream for their future and how they view themselves have changed over time.

In Chapter 7, I synthesize the entire study, through a summary of the findings, recommendations, and implications in the field of education, mainly bilingual/bicultural

education, curriculum and instruction, and teacher preparation. The ideas I suggest in this final chapter materialized from the richness of the realities of my Latinx students' lives in the classroom and our study. I provide potential next steps transpiring from an artistic imagination of what was possible in transforming education.

Invitation to Accompany and Move Forward in this Dissertation Journey

Latinx students and their *testimonios* are urgent in our current political climate because their experiences inform educational reform on not just what occurs to Latinx students individually, but related to the larger Latinx community. My students' *testimonios*, which were expressed about seven months into the Trump administration, provided evidence of the adverse effects of the current political discourse on their collective realities. Thus, it is imperative to conduct studies, grounded in the abovementioned concepts of Chicana feminism, *acompañamiento*, love and care, and *nepantla* to validate their lives. This study contributes to the “historical legacy of resistance and translates into a pursuit of social justice in both research and scholarship” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 562), legitimizing our communities and dismantling problems of racism and linguicism. Using these perspectives shaped a study that integrated our experiences into a broader context of Latinx knowledge.

As a butterfly emerges, it is not the end of the stages in the cycle, but a new beginning. Restructuring and rebuilding education is an ever-changing process as humans also transform, needing different systems. Moving towards a process, instead of final product, allows for new knowledge, listening to historically silenced voices. The profound collective *testimonios* in this study are voices of resistance in this search for justice, using creative lenses to humanize our Latinx lives. Like Latinx scholars that have come before me who have written their collective work as broader *testimonios* (Urrieta Jr., & Villenas, 2013), I, too, write this dissertation as a

collective artistic *testimonio*. I invite the reader of this dissertation to witness the stories – the *testimonios* – of our bilingual Latinx existence, how former students and an a/r/t came together to validate the experiences and transformation of identities. This chapter’s “conclusion” is an invitation to read bilingual Latinx voices that matter and belong in schools and society.

Translations, Definitions, and Explanations of Terms

Latinx

Latin American Identity, inclusive of all nationalities and gender identities.

I predominantly use the term Latinx as an inclusive term for the wide variety of Latin American communities and identities, including Mexican, Central American, Latina/o. I substitute Latinx when discussing and quoting all-encompassing identities from the work of other scholars – using brackets. Additionally, Latina/o, *Mujerista*, *nepantlera*, *mestiza*, *Mexicaness* are possible identifiers of a Chicana/Latinx consciousness. However, I use the term utilized by the scholar or by a student, if Latinx does seem appropriate. I identify as Mexican/a and Chicana/x.

Mestiza

Mixed Identity

Mujerista

Chicana Feminist

Testimonio

Politically and socially urgent testimonies stemming from collective Latinx experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Testimonios are politically compelling testimonies rooted in a collective Latinx experience and later elaborated.

Testimoniador/a

One who shares *testimonios*

Pláticas y Encuentros

Informal chats, talks or gatherings and Encounters.

This term comes from Chicana Feminist framings of Latinx everyday gatherings (Godinez, 2006).

Trans/formation

A play on words using dictionary definitions inside each other - trans-, transformation, and formation.

trans – across or through

	<p><i>formation</i> – to construct and frame; bring together parts or combine to create.</p> <p><i>transformation</i> – to change in form, appearance, or nature; a metamorphosis during the life cycle of a butterfly.</p>
English Language Learner (ELL)	The political or educational definition of students speaking another language other than English.
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	The political or educational definition of a student not sufficiently acquiring English, based on standardized language proficiency exams
Emergent Bilingual/Bilingual	By legal definition, bilingual students receive the label of English Language Learners (ELLs) and Limited English Proficient (LEPs). Similar to scholars, like García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008 and Escamilla & Hopewell (2010), I also make an effort to disrupt deficit perspectives, preferring to use terms like bilingual to encompass asset-based characteristics of learning and living in more than one language.
<i>Acompañamiento</i>	Accompaniment – this is not just a literal translation; but a deeper meaning of walking and standing together, humanizing each other (Sepúlveda, 2011) see conceptual framework.
<i>nepantla</i>	Land-in-Between (Anzaldúa, 2015)
	The complicated idea of <i>nepantla</i> carries connotations like <i>tierra entre medio</i> [land in-between], shaky ground, <i>tierra desconocida</i> [unfamiliar or unknown spaces], liminal/transitional spaces, etc. Like scholars before me, I use these terms interchangeably, since there are many images <i>nepantla</i> takes when crossing, straddling and existing in between borders.
<i>conocimientos</i>	Reflective consciousness; Cultural knowledge

Chapter 2 Literature Review

My personal and professional experiences as a Latinx community member and as a bilingual elementary school teacher, outlined in the first chapter, led me to initiate this study and find the following literature. In Chapter 1, I communicated my purpose and my experiences in building relationships with Latinx students and their families. In this study, I explored how, by opening my classroom door and heart, I created opportunities to see and listen to my Latinx students over time. This study contributes to helping educators better understand how to prioritize students' experiences, knowing that their lives are complicated inside and outside of school. The empirical studies in the field of education presented in this literature review address and acknowledge the deficit views and practices plaguing mixed-immigration-status Latinx students. It also includes scholarship developed with Latinx communities and the possibilities for transformative humanizing education. The research studies coming from scholars working with Latinx students and employing similar conceptualizations and methods to mine was vast. While reading the literature, I learned of incredibly deep and caring relationships between researchers and participants. However, there were limited studies explicitly documenting relationships with participants sustained over long periods of time before the initiation of a study (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Sepúlveda, 2011). There were also limited studies utilizing art and poetry or writing in conjunction with spoken *testimonios* or life stories (DeNicolo & González; 2015; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Handsfield & Valente, 2016; Pahl, 2005; Sepúlveda, 2011). There were no studies that used art, poetry, and *testimonios* over various moments in life, for instance across an elementary, middle, and high school. In

summarizing the literature, I divided it into sections, organizing and including only the studies most relevant to my research.

In the first section of this chapter, I illustrate in detail the approaches I used to search for empirical studies, specifically those aligned with my conceptual frameworks, methodological approach, and population. I divide the subsequent sections into central themes that emerged in the literature: (a) disrupting negative narratives and deficit perspectives and practices, (b) centering Latinx students, (c) creating space and time, and (d) building caring relationships. At the end of each theme, I provide a summary of the findings and assert how my study addressed the opportunities in educational scholarship. I also acknowledge the impact of others who have laid the groundwork for my research. In the final section, I outline the contributions my dissertation makes to the field. I stand in the midst of incredible scholars and heed their calls to carry out humanizing and decolonizing research through which we center the lives of Latinx students.

Overview of Literature Review Methods

The selection of literature presented in this chapter elucidated the importance of contesting harmful and damaging educational practices. My initial search method did not result in the studies necessary for my literature review, leading me to a new approach. I searched studies using ERIC database using the following three main ideas and any synonymous terms: (a) the population, (b) the combined conceptual frameworks, (c) and the methods (for terms, See Appendix A). When I mixed the words and phrases for the community, conceptual frameworks, and methodological approaches, there were hundreds of investigations. I used specific criteria to narrow the work, including studies after 1980, peer-reviewed, qualitative, empirical, and ethnographic research pertaining to Latinx students. However, I found very few studies. I also

excluded studies based on the participants' characteristics; for instance, if they were not Latinx, not in public education, or studying mostly a Latinx community or just Latinx parents and families as opposed to students. The reason I used the time frame of studies since 1980 was to capture my lifetime and that of my former students. With only nine studies, it was evident that studies available were both fairly limited using the databases or overwhelming when using Google Scholar. In an attempt to organize the literature, I organized these titles, abstracts, and my notes focused on central themes into color-coded excel data spreadsheets.

Realizing I needed a broader path, I took an *insider* approach and entered the scholarly conversation by using my Latinx experiences and cultural intuition to read and understand Latinx scholars' work. Growing up in the United States as a Latinx student in the public education system, I was unaware of the array of Latinx scholarship. I was able to use what Delgado Bernal calls (1998) cultural intuition – my personal and professional experiences – to find and connect to this essential work. I used both the studies I saw in my literature searches and Chicana feminist readings with which I was familiar to branch out using their bibliographies (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). In other words, I read the works of relevant Chicana Feminist scholars and walked back and forth through the themes emerging in their citations (Athukorala, Hoggan, Lehtiö, Ruotsalo & Jacucci, 2013). This process granted me access to the world of literature by Latinx scholars, which had been missing from most of my adult life. By recognizing the importance of community memory and personal lived realities (Delgado Bernal, 1998), I found thirty more works to review, which were relevant to my research, but as I read through them, I learned some did not meet the criteria.

I kept looking for studies which did meet the criteria, including works with bilingual Latinx students, and read until I reached saturation in the literature, indicated by the repetition of

themes. I selected studies based on this theoretical justification—alignment to my population, conceptual framework, and methods (Morse, 1995). It was through this bibliographic branching and citation chaining (Athukorala et al., 2013; Rogers et al., 2005) that I was able to walk back and forth between the studies and works by specific authors to see a collective community of scholars who are cognizant of the unique knowledge of Latinx communities. In other words, after reading a study, I would look to the scholars they cited in their reference list, found a new group of studies, read to see which studies pertained to my study, and repeated this process, looking for relevant studies. Through searches in various databases and citation chaining, I coordinated the works through themes, entering into conversations with like-minded scholars, to retrieve literature applicable to my study. I assembled vital components such as the studies' purposes, participants and researchers' positions, methods and analytical process, their main findings, and limitations. Analyzing these studies and identifying the importance or relevance helped me to understand how my research might contribute and add to the literature.

The scholars I mentioned in this review helped define a landscape of how relationships with and within the Latinx community support students' identities and schooling. The literature in my review interpreted spaces and bridges, a crossing and blurring of boundaries in what it means for the artist/researcher/teacher to work with Latinx students. As iterated by Behar (1996), the "researched" body, has become the "researcher." Echoing Behar, Calderón and colleagues (2012) warn that too often, the Latinx community has been at the hands of colonizing researchers' observations and interpretations. These scholars encourage and invite Latinx researchers like myself, to conduct studies and "make knowledge claims based on the lives of Chicanas" disrupting the dominant practices which have established what is legitimate in educational research (p. 518). For clarity, I again provide the section titles that represent the

issues I traced for this literature review: (a) disrupting negative narratives and deficit perspectives and practices, (b) centering Latinx students, (c) creating space and time, and (d) building caring relationships. It is my turn to answer the call to tell our stories. In the following section, I organize each central theme found in the literature. Further, I explain the importance of my long-term relationship with my students in conducting this study.

Disrupting Negative Narratives and Deficit Perspectives and Practices. While deficit and racist views of communities of color have been around long before the establishment of the public education system in the United States, researchers have been documenting and publishing challenges to these deficit and negative opinions of Latinx communities for more than 20 years. Scholars have found that deficit framings of Latinx students include, but are not limited to, labeling with stereotypes of inferiority, incapability, or lack of interest in their academic trajectories (Fránquíz, Salazar, DeNicolo, 2011). Racism has allowed the pathologizing of Latinx students through deficit perspectives privileging one group's culture, language, knowledge, and actions over another's. The group of scholars listed below challenges these racist views.

Utilizing a “funds of knowledge” framework (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006), Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) examined these deficit views of low expectations and *pobrecito* [self-pity] mentality. They worked with a Latinx community, analyzing data collected from a larger ethnographic study of two Latinx-based community schools in Chicago and New York. These researchers’ study was guided by observing and interviewing the teacher and students understanding relationships at two large high schools. A significant outcome in these researchers’ study was the overwhelmingly high report from students about how high expectations, coupled alongside critical care and quality relationships, positively prompted their

engagement in their learning process. It was not a deficit view or a "take pity" view, but a more-than-capable picture of students which helped transform their education.

In a study employing a similar framework, Espinoza-Herold (2007) questioned the negative perception and low expectations of Latinx parents with their students. However, one significant difference in this study was that she was both the teacher and the researcher of the student. Even more importantly, she used the same data set to document a decade-long relationship focused on one student labeled “at-risk” for failure and dropping out of high school and her family from the original study. By maintaining contact with the student and her family over ten years, she gained valuable insight into how the mother inspired her daughter. Teachers framed the student as lacking and labeled her an academic failure; however, the student not only graduated from high school but college. The positive *dichos* [sayings] and encouragement from her family inspired and motivated her to persevere and complete her education. Espinoza-Herold (2007) showed how “oral traditions within families of Latinx descent helped create a powerful context for student academic motivation and demonstrated folk knowledge and literacy practices—particularly when shared between mothers and daughters—can be a powerful inspiration on life choices” (p. 273). Although the study highlighted only one student, the depth of the ten-year relationship with the family, plus the knowledge she gained in her first study, was indispensable. Espinoza-Herold emphasized the need for preparing educators in understanding the critical importance of honoring family knowledge in students’ lives and of seeing them as valuable experts and resources. She contrasted this to the problematic behavior of schools positioning Latinx students through deficit lenses. In this case, the student rose above the deficit views proving the stereotype wrong.

In another study, employing critical race theories, there was a similar outcome regarding

academic growth when positioning students through asset-based framings (Handsfield & Valente, 2016). Handsfield and Valente's study stemmed mostly from their suspicions of deficit discourses surrounding the immigrant families in their school district and communities. The researchers examined through observations how a non-native Spanish speaking fourth-grade teacher reframed a mandated and irrelevant writing unit on memoir into one of *momentos de cambios* [moments of change] narratives to center children's significant life events through *testimonios* (Handsfield & Valente, 2016). Using a qualitative approach with critical race and LatCrit theories, Handsfield and Valente spent one school year highlighting the practices of a teacher who demonstrated care in building relationships with students, and the language and gestures used in helping students construct personal identity trajectories to understand texts. A critical relational aspect of this study was the relationship between the authors. The first author, Handsfield, was a university-based researcher and former fourth-grade teacher, while the second author, Valente, was the fourth-grade focal classroom teacher in the study. It is imperative to notice that while this was one year of data collection, the teacher had moved from third grade to fourth grade, so seven of thirteen students were familiar with their teacher from the year prior. Additionally, the teacher positioned students as experts in their bilingualism and cultural experiences, which became significant sources for textual and interpersonal understandings of their educational learning and social growth.

In another study employing a Chicana and Latina Feminist lens and using spoken and written *testimonios*, DeNicolo and González (2015) grappled with the persistent labeling of Latinx students as inferior, while marginalized by dominant perspectives. They contended that educators lose the true knowledge embedded in the Latinx community by not listening to and learning from our students. Similar to Handsfield and Valente, the researchers in this study were

observing a teacher using *testimonios* in a memoir unit as a vehicle for students' voices in a hybrid *nepantla* space created in a third-grade language arts class in a Midwestern region school from 2010-2011. The scholars found that the majority of the 19 students of Mexican descent in the class spoke of shared struggles, experienced tensions between pride and internalized deficit feelings, and pushed back on dominant ideologies positioning them as inferior. They reframed bilingualism as a tool for making sense of their worlds. DeNicolo and González emphasized the need to centralize students' lives in education by constructing open spaces for them to “negotiate competing cultures, borders, histories, and realities—physical, lived, created, and imagined” (p. 113), legitimizing their knowledge as invaluable in the classroom.

Through the studies I mentioned above, the inferior perceptions of Latinx students were both named and questioned. When students were highly esteemed, educators saw positive motivation for student growth and development. Only one of these studies spelled out the initiation and sustained relationships of significant length (five years or more) (Espinoza-Herold, 2007). The studies outlined thus far were only a few of the many resisting negative views of Latinx communities. By centering Latinx students' lives as the core of their studies, scholars not only debunked deficit views of this community but altogether rejected and replaced negative opinions with alternative knowledge and positive perspectives. Others, as will be expressed in subsequent sections, also disrupted deficit views of the Latinx community. Their results, however, merited more in-depth portrayals in accord with themes further explicated below (Cohen, 2012; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Ramirez, Ross & Jimenez-Silva, 2016). In the next section, I validate the long-held knowledge Latinx students bring to the classroom. Overlooking their understandings erases their histories and lives. Below, I present research related to the theme of prioritizing Latinx students' lived experiences in research.

Centering Latinx Students. After organizing the literature rejecting deficit views of the Latinx community, I present the next theme: Centering Latinx' student voices, as scholars and educators position Latinx students' identities as valuable and worthwhile.

In an exploratory qualitative study using Freire's (1998) critical perspectives and pedagogies in education and a Chicana Feminist Lens, researchers Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal (2012) listened to oral histories in a predominantly Mexican and Mexican American urban school on the west side of Salt Lake City. Using these epistemologies ensured the inclusion of marginalized lives of students in the co-construction of knowledge. The two scholars investigated reciprocal relationships between teachers, parents, and students through the school program called Adelante, teaching about college awareness. The partnership program was founded in 2005 by Dr. Delgado Bernal, Dr. Enrique Alemán, and Dr. Octavio Villalpando. At the time, Dr. Judith Flores Carmona was working as a research assistant. The researchers moved up with students each year until they were in fifth grade with 250 participants at the time of the study. The scholars began collecting data which consisted of students' oral histories, photo stories, interviews with teachers, students, and families. The study focused on one of the five interconnected components of the program and partnership – Adelante Oral Histories Project (AOHP) – because teachers expressed a desire to have a curriculum based on students' culture. Through this program, the researchers drew from four years of data focused on a second-grade dual language classroom. The researchers developed family culture units in which students artistically illustrated their *testimonios* and relationships over three years while conducting interviews with the teachers, students, and parents to assess the effectiveness of the oral history projects. Flores Carmona and Delgado claimed that centering the lives of the students and listening to their stories strengthened solidarity and communication between families and

teachers. Given this context, Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal argued: "By having the students...collect their oral family histories, the lessons of resilience and of making sacrifices to seek better life opportunities were learned and passed on" (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012, p. 121). Appreciating the home-based knowledge students brought to the classroom strengthened relationships between families and teachers and created solidarity among students.

Similar to Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal's "oral histories" (2012) study, Bagley and Castro-Salazar (2012) used critical race theory to examine "life histories," "counter-histories," and "counter-stories" to examine visual and oral performances of six undocumented Americans of Mexican origin students (p. 239). The second author knew a Mexican-American community in Tucson from which they recruited potential participants for their study. Their sources were either undocumented and unwilling to share their stories, or willing to participate, but not undocumented, making for a difficult process in looking for participants. The scholars pushed for approaches to constructing knowledge through performed written and artistic texts documenting as a way to alleviate the tensions of sharing (2012). Through life history interviews – the tool for constructing texts – the authors depicted that vulnerable students' narratives were "intrinsically political and deeply embedded in relations of power and [were] not so much about facts, but about cultural and collective memory, shaped by intricate contexts and those who tell the story...Thus, what a community believes its history to be can be more important than 'facts' concerning the lived experiences of that culture" (p. 244). What was important was that these scholars found that what students experience at home with their families has profound effects on their lives in the classroom. Bagley and Castro-Salazar (2012) centered the experiences of the students, arming the communities in the resistance against oppression and racism by reclaiming their linguistic and cultural identities (2012).

In a qualitative “critical case study,” Curry (2016) honored the whole child, including students’ collective and community conscience. Curry observed school-wide rituals and rites of passage, analyzing four years of data based on a broader study using authentic *cariño* [caring] framings. Curry investigated and collected an extensive amount of data, including over 40 interviews with students, staff, and school leaders and 220 hours of observations at a small urban public California high school. The school had established annual rites of passage, called fire walks, in which students, confronted and recognized their behaviors, positive and negative, to gain acceptance and approval from the audience (peers, teachers, and staff) before progressing to the subsequent stages of their lives. These stages included their sophomore and senior years of high school. The reasons were because the sophomore year was a self-reflective time before starting the second half of high school. The senior year fire walk was positioned as a time to critically think about their choices past and present, before moving on to their futures outside of high school. At these two years of their life, they had to stand up—in the fire walks—in front of others in the school. For example, friends and staff advised students to focus on their studies or acquaint themselves with a better group of friends, bringing their behaviors to the attention of everyone, holding each other accountable in a loving manner. Students were asked questions and answered to their actions, taking responsibility for their life choices. Inquiries included: “What inspires you? Do you have any regrets [in] high school? What are your college plans? What career do you want to pursue?” (2016, p. 900). Curry found reciprocal relationships, where students believed their lives mattered and staff considered them whole, including their lived and home experiences, translated to students caring about school (2016). Curry disagreed with other scholars (Ginwright, 2010), showing that students do not need to be saved or fixed, but instead require safe spaces where they can thoughtfully reflect on their individual and collective

humanity (2016). Curry also revealed the importance of having students contemplate their future through symbolic rituals at the high school. As students imagined their journeys, while symbolically standing alongside peers and staff, they professed their inspirations and dreams.

In the following study, Fránquiz and del Carmen Salazar (2004) oversaw an investigation with Latinx high school students in Colorado to investigate school programs supporting the academic resiliency of Latinx high school students. The scholars noted how students responded to their teachers' instructional practices. The data stemmed from a larger a five-year ethnographic study conducted earlier and run by Latinx scholars in a context where teachers encouraged the use of humanizing teaching practices (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004). These scholars employed Freire's (1970) critical stance of revolutionary teaching practices by prioritizing Latinx students' culture, observing how teachers and students established relationships in a Colorado high school (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004). The school provided various special classes and programs to support Latinx students. Three of these classes which had a high percentage of Latinx students enrolled became the focus for this subset of data, which included: courses in Social Studies, English, and English as a Second Language. Their data included video recordings in these classes, interviews with students, teachers, and other staff, field notes of class observations, and an inventory of the "material culture of the school" (p. 38). The findings unveiled that most teachers positioned students as "problems," with deficit lenses. The teachers did not see Latinx students as experts. The scholars found it was the few teachers using positioned students' "authentic lives" with trust and gave advice and respect, who saw the academic development of Latinx students. When educators see Latinx students as knowledgeable and center their lives, positive transformations in schools are possible.

In another study, Jiménez (2000) wove Vygotskian theories, critical theories, and post-structural theories to conduct a year-long collaborative investigation with four teachers on language and the contextual factors influencing literate identities of nine to twelve-year-old students from linguistically diverse communities in the Midwest. He incorporated Cumín's Interactive Empowerment Theory (1986) to explain the extent to which students succeed or fail when the school included their language (Jiménez, 2000). About half of the 85 students in the study were born in the United States; the remainder were born in Mexico. After extensive classroom observations and student/teacher interviews, the researcher looked at bilingual strategic reading instruction approaches and identified reoccurring themes. First, the teachers elicited student discourse through think out loud activities, using culturally relevant texts, and centralizing important part of their lives in the classroom. Based on the students' narratives concerning their identities and use of languages, teachers positioned students as biliterate, bicultural, and bilingual processors of text. By drawing on these theories to better understand the complicated relationship between language and instruction, the research explained how students identified themselves as empowered when their linguistic style was honored, contrary to how society positioned them. Furthermore, the researcher discovered that students actively considered the role Spanish and English literacy played in their lives. Students shared narratives communicating their difficulties in learning English and their fears of losing their Spanish were exemplified by their stories of strength, contributing to the knowledge of honoring language in education.

Relating to the same sociocultural framework as Jiménez (2000), Cohen (2012), a white male, English-speaking scholar, characterized three adolescent students as they imagined themselves in another space. They were in a mainstream class, which both provided and denied

opportunities for English Language Learners (ELL) in English as Second Language (ESL) spaces. The study took place in a spring semester in a high school with a 97% Latinx population in the southwestern region of the United States. Cohen conducted over 70 hours of observations and 90 mini-interviews. The investigator selected focal participants from 254 students identified as ELLs through a survey created by the researcher. The three students, all of whom had lived in the United States for at least five years, were in an advanced ESL class where the teacher identified as a “traditional teacher” with “teacher-centered [approaches]" (p. 272). Cohen sought to understand the experiences of these three students in this ESL setting. Although the high school attempted to address the ELL’s needs by creating an environment for the students, Cohen forwarded two main conclusions: ESL student did not feel their class was cognitively demanding and that these low expectations hindered their hopes for their future careers. The students also perceived their lives as unimportant. Cohen extended Vygotsky’s notions of socially constructed knowledge, as teachers should maximize and hold high expectations of bilingual students using of all of their linguistic resources. When teachers did not give students the opportunity to utilize all of their resources, or teachers did not position them as valuable, it manifested in low-expectations for themselves, their culture and their community.

In the final study presented in this section, I relate how a scholar moved marginalized students’ lives to the center, prioritizing students’ knowledge and seeing them as valuable. Sepúlveda (2011) merged critical literacy, theology, and *testimonios* into a pedagogy of the borderlands, working with undocumented students, building on their daily experiences through reflections and poetic literacy. As a former educator for ten years in the same community as Bosque High School, the site for Sepúlveda’s study (2011), the researcher constructed critical and necessary spaces for centering undocumented transmigrant high school students’ lives. He

spent one year using the arts, specifically poetry, to accompany youth through their spiritual and academic journeys lovingly.

The first semester he spent as observer/researcher, but by the spring semester, he became a teacher/participant observer. He gained entry into the school, which was made by being a community member for ten years, making time for students outside of the classroom, and building a reputation for having close relationships that transformed students' lives because of successful mentorship. His research focused on digging into the cultural experiences and the identity formation of students' lives. As students shared their feelings of displacement—the pain of leaving family, loneliness, and hope—Sepúlveda listened and used students' poetic narratives and self-reflection as data (2011). Sepúlveda developed an insight into the lives, dreams, and voices of trans-migrant youth, not only changing their lives, but his own, too. His position shifted in the study, first as active participant/observer in the first semester, then into an ethnographic role, and finally emerging as accompanying writer and poet in the second semester (Sepúlveda, 2011). The study recognizes and documents the fundamental need for educators to know the lives of their students. The urgency of centering student voices is a part of the process of liberation, referring to the Pedagogy of *Acompañamiento* [Accompaniment] in which the educator not only stands in solidarity with youth, but accompanies the students in their humanization and educational journey (Sepúlveda, 2011; E. Sepúlveda, personal communication, October 12, 2017).

Latinx students bring their lives into our classrooms every day. These lives include their culture, their language, their family, their experiences, their struggles, and their dreams. Educators must make students' lives central in classroom learning. Research, as documented in these studies, demonstrates that when students' entire lives are centralized and valued, students

are more motivated, and this helps educators create effective educational opportunities. In some of the aforementioned studies, the data collected were longitudinal in nature having been collected in time periods not exceeding five years (Curry, 2016; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004). Despite the long-term connections, it was not always clear how relationships initiated or were established with participants. Some studies with some examples included, Curry, who had mentioned having an insider emic perspective (2016). Also, Flores Carmona had developed the curriculums and modules at the school through the Adelante program in the school for years (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012). Fránquiz and del Carmen arranged a five-year ethnographic study; an exception was Sepúlveda's study (2011). In this case, the researcher did outline the nature of the relationship, providing extensive account of how he built relationships with the community and school for over ten years, becoming a fixture in the community and lives of the students (2011).

My study contributes to the scholarship centering Latinx students' lives by explicitly making clear the nature and outcomes of building long-term relationships when conducting a study. Accomplishing this is challenging and involves creating time and space. In the section that follows, I summarize the research that elucidates how constructing alternative space and time blurs traditional boundaries in classrooms, informing potential changes needed in education.

Creating Space and Time. To honor and center students' lives, educators must co-construct and include both physical and metaphorical space and time with Latinx students with the purpose of listening and learning. The establishment of these conditions has the potential to enrich and positively guide Latinx students. The scholarship below presents the various conceptualizations of space and time, including, but not limited to *nepantla*.

Space and time are indispensable lenses through which to analyze tensions, borders, and dichotomies. Moreover, these lenses clarify official and unofficial areas and times for students (Gutiérrez, 2008). The following analyses allowed me to see that there is much potential when creating spaces between and inside the borders with educators, teachers, and students. The ability for educators to make connections in the in-between areas and times allowed for a co-construction of knowledge and sense-making. Scholars called these spaces hopeful (López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013), hybrid (Gutiérrez, 2008; López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013), alternative (Sepúlveda, 2011), pedagogical (Handsfield & Valente, 2016), and *nepantla* (DeNicolo & González, 2015; Ramirez et al., 2016). These studies set the stage for relationship building, creating a sense of safety and a place for expressing experiences related to transformations and shifts in identity (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007; López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013). In this space and time, educators and researchers appreciated the past and present lives of students, helping students realize their future potential. Moreover, when educators do not foster these kinds of classroom spaces, students' identities can be negatively swayed (Cohen, 2012; DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007). In the studies outlined below, the researchers maintained teachers should structure instruction in a way that helps children connected and a sense of belonging to their environments, texts and materials by providing these various space (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013).

López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate's (2013) study took place at a public elementary school in the southwestern United States in a second-grade classroom in the fall of 2009. They observed a teacher establish a space for connecting children with culturally relevant texts, disrupting dichotomies between English and Spanish. López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate

employed cultural hybridity and third space theory in language and literacy to highlight one student's stories in the class. The scholars conceptualized the teacher's role as bridging the official knowledge determined by the school and the personal expertise in the student's home, including their language and experiences. She created a contested and hopeful space where children benefited from having the opportunity to engage in critical thinking while having their lives and languages cherished (López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013). López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) relate back to Fránquiz and del Carmen Salazar's study (2004) because they also highlight the importance of connecting home and school experiences.

Using Cultural Hybridity Theory and other post-structural theories, López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) analyzed how one focal student consistently used stories from her home. The student recounted these narratives using Spanish to make sense of the stories read in the classroom. The personal experiences shared by the student were captured by the scholars, as the teacher gave this child the opportunity to use her two languages to comprehend the stories. Furthermore, the scholars found that the child made connections to the stories using her past and present experiences. Using this case study approach, López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) documented how this child connected to literature and other students' stories. The scholars concluded the importance of establishing spaces and times with bilingual students allowing them to use multiple ways to connect and interpret literature in the classroom.

DaSilva Iddings and Katz (2007) also researched second-grade classroom environment, mostly three focal immigrant children in a dominant English classroom, who resided in the United States less than five years. The scholars also observed the teacher, a White middle-class, monolingual, English-speaker with over 20 years of experience. In their qualitative study, using a sociocultural, psychological frame and micro-ethnographic discourse framing, DaSilva Iddings

and Katz investigated social and academic conditions for Spanish and English speakers. They also documented how teaching practices shape students' home and school identities in the official classroom space. These scholars found favorable circumstances for bridging home and school connections, which include allowing students to perform their home and community roles in the classroom, creating spaces encourage their families' knowledge, and relevant and authentic activities for student and family participation. However, through their study, they found how a teacher may constrain these optimal conditions. For example, the teacher had positioned one of the students as immature at school, while the family saw her as a great helper at home. Moreover, this teacher encouraged parents to use more English at home and school, creating different circumstances than those available in López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate's study (2013). Other examples revealed that the limitations of embracing students' cultural knowledge became missed opportunities for the teacher to enhance, integrate, and bridge knowledge between home and school (DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007). The scholars exerted that when teachers positioned students through deficit frames, students' potential to positively evoke their agency and identities were limited and reduced. However, children did take positive action when the teacher provided purposeful and meaningful activities connected to their lives. These conditions supported students' exercising independence, confirming themselves as active social agents (DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007). Although it was unclear how long the scholars developed relationships with the participants (before or during the study), they ensured trustworthiness of their findings through "prolonged engagement" through "long-term observations in the field" (DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007, p. 305).

In this study drawing from Anzaldúa's (1987) process of *conocimiento* [reflective conscious; cultural knowledge], Freire's (1970) notion of consciousness, and Valenzuela's

(1999) care, Ramirez et al. (2016) examined data from a more extensive qualitative study. These scholars initially studied fifteen teachers by conducting classroom observations and interviews while also collecting student work, classroom artifacts, and recording discussions. They narrowed this study to two teachers and how they enacted border pedagogies, understanding their *nepantlas*, with Latinx youth in a Southern Californian high school near the Mexican border. The scholars explained their multiple case study approach and how critical moments existed outside of theoretically sanctioned spaces at school. The themes of *conocimiento* [reflective conscious; cultural knowledge] and *cariño* [care] emerged, as the researchers observed teachers using love to foster essential thinking spaces in these border contexts. They also recognized that border pedagogies were not “a recipe for success,” but a way to disrupt marginalizing approaches in schools (p. 318). As the teachers established the circumstances, the observers revealed the need for *nepantla*, especially at a school physically located on the U.S./Mexico border. They noted that the school space was assimilationist in nature, and the “norms” were the students and teachers abide by the surroundings. However, the *nepantla* spaces created by the teachers allowed the Latinx students the opportunity to negotiate their identities through their culture and language. Honoring their own identities, the scholars illuminated their positionalities as well. The first author identified as a product of border school education, turned secondary teacher, now a scholar of color researching in Latinx high schools. The second author was a social justice education researcher. The third author had immigrant parents from Mexico and was now researching with immigrant Latinx youth. These scholars stated their backgrounds, but describe minimally how they established the partnership and relationships.

Like the Ramirez et al. (2016) arguments, Fránquiz, Avila, and Ayala Lewis (2013) also drew from Anzaldúa’s *conocimiento* [reflective consciousness; cultural knowledge] (2002) to

analyze data from a more extensive study framed by creating these spaces. The former teachers self-identified as Latina *nepantlera* scholars reported on the collaboration between two Mexican bilingual teachers in a fourth and fifth-grade classroom during the academic years of 2009-2010 and 2011-2012 asking the following questions: What are the practices of *nepantlera* teachers? In what ways do *nepantlera* teachers cultivate affirming spaces for emerging bilingual/biliterate identities to grow? How does a *nepantlera* teacher develop consciousness, that is, work within herself to foster *conocimiento* [reflective consciousness; cultural knowledge]? The scholars' observations, interviews, and reflections showcased Latina *nepantlera* teachers taking up an ethos of caring about their students' cultural wealth, selecting relevant texts, and collectively and personally contesting the borders between culture, language, and race in a path to critical consciousness. The teachers in this study invested time in their students' academic literacy development by focusing on trusting relationships (Fránquiz et al., 2013). Their findings related to DeNicolò and González's (2015) work as there were moments of self-awareness, as students and teachers made sense of problematic views of Latinx students. Students and teachers in these spaces and times shifted and transformed their consciousness as they made sense of their worldviews and experiences (DeNicolò & González, 2015; Fránquiz et al., 2013).

In a two-year international study based in London, Pahl (2005) conceptualized relationships between narratives and artifacts in migrant families' homes through new literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000), a theory of narratives (Brockmeier & Carbough, 2001), and Bourdieu's theory of habitus (1977). In her research, she presented data from a two-year ethnographic study of students' communicative practices in participants' homes, incorporating objects and artifacts in the home in tandem with writing, drawing, and photographs (2005). She originally began the study when teaching a family literacy class specifically for parents of young

children, ages five to six in North London. Through this class, she met families that would become involved with her study. Although she had multiple sites in which she conducted her study, including classrooms, after-school organizations, and play spaces, this article focused on the data from homes, where she built trusting relationships by visiting two families in three homes every two weeks for two years. She found students' past and present everyday lives and migration linked to their narratives (2005). The objects in students' homes were inextricably tied to these stories, providing contextual meaning, expanding various points in their historical timelines. In other words, the stories from the objects were passed down over generations, triggering memories in recounting their lives. Pahl looked at how these personal objects work together in space and time. Relating to Curry's (2016) work on rituals and rites of passage, Pahl (2005) also reflected on how students' narratives converged around specific moments, particularly, specific transitions between time and space. These scholars found creating these spaces influenced a strong sense of belonging (Curry, 2016; Pahl, 2005). Pahl (2005), along with other scholars, found that when participants were encouraged to discuss specific moments in their lives, they remembered critical relationships and named emotions tied to these experiences (Curry, 2016; DeNicolo & González, 2015; Handsfield & Valente, 2016). Together these studies underscore the importance of acknowledging the significance of constructing spaces and of the importance of remembering specific times in a participant's life.

Scholars are striving to understand Latinx students' experiences by examining creative uses of space also looked at histories and memories (Bagley & Castro, 2012; Handsfield & Valente, 2016; Pahl, 2005). The studies' findings demonstrated that when there are spaces for expressing individual and collective histories students felt validated and legitimized (Bagley & Castro, 2012). Teachers can take up critical "*momentos de cambio*" [moments of change] to plan

and build lessons in which they position their Latinx students' past lives as relevant to their academic development (Handsfield & Valente, 2016, p. 138). Similarly, when students recount their memories, they reveal immediate lived impacts (DeNicolo & González, 2016). These scholars and the teachers they worked with incited conversations and listened to their students make sense of their lives between worlds, orally, in writing, and artistically (Bagley & Castro, 2012; DeNicolo & González, 2016; Handsfield & Valente, 2016).

Research showed that altering space and time and having students use stories and writing to define experiences of consciousness, or critical awareness, was an essential consideration in education (Curry, 2016; DeNicolo & González, 2015; Handsfield & Valente, 2016). These moments of self-actualization were also significant for teachers in engaging reciprocal and open relationships with students (DeNicolo & González, 2015). Other scholars presented similar results on how lived experiences impact students' conceptualizations of their future aspirations and dreams (Cohen, 2012; Curry, 2016; Espinoza-Herold, 2007). As educators co-construct these spaces and build in the time, in and out of the classroom, students' identities develop in positive ways; they feel seen, they strengthen relationships, and build communities. In the literature, it is apparent that history, memories, past experiences, factors, and relationships do matter in the classroom, as they shape academic skills and imagined futures.

In sum, the studies above demonstrate the need for constructing time and space for students to legitimize their lives. Only a limited number of studies explicated in detail the nature of building relationships with their participants before or during the study. One example was Pahl (2005), a scholar explained how she visited with families every two weeks for two years, thus building trusting long-term relationships. The next theme establishes the need for studies defining the development of caring research.

Building Caring Relationships. Thus far, I have reviewed the first three themes emerging from scholarship: (a) Disrupting Negative Narratives and Deficit Perspectives and Practices, (b) Centering Latinx Students, and (c) Creating Space and Time. As I had incorporated emotions as part of my conceptual framework, I reviewed literature in building loving and caring relationships as essential guiding my study. In this final section, I present the studies discussing the kinds of relationships necessary in these kinds of in educational spaces to traverse physically and metaphorically various moments in time, established through love and care.

Several of the studies I mentioned above advance notions of care in relationships between teachers and students as indispensable for student success (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Curry, 2016). Speaking of critical love and care, Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) and Ramirez, Ross, and Jimenez-Silva (2016) added high academic expectations and high-quality relationships under the umbrella of love and care, which produced actions and outcomes of engagement with students. Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) explained how students who had teachers holding high expectations rejected deficit framing or internalizing a *pobrecito* [self-pity] syndrome. Rather teachers perceived the students holistically and as strong through positive framings. By a similar token, Ramirez, Ross, Jimenez-Silva (2016) found critically caring relationships “positively [influenced] student’s academic achievement and levels of engagement in school” (p. 306). In their school programs, when teachers demonstrated care for the community’s beliefs and knowledge, including students’ culture, students’ identities were affirmed and developed. Curry’s (2016) work also highlighted how caring relationships supported the development of not only the individual conscience but the collective social one as well (2016). Teachers created loving and caring lessons through deep and positive connections, centering their students’ lives. These established conditions of providing “youth with

opportunities to develop as critical thinkers” got them excited to learn (p. 320). To summarize, these scholars stressed love and care in the classroom which was critically important (Curry, 2016; Ramirez, Ross, & Jimenez-Silva, 2016). They argued that with these, not just Latinx students, but all students, could reach and realize their full potential.

The following studies, some of which I portrayed earlier in different sections, are now revisited through the lens of building caring relationships. As I mentioned previously, Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal’s (2012) work drew from Sonia Nieto’s (2006) ideas of empathetic teachers creating strong partnerships through courageous love with students. Flores and Carmona (2012) noticed that when teachers listened to their students and heard their struggles, pains, and dreams, teachers and students became a “we” instead of an “us and them,” establishing solidarity (2012). These scholars stated listening, or critical witnessing was also essential in forging relationships between students. In their three-year project, Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal grounded their work establishing the “we” in their class. Teachers learned from the pedagogies of students’ homes, incorporated them into the lessons at school.

These scholars underscored the importance of understanding students, their families, and their communities. When students’ shared histories or pieces of knowledge, they transformed the school curriculum. This strengthened relationships and community-building. Arising from the scholarship was the significance of relationships, through love and care, which were shown to be critical aspects in the positive transformation of Latinx identities. People are social beings; we are hardwired to connect and learn from each other through love and care (E. Sepúlveda, personal communication, October 12, 2017). When building loving relationships, this establishes a level of mutual interaction. Speaking and listening to each other creates solidarity, ultimately resulting in the trust vital for learning. Through these studies, I validate the importance of the

theme of building loving and caring relationships. However, as reiterated, there is a need for more literature in rationalizing the nature and foundation of how researchers made profound and long-lasting relationships with their participants.

Contributions to the Field

It is vital to restate that in the research reviewed, there were few long-term studies documenting sustained relationships (Curry, 2016; Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Sepúlveda, 2011). There were even fewer highlighting the nature of the relationships between researcher and participants, before, after, inside, and outside of the proposed research study (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Sepúlveda, 2011). By offering an investigation based on strong relationships held with students since I became their teacher in 2009, I contribute a new approach to the examination of long-term relationships and an alternative perspective of teacher-turned-researcher. Although addressed in Chapter 3, having fewer participants, in my case eight students, could be viewed as a limitation. However, I argue that the depth of our relationships, built over a sustained period, through love, care, and *acompañamiento* adds to the strength of the findings. This alone is a significant contribution in the field of education.

Another contribution my study makes in the field of education is combining written and artistic testimonios in conjunction with spoken *testimonios* while working with Latinx bilingual students. There were limited arts-based studies in which the scholars used counter-stories or *testimonios* with high-school aged Latinx bilingual students (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012; Pahl, 2005) and only a few using poetry or other forms of writing in conjunction with spoken *testimonio* (DeNicolo & González, 2015; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Sepúlveda,

2011). As the field of education continually transforms, studies in these areas will continue to emerge. It will be essential to stay updated with written, visual, and artistic examinations.

Conclusion

The scholarship on transformative education, with a lens of rejecting deficit views of the Latinx community, while creating space and time creatively, and building positive relationships by listening to students and families was vast and continues to grow. The relevant literature presented demonstrates there is still a need in conducting studies that establish long-term relationships utilizing arts-based methods to humanize Latinx students.

These scholars before me established the fertile ground to sow the seeds of my study. These studies presented Latinx students through asset-based and positive views, countering deficit perceptions. I assert that there continues to be a critical need for supporting/conducting research that translates to humanizing educational practices in the classroom. Furthermore, there is a significant need for research on relationships built over extensive periods of time, spanning multiple spaces (i.e., home, school, and community, etc.) and time (i.e., during class, outside of the school day, and beyond traditional teacher/student relationships, etc.). Doing these kinds of studies reveal a stronger representation of our lived human experience and how through longitudinal relationships we shape and understand our pasts, presents, and futures across time and space. To recap the studies presented, they primarily centered on humanizing and transformative educational practices. The literature shows there are not neat and predetermined categories for proposing research with Latinx students, and I acknowledge research is messy and full of contradictions (Calderón et al., 2012). There were times of love, pain, and joy, but through it all, the works of the scholars before me grounded and encouraged my study. My methods and findings result in implications and recommendations to transform and humanize educational

pedagogies and practices. The work I have conducted contributes to the scholarship and understanding that educators must center, honor, and humanize Latinx students (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Sepúlveda, 2011). Based on the literature, we must continue creating space, time, and build relationships to capitalize on students' agency and transform identities, and thus education.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

From 2009 to 2013, I moved up with my former students, accompanying them from second grade to fifth grade at a transitional bilingual educational school (TBE), Rhopalocera Academy (RA). I witnessed incredible transformations in their identities over the years, in relation to their academics, their language development – in both Spanish and English – and their social interactions. Over the years, I watched students grow and change. I spent time with their families on many home visits, building strong home and school connections. These relationships resulted in students writing powerful poems about their lives.

During the second grade and third grade, students came in as predominant Spanish speakers, and the majority of the literacy instruction was done in Spanish. I began with the district's mandates of implementing a minimum of 45 minutes of English language development. However, I gave students an opportunity to answer in whichever language they preferred or felt more comfortable. I gradually increased the English language development time, and also added literacy in English. However, I continued Spanish language development times, and students could use Spanish to answer and show comprehension during any English instruction. Through fourth and fifth grade, although the majority of literacy instruction was now in English. At that time as a classroom teacher, I was unaware of the theories of translanguaging, however I did not have a strict separation of languages in my classroom (Palmer, Martínez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014). My instructional practices were deliberate and carefully planned, taking into consideration the language of instruction for literacy, Spanish or English. However, there was a flexibility with my students' language practices and my own. Using less restrictive language policies, if we needed to use a word or have a conversation in the other language, we did. Once

there was clarification, we moved back to the language of instruction. This practice in my classroom, invited students to use the languages they felt comfortable with, while also honoring their linguistic capabilities over the four years.

On the last day of fifth grade, I invited students and families to celebrate our years together. This day marked the end of our traditional school relationship. I expressed to them my most profound gratitude and said, “I wish I could move up with you through high school!” Unbeknownst to me while I was their teacher, I embodied the conceptual frameworks of *acompañamiento* (Sepúlveda, 2011), love, and care (Orellana, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999), while creating a unique *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 2015) with my students. In our established long-term relationship, we built a loving classroom family. These conceptual frameworks not only grounded this study, but our life philosophies, which helped me to imagine an investigation that would disrupt, and challenge deficit approaches traditionally used to define Latinx students.

My qualitative, arts-based, and auto-historic research study explored how former students expressed themselves through spoken, written, and artistic *testimonios*, documenting essential topics impacting their past, present, and imagined futures. Over the years, I developed relationships aiding in the construction of an investigation with multiple layers of time and space to commune with students. I employed *pláticas y encuentros* as a way to generate *testimonios*. Underlying the purpose of the study outlined in the first chapter, I committed to following my students to better understand how society and schooling impacted their lives.

I divided this chapter into five main sections providing a summary of the study: (a) the research methods, (b) research design, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, and (e) reflexivity and role. The research design section includes recruitment information and plans before, during, and after the study, and the site and participants. In the data collection section, I describe how I

produced and assembled the data, in the past and present, explained how *testimonios* were examined in the data analysis section, concluding with my reflexivity, role, validity, and ethical considerations.

Research Methods

Below I provide explanations of *auto-historia*, *pláticas y encuentros*, and *testimonios*, with arts-based research methods (ABR). Although the findings were not generalizable to all Latinx bilingual students, our lives served as significant examples integrated into the larger narrative of the broader context of humanizing educational practices and research.

Auto-Historia methods. Drawing from Anzaldúa (2015), I overlaid personal stories with *testimonios* to construct the study. My auto-historic accounts provided an alternative approach to educational research. As Anzaldúa states, auto-historia is an approach to understanding the self and others, using “self-inscriptions” to traverse private and public borders (p. 6). I connected my accounts to my former students’ experiences, permitting a different angle in understanding the world. I provided examples with my students, recounting my memories and dreams of our collective experiences at our former elementary school, Rhopalocera Academy. I also describe auto-historic past and present experiences throughout this chapter.

Pláticas y Encuentros methods. Coming out of Chicana feminism, the everyday cultural practices of Latinx community members include *pláticas y encuentros*, as we naturally come together to share our lives (Godinez, 2006). In these *pláticas y encuentros*, we share *consejos* [advice] and develop relationships built with *confianza* [trust] (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Flores Carmona, 2008). These informal conversations happen in Latinx communities sharing anything from past or current moments to recipes (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Flores Carmona, 2008) to *chismes y chistes* [gossip and jokes]. I engaged in these informal talks as they are

welcoming, familiar, and safe for generating testimonios. Chicana Feminists maintain that *pláticas y encuentros* reveal the complexity of Latinx identities in the United States (Flores Carmona, 2001; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Having *pláticas y encuentros* along with artistic tools for expressions, this study disrupted dominant practices in traditional educational settings.

Testimonios in methods. To assist in understanding the study, I further elaborate upon the differences between spoken, written, and visually artistic *testimonio*. I indicate and provide examples, grounded in theory, of what statements I did and did not examine as *testimonio* during our sessions. As I described in the introduction, Latinx members have racialized lives. Race underlies all social constructions (Omi & Winant, 2014), especially their family and life encounters. Therefore, anything expressed could potentially count as a *testimonio*. Also, *testimonios*, could be embedded in their general discussions, depending on the context. When listening to student's expressions, I looked for instances of emotions or experiences related to racialized stories of marginalization (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Urrieta Jr. & Villenas, 2013). I coded *testimonios* when students expressed politically urgent messages surrounding encounters impacting their sociopolitical identities (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In Table 1, I provide overall examples of themes in students phrases meeting criteria to count as *testimonio* or not. Again, just a general discussion of their family, lives, experiences, interests, thoughts, and discussions were not counted as *testimonio*, unless they had an embedded message of their politicized lives.

Table 1. Difference between *Testimonio* and not a *Testimonio*

<i>Testimonio</i>	<i>Not a testimonio</i>
Sociopolitical realities, identities, or “stories of marginalization” related to these topics:	Oral histories and personal stories related to these topics:
Race	Family and Life encounters
Ethnicity	Memories and Future Dreams
Nationality	Interests and Hobbies
Citizenship	Sports and Music
Heritage/Ancestry	General School life
Language	<i>Chismes</i> [gossip]
	<i>Chistes</i> [jokes]

Spoken Expressions. When compiling data for this study, I analyzed the students’ spoken expressions (including phone calls and texts) while recognizing the complexity of communication between the students and myself, and left physical gestures outside the scope of this study. In other words, I did not analyze the students’ hand and body movements while they spoke. If I needed to clarify or had any questions, I sent students text messages or emails, as member-checks. As for spoken expressions and labeling them as *testimonios* relates back to Table 1 – connections to sociopolitical realities of Latinx bilingual students. Table 2 provides examples of spoken expressions coded as “not a *testimonio*” or not. Again, it does not mean they remain inconsequential to Latinx lives, especially examined in a different context or through another framework.

Table 2. Examples of Spoken Expressions counting as *Testimonio* and not a *Testimonio*

<i>Testimonio</i>	<i>Not a Testimonio</i>
“My Spanish teacher is racist”	“I fell of the swing...I went flying off the slide and still have a scar.”
“Didn’t Trump say...all immigrants that came here, that they were like rapists...?”	“I went to prom and the Valentine’s Dance.”
“I don’t know what happened, but she got deported.”	“I tell my mom everything, well, not everything.”

ABR Methods - written and visual expressions. There are many art forms to consider (i.e., painting, poetry, photography, music, etc.) to understand ABR methods. I demonstrated varied art-making approaches to students, inviting them to incorporate any medium they wished while I mostly supplied the drawing and painting materials. Additionally, students brought cultural objects to talk about their lives, which I defined as a visual expression, and categorized as “brought” vs. “created.” Granting students options for alternate forms of expressions allowed for understanding their lives in unique ways, guarding or veiling their emotional *testimonios*.

As Leavy (2015) describes, ABR practices provide a new set of tools; transformative ways of conceptualizing dominant research practices through all aspects of research and supporting successful means of communicating to diverse audiences. As Leavy further states, cultivating artistic methods speaks to social and political issues. Applying ABR method to studying the complicated concerns of Latinx lives, affords another lens in the analysis. This "enhancement of perspectives" concept is explained by ABR scholars Barone and Eisner (1997):

Literary language is designed to stimulate imaginative faculties, inviting the reader to fill gaps in the text with personal meaning...This sort of expressive language employs the use of metaphors. Metaphors re-create experience through the forms they take, never signifying a closed, literal meaning, but enabling the reader to experience that which they express (p. 97).

For this study, I conceptualized poetry as literary language within ABR methodology, inclusive of literacy, language, history, and English language acquisition (ELA). I operationalize poetry as knowledge; a powerful literary tool as an alternative to communicating identity and lived experiences (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Leavy, 2015). In this study and when the students were young, I presented them with opportunities to use literary forms and symbolic expressions

as choices for communication. Moreover, poetry straddles categories of writing and art through its imaginative capabilities (Barone & Eisner, 1997).

Written Expressions. In this study, the participants’ poems (old and new) were the central data sources for written expression. In Table 3, I provide examples of literary language – written expressions – from 4th grade and recent poems created in the study. By blurring borders, I understood their written words as art and as *testimonios*. The examples are words, verbatim, from students’ poetry, indicated whether or not it was a *testimonio*. A student might have had only a few lines or words from an entire poem qualified as *testimonio*, determined by information referenced previously in Table 1. I further elaborated the way students used spoken expressions to describe their poems in the data analysis section and findings chapters.

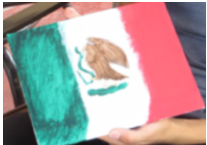



Table 3. Examples of Written Expressions counting as Testimonio and not a Testimonio

<i>Testimonio</i>	<i>Not a Testimonio</i>
I worry about problems in Mexico.	<i>Yo deseo ser una veterinaria cuando sea grande porque quiero aprender como cuidar los animales</i>
I worry about losing my Spanish.	[I hope I am a veterinarian when I’m big because I want to learn how to take care of animals]
I see a lot of conflict between two races.	I dream that I can be a singer.

Visual Expressions. Additionally, visual aspects merit explanation. Students painted and drew images, and symbols; in some cases, collaged words into their art, crossing into categories of literary expressions. These overlapping examples were considered wholly as visual art. Like their poetry, an entire work of art could have just a few elements qualify as *testimonio*. This aspect of crossing between boundaries speaks to the complicated nature of human lives, harmonizing within a *nepantla* framing. Table 4 contains examples of visual expressions that I counted as *testimonio* or not as *testimonio*, showing an image of piece of their entire painting or

just a piece, alongside a brief description and spoken expressions of the artwork. I provide my analysis of all their expressions in the following sections and the findings chapters. It is crucial to reiterate contextual dependence – spoken, written, and visual pieces of our lives – crossed borders, boundaries, and categories.

Table 4. Examples of Visual Expressions counting as Testimonio and not a Testimonio

	<i>Testimonio</i>		<i>Not a Testimonio</i>	
Artwork Photograph				
Artwork Description	acrylic painting on canvas Mexican flag	acrylic painting on canvas two flags split diagonally Mexico & United States of America	gel pen drawing of on canvas camera the word “future”	pencil drawing & acrylic painting on canvas soccer ball & two guitars the letter ‘M’

Elaborating further on ABR methods, the arts are meaningful ways of expressing stories (Richardson, 2016), as complimented by Anzaldúa’s ideas (2015) of *nepantlera* artists centering the heart of our expressions as imagination. Using art as proxies for language and thought allowed us to build a supportive space to resist, grow, and change. Students creatively expressed the "stuff of life" – the memories of traumas, pains, joys, and dreams to make sense of their lives (Richardson, 2016, p. 3). I gave students the opportunity to translate their pains and joys into poetic and visual expressions if they chose. As Dutro and Bien (2014) suggest, "Such a revealing of the difficult – whether a literal or symbolic exposure of a wound – creates a fissure in the surface routines" of life (p. 22). In combining ABR with my conceptual framings, I created art and poetry alongside the students, weaving a few examples into this dissertation.

Research Design

In my original proposal, I had envisioned a study with three phases of data collection, including: (a) artistic *pláticas y encuentros* with students only, (b) an art presentation of student work, and (c) gathering with individual families. Additionally, I conducted two informal pre-data collection gatherings to recruit participants for the study. When I met with students, they initially rejected the idea of presenting their work, thus prompting an engagement of process over product. We decided on an art gallery-style celebration to conclude this study post data-collection. The study also took place during the “*nepantla*” of traditional schooling, as freshman and sophomore years border the summer time. The timing made it difficult to meet with all the families. Hence, I had one phase of data collection, with students only.

Pre-data collection gatherings and recruitment. Table 5 shows the pool of students recruited for this study. Due to student mobility, this table depicts an approximation of 34 to 37 students entered our classroom over four school years between the academic school years of 2009-2013. I maintained various relationships over the years, through personal and digital connections.

Table 5. Recruitment Pool, Numbers of Students in our Classroom

School Year	Grade	Entering Students	Exiting Students	~Number for the School Year
2009 – 2010	2 nd	18 - 21	6	18 – 21
2010 – 2011	3 rd	7	2	22
2011 – 2012	4 th	7	13	26-28
2012 – 2013	5 th	2	18	18
Total		34 - 37		

Interest gathering. During the fall of 2016, I garnered interest from students for study participation by organizing an informal picnic at a neighborhood park, inviting 20 of the possible 34-37 students and their families through face-to-face contact, phone, and social media. Some parents showed up, while other students were dropped off. In total, nine students attended, five of which participated in the final study: Camila, Jaelyn, Ignacia, Stella, and Valeria.⁴

Initial overview. Upon dissertation proposal approval, I created an invitation to an informal gathering describing the overview of the study, searching for participants from our former classroom. In addition to the nine students from the initial fall gathering, I invited another 15 students from our class, for a total of 24 students. Of these possible 24 participants, 12 officially RSVPed. On July 17, 2017, I held a two-hour meeting at a public library a few miles west of our neighborhoods, ten days before the study commenced.

The day of the event, only five of the 12 respondents showed up with their families – Jaelyn, Valeria, Camila, Stella, and Jose. I showed a presentation of the proposal, original research questions, initial phases of data collection, potential date/times/locations for our sessions, and the voluntary nature of story-sharing. With such a small number of attendees, we collectively decided on eight meeting sessions, becoming a four-week exploration with students only. I presented predominantly in Spanish, ending with discussions, permission forms, and a sketch journal for each student to use as they wished; I had mine as well. The students' journals were not collected data sources but provided a safe space for drawing, writing, and reflecting during the study. In general, students privately sketched before collectively sharing out.

After the initial overview, I reached out to those who missed the meeting, of which only one became a participant – Ignacia. Serendipitously, I ran into a few students or families of

⁴ I use pseudonyms for all any participants and locations. Students chose or approved pseudonyms and spellings.

whom I had not seen since our last day of fifth grade back in 2013. Two of these students, Antonio and Cristiano, completed our participation group of eight. I had initially planned between six to twelve students as the optimal and manageable target number of participant (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). We experienced some attrition, as students have complicated lives. Camila, Jose, Valeria, and Stella were able to complete the entire study. However, all eight contributed important *testimonios* in their time with us.

Overall Study. With my eight participants, we met for eight *plática y encuentro* sessions, for four hours a day, two days a week, for four weeks. The first three weeks had a theme of past, present, and future with accordingly planned activities with art-making, generating *testimonios*. The fourth week, we completed our poetry and art.

Plática y encuentro sessions. As Latinx bilinguals, in our *pláticas y encuentros*, we generate knowledge within our informal exchanges (Godinez, 2006). This knowledge came in the form of *testimonios* – spoken, written, and visual – transforming into foundational sources of data collected during the eight sessions. The Chicana feminist epistemological foundation of our conversations was loosely structured and informal, within a purposeful schedule of activities (See Appendix B-I for details of our *pláticas y encuentros*). Each day, I had a list of questions related to relationships and experiences from their past and present and imagined dreams for their futures. The students attended to these inquiries, but they also brought up topics central to their sociopolitical realities. The tangential, but urgent dialogues emerging about racism, linguisticism, and border crossing experiences, sometimes were unrelated to the topic I was wondering about. The conversations naturally branched out of other themes. Each session built on previous talks, helping me prepare for the next day, circling back to topics students had contributed. Our discussions organically grew, and when students felt comfortable, they led us

down various paths. Their *testimonios* were central in my examination and elaborated in the data collection and analysis section. Moreover, even though *pláticas y encuentros* had specific categories of past, present, and future, our expressions broke time barriers, flowing back and forth, crossing various moments of our lives throughout all the sessions.

We met in various locations near our homes from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays (minus our sixth session on a Saturday, as we drove to the University of Colorado Boulder). Depending on locations, we mingled for the first 30 minutes, waiting for all students to arrive. Students ate, doodled in their journals, texted and talked, or played during this time. Beginning around 9:30 am to 11:45 am, we engaged in the various activities. We took a lunch break between 11:45 am to 12:00 pm. In the last 45 to 60 minutes, we usually continued individual and collective conversations, while creating art.

Site. My study was grounded in a particular region of a large urban city, but I collected data across many surrounding areas. According to community data, 72-77% of residents in these neighboring areas, which include our own families and former school, were predominantly of Latinx heritage (“Community,” n.d.). Although Rhopalocera Academy (RA) was foundational to our memories, we never entered our old classroom during the study. Nor did I conduct any observations in students’ schools, all of which pertain to the same district as RA. While RA and their classrooms were not physical sites, they served as backdrops for our *pláticas y encuentros*. The history and sociopolitical context influencing the neighborhoods and educational system were critical to understanding the *testimonios* and this region of the city.

Brief Historiography. After the federal decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* 347 U.S. 483 (1954), ruling racial segregation as unconstitutional, state and local school governments around the nation began interpreting how to desegregate. The city where I collected data, was

like many cities around the country that started to shift its segregation practices. During the 1960s and 1970s, the southwest region of this city had a completely different demographic than during the time of the study, with predominantly White residents. Desegregation began in the schools in the northeast region of the city. Once the Supreme Court ordered the change, surrounding schools followed suit according to *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, Colorado (1973). The *Keyes* case pertained predominantly to the issues of desegregation of Black and White students. However, in this school district, Latinx students counted as White (K. Escamilla, personal communication, October 27, 2016). Outside of the southern United States, this city was in the unique situation of having schools that “appeared” integrated once the large population of Latinx, counting as White students, were bused to predominantly Black schools (K. Escamilla, personal communication, October 27, 2016).

At this point in the early 1980s, the southwest part of this city was still predominantly White. However, as the courts required desegregation practices, White parents opposed to busing remedies for racial balance quickly fled out of neighborhoods where these mandates took effect (Bell, 2004; K. Escamilla, personal communication, October 27, 2016). As White families retreated to the suburbs across the country, the remaining areas of the city were left heavily non-White, Black or Latinx (Bell, 2004). In the case of our neighborhood, it became predominantly Latinx. Within these demographics was a subset of children who were Latinx and bilingual (K. Escamilla, personal communication, October 27, 2016; Roos, 1983). Despite desegregation practices, schools continued to discriminate against Latinx bilinguals.

In response, thirteen Mexican-American parents of children attending the district schools, along with the Congress of Hispanic Educators (CHE), filed a motion in the 1980s to ensure access to bilingual education for Latinx students (*Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1*, 1983). The district

court determined that a meaningful desegregation plan must provide English support for Spanish-speaking children, electing a Transitional Bilingual Approach (Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1, 1983). Although the courts mandated no specific interventions, the school district had the duty to employ the proper actions to legally comply eradicating the impacts of past segregation policies (Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1, 1983). Despite this mandate, now over 30 years old, it is evident that the school district continues to struggle in implementing a successful language and academic instructional plan to honor children’s linguistic and social capabilities (K. Escamilla, personal communication, October 27, 2016; Roos, 1983). Over the years, this consent decree translated to a minimum 45-minute block of English Language Development (ELD) granting access to the content curriculum.

During the earlier part of the 2000s, Colorado, with help from researchers, community supporters, teachers, administrators, and families, fought to defeat anti-bilingual legislation, further elevating the push support bilingual students in the school (Escamilla, Shannon, Carlos, & García, 2003). In more recent years (2008-2018), the addition of charter schools, unique school programs, some of which qualify for “innovation status,” and school choice have become a central part of this districts’ reform in response to supporting students in these neighborhoods (Asmar, 2017). All of this, coupled with gentrification as White people move back to this area, has established a complicated study context. Our individual and collective experiences of straddling multiple cultures and languages between home and school, while being labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) in this district, and the political and social history of this district, impacted how we experienced the context within which this study took place.

Physical sites. Having multiple session locations for our *pláticas y encuentros* lent themselves to generating rich *recuerdos* and imaginations surrounding themes of our past,

present, and imagined future (See Table 6). Due to school renovations, we could not meet inside RA, settling on the playground for our first session. Meeting spaces were difficult to secure as they were expensive, restricted food or art materials, too far away, or opened too late. Hence, five of the sessions occurred in my home. Our final meeting took place at my house and a restaurant to pay my respects to students.

Table 6. Session Themes and Locations

Theme	Session	Location
Past	#1	Former Playground & Local Library
	#2	Paty's Home
Present	#3	Paty's Home
	#4	Local Library & Elementary School Playground
Future	#5	Paty's Home
	#6	University of Colorado Boulder & Restaurant
Wrap Up	#7	Paty's Home
	#8	Paty's Home & Restaurant

Participants. Overall, when I met the students in elementary school, we shared some similarities in cultures and languages through our Latinx upbringings. However, each student was unique. In this section, I present details about the eight students. This information comes from when I knew them when they were in our elementary school and from their time during the study. I exhibit this information collectively and individually. Table 7 shows the grades students entered and spent in our elementary classroom. Moreover, except for Stella, they were all born in the United States, to Mexican or Central American immigrant parents between 2001 and 2002. Two of the students, Valeria and Cristiano, moved to Mexico and Guatemala when they were little and came back, for kindergarten through 2nd grade.

Table 7. Students' Grades while in our Classroom, 2009-2013

Name	Elementary Grades			
	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
Jaelyn	✓	✓	✓	✓
Camila	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jose		✓	✓	✓
Ignacia		✓	✓	✓
Valeria		✓	✓	✓
Antonio			✓	✓
Cristiano			✓	✓
Stella			✓	✓

After describing the history of the district and a brief narrative of the sites and students, Table 8 depicts the eight students' self-reported ELD placement. The table also shows the middle and high schools they attended. What is noteworthy from this table is how scattered the students were across this particular area of the district, as public schools contend with new charter schools and whether or not they self-reported receiving language supports through ELD at their schools during the study.

Table 8. Students' ELD placement and middle/high schools

Name	ELD Placement	Middle School	High School
Jaelyn	Yes*	ABC Charter 1	Global Public
Camila	No	ABC Charter 2	Ready Public
Ignacia	Yes*	Sunrise Public 1	Sunrise Public 1
Jose	No	ABC Charter 2	XYZ Charter
Valeria	No*	LMNO Charter	LMNO Charter
Antonio	Yes	ABC Charter 3	ABC Charter 3
Stella	No	Sunrise Public 2	Sunrise Public 2
Cristiano	Yes*	Bright Public	Global Public

*Note: *Student had an ELD placement during the time in the study, exited ELD in the fall of 10th grade.*

Camila and Stella tested out of ELD after fifth grade. Jose had ELD services in sixth through eighth grades. Four of the eight students were in ELD classes up to 9th grade and during the time of the study. Three of these four students exited out of ELD by the start of their sophomore years, after data collection ended. According to Valeria, she qualified for services but

was not in ELD. Overall, the eight attended both charter and public middle and high schools. Fascinatingly, only Jaelyn and Cristiano attend the same high school. Ignacia and Stella did attend two different school programs housed in one building on a shared campus.

Jaelyn. Jaelyn entered RA in second grade, spending four years in our classroom. She was sweet and often cried during class. Jaelyn's emotional personality prompted me to reach out to her mother, initiating a close connection. Coming from Mexico City, she raised Jaelyn, along with her older son. The profound trust I developed with Jaelyn's mom would encourage her to reach out to me during the most joyful and the most painful of experiences. Jaelyn's sensitive nature as a young child was present in our study, as she bravely shared her life with us during our study. I maintained close contact with Jaelyn and her mother after 5th grade.

Camila. Camila also joined our class in second grade. In fact, Jaelyn and Camila went to the same elementary school for kindergarten and 1st grade. Camila was a reserved child in our class. In third grade, our school staff nominated her for an honorable district award. She also won a bilingual writing contest in fourth grade. I also maintained consistent contact with Camila after fifth grade. Like her demeanor in our classroom, she was probably one of the quietest during the collective conversations, but one-on-one, we had some of the most in-depth and lengthy exchanges. Not surprising, given her reserved personality, she opted out of art-making publicly in our study. Instead, she brought a soccer ball, inviting students to play during breaks.

Jose. Jose was one of our new students in third grade. Similar to Camila, he was a reticent and reserved child. As the oldest child, Jose took on roles and responsibilities at home. However, at school, Jose had trouble working with others at first. He excelled in every single subject area, wanting to get the work done and preferring to work alone. This difficulty in collaborative group-work led me to connect with his mother, creating a close relationship. I

encouraged Jose to bridge his leadership skills exhibited at home and as an athlete, into our class. He internalized this, becoming a funny, gentle leader in our classroom. Although he came to every single one of our sessions, Jose, along with Camila, was the quietest in the group. Although, Jose continued to engage with quick-witted humor.

Ignacia. Along with Jose, Ignacia was a new student in third grade. With her fire red hair, she ignited our classroom dynamics with charisma. With parents from Durango, Mexico, and the youngest of five, I witnessed entertaining family dynamics through home visits. The household joked around with ease. As they playfully interacted, I saw where Ignacia developed her fiery passion. These interactions at home translated to a bold child in our classroom, as she fearlessly engaged in our class in spoken Spanish and English. However, in her writing, Ignacia struggled with spelling in both languages. I maintained contact with her mother through Facebook. Given her personality, not surprising Ignacia confidently participated in making art. Unfortunately, Ignacia only made it to a few sessions. While her time in the investigation was short, her presence was important. Her stories were prominent, insightful, outspoken, and funny, often times providing comedic relief when discussing painful stories.

Valeria. At a young age, Valeria's mother moved her family back to her native Chihuahua, taking her three daughters to Mexico. The family came back to the Colorado meeting Valeria in the middle of third grade. Valeria attended school there until the middle of third grade. Even as a third grader, I remember her as mature, quiet, and artistic. However, over time, Valeria became a leader in our classroom because of her performance skills, she led the entire school in a choreographed dance on the last day of fourth grade. Valeria only missed the last day of our sessions due to of the start of her school year. Her absence on the last day was notable, as she was an extremely vocal and influential participant.

Antonio. Meeting Antonio and his family in fourth grade were not without challenges. He came to our school bringing behavior difficulties from his previous school. He distracted others regularly. Antonio also struggled with spelling. However, he excelled in math. Because of academic and behavioral concerns, his mother and I spoke periodically, becoming close in this respect. With his mother, I positioned him as a smart and capable student. Over time, Antonio internalized the aspects of being a leader in our classroom family. After fifth grade, I lost contact with him and his family, until I ran into his mother at a restaurant drive-thru. Because of his football schedule and early school-start, Antonio was only able to come to four of the sessions. He had matured over the years and was a robust and critical presence in the sessions he attended.

Cristiano. Stated earlier, Cristiano was born in the United States but moved to Guatemala from age three until third grade. Getting to know Cristiano and his mother in fourth grade was a compelling experience. His mother worked hard to take care of three of her kids in Colorado single-handedly. She also had older children in Guatemala, who are now, fortunately, with her again. Cristiano was the middle of the three in Colorado. Having spent most of his elementary schooling experience in Guatemala, he spoke mainly in Spanish when we first met. He was extremely engaged in our classroom, courageously attempting English. I lost contact with Cristiano and his mother after fifth grade. I was excited when Jaelyn invited him to participate in the study on the first day. Cristiano abstained from the art-making aspect, preferring to play soccer. Due to his soccer schedule, Cristiano missed four sessions. As one of our comedians, his absence was noticeable. He made us laugh, playfully poking at Jaelyn.

Stella. I met Stella the year of fourth grade. She had a strong bond with her parents and was the oldest of two daughters. On the first day of the research study, I was surprised to learn she was supposed to have repeated third grade. This was the reason her mother moved her to our

school. Antonio and Stella went to the same school for third grade, sharing their teacher had quit in the fall. According to the students, this created a disruptive learning environment. Regardless, she excelled academically in our classroom for two years. She was a strong leader, others looked up to her, and she made friends quickly. In the short two years in our class, I built a relationship with her family and maintained contact with them through Facebook after fifth grade. Her demeanor in our classroom carried throughout the study –she was active, vocal, and funny.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection. I collected spoken, written, and visually artistic expressions as data sources before and after the eight sessions of *pláticas*. The pieces collected prior are their poems explained below. I documented the spoken conversations with audio and video equipment. The attendance of the students varied across each session, which is depicted in Table 9. I wrote extensive field notes, transcriptions, and reflective narratives after each session.

Table 9. Attendance During the Eight Sessions of the Study

	<i>Pláticas y Encuentro Sessions</i>							
	2017							
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
	07.25	07.27	08.01	08.03	08.08	08.12	08.15	08.17
Jaelyn	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Camila	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ignacia	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Valeria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Antonio	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Cristiano		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Stella	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Each of the eight sessions was about four hours long, but because I had to start and stop the recordings for shorter files. I also refrained from recording many walks and breaks, as they were harder to hear. However, collectively there were 16 hours of audio and 21 hours of video recordings of the eight *pláticas y encuentros*. I uploaded the audio and video files to my

computer, organizing them by date and time, followed by writing field notes after each session. I also completed several iterations of transcriptions, beginning with an initial listen, highlighting salient topics. Then, I indexed each recording by date, recording number, names, and themes. These titles aided in easy retrieval and organize the sessions. After categorizing, at a later time, I cleaned up transcriptions, typing words verbatim.

The tangible data sources, including student work written in fourth grade and pieces written, brought, and made during the study, for each student is summarized in Table 10. Collectively, they are called each students' *coleccion de arte guardada* [cherished collection of art]. Written expressions, both past, and present were typed and printed and cherished safely over time. I photographed students' objects and artworks. There were a total of 16 poems, 13 artworks, and five objects (Appendix J-P). Jaelyn and Antonio participated in art-making but refrained from handing in pieces for analysis; this is important as I did not require students to make anything if they did not wish.

Table 10. Data Sources - Students' coleccion de arte guardada [collection of art]

Name	Written Expressions			Visual Expressions - Brought or Created			
	Past Poems (2012)		New Poems (2017)	Objects (2017)	Artworks		
Jaelyn	✓						
Camila	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jose	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Ignacia	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Valeria	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Antonio	✓						
Cristiano	✓			✓			
Stella	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The day of session #2, I gave each student a copy of their fourth-grade poems (two students were absent). I met with each student privately to hear their thoughts, while the others created art. It was crucial the student meet with me individually, before sharing collectively because of the sensitive nature of the writing in their poems. Over the course of three days (sessions #2, #3, and #4), we had individual and collective conversations surrounding their poetry. Table 11 illustrated the dates I had these conversations with individual students, and when they shared their poems collectively with the group. I ensured students knew reading their poems out loud or sharing any experiences with the group was entirely voluntary. Except for Camila, all students shared with the group.

Table 11. 4th Grade Poem – Individual and Collective Discussion Session Dates

Individual		Collective			
Session #2	Session #3	Session #2	Session #3	Session #4	08.03
07.27	08.01	07.27	08.01		
Jaelyn Ignacia Jose Cristiano Valeria Stella	Camila Antonio	Jaelyn	Antonio Cristiano Jose	Ignacia Valeria Stella	

The Past. The fourth-grade poems exhibited in this study were the versions students created in 2012. Although students wrote a variety of poems during the writing unit, they drafted two in particular. In one poem, students focused on their hopes, dreams, and fears. The other poem used an “I am” poem structure. I modeled the structures using a poem written by a poet identifying as Muslim (Appendix R). After reading this poem, by Alpha Oumar Diallo, students became interested in learning about other cultures and religions. They sadly asked what it meant to be perceived as a terrorist, prompting a collective discussion about religious discrimination and racism. However, during this time, we did not jointly discuss death, language loss,

immigration, deportation, or the Mexican/U.S. border, which happened to be topics they wrote about in their poems. Also, during this time, we did know about scholarly concepts of identity, *testimonio*, or border crossing theories.

During elementary school, I adapted our curricula to incorporate visual components. When they finished their poems, which went through a writing process of revising, editing, and publishing, we decided to add artistic elements. I worked with each student individually and understood through their powerful words the importance of permitting them to anonymize their poems. Inspired by a world of artists, with the whole class we discussed the importance of confidentiality and anonymity through various art pieces. Together on the playground, we took photographs of their shadows, the soles of their shoes, and their backs as symbolic visual representations of anonymity for their poetry publication. Other students chose images from the internet to accompany their poems. All of the students wrote their poems, typing up a final version with various fonts and colors. In 2012, the students attached and emailed me their poems. The students' poetry was compelling, as they jointly took up topics relevant to their lives. Their words moved and prompted me to hold onto to their work for over five years.

When I first collaborated with students on this writing project, I had envisioned students presenting these poems to their families. There was an opportunity to have a collective discussion about the issues they were addressing, back when they were nine and ten years old. Unfortunately, we never revisited the poems collectively because of school pressures to implement mandated curriculum and testing, as well as extreme time constraints. Even more heart-wrenching, the dream to have students openly share their writing with their families fell short because of the need to move quickly through writing units. We did, however, invite parents into our classroom for a potluck to share poetry books they created, with their printed poems

inside. Moving quickly through the curriculum to meet the pressures of education and prioritizing the standards and tests over children related back to the problems in Chapter 1. The official school demands took precedence over loving and caring for the lives and experiences of our students.

While I was my participants' teacher in elementary school, I watched and learned how they were seen through deficit lenses by the district and the state. I saw this most during standardized exams, the assessment practices, and letters sent to families about our students, labeling them as unsatisfactory or low-performing.

I do not pretend to have been a perfect teacher, as I also held discouraging perceptions of my students, primarily based on their test outcomes. I initially felt if they did not perform on the tests, it was because they needed to work harder. Their lower test scores transformed into an internalized pressure that I was not doing my job, that the kids were not doing their job, and that we all needed to work even harder to get children to perform highly on the test. Succumbing to these pressures of dominant educational practices pushed me to prioritize lesson plans over their lives (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). This negativity trickled down and played a role in my own harsh pressuring of students; this included demanding quiet behavior from the student while instructing primarily to the standardized tests. However, as I developed as a teacher and became more confident in my instruction, I understood these educational practices as problematic. Students need to interact with each other; this looked like noisy collaboration, asking questions, sharing resources, and collectively engaging in our struggles. Through this process, I learned it was not the students or their families that was the problem; it was the system. I worked to improve my instruction, which involved thoughtful, loving, and caring approaches towards students engaging reciprocally in the classroom. As I embraced my students' abilities and backgrounds, I

rejected the deficit views of Latinx students based on their test scores. The more I honored their experiences as valuable, the more we shared our lives together. The more we shared together, the closer we became. The closer we became, the more we shared. Blurring these boundaries of student/teacher relationships, getting to know my students in more profound and loving ways, did not come without challenges.

This idea of loving and caring for students, and wanting to move up with them for four years, was not always welcomed by all my colleagues. Although encouraged by our school leader, there was substantial resistance stating moving up with students as problematic. However, my students and their families and I had strong relationships for years. These connections allowed me to support student in their times of need and supporting their families. By having one foot in the dominant academic spaces created without the voice of the Latinx community and the other foot in my personal Latinx upbringing of caring for students and their families, I was judiciously aware of the many forces used to dominate and separate the Latinx identities and values we embrace.

On top of this struggle from colleagues, moving up for four years from second to fifth grade was difficult, there were other challenges. I had to move classrooms two times (I was able to convince the school to let fourth and fifth grade stay in the same space; so as not to move an entire classroom a third time). I did however have to unpack and set up new curriculum each summer in between the four years of teaching, which included organizing books and materials and formatting new technology. I had to attend further professional development trainings every summer for each new grade, to ensure my approaches in each curriculum were up to date. Although not easy, I worked diligently to make sure that each year, the classroom looked different, that lessons were new and appropriate, as it was imperative that having the same

teacher did not mean they would receive the “same” lessons and instruction each year. Also, I sent a survey at the end of each year, asking students and families if they preferred a new teacher the subsequent year. The overwhelming response was for my continuation with their children. Had parents sent information that they did not want me moving up with their students, I would not have done so.

Another challenge of moving up each year is that not all students and I got along all year every year. There were relationships in the class, between myself and students, that were emotionally taxing. However, with an open invitation to all students and families, they often came to talk to me when they had a problem, and we worked them out with welcoming inviting communication on my end. Overall, the challenges never outweighed the benefits of getting to know students and families. I persisted, understanding we needed more time to accompany, love and care for our students over time within and between various spaces.

The Present. The students and I co-constructed a *nepantla* space, informed by theory and our shared past. Our first session occurred on the playground of RA. Because it was relevant to reinforce and further develop my relationships, with the now adolescent youth, we began again with getting to know each other. We had to relearn our roles and interactions in this new unfamiliar ground; as we were no longer traditionally teacher and students. Reminiscent to our first days in the classroom, they hesitated to speak. I initiated conversations, as *confianza* requires vulnerability on my end, sharing personal stories from my childhood. This helped break down barriers and walls, and students again began to take risks in sharing their lives. I was their former teacher and they were my former elementary school students. This history provided interesting dynamics as we attempted to reconstruct new roles. As such, it is important to describe the shifts in relationships and interactions through naturally occurring conversations in

our *pláticas y encuentros* (Godinez, 2006). We discussed our roles, and in this made clear my role and position as someone who would listen and engage, providing my *testimonios*. The responsibility that came in my blurred role was apparent, as interlocutor; I both wrote and disseminated *testimonios*, engaging in establishing rich narrated events (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). The data sources described below as we made sense of our experiences in these border crossing roles. We created a *nepantla* space to honor their Latinx lives, through love and care, and understanding our *tiempo acompañando* [accompanied time] over the years. All our shared moments, spoken, written, and visual were carefully collected, safely *guardados* [cherished], and analyzed methodologically and conceptually using the collective humanizing frameworks.

Data Analysis. As advised by Miles and Huberman (2013), data analysis happened concurrently with data collection. Table 12 shows my data sources, data collection methods, and approaches to analysis. The extensive field notes were not just data collection, but a source for making sense of what happened and what students said after each session. I wrote reflective narratives about each poem and art piece and uploaded images or documents to files in my qualitative software program, MAXQDA Analytics Pro. I also used this software to transcribe and code. I used the frameworks (Chicana feminism, love, care, *acompañamiento*, and *nepantla*) and research methods (arts-based) as concepts and tools for examining expressions (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Table 12. Data Collection and Analysis

Data Source	Collection Methods	Analytical Frames and Methods	
		Conceptual	Tools
Spoken Expressions			Field Notes
<i>Testimonios</i>	Audio		
Eight <i>Pláticas y Encuentros</i>	Video		
	Field Notes	Chicana feminism	
	Transcriptions		ABR Language
Written Expressions		Love & Care	
Past Poems	Typed/Printed		
New Poems	Reflective		Analytic Memos
	Narratives	<i>Acompañamiento</i>	
Visual Expression			Deductive Inductive Coding
Artifacts	Photographs	<i>nepantla</i>	
Artworks	Reflective		
	Narratives		

During and after writing field notes, I branched out and wrote, sketched, and drew analytical memos. There was also an extensive process of producing deductive and inductive codes to data. I applied hierarchical levels of codes, using the software and through the reflective narratives of each piece, using the conceptual frameworks to understand relationships, experiences, emotions, and identity.

ABR and Poetry analysis. My students and I are products of a public education system in which our Spanish was not developed, fostered, or valued. In fact, Alvarez (2013) reminds because the marginalization and terrorism of Latinx students’ languages are real, we must put a stop to the dehumanizing practices of correcting every imperfection of Latinx students’ language when compared to Standard English. As their elementary teacher, I attempted to disrupt negative experiences, humanizing the spelling and grammar instruction. Taking this into consideration, the Spanish spelling and grammar in both their past and present poems are not “perfect.” For

these reasons, poetry analyzed in this poem contains students' original spelling and grammar variations. When necessary, to aid in interpretation, I placed spelling supports or translations in brackets. If the message was discernable, however, I refrained from making changes or additions.

As ABR scholars direct, arts should be a part of every stage of research, including the analysis of the data sources (Leavy, 2015). My background in art came in handy, mainly when examining their poetry and art. This level of analysis also aligned conceptually, as poetry and arts straddle borders, metaphorically and through imagination in *nepantla*. Exploring students' poems and art, I reflected on the symbols and imagery as they wrote and created pieces to make sense of our lives. Designing an ABR study required an in-depth look at these figurative images (Leavy, 2015). I simultaneously used my artistic training and cultural knowledge to examine metaphors and symbols. As Miles and Huberman (2014) juxtapose the two clichés when it comes to visual analysis, "A picture is worth a thousand words," and "Images don't speak for themselves" (p. 98). With these two contradictory statements in mind, it was imperative to interpret the "thousand words" emitted from looking at a piece. However, since images cannot speak, I supported the visual and written work by the student's spoken words from their *testimonios*. Hence, my analysis was made by connecting across themes in spoken, poetic, and visual expressions.

Analytic Memos. As Miles and Huberman (2014) describe, raw field notes are "sketchy," (p. 71). In my sketch journal, similar to the one I gifted the students, I wrote, sketched, and doodled field notes and memos, transferring them to computer files by typing and scanning, translating them into figures and tables in this dissertation. Then, I processed these field notes by writing analytic memos when I noticed striking ideas and moments (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Without restrictions, memoing was a “fuzzy and foggy” process (p. 99). My drawings and paintings of striking moments were messy. But as I illuminated, I would take these creations, and organize them by topics into sortable and understandable formats.

Deductive Codes. My first cycle of coding approach was guided by a “start” list (Appendix Q), using conceptual frameworks and arts-based/time/space language for honing in on (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 73) experiences, relationships, emotions, and identities. To clarify in the text below, primary codes are not italicized and subcodes are *italicized*. In the “start” list, I began with primary codes on the left. Since the conceptual frameworks and analytical tools were so tightly linked, it was challenging to capture the categorizations between codes, as many cross boundaries resisting a solo label. For example, many codes would cross between the four frames of Chicana Feminism, love and care, *acompañamiento*, and *nepantla*. However, the potential of these combined frameworks lent themselves to a variety of angles and perspectives to making sense of the data. Furthermore, as I had described what *did not* count as *testimonios* earlier, were codes as “*non-examples*” of love and care experiences, relationships, and emotions – labeling them as *oppressive*, *un-affirming*, or *negative* – in essence, *lacking love and care*. And as is the nature of these border crossing situations, some codes were in shaky ground “in-between,” neither *negative* nor *positive*. To add a layer of complexity, applying arts-based and time/space language codes to students’ expressions traversed borders, establishing other layers of subcodes. The subcodes, or “second-order” hierarchal codes, helped me enrich the data (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 80). The start list in Appendix Q, shows expanded levels of subcodes, not all of which are listed in the appendix. For example, *ancestry* and *grandmother* were lower levels of the deductive code RELATIONSHIP: *family*. In the next section, I describe inductive codes emerging from the data sources, which had their own subcodes.

Inductive Codes. Because this study was grounded in long-term relationships and included spoken, written, and visual expressions from the past and the present, fascinating ideas were bound to emerge. For example, there were instances of humor, sarcasm, and comedic relief in the form of *chistes* [jokes] between the students and myself. There were also other playful moments of fun, in which students returned to their childhood innocence. Other inductive codes surfaced, addressed in the findings from Chapters 4 through 6. Therefore, I describe the inductive codes as specific to their emergence, arranged by the chapter findings sections below. Although all students contributed to the session, I highlighted distinct voices in each chapter.

Chapter 4 analysis. I deductively marked students' references to experiences in learning languages and how they linguistically self-identified, paying attention to instances related to time, space, and shared experience. These deductive inscriptions helped me answer the following research question:

RQ1: What do bilingual Latinx students express in their spoken *testimonios* about their linguistic identities and language learning experiences?

I took note of when and where the experiences happened and whether experiences were *positive* or *negative*. I bolded the word and phrases to illustrate the codes on TIME and SPACE presented in this example. As an example, see this iteration by Ignacia:

“Even my **teachers are** like, ‘You, **you, shouldn’t** even **be in this [ELD] class!**’”

I applied the subcode *present*, as Ignacia talked about a reliving as if it were the present. However, I also coded it as *past* since it had happened in her previous school year. After the first cycle of coding, I revisited the data in the second cycle of pattern coding, organizing categories and themes together (Miles & Huberman, 2014). I used predominantly analytic memoing, narrative descriptions, sketches and doodles, shuffling encounters of experiences around. I

settled with plotting them in a “matrix display” (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 90) marking emotions as *positive*, *in-between*, or *negative* and identities as *Spanish*, *English*, or *both*. I capture some examples in a matrix seen in Table 13.

Table 13. Positive and Negative Language Learning Experiences

		Identities: Language		
		Spanish	Bilingual (Both)	English
EMOTIONS	Positive	“I appreciate my parents for helping me learn my language”	“I am proud to be Bilingual”	“You helped me learn English”
	“In Between”		“She won’t let us use our Spanish”	
	Negative	“ELD is taking away my Spanish”	n/a	“We are the only ones who have to prove we are perfect in English.”

As Miles and Huberman (2014) suggest, I did not show every instance in the matrix. However, I identified relevant exemplars. Creating this display helped me see a theme, seeing no mentions of *positive* experiences in ELD. Second cycle analysis of sub-codes emerged inductively during “in vivo” coding carefully by attending to students’ words (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 74), prompting to do an in-depth analysis of students’ critiques and opinions of ELD. Examples of codes attached to ELD included: “*It’s boring,*” and “*I want to get out!*” which I also identified as *testimonios*. These references prompted an in-depth analysis of ELD instruction based on students’ expressions of experiences, relationships, emotions, and identities in ELD in various spaces (*schools, ELD classes*) within a district with a complicated historical stance toward racial integration and towards addressing students’ language acquisition needs

with ELD. These collective experiences laid the foundation for the findings and arguments in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 analysis. Similar to the process outlined above, I used primary codes and subcodes, applying them as expressions of experiences, relationships, emotions, and identities related to their sociopolitical realities across time and space. I also marked the nature of *contradictions* and *tensions* in their *feelings* helping answer the research question:

RQ2: What emotions do bilingual Latinx students embody in their present spoken *testimonios*, individually and collectively, when revisiting written expressions from their past?

I again show an example illustrating how I coded references to sociopolitical experiences and identities, coming from how Jose felt and identified himself after sharing his poem:

“Just like, it comes... **appreciating** more my **culture**, as a **Mexican.**”

In analyzing this statement, I applied subcodes to the primary code identities - *cultural*, *ethnic*, and *national*, and *Mexican*. I also coded Jose’s emotions as a *positive*, with deeper level codes of *appreciation* and *gratitude*. In Table 14, I also used “in-vivo” terms or straightforward phrases of how students’ self-identified through speaking or in writing, or how others perceived them (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 74).

Table 14. Students’ Self-Reported Identifications

Student	Self-Reported Identifications
Jaelyn	Mexican, Latina
Camila	Mexican
Jose	Mexican, Latino, American
Ignacia	Mexican, Mexican American
Valeria	Mexican, Latina, Mexican American
Antonio	Mexican, Latino
Cristiano	Guatemalan, Mexican, Mexican American
Stella	Mexican, Latino

I also used the information from the fourth-grade poetry to understand how students negotiated sociopolitical identities in the past and present. In the second cycle of coding, looking at patterns and themes across time and space, I also ascribed values to these emotional responses in terms love and care (or lack thereof) as *negative* or *positive*.

Below, in Table 15, I include an part of one of Ignacia’s poems, or written expressions, showing how I analyzed it as *testimonios*. As I communicated earlier, I bold to highlight words and phrases that I coded, showing a two-tiered system of primary and subcodes.

Table 15. Coding Excerpt - Ignacia’s Fourth grade poem
“Mexican American” by Ignacia

I worry [about] my **family** [**getting**
[deported] to Mexico
I cry When someone in my **family** [die] in Mexico
I [am] Mexican American
I [understand how] my **Mom** [**feel**]

In Ignacia’s poem, I coded relationships with *familial* subcodes including *mom*. Additionally, I noted negative emotions attributed to Ignacia’s words, when she wrote “I worry,” “I cry,” and “Mom feel” When Ignacia was young, she wrote worries of her “*family getting deported.*” I coded this statement as *testimonio* – a urgent sociopolitical message – related to deportation. Unbeknownst to us in the past, parts of students’ fourth-grade poetry were written *testimonios*, which generated spoken *testimonios* in the present.

I also coded spoken expressions, juxtaposing them to their poetry. I examined themes across their speaking and writing, paying particular attention to the time/space language. Students produced expressions situating experiences, relationships, emotions, and identities across various points in time and space, as findings surfaced around border crossing experiences and their racialized lives.

Chapter 6 analysis. The findings written in Chapter 6 emerged through similar cycles of examinations described above, coding spoken expressions from the eight sessions and written expression from past poems. Additionally, I examined their new poems, artwork, artifacts, mapping themes across the three expressions – spoken, written, and visual, answering the following research question:

RQ3: How did bilingual Latinx students’ memories and dreams of their identities trans/form into visual expressions?

As I mentioned, I spent time reading their past and present poems and looking at their visual pieces, mainly through photographs. I applied layers of deductive and inductive codes to these pieces. Figure 6, shows how I layered of coding of visual expressions.

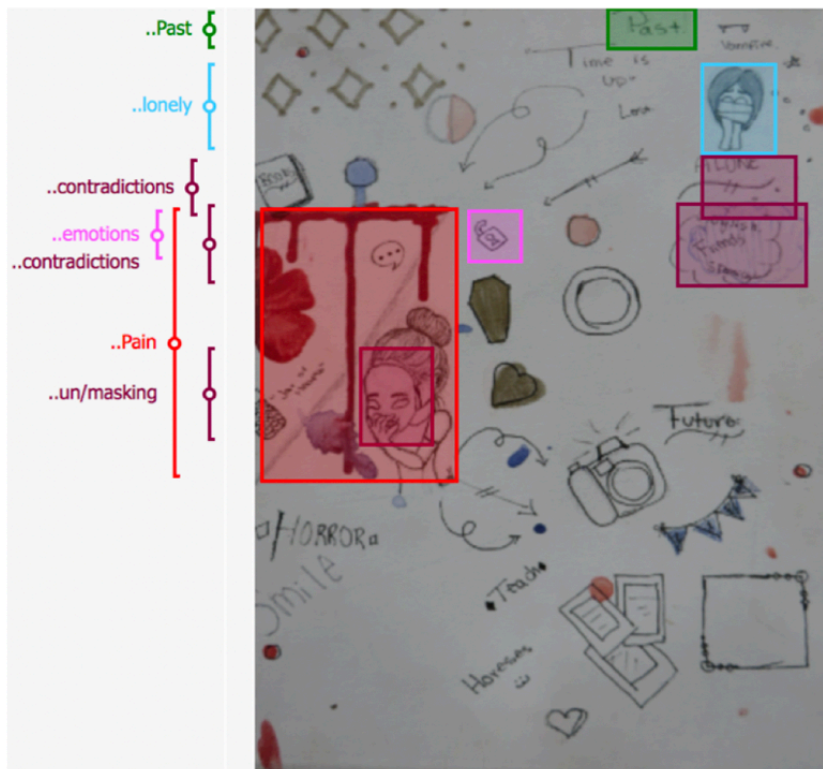


Figure 6. Coding of Visual Expressions

This particular layer had aspects of the *past* –emotion – on some of the areas of Valeria’s paintings using the qualitative software. This painting served as an example of how different aspects may or may not count as *testimonio*. I paid close attention to her *symbolically expressive* language, *metaphors*, *symbols*, and *imagery*. In the figures, I highlighted the *contradictions* and *tension*, conflicting *pain and loneliness*, which stemmed from her *past*. I put together the codes from the spoken expressions in the recordings, transcripts, and field notes, with the written expressions from their past and present poetry, in conjunction with their visual pieces. The final analysis considered the overlapping themes across their *colección de arte guardadas*, as themes emerged relating to transformations of *resistance, growth, and change*. Piecing together three *testimonio* expressions helped me make sense of students’ *recuerdos*, experiences, and emotions related to their past poetry, how their lives translate poetically and artistically in the present and future. I creatively pieced together the three expressions of *testimonios* answering the question in Chapter 6.

Reflexivity and Role

As an invested participant, through my auto-historic accounts, I purposefully positioned my subjectivity through the conceptual framing of the study. I designed this study knowing my subjectivity, affinity, and relationship to my participants and their lives. To this day, the students and parents call me *maestra* [teacher]—even though I am no longer *la maestra* in the traditional sense of the word. This sign of respect continued to undergird our established *confianza* while also maintaining a formal aspect to our relationship. My role was both that of a critical witness (Dutro, 2013; Dutro & Bien, 2014) and a caring participant in their lives. I attempted to share my experiences with them. Our reciprocity was grounded in scholarship, knowing that if I shared vulnerably, they might also share. I rooted our relationship in elevating my students, not

benefiting from them. My research study aimed to honor the lives of families, seeing them as a whole and as necessary, and to listen to their stories of the past, present, and future to weave into the collective narrative about Latinx communities.

Validity. In my role as a former teacher – now a researcher – I straddled various boundaries and identities. As such, I remained aware of the complexity of being both an insider and an outsider. I walked a thin line, positioned as a colonizer and the colonized in preparing to “tell” others’ stories (Villenas, 1996). I was transparent in my goals, practices, and interpretations. Carefully cognizant of the responsibility of holding my students’ lives in my hands, I consciously attempted not to broadcast their testimonios solely for the sake of research (Flores Carmona, 2014). Even though I am a part of the community, my students and I were well aware of my position. This role granted me privileges over their lives that I strove not to exploit (Flores Carmona, 2014). With this in mind, I was mindful of ethical obligations to conduct my research with respect and love.

Critics of race-gendered epistemological approaches insist the telling of personal stories distorts any pursuit of analysis (Delgado Bernal, 2002). However, many researchers using dominant practice neglect to acknowledge White male privilege, rendering it invisible. The stories and narratives about the U.S. educational system positioned as fair, unbiased, and meritocratic have become the norm, instilling a distorted sense of objectivity (Delgado Bernal, 2002). It is a false equivalent to give up one’s identity, to pretend objectivity is a path our work should take because dominant research has determined that emotions and experiences are biased (Behar, 1996). I could not deny my personal and professional experiences did not profoundly impact my research trajectory. Moreover, I reframe the critiques of my teaching as “too personal” or biased as an insider lens (i.e., emic), replete with critical awareness and having

cultural knowledge and intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Revealing these connections should not be seen as biased, but rather as truthful and upfront about the importance of our relationships and experiences as teachers and researchers working with Latinx students. It is not that our personal and professional experiences taint the data analysis, but instead, give us a different perspective in presenting results (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Other Chicana Feminist scholars impart how knowledge was collected, organized, translated, and interpreted with relevant to claims as both participant and researcher, applying our perspectives while sense-making (Anzaldúa, 2015; Pillow, 2003). The role of self-reflexivity is not just about being an observer or “witness” to the conversations between students, but concerns making my position known while engaging in the conversations (Pillow, 2003, p. 183). The examples I shared with students, from my experiences, were as Pillow describes, “an acceptance that is coming to know oneself will aid in identifying, understanding, ‘witnessing,’ the other” (2003, p. 183). The stories and *testimonios* students shared were dependent on the ideologies of subjectivity (Pillow, 2003).

Scholars acknowledge the importance of the transparency of our positions, but stress we cannot endlessly talk about ourselves without purpose (Behar, 1996; Pillow, 2003). I shared stories purposefully, aware when they were essential to conversations. Following these scholars, I understood the importance of how I talked about my positions, required practicing reflexivity, which impacted my critical analysis and presentation of findings. I framed my insider perspectives not as bias, but as a historical and longitudinal angle enriching the perspectives, weaving my testaments into an abundant wealth of Latinx knowledge.

Ethical Considerations. The mere thought of writing about my students’ lives came with complex emotions. As Flores Carmona (2014) declares, we must keep in mind, “Who are we

doing research for and for what purpose?” (p. 120). With this in mind, one of the most critical considerations was safeguarding my students’ lives and testimonios. I worked with a purpose of elevating and affirming students’ identities, while honestly expressing my position. It was imperative that they felt safe, protecting their emotions and privacy. I cautiously trod on my privileged role, making sure not to push anyone to share, while intentionally holding a space if they desired. Although the district was anonymized, it was easily identifiable through citations. Therefore, it was essential each student and school had a pseudonym. Keeping their information confidential and safe while in my possession was critical. With that, the voluntary aspect was heavily stressed, with students welcome to decline participation at any time. As much as the students wanted me to use their first names, the nature of their testimonios prompted me to make sure they were anonymous, reminiscent of when we took photographs of their backs, shadows, and shoes for their fourth-grade poetry. The intimate details expressed, either in the past or present, were carefully guarded.

Conclusion

This study was a balancing act—a thin line—I traversed across artist/teacher/researcher. I believed that one way to conduct humanizing research was to consistently communicate and accompany participants, maintaining *confianza* [trust], and remembering the reciprocal nature of our relationship (Delgado Bernal, Alemán & Flores Carmona, 2008). If we come to a shared description of Latinx values, beliefs, and experiences, seeing ourselves as experts, this adds to the collective knowledge base of Latinx scholars, helping change practices into loving education for Latinx students.

Chapter 4

Spoken Testimonios: Latinx Students are the Ones that have to be Perfect

Jaelyn: [In our ELD Class], we would mostly just read articles...and answer questions and note some vocabulary, but that's really it.

Miss Paty: Were teachers supportive? Or [did they] do anything you think helped?

Jaelyn: The teachers didn't really know how to teach it because that wasn't their specialty at all. We literally had a French teacher teaching us English. The teachers were supportive, it's just that they didn't know what to really teach.⁵

The excerpt above illustrates Jaelyn's dissatisfactions, which transpired our first day of the study while painting with other students in a small library near our former elementary school. I had just asked the Latinx bilingual youth about their memories back in grade school during the years of 2009 through 2013, between colorful brushstrokes on their canvases, only to be met with their present frustrations of the quality of English Language Development (ELD) class instruction in high school in 2017. Jaelyn's *testimonio*, along with other spoken expressions from her Latinx bilingual peers in the study, is the focus of this chapter. These *testimonios* led to the following findings in this chapter, answering research question one: What do bilingual Latinx students express in their spoken *testimonios* about their linguistic identities and language learning experiences?

⁵ Transcripts are typed verbatim.

I respond to the question by presenting what Latinx bilingual youth articulated based on how they contend with ELD spaces, their teachers, and peers. I interconnected their expressions related to how they understood the devaluation of their identities as they were positioned as less deserving when it came to their linguistic lives. They emphasized thoughts of substandard education and unfair treatment, alongside feelings of stigmatization and segregation as Latinx bilinguals. The young adults attributed their schools' handling of categorization and labeling within a rigid system of language placement and instruction.

As I spelled out in Chapter 3, the eight students in our study attended seven distinct high schools. All students self-identified and produced language bilingually, in Spanish and English, during the investigation. This chapter highlights five of these students, the ones labeled requiring language support services, while only four of them – Jaelyn, Ignacia, Antonio, and Cristiano – were placed in ELD during the time of data collection. Meanwhile, Valeria shared in the struggles based on how her school responded to her language needs. These students collectively shared testimonios expressing critical awareness of their linguistic identities, describing their experiences, and critiquing ELD instruction (or lack of) at their various schools.

In this chapter, I paint a picture presenting central findings demonstrated through themes raised in students' *testimonios* about their linguistic identities and language learning experiences during our *pláticas y encuentros*. Each topic had related components, as students self-reflected both individually and with others. I emphasize that the students' *testimonios* were connected to their language and linguistic identity in relation to sociopolitical realities concerning their race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and heritage. However, with the research question in mind, I put language at the forefront. I organized the findings into three themes titled: (a) forced

placement in low-quality ELD instruction; (b) ELD as an interference and hindrance; (c) critical awareness of the injustices of ELD assessment and placement.

The *testimonios* in this chapter come from Latinx bilingual students who all attend high schools in a district under federal mandate to provide support making the curriculum accessible. These spoken expressions stemmed from how they make sense and perceived these schooling encounters. Below I present testimonios of how these encounters impact their linguistic identity.

Forced Placement in Low-quality ELD Instruction

Within this theme, I drew on the aspects of my frameworks, mainly the lack of love, care and *acompañamiento*. The following examples demonstrate what students convey in assessment practices placing them in ELD through assessment scores, followed by schooling experiences contradictory to support or help in developing their language.

In that first day painting at the skinny table, Jaelyn unprompted announced she was still in ELD, striking a collective discussion of who was and who was not in this language development class at their schools. I was overwhelmed by their experiences as they began rapidly broadcasting their experiences. I asked them to clarify, “Wait, who is in ELD? Is everyone?” Those placed in ELD raised a paintbrush or said, “me too.” As I discovered the three students ELD placements, Valeria shared she “should be in ELD”. (Cristiano did not join us until the second day). With paintbrushes in their hands they waived them around in frustration, confessing confusions and complaints to their placement in ELD. Ignacia, Jaelyn, and Antonio all expressed being on the verge of exiting ELD. According to the students, their understanding of how to withdraw from ELD placement was scoring an overall six points on the language proficiency exam. Exasperated Jaelyn added, “I have to take the test again... We need to have a six, but we...have like a five or a five point five. We are like halfway there.” Antonio expressed

similarly, “I am close, I will be mad if I have to take it again [his sophomore year].” Ignacia, also unsure of the exact score declared, “I have like a 5 point something.” Ignacia revealed frustration about how her teacher, “couldn’t do anything [to get her out of the class]” and “[didn’t] understand why” Ignacia was still in ELD. The confusions and frustrations in ELD placement became salient *testimonios* in this investigation, described at length below.

During the second session, Cristiano joined our *pláticas y encuentros*. He added a new element to our continued ELD conversation because Cristiano and Jaelyn happened to be the only two students attending the same school. Coincidentally, they happened to be in the same ELD class in ninth grade. As friends, Cristiano and Jaelyn poked fun at each other, joking about their experiences in school. At one point, they light-heartedly quarreled about the lack of quality in instruction and how to avoid the class. At this moment, other participants joined in the discussion, taking sides on the appropriate ways student exit ELD. Cristiano exclaimed he would “just find permission” from a teacher to remove the class from his roster, and if that did not work, he would “just ditch.” Jaelyn became mildly agitated, disagreeing with Cristiano’s possible ways of “getting out of ELD.” To corroborate with Jaelyn, Ignacia inserted herself, stating the only legitimate way “out” of ELD was to pass the standardized language proficiency exam. Highlighted in bold, in the following excerpt of one of the conversations, are instances students described the language class as problematic or deficient, announcing reasons for disliking ELD:

Jaelyn: You have ELD? You got it in the third...?

Cristiano: Third period...I’m a **get out** of that class. The **class is boring**. We **don’t do anything** there.

...

Miss Paty: Your ELD class? Why do you think you don't need to be in ELD?

Cristiano: No! It's cuz **she never teaches us anything**...she just tells us to like....

Jaelyn: **Read** umm... Junior Scholastic™

Cristiano: And **that's it**.

Jaelyn: And **that's it**....

Miss Paty: And that doesn't even help you?

Jaelyn: No.

Cristiano: No...**she never tells us, like, strategies**...

Jaelyn: No, no... **she doesn't do anything**.

Cristiano: I guess that is extra credit...

Jaelyn: And she is the French teacher!

Miss Paty: For ELD?

Jaelyn: Yea.

In this finding, I pinpoint that while Cristiano and Jaelyn argued back and forth about how one exits ELD, they agreed on one thing: the teacher nor the class met their needs. They suggested experiences indicating ELD activities were of low-quality with a low-return on their investment. They explained their teacher did not assist in developing their language. They reiterated their teaching as a bare-minimum experience. Cristiano reported that the class was dull, and that the teacher did not use challenging instructional strategies to engage or support bilingual students. Based on my analysis, Cristiano and Jaelyn reinforced each other's sentiments on the negligible levels of language development, detailing several times unsupportive experiences in this particular space – ELD. Cristiano even asserted desiring some level of

support, calling out the lack of strategies in his ELD class. I analyzed this as a *testimonio* because of the shared experiences among students. They described ELD as marginalizing and wanting more helpful instruction. It just was not enough. Jaelyn and Cristiano corroborated the incidents, revealing these non-affirming unsupportive teaching approaches in developing their English. According to the students, the teacher handed out an article, which has comprehension reading quizzes at the end. The teacher did not give any explicit lessons or strategies during their ELD block. I perceived this through my analysis as unhelpful, unloving, and uncaring to students' language development, based on Cristiano's recognition that anything his ELD teacher provided would have been a bonus, or in his words "extra credit."

As noted in the opening excerpt, and again throughout their exchanges, Jaelyn experienced a level of frustration in her experiences in ELD and confusion of having a French teacher instructing English. I do not know the teacher's expertise in a foreign language or language acquisition training. However, it is crucial to note sociopolitically and pedagogically speaking, teaching a foreign language is not equivalent to teaching English language acquisition to Latinx bilingual students. Regardless of the teacher's bilingual language abilities or training credentials, students expressed mediocre, less-than validating language instruction and methods. It crucial to note that Jaelyn derided the dissonance of having a French teacher teaching English in several of her *testimonios*, often stating, "I don't understand, she's the French teacher!" Established through my interpretations, Jaelyn felt confused about the person standing in front of her, teaching her English. Based on both Jaelyn's and Cristiano's expressions, they wanted explanations and were holding their teacher to higher expectations.

At a minimum Jaelyn wanted some justification from her teacher, a clear indication as to what made her teacher qualified to instruct ELD. In other words, she desired to understand if her

teacher was equipped to develop the students' English language acquisition. Jaelyn's perceptions indicated in her *testimonio* in the opening of this chapter, reinforced by the remote instructional approaches in the class, illuminated uninterested levels of developing or promoting students' language. The students' conveyed expressions were more than inconsequential thoughts, and based on my analysis their *testimonios* transmitted critiques to what they perceived as an inadequate and confusing educational situation. As a result, Jaelyn was exasperated, and Cristiano actively sought ways to miss the class.

During another *plática y encuentro* in which we were talking about the present, I asked students about their favorite classes in high school. They discussed teachers they liked and supportive environments. As students recalled the subjects they enjoyed in school, they also discussed their dislikes, and again initiated conversations about ELD experiences. I followed up with Jaelyn after this discussion, during another *plática*. I asked her to elaborate on the activities and instruction during her ELD class. The following excerpt shows her response:

We would mostly just read articles...and answer questions and note some vocabulary, but that's really it. She passed out the articles, we read it silently, and then when we are done, she hands out the quiz. She does not have a lesson, and she does not even let us talk.

Through my analysis, the lack of *acompañamiento* was apparent. Teachers should be loving professionals walking alongside students, using explicit caring and instruction to develop their languages. ELD, which has the focus and purpose of helping students acquire English, was described as questionable through unengaging instructional practices. Students were left alone, *sin acompañamiento* [without accompaniment] to figure out the assignments. Based on Jaelyn's expressions, she was prohibited from engaging in dialogue with her peers, another instance of

solitary work, thus limiting her oral language skills necessary in influencing all aspects of her English. Given the students' reporting of the teacher's shortcomings concerning ELD instruction, it was astonishing to hear Antonio and Ignacia offer similar accounts, at two separate times, at two other schools during our *pláticas*. I placed the below excerpts together, but explain them cohesively afterward:

Miss Paty: How do teachers teach? Is it helpful?

Antonio: I was pretty mad because I don't want to be in ELD...It's boring for me and my partners because **we know everything**.

...

Miss Paty: What did you do in your ELD classes?

Ignacia: We would just write many essays, do presentations, and read.

Miss Paty: How did teachers help you?

Ignacia: I don't think she helped me, since **I already knew those things**.

Echoing Jaelyn's and Cristiano's feelings, Antonio and Ignacia confessed not wanting to be in ELD, as they found them equally unengaging in their school environments. At another point in the discussion, Antonio alleged all they did in ELD was worksheets. I could have easily dismissed the students' sentiments as typical adolescent apathy. However, based on my analysis of *testimonios*, as students collectively and publicly shared, they perceived their ELD experiences as unchallenging. These *testimonios* were expressed more than once, by several students, in various spaces across this region in this large urban district. Students consistently declared a lack of engaging material leading to their lack of engagement in the classroom. They repeatedly denounced the experiences, as students believed they were gaining little to no new information in these classes. Antonio and Ignacia both articulated respectively, "we know

everything” and “I already knew those things,” on separate individual occasions. Again, disengagement in ELD, or any class for that matter, is sometimes understood as indifference on the part of apathetic teens. However, not one of the four students discussed ELD methods as gratifying or helpful in learning English; on the contrary, they disengaged in ELD, bored by the uninteresting instruction provided.

Interestingly, students did convey support and satisfaction in learning in other classes and areas. For example, Jaelyn described her advisement teacher and her world history class as more supportive, and that she loved her Italian class. She also explicitly clarified other teachers “builds relationships” in other classroom environments. Cristiano expressed his English language arts teachers as accommodating. Antonio mentioned his teacher accompanied him, receiving support from his teacher in his Advanced Placement history and Literature composition courses. Curiously, Ignacia revealed her ELD teacher was supportive, but because the teacher agreed Ignacia should not be in the ELD class. The teacher was targeting instruction towards students with higher demands in language instruction. During any ELD conversations, Valeria often inserted herself, divulging that her school did not provide this class. She disclosed having taken the language proficiency test and scoring in need of English support. According to Valeria, her school’s response to her test scores was separate work from her peers, such as her world literature teacher giving her “level-one packets.” Even though she was not in ELD, she resonated with the other students, conveying in her *testimonios* that English language instruction was beneath her abilities. Her exasperation was that the assignments were “too easy. It is frustrating.” Students interacted collectively, expressing *testimonios* of criticisms pertaining to their placement in ELD through testing. They described issues of having the school require attendance in a class with a range of low-level ability instructional practices and materials, even though they

scored near the “test out” levels. Based on my analysis, this answers the research question, as students convey *testimonios*, urgent message of their language learning experiences. Required by law, the students were meant to have ELD build their language skills and grant them access to the curriculum. However, instead of developing language, it translated into a class contributing to Jaelyn’s confusion about her teacher’s qualifications; Ignacia’s bewilderment of placement; Antonio’s angrily forced attendance; and Cristiano’s desires to altogether skip class.

The following section elaborates on another theme conveyed by the students, denoting how unsuitable ELD neglected their language needs, and consequentially, blocked other academic and linguistic opportunities.

ELD as an Interference and Hindrance

As I illustrated previously, there were plenty of heated sentiments related to ELD. Not one of the students within these various schools disclosed any enthusiasm or positive emotions about their language development placement. On the contrary, the findings I highlighted in this section I derived by examining how students reported this class as blocking opportunities in their academics and interfering with the expansion of their linguistic repertoire. Furthermore, students also perceived their attendance in these low-quality classes hindered their linguistic identities, *testimonios* found below.

In the last section, I briefly explained the classes students liked. Here I elaborate on ELD blocking admittance into encouraging affirming spaces. As we sat around the coffee table on one of our *pláticas y encuentros*, while the students doodled in their sketchbooks, they engaged in conversations about the differences between their schools. They were curious about language offerings and requirements across the district, while they questioned each other on what classes they had to take for graduation and college applications. Valeria led the group in asking how

many foreign language classes they needed in their four years in high school. Below are separate excerpts from the various back and forth conversations during the same *plática y encuentro* between Jaelyn, Valeria and I:

Valeria: How many languages do you, like, have to take?

Jaelyn: Well, if you **don't have ELD**, you **can pick two**...my favorite subject ...not sure if it is a subject...but I love my Italian class.

...

Miss Paty: Why do you like Italian?

Jaelyn: I don't know...it's one of the easiest classes...I don't know; I really like it. But **I can't have it** this year **because I have ELD**.

Jaelyn enthusiastically described her love of Italian, but could not articulate why she found delight in this class that came to her so effortlessly. Although Jaelyn had difficulty articulating why she found Italian a pleasant endeavor, it prompted Valeria and Jaelyn to engage in a collective discussion about their language abilities. Within this interaction, Jaelyn asserted, "Italian and Spanish are really similar." Her connections between languages prompted me to suggest her comparisons between the languages, and the benefits of knowing one language and how it influences the acquisition of another, might be a possible reason as to why Italian came seamlessly to her.

Between the students' schools, they had numerous language requirements and opportunities available, and it was unclear to me exactly what were all of the students' language requirements at each of their schools. However, I did learn that Jaelyn did need four foreign language classes and four language arts classes to graduate from high school. Frustrated, Jaelyn disclosed ELD did not count for her foreign language requirements. In the previous excerpt,

Jaelyn described how ELD restricted her ability to engage in the full array of foreign languages at her school. She also described how she would have to make up this difference by having to take two foreign languages her senior year to make up for the time spent in ELD. Examining their expressions, linguistically all the students, including Jaelyn were bilingual in Spanish and English. However, most students, including Jaelyn, self-reported aspirations to enhance her linguistic repertoire. According to the four students in ELD, they were placed in this class for far too long. Based on the students' expressions in our *pláticas*, learning English was not counted as part of their foreign language requirement. Jaelyn's frustrations of ELD continued, as not only was the class unengaging as aforementioned, it prevented her from learning an additional language. Based on my analysis, Jaelyn exemplified several spoken *testimonios* of ELD, addressing issues in which the class impacted her linguistic development. Stated differently, she felt the system denied her ability to take a foreign language helping her develop and enhance into a trilingual identity.

As ELD created an obstacle for some students, I also present how this language development class hindered students' language identities. I revealed in Chapter 3 how all students were born to Latinx immigrant parents. While English was an imperative aspect of their schooling, Spanish was essential to their lives, as maintaining this language was significant to their home culture and connection to family. Students expressed perceptions that this systematic focus on their English development precluded entirely progressing their Spanish development or full bilingual identities. I present the examples of shared *testimonios* about their views on their bilingualism. Exclusively, they attributed ELD as deterring their Spanish progress or that it was erasing their native language altogether.

I had followed up with Antonio during another session because he had described he would be mad if he had to take ELD again. Below, is an excerpt of him explaining how he was barred from elective classes because of ELD:

Miss Paty: You had mentioned...that you are still in ELD. You said at one point, you needed to improve and if you did, you would **get out** of it. By being in ELD, **are you able** to take classes you want?

Antonio: It **takes away one** of my elective classes.

Miss Paty: Which elective class would you rather be taking?

Antonio: I would like Art or PE...ELD is just reading and vocabulary.

Antonio asserted what I understood as a *testimonio*. His expression connected to Jaelyn's, as they collectively shared ELD as a barrier to taking classes they preferred. In subsequent *plática y encuentro* sessions, particularly when discussing the future, Antonio had announced desires to play football in college and to become an architect. Both physical education (PE) and art would provide avenues in following these dreams; yet, ELD obstructed access to these classes. Based on my analysis, ELD becomes an impediment in Antonio's future, inhibiting him from enrolling in courses relevant to his interests and future career goals.

ELD placement not only prevented Antonio from taking content classes he liked, but it also impacted his ability to maintain and develop his Spanish. Below is an example of Antonio's sentiments for his languages:

Antonio: **I feel like my Spanish could** be better, but I feel like I don't need ELD.

Miss Paty: Why do you think your Spanish could be better?

Antonio: **I don't read very fluently**, and my vocabulary is not that great.

Miss Paty: What do you think would help with your Spanish?

Antonio: Well, **if I didn't have ELD, I would have a Spanish class.**

Antonio's conceptualizations showed expression of the inflexibility in the structures of ELD placement, prohibiting him from choosing classes necessary to sharpen his native Spanish abilities. Understanding the Hegemony of English (Shannon, 1995) coupled with inferior messages about Spanish (Valenzuela, 1999), it was not surprising that in this exchange Antonio felt his Spanish, not his English, needed improvement. He even listed a couple of areas of growth for his native Spanish language such as reading fluency and upping his Spanish lexicon. It is noteworthy how he paralleled and defined ELD as "reading and vocabulary." He did not report internalized deficiencies of his English, but pronounced enhancement needs in his Spanish. Unfortunately, students expressed negative emotions in their *testimonios* ascribed to ELD. For instance, in the following example, Jaelyn expressed one of the most heart-wrenching *testimonios* of the loss of her Spanish as a consequence of the overemphasis of ELD:

I feel like they are **taking away** my Spanish because now I feel like I'm **losing** my own native language. And, honestly, **it hurts a lot** because I'm **focused on having to pass ELD** in order to look good for college. And, honestly, that really **stresses me** out so much.

Not only were students in what they perceived as mediocre ELD classes, which they believed was not improving their English, as well as the experience stripping away Jaelyn's primary language. Jaelyn articulated this powerful *testimonio*, personifying ELD as a thief, stealing aspects of her linguistic repertoire, directly connected to her ethnicity, her culture, and her family. As Anzaldúa cited Smith's critical question, "Who [was] to say that robbing a people of its language [was] less violent than war?" (as cited in Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 54). Jaelyn viscerally

felt the pains of the degradation of her bilingualism. Not only is she concerned with the devaluation of her identity, on top of that she was worried about exiting ELD to take foreign language classes for high school graduation and prepping herself for college applications. During one of our future sessions, Jaelyn elaborated her feelings stating:

When I was in ELD, it honestly **made me feel** like I **didn't know how to speak** it. It **made me feel bad**. Just because my first language is Spanish doesn't mean I need help with English...because we are still in high school learning how to write and how to speak it. Just because a Spanish speaker doesn't know how to read a specific word in English, doesn't mean they have to get **put in a different class as others**.

Jaelyn continually spoke of negative feelings associated with ELD, expressing that it caused feelings of self-doubt in her language abilities. She identified herself as both an English and Spanish speaker of Mexican heritage born in the United States. In her *testimonios*, she was self-reflective, positioning herself as bilingual. Not only was ELD causing her to feel like it was taking away her Spanish, as I previously maintained, but it also caused feelings of self-doubts in her English abilities. She also actively recognized the legal form of segregation as the school placed her in a separate class from her monolingual English-speaking peers. She later confessed embarrassment, hiding the fact that she was in ELD from her friends, stating that telling them would make her feel “downgraded” or less than others. I examined these *testimonios*, from Jaelyn as the stigmatizing impacts of ELD, and the hindrance on how she views her linguistic identities and abilities.

Ignacia recounted similar feelings stating, “I **felt like I wasn't as intelligent** as other kids. I also felt like it wasn't fair.” Like Jaelyn, Ignacia internalized feelings of inferiority, when,

in fact, she is the one with two languages. This internalized message of subordination related to the perception of low language status granted to Latinx Spanish speakers in the United States tied to Latinx bilinguals culture and heritage (Shannon, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). However, the students in this research project were the ones with two languages; the ones with more, but unfortunately, made to feel less.

Through my examination of listening to their recorded compelling *testimonios* several times, the students conveyed the impacts of this language course impeding and hindering their linguistic identities, thus answering the research question. Based on this analysis of students' perceptions of the inconsistency of ELD and how it negatively impacts students in various ways. In other words, the students attributed this class as preventing them from growing their language abilities, blocking their content knowledge, and diminishing aspects of their language. Obligatory exams and compulsory placement in low-quality ELD instruction triggered the following findings.

Critical Awareness of the Injustices of ELD Assessment and Placement

A Chicana feminist stance informed the findings within this section in resisting discriminatory dominant practices in education and the need to legitimize Latinx knowledge and abilities (Delgado Bernal, 1998). I situate these *testimonios* expressing their understanding of inequitable language testing and placement practices. Furthermore, students offered their assessment and evaluation to this oppressive system. Below, I show examples of student's critically conscious objections.

Referencing back to our first day, while painting in the library, all of the students, including those no longer required to take ELD, explained the English proficiency exam process. Ignacia and Jaelyn shared again how close they were to exiting ELD. Jaelyn then stated how she

had not learned anything in ELD over the past four years. This brief background resets the stage for the following excerpt, depicting their exchange:

Ignacia: **You have to be perfect.**

Jaelyn: I have to take the test again.

Ignacia: **You should protest!**

Jaelyn: [Putting down her paintbrush and counting on her fingers]

 You have to have a six on writing, reading, speaking, and
 listening!

Ignacia: **That is dumb, you have to be perfect** in English!

Within this finding, these two students initiated a theme of internalized perceptions of and expectations of who had to demonstrate flawless language abilities in their schools, especially when it came to English, on the first day of the study. Essentially, Ignacia expressed this need to “be perfect” sarcastically and often over the course of her short time in our *pláticas y encuentros*. Spending year after year in ELD, Jaelyn expressed little gain to her language abilities, consistently labeled deficient in her English. Ignacia offered a critical awareness of the unjust task at hand, encouraging Jaelyn to resist and refuse another set of the language examinations in the fall. Unapologetically, Ignacia had a label for the language practices they experienced as absurd, or in her words, “dumb.” The situation was perplexing. Ignacia expressed an understanding that the system was deficient, not the students. They knew how close they were to passing the exam, needing less than a point to successfully score the average six points required across the language domains. These collective *testimonios* of students’ examination of the system continued into subsequent sessions, explained below.

On one of our present sessions, we transitioned from the living room out to the patio to paint. Once again, Ignacia instigated a discussion on her reviews of ELD, depicted in the following excerpt:

Ignacia: But I think it is **kinda dumb** that we have ELD. I mean, they **expect us to be perfect.**

Valeria: **Mmm-hmm!**

Ignacia: Like they are...you know? Because **they are not bilingual**, so **they don't have to struggle** with that. **They don't really understand ...**

Miss Paty: Uh huh!

Ignacia: ...how hard it is to just focus on **one specific language**. Cuz, I mean, I am pretty sure **we all think in Spanish** when **we are speaking English...**

Jaelyn: **Yeah!**

Ignacia: All the time.

Jaelyn: Yes, and the thing that **gets me mad** is that... most of...most of my...like **White friends, they can't spell...**

Valeria: **Same!**

Jaelyn: ...like in English. And **we are the ones that have to be perfect** and **pass that class** to like have others.

Miss Paty: Yup!

Ignacia and Jaelyn provided different, yet related critiques of these language learning expressions and their identities as bilingual Spanish and English speakers. As the two of them

talked, Valeria and I listened to their *testimonios* and agreed with their situations with positive affirmations. Latinx bilingual students do “double the work” based on Ignacia’s perspectives, compared to monolingual English speakers (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007, p. 1). Ignacia subtly speaks to the notions of the Hegemony of English that speakers of the dominant language (English) are bestowed an esteemed status and “don’t have to struggle,” while society perceives minority-language speakers (Spanish/Bilingual) as substandard (Shannon, 1995). The reason that the English speakers do not have to struggle is that the educational system was designed to favor monolingualism, and was not created to support or address the needs of bilingual students. In other words, according to Ignacia’s sociopolitical reality, monolingual students or teachers do not have to navigate the world in two languages. She also revealed how she navigates the world by thinking in one language, while orally expressing herself in the other; again, something a monolingual English speaker would not understand.

While she subscribed to Ignacia’s *testimonio*, Jaelyn depicted another layer of systemic injustice. Jaelyn emotionally perceived the language testing and language schooling practices as unfair and related to race. Jaelyn’s White peers, even those she called friends, did not have to “pass that class” even though they might share in her deficient language skills. During a member check, Jaelyn reiterated, “some White kids don’t even know how to spell...they don’t get put in ELD.” According to Jaelyn, White students at her school did not have to prove their linguistic abilities through standardized language proficiency exams. White students escape the burden of language proficiency proof (Flores, Kleyn, & Menken, 2015), relating to the Hegemony of English at work. There is an imbalance of power when only bilingual speakers receive subtle messages of inferiority (Shannon, 1995) and have to take ELD, as monolingual English speakers have the luxury of spelling at the same level as their bilingual peers. Monolingual English

speakers maintain a higher status and dodge the need develop or “perfect” or prove their English proficiency. Ignacia and Jaelyn’s awareness also connects to Flores, Kleyn, and Menken’s (2015) descriptions of the double standards for monolingual English speakers, as they may not have proficient skills in academic English (like spelling), but are not positioned as deficient like Latinx bilingual students. As these scholars have conjectured, students navigating school systems with two languages are the ones who must prove their proficiency in English or, again, “be perfect” as Ignacia and Jaelyn lamented. These students conveyed collectively that as bilingual students they are the ones penalized for having more languages. Based on my examinations, these students’ *testimonios* answer the research question as their language experiences involve perceptions of language exams placing them in classes to develop their languages to perfection. However, the Latinx bilingual students in my investigation critically exposed that it is the system that is flawed and needs fixing.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter, the collectively voiced *testimonios* emerging from our *pláticas y encuentros* answered research question 1: What do bilingual Latinx students express in their spoken *testimonios* about their linguistic identities and language learning experiences? They conveyed in their expressions critiques of a system which forces them to participate in ELD placement, which impacts their linguistic identities. The themes emerging from their *testimonios* show possible needed changes in English language development in schools. Through my analysis, using conceptual tools, I understood their expressions of lacking appropriate levels of support in learning languages. Bilingual students need for teachers to accompany them – moving and walking alongside – (Sepúlveda, 2011) in developing their languages. Further, I drew on my cultural intuition based in Chicana feminism (Delgado Bernal, 1998), recognizing their shared

expressions as politically urgent messages, in which we must legitimize and amplify their shared experiences, and thus their cultural and linguistic knowledge as Latinx bilingual students.

Through our *pláticas*, students felt safe voicing their *testimonios*, their public judgments of a system; a system that has, for far too long, negatively judged their abilities and identities.

Although it is possible that the Latinx bilingual students in this study benefited in having their English developed in their ELD classes, they never verbalized in their *testimonios* any positive feelings or recognized any personal benefits from these experiences. However, the students did convey in their spoken expressions frustrations of participating in marginal ELD classrooms with low-quality instruction, impeding and hindering their identities, and thus producing acts of resistance, publicly denouncing detailed language testing and placement practices. A problem highlighted by students' *testimonios* was a lack of preparation in providing challenging high-quality developmentally appropriate instruction, leading youth to perceive their academic experiences were unimportant or devalued. Notably, these frustrations should not be seen as teenage apathy, as students reported appreciating classes and learning with supportive teachers in environments using engaging materials. What the bilingual Latinx students in this research investigation show confirm the work of others scholars, unloving and uncaring schooling practices negatively impact Latinx bilingual lives through messages of an inferior and less deserving position in schools (Valenzuela, 1999). However, to make schools truly caring institutions for members of historically oppressed subordinate groups like [Latinx students], authentic caring...is necessary but not sufficient. Students' cultural world and their structural position must also be fully apprehended, with school-based adults deliberately bringing issues of race, difference, and power into central focus (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 109).

By and large, the students described grievances about what is an accepted practice, putting them with teachers who utilize unengaging methods, not centering their Latinx knowledge. This accepted practice, of placing students in classrooms for language development, with unchallenging school work, was cause for confusion, frustration, anger, and desperation to “get out.” The students in this ELD class did not feel cared for by their teachers. This schooling practice should be considered unacceptable. The cost of the low-quality and uncaring class came at a higher price than just unsatisfactory feelings.

Students described ELD, a significant part of their language learning experience in school, as preventing them from fully developing linguistically and academically. While the purpose of ELD is to provide access to the curriculum and content, it inadvertently created blocks in their paths. The students held views that the class took away from expanding their English, their Spanish, or engaging in other opportunities in academic knowledge. Their examples revealed inattentive systemic structures, within schools subtracting the potential of Latinx students because of the subtle messages of devalued language, tied to their race (Valenzuela, 1999). Students internalize notions of inadequacies in themselves and their language abilities and themselves, impacting their future. Moreover, the students conveyed in their *testimonios* consequences of ELD, expressing and understanding impacts to the development of their language, one went as far as to state an erasure of her Spanish. Through their perception of the not-so-subtle messages students get about their Spanish, they see ELD as positioning their Spanish as unworthy of maintenance (Valenzuela, 1999). They were actively aware of the importance of their bilingualism, while simultaneously understanding it was being reduced (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Many of our Latinx bilingual students come to school already bilingual, so their Spanish and English should be nurtured and fostered.

The students also expressed feelings of inferiority, as they felt unintelligent when their identities and language should have been bolstered, nurtured, and accompanied. The students demonstrated a collective interrogation of systemic schooling practices. They shared *testimonios* speaking towards the broader narrative of racism and linguicism in this country (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). Through my analysis, I knew their perceived feelings of misplacement were consequential. In their *testimonios*, students promoted a critical sociopolitical stance related to an awareness of who was required to take the language proficiency exams and which students the school placed in ELD.

They knew this placement, was related to their racialized identity as Latinx bilinguals. The youth expressed feelings of diminished positions, as requiring something they were lacking, or as a problem to be fixed, as opposed to valuing their Spanish as a resource (Ruiz, 1984). And yet, the students also positioned themselves in critically conscious ways, as some encouraged others to resist and protest the system. They critiqued the system and they were aware White monolingual English-speaking peers were not held to the same standards, speaking to what Ortega (2014) calls a “monolingual bias” or the presumption that English is the superior and only necessary language. Their collective *testimonios* addresses the fact that the educational system needs an overhaul as certain schooling practices must align to supporting students’ language and identity.

The findings in my investigation show when ELD lacked in substance, it negatively impacted the bilingual Latinx students’ identities and language development. Also, low-quality ELD resulted in disengagement, which is similar to what other scholars have found - when students do not feel cared about by teachers, they, in turn, do not care about the class (Valenzuela, 1999). I found their revelations as powerful stances against the injustice they

experience. As my students encountered unengaging education, it translated into questions and critiques of their position in schools, desiring and expecting higher-quality instruction and clarifications from their teachers (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, other scholars reveal foreign language course requirement hold a superior status (Kibler & Valdés, 2016). This inequity in language status was evident in ELD not counting as a graduation requirement in this category, something that we must consider in education for high school students.

In summary, my students expressed critiques of ELD classes. What is crucial about giving students opportunities to share *testimonios* is that these collective experiences are indicative of broader societal issues of harm towards our Latinx community. The students are not describing minor infractions when it comes to their language classes and language development. They are expressing in their *testimonios* shared marginalizing encounters, tied to the historical exclusion, segregation, denigration, and devaluation of Latinx students in mainstream classrooms in the United States of America. They are positioned in ways that are less deserving, and expressed *testimonios* of low-quality instructional practices are more than just feelings of misplacement, it was a real expression of an urgent collective need to change a racist system (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Sepúlveda, 2018).

According to my participants, consistently and across schools, the very language course that is supposed to help bilingual Latinx students acquire the English language, build their linguistic repertoire and identity, grant them access to the curriculum, and help them pass the English language proficiency class, was reported as mediocre at best and racially stigmatizing at worst. Thus, when the instruction is low quality, there is little support and love, care and *acompañamiento* in the instructional practices; it results in not passing the language exam, only

to be placed back in the vicious cycle, entering ELD once again. Students expressed ELD as not beneficial to their identities, in fact, they were desperate to exit the class.

The role of educators for Latinx students is to support students in their identity development, educational knowledge, and achievement. However, teachers are not just addressing academics. There are deeper, historical issues of collective racial and linguistic assaults impacting Latinx students that educators must consider (Sepúlveda, 2018, personal communication, June 11, 2018). Latinx students are sharing important critiques to a system, that has devalued their ancestors, and now them, for far too long. Educators should listen, through *acompañamiento*, love, and care to humanize their students and to dismantle questionable practices in education.

Chapter 5

Written Testimonios: Dude, what was up with the poem? It's messed up!

- Stella: Dude, what was up with the poem? **It's messed up!** What is that?
- Ignacia: Not just that...*pero* [but] like, the stuff that we wrote.
- Stella: Yeah.
- Ignacia: It's like, *como allí dice*, [like it says there] "**I am scared for my family to get deported**"
- Valeria: Yeah.
- Jaelyn: Don't start with that. Don't, my goodness.
- Ignacia: A nine-year-old having have to think of s#!+ like that bro...about that...
- Stella: I [wrote about it] too.
- Ignacia: **That is freaking messed up! It's sad.** I don't understand. Why? we are people! Cuz if we look at the earth, it is all the same thing.
- Valeria: *Ya estuvo* [That's enough already]!⁶

[07.27.2017]

The excerpt above reflects the *testimonio* engagement between the Latinx youth during our *pláticas y encuentros*. Six of the eight participants and I were sitting outside, around a glass coffee table on my back patio, on the second day of our study. I had just had individual conversations with each of them about poems they wrote in fourth grade, in 2012. Because of timing, we only had one student share, but we knew these collective conversations would extend

⁶ Transcripts are typed verbatim.

throughout the study. It was an early afternoon in the summer of 2017; the calm breeze and the quiet rumbling sounds of the neighborhood were no match for the captivatingly intense collective *testimonios* between the adolescent youth. The four young ladies, in the opening excerpt above, shared an array of important emotions as they tried to make sense of their past reality as young children. These *testimonios* indicate an example of the exchanges between Latinx youth as they recall the past. In our *nepantla*, we crossed time and spatial boundaries, remembering emotions from when they were only nine.

These shared *testimonios* with the group, along with individual *testimonios*, emerged in our time together. In this chapter, the *testimonios* led to the central findings demonstrated through themes arising from students' emotions, thus answering research question two: What emotions do bilingual Latinx students embody in their present spoken *testimonios*, individually and collectively, when revisiting written expressions from their past?

What students uttered in their spoken *testimonios* surrounding their identities and experiences from their past poetry offered a contextual understanding of the profound seriousness, marginality of the sociopolitical realities in their precarious personal lives (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Sepúlveda, 2018). These deep sentiments expressed through reflective practice, while making sense in shaky ground (Anzaldúa, 2005), stemmed from our shared history in this new space in the present. They felt safe to recount their intimate *testimonios*, as this was not our first time together. Importantly, I moved alongside the students, through *acompañamiento*, metaphorically and physically, from when they were young until now. I knew them as little ones, watched their emotions and lives transform as they have grown into young adults. Their poems from years ago, cherished over time, were brought out to remind them of their past. Students described collectively emotional pains and memories as Latinx community

members, as they have real worries of detention and deportation for their friends and families. The poems reawaken these concerns. However, students also shared positive feelings tied to their families, especially when describing these painful experiences. Students' *testimonios* illustrated the ways they felt while they grapple with race, racism and racist nativism. Drawing on Anzaldúa's conceptualizations, Pérez Huber and Cueva (2012) put forth that *testimoniando* [sharing *testimonios* or bearing witness] plays an active role in the process of becoming consciously aware of the impacts of racist nativist ideologies, practices, and "race-based trauma[s] and other forms of oppression" (p. 396). Furthermore, the students and I shared in blurred roles as *testimoniador/a* [testifier, writer, and creator of *testimonios*] and interlocutor (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). As I analyzed the spoken and written expressions as data for this chapter, I understood our process of sharing and listening to each other's *testimonios*.

The fourth-grade poems served as vehicles helping us navigate between the past and the present, a tiny piece of the memories when they were young. As can be expected, on numerous occasions, students voiced sensitive *testimonios* of their feelings during our *pláticas*. The richness provided in these conversations was vast and overwhelming, not just for my students, but for myself as I had listened to them back as their former teacher and now a researcher. For this chapter, using my conceptual frames, I narrowed down what youth expressed into individual and collective spoken *testimonios* related to two separate poems written by two students – Antonio and Ignacia. Within each of the student's sections, I illuminate findings of emotional border crossing experiences, with examples of how students navigate and make sense of their lives and identities in the "in-between" *nepantla* – straddling the present and the past. The *testimonios* demonstrated the centrality of racism impacting their lives producing themes underwriting their individual and collective *recuerdos*. The themes are as simple as they are

complicated, as students embodied compelling emotions tied to their families and identities, in the past and the present.

As described in Chapter 3, to honor the stories of their lives, before sharing with the group, I gave students an opportunity to revisit their past by reliving their poems first. I listened, paying careful close attention, with love and integrity, as Latinx students shared their border-crossing and race-based feelings. The Latinx bilingual students' *testimonios* came from understanding their families' physical and metaphorical border crossing experiences. Below, I provide interconnected examples, highlighting in bold the phrases of these emotional responses, about their experiences, relationships, and identities – across time – and through written and spoken expressions.

Ignacia. Within Ignacia's section, I drew on Anzaldúa's (2015) conceptualization's of *nepantla*, as we traversed new ground, emotional, cultural, spatial, and temporal borders in a new territory outside of our classroom. Holding on to the students' poems transported us back to that time in elementary school, remembering what we felt then and now. We had an opportunity to see the world in a different way “creating a split in awareness that can lead to the ability to control perception” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 28). We balanced these perspectives of school, home, society, moving back and forth metaphorically in our *nepantla*, understanding our lives through new vantage points.

In the spring of 2012, Ignacia wrote her poem, “Mexican American,” illustrated in Figure 7. She first identified as Mexican American in her written expression. Her identity stance shifts

Mexican American



I am Mexican American
I wonder how Mexico [looks]
I hear from my mom [details] of Mexico.
I want to change [things] in Mexican
[I'm] Mexican and American

I pretend love [all Mexicans]
I feel sad for what Mexicans [there] are to [state]
I touch my Mom when she [cries] for my Uncles
[because] they [die] in [Mexico]
I worry [about] my family [getting]
[deported] to Mexico

I cry When someone in my family [die] in Mexico
I [am] Mexican American
I [understand how] my Mom [feel]
I say way do they do [this] to me
I dream [stuff] was [different] in Mexico
I try to Change things in Mexico
I Change things
I am Mexican

Figure 7. Ignacia's 4th Grade Poem (Spring 2012), "Mexican American"

from Mexican American to Mexican as she ends of her poem. In her poetry lines, she wondered about Mexico, thinking about how it looked. The stories and encounters she heard about Mexico, came from the details expressed by her mother. These narratives fabricate a cloud of suspicion, negatively stereotyping an entire country and its people. These stories of caution about Mexico impact students in contradictory ways. They not only have cultural, ethnic, and national pride; however, they also are conflicted. For example, Ignacia identified as Mexican and Mexican American, but also wants something different for her family's native Mexico. Moreover, feelings of tension arose in her written expression. Ignacia poured words of sadness into her poem describing issues of the death of a loved one in Mexico, coupled with preoccupied feelings of a

possible deportation in the United States. There was a literary shift, hopefully imagining and dreaming of changing Mexico. In Ignacia's poem, she wrote three times about her desire to make a change in her mother's country, beginning with her intentions, "I want to change things in Mexico," "I dream stuff was different in Mexico," and "I try to change things in Mexico." As her poem flowed from beginning to the end, her desires of wanting to transform situations for her mother's native country, ended with a final declaration of "I change things/I am Mexican."

Ignacia's Individual Testimonios [07.27.2017]. On our second day of the study, I met with the six students present to describe their poems. We were sitting in the backyard, and I pulled out their past poems. They exclaimed, "You held on to our stuff?!" When they were little, I had printed out their poems, and they cut them out and pasted them into poetry books created in fourth grade. Since they had emailed me their final copies as electronic versions in the past, I was able to print out new versions. In my hands, I physically held their words, their lives, close to my heart. One by one, I met with each student individually, while the others painted and doodled in their sketchbooks. Ignacia was the second student with whom I spoke. I gave her the poem, allowing ample time for her to read it.

Ignacia was a happy child in the past in our classroom, which was evident in the present as a teen during our study. However, her brilliant spark slightly dimmed when I asked Ignacia her thoughts on her poem. The first things she communicated were feelings of sorrow related to her uncle's passing. She recalled the difficulties at home, "It was such a hard time. It was hard seeing my mom." Positioning herself back in the past with her families. It was apparent the change she had desired through her writing, had translated into these expressed feelings in the present. She described the struggles her family endured, internalizing her mother's grief since she could not return to Mexico to be with family. Over time, some of the pain has lessened as the

family has healed. Ignacia articulated her uncle's death was not something her family often discussed anymore. The following is an excerpt as this discussion continued with Ignacia remembering her poem:

Ignacia: **I worry** about my family being deported to Mexico.

Miss Paty: Thinking about those **feelings** then, what comes up for your now?

Ignacia: They still come up. **It's all pretty scary**. You know, any time, you get to think, just cuz, **it's pretty scary**.

Miss Paty: Yeah, **it's frightening**. You wrote these [poems] when you were eight or nine, how is it possible that kids are feeling that...

Ignacia: At such a young age!

Miss Paty: **It's so unjust and unfair**...and to think you are now 14 and 15. How are you feeling about it now?

Ignacia: Just the same, actually I think it is **kinda scarier now**, since I have an idea of how different your life will be if we got deported...cuz many people have like uncles or like sis...or other siblings, who wouldn't get deported. But in my case, my parents and siblings are immigrants, they could all get deported.

Miss Paty: Yah, ugh, how it **makes me sick** to my stomach.

[07.27.2017]

As her family has mended and repaired over the death of a loved one, feelings of worry clouded Ignacia's present life, with the possibility of deportation. Her written expression translated to her spoken expressions, as she voiced feeling "just the same," indicating that her life continued to feel in her words "pretty scary." However, she emphasized the fears of

deportation were “scarier now.” I analyzed her written, and spoken expressions as emotion carried while crossing temporal boundaries. As Ignacia revisited her poem, I understood these instances of amplified anxieties stemming from the memories of her written expression directly related to the continued reality of a possible family separation. The poem provided a call to express her feelings of these actual and potential lived experiences.

While revisiting her poem, it was through both written and spoken expression, the heavy concerns for her family also weighed on her at school. The written expression as a small child crossed into her present as a teen through a spoken expression. Ignacia imagined what her life might look like if her family was deported, based on stories she heard from others. She related to friends, thinking about their realities as well, depicted in the excerpt below:

My friends, too, most of their parents are immigrants and my best friend right now, she is **having trouble with that**. She is having to go to courts and they are going to decide if she gets to stay or not. It is really hard to have watch her go through it. **It is terrifying!**

As Ignacia discussed the hardships of her friend “right now,” in the present, it was clear that the expectation of potential deportation was not merely something she worried about for herself, and her family, but also those of her community. Ignacia had friends collectively experiencing deportation. She embodied the painful feelings her best friend has suffered, as she currently undergoes the judicial process of deportation proceedings. Through my analysis, I found that this *testimonio* spoke to a broader discussion of the sensitive nature of Latinx students’ lives. Ignacia’s words reinforce what scholars have found when it comes to the marginality of Latinx students, the social exclusion of belonging to the United States, and what students feel when they find themselves or their loved ones in these precarious situations

(Sepúlveda, 2018). Ignacia's empathy allowed her to imagine her friends' precarity, situating herself in the feelings of others – their uncertain futures. She understood the emotional, societal, and collective burden, as this reality influenced her current feelings and the way she made sense of her world.

Ignacia clearly understood that specific people in her life were protected by their citizenship status, noting some would not get deported, as their documented protections afforded relief from the burden of facing deportation. That said, this knowledge did not alleviate Ignacia's associated fears and anxieties. This trepidation of possible deportation extends not only to herself, but she embodied the emotions of others, regardless of immigration status. Based on my examinations of Ignacia's spoken and written expression, I established the emotions students' carry, of having someone they love deported, weighing heavily on their minds, thus answering the research question.

Collective Testimonios inspired by Ignacia's poems [08.03.2017]. Before moving on, I clarify the timeline of events of the collective discussions. After I met with each of the six students individually, those present on the second day of our study (which included Ignacia) gathered together again at the coffee table. They talked about what they had each read with me, but I reminded them that they did not have to share their poem.

However, they chattered away, discussing with each other their past written expressions, evident in the beginning excerpt of this chapter. Within the opening example, the students embodied negative feelings from their past into the present, using spoken expressions like, “that is freaking messed up,” and other expletives while describing deportation. The students suffered these injustices together, as they returned to the past, imagining what it felt like as a nine year to write about these topics. As they relived their histories collectively, they also moved forward

together into the present, *acompañando uno al otro* [accompanying one another] in the experiences (Sepúlveda, 2011). The particular way in which they engaged was through various shared emotions, including anger and rage, but also avoidance. For example, Jaelyn told the other not to “start with that” and Valeria ends the discussion with “*Ya estuvo* [That’s enough already]!” Jaelyn and Valeria both refused at this moment to internalize the feelings, attempting to block and resist the emotions. In this finding, I highlight the way students point to the crossing of physical and metaphorical borders, as they made sense of emotions past and present. They were astonished that they had written *testimonios* expressions at such a young age. They affirmed each other’s feeling, sharing in their collective struggle of what it means to have bordered lives, not just themselves, but their families. At this point in the conversation, they had not yet shared a poem collectively; we had just finished our individual discussion time and had regathered around the glass table in the backyard to collectively discuss the poems. We only had enough time in this second *plática*, for Jaelyn to bravely be the first to share a poem unrelated to issues of documentation. Although her poem was incredibly emotional, this first collective discussion and topic fell out of the scope of answering the research question. With hugs and good-byes, this concluded our second session and first week of the study. We met again the following week to have two more days of collective discussions.

Ignacia had the chance to share her poem out loud to the group on the fourth session (a week after we had had our individual discussion), in a library study room. In this space, we sat at a large table with a giant window overlooking a beautiful city. As we collectively moved our *nepantla* spaces around various areas of our neighborhoods, we made sense of our lives metaphorically and physically through different perspectives. The collective conversations, presented below, about immigration piggy-backed previous session topics from our second

session (i.e., the opening excerpt of the chapter) and the third session (elaborated in Antonio's section). In the following excerpt, I show the conversation that transpired after Ignacia read her poem out loud to the group:

Miss Paty: What do you think now?

Ignacia: That, **I am still scared**. I mean, some things don't change I guess...

Miss Paty: Yeah, we talked a little bit about this on Tuesday. Is there anything anyone wants to add?

[pause]

Miss Paty: You are all so much quieter this time. Think about what is going on with you now? What do you hear? See? What do you know now?

Stella: Trump!

Ignacia: I think **there is more risk to our families** getting deported than there was before.

[08.03.2017]

While hers was not the only poem shared during this session, Ignacia's poem sparked a conversation about immigration. The students were significantly more tired and quieter than other times we had met, as they kept yawning a lot. Typically, I had coffee for them at my house, however, since we were at the library, there was not the added benefit of caffeine. I am not sure if that had anything to do with their silence, but when I asked them what they knew now, Stella blurted out the current U.S. President' name. This unfortunate reminder encouraged Ignacia to recount the embodied emotions she felt for her families, as she perceived they were at higher risk of being taken away because of the current political climate at the time of the study. She moved

back and forth from her written expressions in fourth grade, relating to the increased feelings of fear in the present.

After Ignacia read her poem, we discussed more tangential conversations about who was involved in making policies in this country, how to change what is going on, and whether or not they were too young to have a voice or impact on change. Our digressions often circled back to the current President of the United States, with the students expressing feelings of anger, fear, and disgust. Jaelyn, shared feeling fear in her skin, depicted below:

Miss Paty: What **were the feelings** like after Trump was elected at your schools...?

Jaelyn: So, at my school, there are like more White people, a lot.

Miss Paty: So, it's a...

Jaelyn: There are not that many Mexicans, and that day, there, we had a bomb threat at the school.

Valeria: ummm...mmm bomb threat!

Jaelyn: Bomb threat. They said, that, umm, the "Mexicans were trying to hurt us, take over what we had first."

Miss Paty: Oh, how did that make you feel?

Jaelyn: That's honestly **made me feel really insecure of being in my own skin. A fear really for me.**

[08.03.2017]

Through *testimonio*, Jaelyn recounted time periods of violence she felt right after the 2016 election, provoking a bomb threat. She demonstrated in the present "that day" had impacted her feelings, embodying and sensing fear in her body. Jaelyn recounted learning of a suspected

bomber, whose menacing included eradicating students because of their nationality. Moreover, this *testimonio* from Jaelyn is in accordance to what other scholars have found in documented discourse, that society constructs Latinx community members as a threat to society (Chavez, 2013). Through my analysis, I found that Jaelyn conveyed experiences with racist nativism in which Latinx members are not a threat to society, but actually is the other way around. My students felt threatened in this country. Tying back to the broader problematic narrative of racist nativist practices, Jaelyn's life and her other Latinx peers are the ones under attack, as the intimidation with a supposed bomb came from someone feeling entitled and correct in belonging in this country. This notion and myth that White people were here "first" or native, perpetuates the idea of racist nativism, riddled with offensive threats to communities as not belonging to the United States of America (Perez Huber, 2016). Jaelyn internalized this experience, worried for her life. The weight of this life-threatening racist encounter to Jaelyn and those around her should not be what students worry about in school.

Within these examples, I show the students pointing towards the sociopolitical world they navigate, as they make sense of these realities in the past and in the present. The youth discuss, through spoken *testimonios*, the emotions impacting their daily lives. By revisiting their fourth-grade poems from the past, in this new space in the present, the student tapped into different forms of expression through different angles. In these individual and collective findings, I show the students express their lives when revisiting the past, through present *testimonios* satiated with emotions and knowledge they embody.

Antonio. As I present Antonio's discussion about his poem and the collective discussions that emerged from his poem, I recall Anzaldúa's (2015) conceptualizations of tuning in to the self and others. She describes how we can tap into the depths and wealth of knowledge, as we

embrace the emotional and mental experiences connected to our physical encounters within and across *nepantla*. Before going into depth in this part, I present Antonio’s poem from fourth grade (See Figure 8).

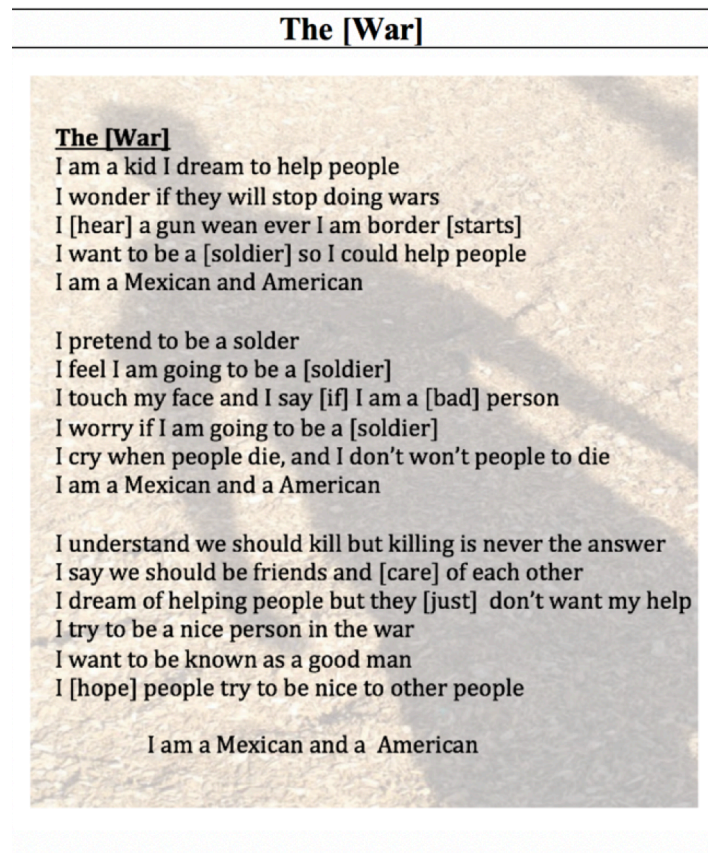


Figure 8. Antonio’s 4th Grade Poem (Spring 2012), “The [War]”

Then, I show how I drew from the various aspects of *nepantla*, to show *testimonios* replete with emotions as Antonio read from his writing, titled “The War.” The poem provided a platform for Antonio to describe his *conocimiento* [knowledge] of racist nativism and his continued familial resiliency.

Antonio’s Individual Testimonios [08.01.2017]. At a small patio table, Antonio and I met for an individual conversation, watching his peers paint at the glass table on the patio. Back

in the spring of 2012, when Antonio was in fourth grade, he wrote a poem titled, “The War,” depicting dreams of becoming a soldier. In his writing, he discussed helping stop war, violence, and death. When he was younger, Antonio imagined saving people from fights, as he shared desires to “be known as a good man” and end battles. There were aspects of Antonio’s poem I had identified as *testimonios* in his poem, where he wrote, “I wonder if they will stop doing wars” and the phrase “I hear a gun whenever I am border [starts].” However, for the most part, Antonio’s poem was about helping others and not explicitly related to documentation status. Also, because of the poem structure we had used in the past, he had self-identified as Mexican and American three times. Over the stream of his poem, Antonio repeatedly scripted aspirations to help people as a soldier. However, the individual discussion below demonstrated how oppressive life experiences and racialized family encounters had impacted Antonio’s feelings significantly, enough to change the course of his future.

When I asked Antonio what he thought of his fourth-grade poem, he demonstrated a shift in his perspectives of wanting to help others.

Antonio: Umm, I don’t know. I still think, like, **I really don’t like White** people.

Miss Paty: Right.

Antonio: Right now. **It’s hard. It’s so much.** My dad, he has been deported two times, I think.

Miss Paty: Oh my gosh!

Antonio: And **he came back**, just for me.

Miss Paty: Yeah.

Antonio: ...But [my mom] might get her papers. **I feel bad for my dad.** He can't leave...

...

Miss Paty: Is he? Where is he now?

Antonio: He can't leave here, because he could get deported again.

Miss Paty: Deported again? It's hard. I don't know, like, do you remember this poem?

Antonio: Yeah, but, I remember writing it, but nothing in it, I don't remember what is in it.

Miss Paty: Nothing in it, yeah?

Antonio: Ha, I can't believe it...

Miss Paty: Yeah, what feelings are you feeling now?

Antonio: Right now, **I am trying to** like, **forget about it**, just try to live in the present because um, **I mean we are all happy** right now.

[08.01.2017]

Antonio's writing became a tool, his memories metaphorically crossing his mind while reading his poem. He recounted his father's physical crossing between Mexico and the United States. I began to understand Antonio's spoken expressions as *testimonios*, provoked by rereading his past poetry. Antonio now expressed emotions of resentment towards White people related to his Mexican and American identity. As Antonio read it over, he spoke of a heart-wrenching *testimonio* about the collective sociopolitical experiences of immigration. He declared great feelings of his animosity, "harboring negative attitudes" towards White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 13) pointing towards systemic White supremacist and racist nativist actions

which have torn Antonio's family apart more than once. This racism determines certain immigrant populations as continually discounted and denied from inclusion in the national "American" identity (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). His memories troubled his present, recounting experiences of deportation and painful feelings via forced separation because of his family's immigration status. Antonio provided an upsetting *testimonio* of how negative racialized experiences influence Latinx youths' emotions. While society could misinterpret Antonio's words as hatred toward individuals, through my analysis, I found Antonio's powerful emotions as a sociopolitically urgent remark resulting from an unjust system. These emotions related to how his Latinx family was profoundly impacted by a racist systemic system, treating people inhumanely because of their immigration status.

Children in mixed-status families are in precarious positions, as it is possible not all members are documented. There might be people living in the home who are citizens, and others positioned as not belonging in the United States. Latinx students live multidimensional lives and clearly understand at an early age what it means to cross physical borders. Antonio's *testimonio* included the taxing weight of worries for his family. He emotionally recounted his parents' immigration status and his father's deportations, linked to his personal borders, and racialized experiences. His parents have been through difficult situations, and his father's experiences were anxiety-provoking for everyone at home. Antonio's poem was a means to express complex border-crossing feelings, as he has internalized his family's situation. Antonio relived the past, but also worried about an unknown future, as his father could "get deported again."

Understandably, what was troubling in Antonio's *testimonio* was that when I asked him about his present feelings, he discussed avoiding them in the present. Although talking about deportations was something in the past, Antonio knew they continued as a potential future. He

had confirmed four times “right now,” making an effort to focus on the present positive feelings of his current home circumstances. He later stated feeling glad they were all together, that they had each other, and that his parents had jobs and a home thanks to his uncle. Through my analysis of understanding contradictions and the physical, mental, and emotional conflicts of crossing borders, the written expressions from his past transformed into spoken expressions reflecting the feelings shaping his life.

Antonio both recalled and wanted to express these remembered emotions from his experiences, while simultaneously he sought to block the disheartening tensions tied to his recollections. The blurring of moments in time were real for Antonio: he grappled with intense feelings of wanting to live in the present, but worried about an uncertain future of potential future deportations in his family. Having Antonio’s poem available for him provided an avenue to express *testimonios* of these poignant moments in his past. Even though his poem was not necessarily about immigration, the literary format and the space created in our *pláticas*, allowed him to examine the complicated ways in which it which these remembered emotional experiences in the past were central to this his present reality.

Collective Testimonios inspired by Antonio’s poems [08.01.2017]. Antonio was one of the first to share his poem with the group.⁷ After Antonio read his poem out loud to the group, it prompted a lengthy discussion entailing many *testimonios*, including topics surrounding racism, immigration and deportation, police and law enforcement. The collective discussion stemming from Antonio’s poem concluded with other students’ sharing their poems (prompting another

⁷ It was possible Antonio volunteered himself as one of the first to read his poem because the time that passed between our individual and collective conversations was short. However, another student, Camila, had also just shared with me individually that day, about 45 minutes prior. She chose not to share her poem in the collective groups.

round of conversations). However, for this chapter's purpose, I focus in on the conversation directly stemming from Antonio's poem depicted in the excerpt below.

Antonio: ...I wrote this because, um, well I really don't remember...what I was going to write about...But, I just really, **never liked**, uh, **White people** and because, uh my dad, **he's been deported**. Who knows how many times? And, like...during the time when I was writing this, I found out. They never told me, and uh, and ever since then, like of, of like the **struggle that my dad goes through**, just to **see us happy** and stuff. **It's amazing**, what he has done for us.

Miss Paty: Yeah, yeah...does anyone else think about those things, or listening to Antonio think about...

Valeria: Um, so before my mom getting...she would tell me so many things, "don't open the door, don't do this, don't do that." And honestly, I have like never experienced my mom getting deported, like he, like [Antonio's] dad. But I just want to **put myself in his shoes** cuz yeah...

Miss Paty: Yeah, **It's a real worry**. Yeah, no it's uh, you know, maybe if we, personally, **are not worried** about that, sometimes it's our friends or family. Our families are **worrying** about these things. You wrote these poems when you were **eight or nine years old**. You know? Did anyone else **worry** about **those things** when you were younger?

Cristiano: **Worry?** Like, Yeah.

Valeria: **I feel we were too young to worry** about those things, like way too young.

Miss Paty: Right? That is what I think too. How is it possible that eight/nine years old are **worrying** about their parents being deported or being killed? You were little. Anything else anyone wants to say? Or thinking about?

Stella: Well, like what Valeria said, we were so young and having **to worry** about that. It's kinda like; I don't know, that's just too... Just like, yeah, it's not ok to be so young and **having to worry about**, like doing, having to do the right thing **so our parents won't get caught**.

Valeria: mmm hmmm.

Stella: And like maybe, as little kids we didn't realize what we do now, but like there are people who aren't really agreeing about how everyone is.

Valeria: Do you, [Antonio], **still think about that**? Or do you like...

Antonio: Uh yeah. **I try not to think about it**, cuz uh...

Valeria: A lot can happen.

Antonio: But it is still there, **it's sad**.

[08.01.2017]

While collectively discussing Antonio's poem, which he explicitly did not write about immigration, he initiated the racialized and politicized topic of deportation. When he had talked with me individually, Antonio initially said, "I still think, I really don't like White people." With the group, he shared, "I just really, never liked, uh, White people." His statements, between the two accounts, were not word-for-word in his next declaration, but conceptually carried the same weighted meaning. In other words, Antonio reiterated his individually expressed feelings to me, now with the group – his current disdain for White people. I understood these messages as pain, as Antonio attributed White people involved with dehumanizing and tearing his family apart.

The sociopolitical systems, built on racist nativist practices, realities, and ideologies profoundly impact Latinx lives. Thus, Antonio implicitly blamed the deportation of his dad on Whiteness and racist nativism.

The emotional experiences tied to immigration status and deportation was on the Latinx students' minds. As Antonio *testificó* [testified], others affirmed and collectively shared in the experience, whether or not deportation had directly impacted them. For example, to empathize, Valeria began recounting her mom's experiences when she first was responding to Antonio. Without finishing, she trailed off into a discussion of her mother's warnings of not opening the door to potential strangers. Valeria affirmed his *testimonio*, imagining herself in his situation, an effort to imagine and cross into his life and feelings. Through *testimonios*, students connected through similar struggles, acknowledging each other's feelings. Valeria expanded the conversation to include awareness about how young they were in fourth grade, stating twice, "we were too young...like way too young" to worry about deportation. Like Valeria, Cristiano and Stella echoed each other's emotional concerns; the emotional burdens children embody when agonizing over potential deportation.

Students collectively understood past fears in relation to present potential concerns. As they have aged, these traumatic experiences continue to emotionally crossover time, impacting their lives in the present. Recognizing a shift in their age, the students demonstrated empathy for their past self as teens. Near the conclusion of this point in the conversation, Valeria asked Antonio his present thoughts on his past experiences. As he had done so with me individually, Antonio articulated avoiding these thoughts. I understood this particular instance as a moment of navigating positive and negative feelings, back and forth. Even as these dominant and heavy

discourses of crossing physical borders permeate their lives, they resist, taking a break from the flood of emotions. In Antonio's words, "I try not to think about it...but it's still there."

Overall, in our individual and collective *pláticas*, Antonio, along with his peers, traversed positive and negative feelings, in the past and the present. Based on my analysis, I recognized these instances as moving themes of *testimonio* emotions navigated across time and space, thus answering the research question. Traversing the metaphorical and physical borders, through painful memories of family separations in the past, Antonio actively sought gratitude and content in the present, "I mean we are all happy right now."

Conclusion

My conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches informed the findings as we created a *nepantla* through Chicana feminist epistemologies, love, care, *acompañamiento*, legitimizing their feelings and experiences. Through these exchanges, I made sense of students' emotions through the idea of loving and caring enough to witness and feel for myself, their traumas, pains, and joys (Ahmed, 2013; Dutro, 2013; Dutro & Bien, 2014). Moving up with students, I stood and walked alongside, metaphorically in their life journeys, *acompañando* and listening to how they describe the racial denigrations that impact their lives over time (Sepúlveda, 2011). Holding on to their poems over the past few years was another act of *acompañamiento* while cherishing a piece of their lives (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), knowing what they felt when they were young mattered. Knowing their lives in elementary school, pulling out the poems – *los papелitos guardados* (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), spending time with them again, gave us a chance to comprehend past written and spoken expression.

According to scholars, our *testimonios* came together naturally, as we acknowledged the elaborate connections between our race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture to generate community

understanding and awareness (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). To answer the research question, what emotions do bilingual Latinx students embody in their present spoken *testimonios*, individually and collectively, when revisiting written expressions from their past? I examined students' spoken and written expressions. Providing a *nepantla* space, and through our *pláticas y encuentros*, students had a chance to reexamine and grapple, individually and collectively with memories of painful and emotional experiences triggered by racial injustices, associated with time/space, physical, and metaphorical border crossing experiences over time. I explored these emotions moving in and out of various points in time, as students described experiences of their past and the present. They were aware that the conditions that existed when they were in the fourth grade created the potential of their families being taken away because of deportation. The fears back then continued into the present. The students' poems were written *testimonios*, describing aspects of their sociopolitically urgent realities back then. They collectively affirmed they were too young to have had these kinds of emotional experiences when they were little. However, in combination with their growth, they maturely described their present racialized border crossing encounters within their families. Traversing time periods, individually and collectively through past poetry, provided different ways to examine and validate their lives. The poems were the students' emotions generated in the past, coming to life in the present. The examples in this chapter highlight the way teen youth verbally mark emotional embodied moments in the past, present and, their imagined future *testimonios*.

The personal emotions of the students were collectively negotiated, influenced by inner and outer forces of the experiences within their families, past and present, as they shared together in our *pláticas y encuentros*. This follows with what other scholars, who present the real difficulties people with an unauthorized status face when reentering the United States after

deportation, on top of the potential emotions tied to subsequent deportations (Talavera et al., 2010; Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon & Rey, 2015). For instance, students shared profound feelings of fear and worry when discussing both possible and actual deportations, connecting self to documentation status. The students were not alone in their experiences, speaking to the broader collective narrative of deficit views and racist nativist practices impacting immigrant communities.

The current president, Trump, has made damaging, racist, and malicious references towards the Latinx community and immigrants (Reilly, 2016). Trump quickly get his comments out, orally and through social media, perpetuating negative and racist rhetoric of immigrants coming to this country and building a wall between the Mexico/U.S. border (Liu, 2016). Recent reports show children are worried in schools tied to all of these negative sentiments and actions related to immigration (Costello, 2016).

Students internalize these feelings into heavy burdens of responsibility for their families' circumstances. Other scholars and studies have shown how these emotions influence how identities are formed, both internally and by external forces (Ahmed, 2013; Anzaldúa, 2015; Ioanide, 2015; Orellana, 2015), thus informing how we make sense of the world. It is important that we understand how students express and share positive emotions of empathy, gratitude, love, and respect for their friends and families. With this in mind, it is imperative we be critically aware of Latinx students' lives. Through love and care, we must listen and witness to what students express based on their lives and be cognizant of what they do not express as well in their silence. Furthermore, a conceptual framing like love and care complements the responsibility and blurring of what it meant to be narrator or teller of *testimonios*, as we listened and interpreted *testimonios* through a collective identity (Brabek, 2003). In other words, alongside the students

we collectively shared and interpreted each other's lives, offering new ways of understanding the world.

I presented the voices of students as they made sense of their complex family dynamics with deep respect. Holding their poems close to my heart was representative of their lives. I have had the opportunity to know the students through different perspectives over time. I have walked alongside the students physically and metaphorically, being present and available to listen to their “dramas and their traumas” (Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 555). I have witnessed their lives, knowing the adversities they shared in the study and in the past. Nevertheless, they balance the emotional tensions with joy and gratitude. I held on to their written expressions out of love and care for their extremely important lives. Highlighting these written and spoken expressions are done so carefully and with a responsibility for their lives. The arguments show a possible way to honor Latinx emotions. However, I also present these findings to expose the sociopolitical realities our Latinx students' encounter as they walk into our classrooms when they are little in elementary school up to when they are teens in high school. What I found through this analysis is that Latinx students embody compelling emotions connected to how society positions them and their families as “not belonging” to the United States (Perez Huber et., 2008). As we understand the impacts of racism on students' emotions, it will have important implications, around teacher preparation and education, now and in the future. Drawing and situating their lives in *nepantla*, space and time, the borders they cross, their personal emotions, make up our students' *testimonios* – the stories of their existence.

Chapter 6

Artistic Testimonios: It was More so a Dream than Reality

Valeria: I was like trying to do paintings and then for this [painting] I was like, “**No!**” **What was I doing? It wasn’t really me!** I am going to start doodling, because **I love to doodle!**

Miss Paty: Yeah, **I like to doodle too.**

Valeria: Yeah.

The boxes of art supplies and the acrylic paints provided a colorful foreground to the white canvas propped up against the fence surrounding our coffee table meeting space. The other materials, like paint brushes, gel pens, markers, and brilliantly displayed colorful papers, transformed my backyard into a painting studio. During each of our *pláticas y encuentros*, we sat together to create unique pieces during our art workshopping. On our first day of the study, I mentioned to my former students we would create art, and that they could make anything they wished to represent their lives. These Latinx youth participants also had access to past poetry written in the fourth grade, while they painted and drew. They picked whatever method they wanted to express themselves. Some were enticed to partake in the art activities, while others decided to text on their phones or play soccer in the grass. As was the nature of *pláticas y encuentros*, these informal activities naturally emerged as we revealed our lives through conversations.

The excerpt above illustrates a conversation between Valeria and me as she walked me through the aspects of her last piece (see Figure 10). The analysis of this artwork is found later in this chapter. Valeria explained how she preferred doodling and drawing over painting, it was

who she was and how she identified. Painting just wasn't who she was, chastising herself for exploring the art medium. Instead, Valeria finished her "painting," transforming it into a drawing and doodle on canvas. There are still faint traces of drips and splatters from her attempts as a painter. In her final piece, Valeria felt more content with her finished product. She permitted herself to be faithful in how she identified, using the methods she favored.

In this chapter, I explored student identities as their spoken expressions trans/formed into new art creations during the four weeks of the study. According to the Latina Feminist Group, sharing *testimonios* is "a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure" (2001, p. 2). In other words, artistic *testimonios* created during the study rendered their lives visible. These *testimonios* led to the findings answering research question three: How did bilingual Latinx students' memories and dreams of their identities trans/form into visual expressions?

Within these findings, I drew from Anzaldúa's (2015) conceptualization of *nepantla*, the liminal space of "bridging and joining" worlds - where physical, emotional, and mental borders meet. Anzaldúa also describes the complications of straddling these multiple physical and metaphorical sociopolitical realities, which were ever-present in how my former pupils made sense of their lives at home and school. In our *plática y encuentro* spaces, transformations were possible, and new knowledge occurred through imaginative faculties and critical awareness. The examination of Latinx youth identities – their memories, dreams, and imaginations – exhibited into creative productions. Also, I understood through my examinations how neither a person's self-perception nor the creation of their art was a solo endeavor, as external, unconscious, and collective forces were impacting the assembling of self (Anzaldúa, 2015). As Sepúlveda (2011) affirms, to *acompañar* Latinx youth, those students whom society and schools have pushed to the

margins, is a “different kind of relationship, one that engages in walking with the Other in ways that promote a deeper bonding and critical dialogue between equal subjects” (p. 558). Over the course of several years, this *acompañamiento* means a humanization and seeing my former students as valuable, while legitimizing their lives. These youth participants’ past and present experiences have been affirming and positive, while others have been dismissive and negative. These personal encounters informed how the teens reconceptualized their lives into art.

Using arts-based methods, provided an “enhancement of perspectives,” enriching the traditional research methods I used to make these claims (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 96). Additionally, arts-based research methodologies provide meaningful understandings by looking at our lives from different angles and vantage points (Leavy, 2015). Examining students’ lives through these conceptual frameworks and methodologies, I learned a wealth of knowledge as teens used artistic tools to construct visual configurations of the self. Through these enhanced and varied perspectives in border crossing and *nepantlera* artistry, I once again mention how I operationalized the term trans/formation from Chapter 1. I creatively divided the word, using dictionary definitions into three different pieces as a) the pre-fix *trans-*: meaning across or through, b) *formation*: to construct and frame, and c) *transformation*: to change in form, appearance, or nature (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These terms inside the entire word transformation describe ideas of movement, building, and the alteration of appearance, which aided my analysis and ability to verbalize the visual expressions created by the students.

In this chapter, I provide brief descriptions of how teen youth produced their art, piecing together Valeria’s and Camila’s *coleción de arte guardada* [collection of cherished art]. Their collective artworks and poetry were not only visual and written *testimonios* in and of themselves, but they also served as tools for provoking spoken *testimonio* expressions during several periods

in the study. Valeria and Camila embraced the invitation to create art in unique ways. However, these two also chose to depict how they visually saw their identities in the past and the present. Their creative renditions offered so much to unravel and examine, as they both described their *recuerdos y sueños* through speaking, writing, and art. I carefully analyzed the examples they brought, wrote, or created, paying attention to patterns and symbols across the various formats as themes of their identity trans/formation emerged.

Although I used the same conceptual frames and methodologies in the analysis presented in Chapter 5, the opportunity and act of revisiting their past, witnessing their present, and imagining their future in our conversations in conjunction with artistic materials provided new viewpoints in the development of personal adolescent identities. Some of the themes I found when analyzing their art were reminiscent of the findings in Chapter 5, depicting issues of race, ethnicity, culture, language, and immigration status, as all of the youth in the study grappled with their own physical and metaphorical border-crossing experiences. However, in this chapter, I emphasize the trans/formations in students' identities and intimate mental border-crossing understandings. These related to the processes of how they negotiate the tensions and contradictions of their sociopolitical encounters across space and time. Furthermore, having the opportunity to move and walk alongside these young ladies, over different periods of their lives time, granted me access to alternative perspectives when making sense of their lives. Through these conceptualizations, I understood Valeria's and Camila's artistic trans/formations as acts growing and changing. Also, in my analysis, I learned how the youth demonstrated disruptions to deficit perceptions of Latinx bilingual youth, allowing me to frame them as inspiring through positive-based views.

I present below the central findings, established through two themes: (a) identity trans/formations over time and (b) visually manifested trans/formations through art. Importantly, these trans/formations transpired from an imaginative and subconscious realm to a physical, tangible, visual form. As is the complication of sense-making in *nepantla*, because of the act of understanding multiple sides of borders and embracing contradictions, I could not explain one theme without the support of the other. These themes are inextricably related. Hence, the themes are divided into two sections by each student – Valeria’s and Camila’s dreams. I briefly begin each student section with an expanded personal narrative and a description. Also, to provide a more precise context and understanding of their identities, their process of how they created their art also supports the findings. As can be expected with the vast array of data from what the students provided, I observed many patterns across all of their expressions. For this chapter, I decided on one piece of art from these two students’ *colección de arte guardada*, and only narrow in on a few aspects of their elaborate pieces to answer the research question.

Valeria’s Trans/formations. As I explained in Chapter 3, Valeria was born in the United States. However, her mother moved back to her native Chihuahua with her three daughters. For this reason, Valeria attended school in Mexico from kindergarten through the first semester of third grade. When I met her initially, Valeria disliked reading because she complained the words moved around on the page. Her mother worried about her middle daughter, wondering if she possibly had dyslexia. Even though as a teaching staff we worked with interventionists and special education providers, they never diagnosed Valeria with any learning disabilities. Through the support of the community in our classroom, she overcame these obstacles. Valeria had a quiet determination which trans/formed into an outspoken brilliant fourth and fifth-grade student. She also used the literary form of drawing and performing in our classrooms, as Valeria often

gave me artistic art pieces in elementary school. She also led the entire school in a dance routine during field day, becoming visible through her artistic roles. In my memories, at a young age, Valeria was a self-proclaimed artist.

Since she had a love of art, Valeria jumped into the art-making with enthusiasm during our *pláticas y encuentros*. She enjoyed these moments when we communed together in our time together; she often doodled in her journal or snapped pictures with a Polaroid™ camera that she brought, capturing our present moments. As I made various options available, the youth participants elected any art medium they wished. Valeria attempted to become a painter in our first session, as depicted in the opening excerpt. However, as mentioned in the beginning, Valeria knew herself as a drawing artist, switching back to her preferred method of art-making.

In explaining Valeria’s creative process commencing on the first day of the study, she positioned two canvases side by side (see Figure 9).

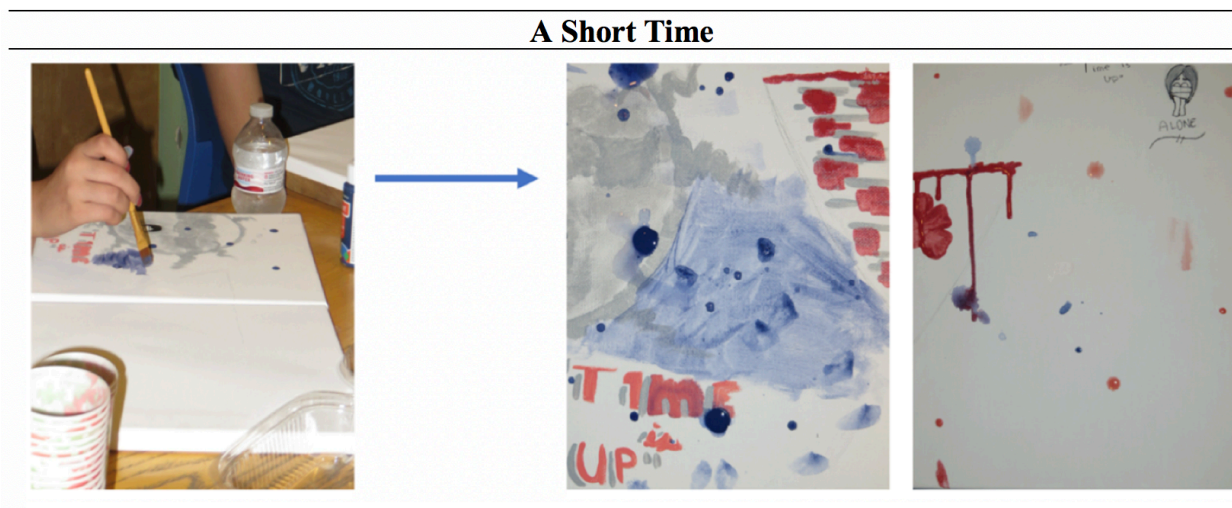


Figure 9. Valeria’s Artistic Process (Summer 2017)

She said she wanted to depict her past and her future visually. In this figure, I show how Valeria splattered and dripped paint on to the blank white backdrops, *trans/forming* images *across* the

canvases. At the end of the first day, she had two original paintings seen in Figure 9. However, Valeria eventually decided to finish only the second piece on the right, with doodles and drawings because of her preferred art medium described above. Even though she switched back to drawing, she incorporated the paint from her initial process into her final picture (See Figure 10). She titled this piece, “A Short Time.”



Figure 10. Valeria’s Final Drawing (Summer 2017)

While making sense of Valeria’s process in creating her final piece, I realized how she

trans/formed herself visually onto canvas; she produced mini-portraits of memories and experiences illustrated in her final piece. Through my examination of her art, and through spoken expressions from Valeria, I describe these few images in detail below. Understanding how she revealed her *recuerdos y sueños* into her drawing, I focused on just a few of the areas and images of her masterpiece, representative of herself. For example, in the top right corner of her painting is a small girl sitting down with her arms wrapped around her knees. The girl buries her face into her knees, making the majority of her face invisible. However, what is visible are the girl's forehead, thick eyebrows or eyelashes, and her long flowing hair. This tiny girl sits above the word "ALONE" in all capital letters, floating above a blue bubble with the words – "English" and "Spanish" – sandwiching in between is the word "Friends." There is an arrow to the bottom left of this "ALONE" girl, pointing to a little opened lock near another girl. This other girl, which also represents Valeria, is pulling off a mask, which is partially covered by her hands. Similar to the other figure, this girl also is covering her face. Above this "masked" girl are red drips of paint from when Valeria initially dabbled with the acrylic artistic medium.

When I asked Valeria about her piece, she described her artwork through memories of her first days in our classroom, back when she was in third grade. She brought to life and illuminated explanations of her illustrations through her spoken expressions. I highlighted the aspects I viewed as tensions felt or shifts in identity in the excerpt below:

Valeria: I just basically...had like [pointing to her painting] how I felt when I first came here [to the United States]. **I felt very alone**, like **I felt like I didn't have friends. I couldn't communicate** in English. I only knew Spanish, and it's like, **I felt dumb**. This is just like a little [pointing to the lock and making air quotes with her fingers]

“unlocked.” Kind of. Like, I don’t have anything to, like, give out, kind of. And then, coffins for, like **I feel**, like, last year, **I hid a lot of my emotion**.

Miss Paty: ...could you talk a little bit more about that?

Valeria: For me it was coming to United States because I didn’t really know everybody. Everyone was saying, “Oh, you know this friend comes. You know this *persona* [person].” And I didn’t. It was a completely different culture than from Mexico. I had to learn so many different things, and **I just felt so lonely** because I couldn’t share those same experiences I had in Mexico that I had here.

As I illustrated before, Valeria struggled with reading as a young girl in our elementary classroom. Now, in the present, this difficulty from her past displayed visually and through her speaking, as she described openly her tensions of how she negotiated her identity. Valeria recalled memories of seclusion and self-perceptions of inferiority in our classroom. She also articulated a perceived inability to share her Mexican and bilingual self with her classmates. Through her spoken expression, she attributed this loneliness to her beliefs of cultural and upbringing differences, even though all of the students in the class were bilingual and of Mexican or Central American heritage. Acknowledging her feelings, she had come to our class in the spring, after we had established our classroom environment in the beginning of the fall of 2010. In other words, her *recuerdos* were her reality, trans/formed artistically. She described her memories, seeing herself as an “outsider,” as not pertaining to the shared social experiences of other kids’ in our classroom who had primarily lived only in Denver and the United States. Her recollections of her linguistic differences showed in this visual image, of a lonely girl resting

above a bubble of words. She could communicate in Spanish, but felt insecure in her English language. It was not until she spoke to me about her painting that I fully understood this art piece. The word “Friends” encircled by the terms “English” and “Spanish” now made more sense; she wished she could have made connections with her peers in our class. This lonely feeling included how she hid in her emotions. I examined her symbols of hiding through Chicana feminist framings of *máscaras* [masks] (Anzaldúa, 1998; Montoya, 1998; Rodriguez; 2006). I understood Valeria contradictorily covered herself visually in the portrayed imagery of the girls on her painting. Conceivably, Valeria unveiled the girl with the literal mask and the girl with her face buried in her knees by describing and revealing her own identity through spoken expressions. She rendered these invisible aspects of her past, the ones she felt she could not share with her peers in our class, visible by illustrating her *trans/formations*. Essentially, the sketched out tiny open lock on her canvas aided in “unlocking” her memories in spoken form. Initially in our class, she had guarded herself – a survival tactic in the past. Now in the present, she embraced and unlocked this aspect of her identity. Valeria had *changed in form*, through the painted and drawn images and symbols. Unfortunately, when Valeria was little, she remembered these past negative feelings, as recounted them over and over in the abovementioned excerpt.

Through Anzaldúa’s conceptualizations of transcending between the borders of subconscious and reality, and understanding the world through liminal spaces, Valeria’s painting became a space to examine new perspectives (2015). The relationships Valeria had in our classroom, impacted how she perceived herself in school. Based on my analysis, her imagery imparted a variety of vantage points, how she has changed over time, and depicts the tensions she felt, both in the past and in the present. During our study, her art creations gave her tools to “unlock” her memories and share her experiences. This process, of how she expressed her

identity trans/formations both through her spoken memories and visual renditions, thus answered the research question.

Camila’s Trans/formations. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, a quiet and shy Camila entered our classroom in second grade. She was a part of our classroom community from the beginning of the academic school year in 2009 until our last day together in fifth grade in 2013. Her attendance in *pláticas y encuentros* was similar to her time in our classroom, Camila was present throughout the majority of the sessions in the study. Her strong presence came from her commitment to her studies and activities she finds vital to her academic trajectory, also having a family dedicated to her having a bright future.

As well, her mother and father come from the state of Jalisco in Mexico. Important to note, she was the youngest of three children; she has a brother and sister that are 9 and 11 years older than Camila, respectively. She laughed during the study revealing, “My parents waited so long to have me!” Although the baby of three at home, she stood out as a strong leader in our classroom, motivated to do well in her work at school. She won several awards based on her bilingualism and her academics in third and fourth grade. Also, during elementary school, she had a passion for animals, especially dogs and horses. While on a home visit to Camila’s house when she was in third grade, she proudly introduced me to her dogs and pet chickens. Not surprisingly, when she was younger, she wanted to be a veterinarian when she grew up.

Contrary to Valeria, who enthusiastically participated in the art workshops, Camila did not join in creating art during our *pláticas y encuentros*. She preferred to kick around a soccer ball she brought or chit-chat with her peers. To my surprise, in the privacy of her own home, Camila purchased all her materials and crafted three complex collages during the study, which she creatively titled, “The Journey” (see Figure 11). Camila made one collage each for the past,

present, and future, with personal images signifying the three general time periods in her life. Separately, every one of her collages had significant symbols *trans*/forming or in other words *moving across* and *through* her visual life journey. She *trans/formed* the visual pieces of her life, framing pictorial narratives of herself. It made sense that Camila would choose to design collages alone, as her reserved and quiet nature was evident in our classroom in the past and during the study in the present. Furthermore, the art form of collaging can serve as a non-threatening artistic approach for people who may be overwhelmed by the idea of symbolizing their life through drawing or painting (Malchiodi, 2006). Camila explained how she created the collages; she found photos or printed images from the internet, then she pasted them onto three separate foam boards. Individually, every collage took her about 45 minutes to make. In a member-check text, I asked her why she elected not to partake in artmaking. She answered, “**I chose not to draw** or paint because the way I did, it seems more reachable and approachable. And I felt that if I drew it or painted it, **it was more so a dream** rather than **the reality that I wanted to reach.**”

The Journey



Figure 11. Camila’s Artistic Process (Summer 2017)

In examining her process and her description of why she elected to collage over drawing or painting, helped to answer the research question. Camila’s visual translation created at home directly related to her personality and how she depicted her life. By understanding my analysis,

her expressions were a personal *nepantla*; I understood Camila as moving beyond the constraints of dream, imagination, and reality. Camila expressed the movement from one dimension – her subconscious – to a more “reachable or approachable” reality – the photographs. Camila’s fashioned her trans/formed *recuerdos y sueños* privately at home, with supplies she felt were more representative in *appearance* and *nature* of who she was and wanted to become.

Focusing on how she manifested her memories and her dreams into art, I narrowed on just a few aspects of one of her collages – the one representing her future (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Camila’s Future Collage (Summer 2017)

In this piece, she glued down images that exemplified the people, places, and things relevant to her in the future. Prominently at the top, she placed a picture of a group of people overlooking a sunset near a body of water holding up the word “family.” She also included graphic images of her impending hobbies, a dream car and house. Her future passions were also evident on her

future collage, especially the ones connected to how Camila expressed herself during our *pláticas y encuentros*. She mentioned to us in one of our sessions of the study how she wanted to be a veterinarian when she was little. However, she declared, “I wanted to be a *veterinaria* [veterinarian]. I still love dogs, but I am not interested in that anymore.” Now, in the present, her imagined goals had shifted, manifesting visually in a new way. Now in the present, she had pasted images of her future aspirations, with captions of potential careers in either criminal justice, engineering, or joining the Marine Corps. On the last day of the study, I asked her to explain her three collage art pieces. I highlighted in bold the aspects I viewed as changes in her identity and the contradictions she experienced and felt in the excerpt below:

My mom tells me, ‘**You should be *veterinaria*** [a veterinarian].’ I don’t know. I just don’t know. I honestly don’t know why **I don’t want to be a veterinarian.**

...

For the Marines, **nobody in my family supports me. They don’t. They don’t.** When they look at it, **they look at the negative** part of it. You know, like...a lot of war. And you know a lot of people die...**That is what my mom thinks** about. But I honestly like, I don’t, I mean, it would be scary, to be in that moment, but **I would rather** help people, and make sure that this is a safe place to be.

Through her words, Camila described these modifications in her dreams, from the past to the present. Although she could not articulate why she no longer wanted to be a veterinarian, she could describe how her family did not support this career move in a different direction. Her mother encouraged Camila to continue on her path to becoming an animal doctor, while simultaneously discouraging her dream to join the military. Having the ability to *acompañar* a Camila for many years, I knew how much her family cared about their child. Her family

collectively associated the Marine Corp with negative aspects related to fighting in a war, with what I imagine are their concerns of their family member possibly perishing in combat. Camila acknowledged their worries, in that it would be frightening. However, she knowingly made trans/formations and shifts in her imagined future, as she now envisioned herself supporting others, protecting people living in the United States of America.

Knowing how much Camila loved her family and how much she valued their opinions, in her mind, going against their wishes was contentious. The feelings she had for her family cause tensions in her identity *trans/formation*. As mentioned earlier, knowing how much her mother loved her, it was not surprising to learn that they were afraid of the possibilities of her daughter caught in a dangerous war zone. Understanding this instance through *nepantla* framings, I examined these external forces coming from the nature of her relationships with her family members. Camila has a close relationship with her family, and she acknowledges that her future decisions are not unaccompanied or constructed on her own. She struggled with her family members' differing viewpoints. Camila weighed her honorable decision of defending and protecting a country in the future against the hopes and fears of her loved ones. For example, it is likely that her mother wanted Camila to become an animal doctor, eliminating this threatening future of physical combat. In examining this instance, related to her artistic imagery of the Marines and family on her collage, I recognized Camila was caught in her own subconscious battle between the memories in her subconscious, the relationship with her family and their disapproval, and her visual renditions of her future. As Anzaldúa pronounces (2015), "by transferring our consciousness, we can move from one world/dimension to another." (p. 45). This crossing between the various understandings in our mind aid in the enhancement of new perceptions, viewpoints, and identities of our realities. The external connections Camila had with

her family, at home, influenced how she made sense of herself, shifting and growing over time. I examined Camila's photographic images as symbols of presenting herself realistically – her reality – through Chicana feminist framings and the ideas unveiling identities, acts of public outward visual aspects of the self (Anzaldúa, 2015; Montoya, 1998; Rodriguez, 2006). However, the internal conflicting feelings she had for her family caused tensions in her identity *trans/formation*. Through her spoken expressions, Camila was using the photographs to present the reality she wanted to portray from her dreams, capturing and disclosing the person she wants to become in the future.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings using Anzaldúa frameworks and ways of making sense of the students' realities through their memories and dreams, employing how she will:

organize my images, ideas, and knowledge via [a] mind map. Next, I must think in images, hunt for symbols, and engage in conceptual interpretations of those images – that is, I must translate the images as symbols for concepts and ideas. I must do it not by controlling the images as my conscious mind wants but by surrendering to them and letting them guide me (p. 25).

This process, of crossing the mental and internal aspects of personal journeys, were understood through the representations found in students' reflections of their *recuerdos y sueños* formed in their imagination and trans/formed into imaginative renditions. In answering the research question three: How did bilingual Latinx students' memories and dreams of their identities trans/form into visual expressions? I show how in creating a space, where teens had access to art materials while revisiting our past, trans/formed into different perspectives in understanding bilingual Latinx lives. Also, students have their own ideas of how they want to express

themselves. However, I provided the art space which inspired some to engage with the materials in their own ways, during the *pláticas y encuentros*, and at home. This speaks to the importance of granting students choices in how they communicate and translate their lives onto paper or canvas – through words or imagery. The tensions while traversing borders, are not always external, but internal and felt within the process of negotiating the self. Furthermore, having the opportunity to accompany students over the years, moving up with them over time, provided different windows and viewpoints of their spoken expressions. That, coupled with their art, granted enhanced perspectives and new ways of making sense of the data, thus their lives.

Children come to our schools having positive and negative encounters, their memories of these experiences have the potential to support how students trans/form – changing and growing their identities over time. The Latinx bilingual youth in my study have profound experiences impacting their growth and change. As Anzaldúa claims, “I am visible...yet I am invisible...But I exist, we exist” (1987, p. 86). In these examples, the youth made sense of their identities, publicly portraying and un/masking their identities through colors, symbols, and imagery (Anzaldúa, 1998; Montoya, 1998; Rodriguez; 2006). The teens’ spoken and written expression, constructed in our *plática* spaces, revealed an understanding of the inextricable connection between their surroundings, their experiences, how they see themselves and how they want to be seen by others – visible. They demonstrated distinctions between how others perceive them and how they challenge and choose to position themselves at home and school.

In closing, through *acompañamiento* (Sepúlveda, 2011), I had the opportunity to watch these young ladies develop, across time, constructing and forming their identities, inventively shifting and maturing. I not only held on to their lives metaphorically in my heart, I carefully held on to their physical, artistic pieces *guardados* [cherished] to provide us access to new

perspectives, of their past thoughts or viewpoints across time. *Acompañando mis estudiantes* [accompanying the students], committing to their past lives, constructing a space for the development of present and future self, allowed for this humanization by valuing and legitimizing their lives (Sepúlveda, 2011). It was imperative to note that their memories and dreams will always be in a state of *nepantla*, continually transforming and shifting because of their bordered lives (Anzaldúa, 2015). They will also build new *recuerdos y sueños* in these encounters, as their identities will continue to trans/form.

Chapter 7

Discussions, Implications, Recommendations



I had the incredible honor of sharing four weeks (in addition to many years), with an astonishing group of young artists, poets, and experts of their own bilingual Latinx lives. My former students' hopes, fears, memories, and dreams were the heart of this work. In this identity-affirming study, I sought to explore ways to legitimize bilingual Latinx students' past, present, and future experiences. The findings and discoveries emerging in this study drew from Chicana feminism, *acompañamiento*, love, care, and *nepantla* framings. In other words, the discoveries from this study were collectively put forth as a *testimonio* in its' own right, supported by the theories, contributing to the bodies of knowledge of dismantling deficit perspectives and practices concerning Latinx youth. Here, I discuss the arguments for using affirming methods, providing potential alternative approaches to trans/form education. I also offer specific examples of how the findings contribute to the broader context of schooling for bilingual Latinx youth, including implications and recommendations. Then, I follow with a description of the limitations

and challenges impacting the study. I conclude with imaginative steps for future potential work in my future scholarly trajectory.

Research Questions

Below, I briefly restate the research questions answered in the three findings chapters:

Chapter 4. Spoken *Testimonios*: Latinx Students are the Ones that have to be Perfect

RQ1: What do bilingual Latinx students express in their spoken *testimonios* about their linguistic identities and language learning experiences?

Chapter 5. Written *Testimonios*: Dude, what was up with the poem? It's messed up!

RQ2: What emotions do bilingual Latinx students embody in their present spoken *testimonios*, individually and collectively, when revisiting written expressions from their past?

Chapter 6. Artistic *Testimonios*: It was More so a Dream than Reality

RQ3: How did bilingual Latinx students' memories and dreams of their identities trans/form into visual expressions? Discussion

In this study, the student and I engaged in *pláticas y encuentros* creating our *nepantla*. We came back together in 2017, years after our time together in our former classroom in 2009 - 2013. This opportunity established an incredibly transformative journey, for me, alongside my students. The intentional creation of *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 2015; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002) stemmed from critically loving and caring relationships (Valenzuela, 1999) in conjunction with supporting and accompanying the development of students' identities, as we made sense of self and self with others (Sepúlveda, 2011). This dissertation was an opportunity to walk alongside Latinx students, understanding their lives and how they understand and resist the deficit practices they experience. I learned from various angles and perspectives, over time, and through different

forms of expressions, alternative approaches to dominant research practices with Latinx students. Grounded in humanizing conceptualizations and arts-based methodological practices, I had an opportunity to understand students' identities, emotions, memories, and dreams expressed through *testimonios*. I witnessed through their speaking, writing, and art how they understand themselves. Although always embedded in this country's history, the study happened to occur during a heightened racist suspicion of immigrants and hateful speech about building a bigger border wall along the Mexico/U.S. border. President Trump's remarks are loud, abrasive, and racist. These detrimental statements are damaging towards the Latinx immigrant community, and all their family and friends. Unfortunately, students hear and internalize these negative messages.

Listening to students express their everyday encounters confirmed and circled back to my reasons in initially proposing this study – to disrupt the deficit perceptions and practices affecting bilingual Latinx youth. When I was my participants' teacher, I connected with Duncan-Andrade's (2009) wonderings of how we center students as the most significant consideration in education. The sociopolitical realities, hateful messages about deportation, along with deficit educational perspectives and practices have taken precedence over bilingual Latinx lives. We have lost sight of what matters in education – students' lives. When working and living within a dehumanizing system historically established through racism (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Perez Huber et al., 2008), it is imperative we continue disrupting these harmful practices. We must also continue deconstructing the larger forces of racism and racist nativism in society. Previous research has stressed the importance of legitimizing Latinx knowledge and experiences and building relationships to dismantle these racist views (Delgado Bernal, 1998; DeNicolo & González 2015; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Handsfield & Valente, 2016).

In this study, I showed how the “participant-researcher” relationship building began long before I conceived the study. It started when I met my students, as their parents hugged them goodbye, on the first day of school back in second grade in 2009. Like nurturing tiny butterfly eggs, it was up to me, as their teacher, to heed the charge of standing in as a family, supporting their development. Over the years, like caterpillars, we grew together through *acompañamiento*. Establishing a loving and caring protective cocoon-like space in our classroom, which paralleled our safe research study space, we vulnerably participated in the building of *nepantla*. Physically and metaphorically, I held on to essential pieces of their lives back in elementary school, long before we understood their expressions as *testimonios*. In the past, after students left the classroom and in the present when the study ended, we all emerged like transformed brilliant butterflies.

Providing *pláticas y encuentros* to revisit the past, listen to the present, and imagine their future, humanized my Latinx students. The artistic tools granted access in witnessing *testimonio* expressions of their identities. I understood their words – spoken and written – and visual imagery as acts of resistance, critical awareness, growth, and change. By sharing *testimonios*, the Latinx students in this study exposed the demoralizing views and practices connected to their educational and sociopolitical realities. The students’ shared how the problematic issues tied to racism continue leaving harmful impressions in their lives. As racism and linguisticism continue to persist, students both internalize and resist injustices. I also learned students’ inner workings and personal mental battles, as they understand their relationships with others, in and out of school. Consequently, I trans/formed in this process, now as “artist/researcher/teacher,” as I now have new perspectives in making sense of Latinx students’ lives, fueling a politically urgent passion for making their world a better place. Next, I present how their *testimonio* expressions are potent

eye-openers in how we address these problems and change education. The findings of my dissertation analysis made it possible to assert implications and recommendations in education, specifically the instructional practices, teacher preparation, and materials for bilingual Latinx students.

Implications

I maintain, alongside the scholars who have come before me, that students can learn content and language in school when they feel affirmed (Sepúlveda, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). We must continue taking essential steps to creating space and time to get to know our students, both in our educational research and in our public-school classrooms. We must build on the scholarship available and the findings of this study, to establish deep relationships and center bilingual Latinx youth before ever beginning any kind of educational collaboration.

Chapter 4. Regrettably, the findings in Chapter 4 corroborate with what scholars already know about racism and linguisticism in society and schools – the marginalization of Latinx students’ language learning experiences and the devaluation of their students’ linguistic identities (Delgado Bernal, 199). There continue to be practices of elevating White English speakers, as they gain the benefit of taking foreign language classes, forgoing the costs of having to prove their native language abilities (Kubota & Lin, 2006). The findings in Chapter 4 inform the comprehensive discussion of education concerning racism and linguisticism, specifically English language acquisition programs, language proficiency standards, and assessments. The constraints in exiting bilingual students from English Language Development (ELD) programs, especially on assessment scores close to the requirements, were highly consequential. This inability and inflexibility to “get out” of ELD had detrimental outcomes of stigmatization. Further, this marginalization sent Latinx students deficit messages, resulting in internalized negative self-

perceptions and attacks on their culture. Just the act of separating and segregating them from their White peers for language differences, was incredibly demoralizing, which is in accordance to what other scholars have found in their studies (Callahan, Wilkinson, Muller & Frisco, 2009; Gándara & Orfield).

Latinx students need and deserve appropriately trained teachers to deliver engaging language development instruction, using collaborative research-based and research-tested strategies and instructional methods. If Latinx bilingual students have to prove their language abilities, then the system, the teachers, and the curriculum must demonstrate capabilities to develop language positively. The findings in my study do not show that we should eliminate ELD. Instead, we must change ELD. The bilingual Latinx students in my research have a critical awareness on what they need to learn, which points to potential in improving the educational process communicating more explicitly with students on how they understand the requirements necessary for *existing in* and *exiting out of* ELD.

Students' perspectives and their critiques of the system matter. Their ideas should not be dismissed as apathetic teen complaints, but we can frame them as possible alternatives in incorporating and inviting students' expressions in the development of educational curriculums and teacher preparation programs. Through our collective conversations, bilingual Latinx students conveyed linguistic experiences that contradicted the school district's federal language mandate, which is supposed to advocate the language rights of bilingual students (Roos, 1983). The purpose of this federal mandate was meant to grant bilingual students language supports, including adequately trained teachers and challenging programs for English language development, to access to other curriculums (Roos, 1983); yet, as were exhibited in the findings, the students reported rarely having access to these supports. It essential we take careful steps and

considerations in changing and elevating the educational instruction for bilingual Latinx students.

Chapter 5. Given the circumstances of our *nepantla* space, while providing access to their past, Latinx youth shared compelling embodied emotions with regards to their identities and experiences concerning their sociopolitical realities, past and present. Poetry written in the fourth grade sparked collective conversations and *testimonios*. Students traversed back and forth across significant moments in their lives written in their poems, granting them windows to understand their past and present. The outcomes of their physical and metaphorical border crossing experiences, unique to the Latinx community, were supported by other scholars (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Students embodied the emotions provoked by racist nativist rhetoric and practices present in society. The feelings they have connected to racism, or when their loved ones encounter immigration and deportation issues, were crucial to how they understand their position and sense of belonging in the United States. Educators must build loving and caring spaces to fully understand Latinx lives, not only in school but at home with their families. Chicana feminist framings aided in legitimizing and honoring these emotional *encuentros*. Additionally, we must also permit students to reserve their emotions, respecting their decisions to remain silent and keep their *testimonios* in their hearts whenever necessary.

The findings in my study support the body of knowledge in that generating *testimonios*, describing feelings of racist nativist incidents, is central to Latinx lives (Pérez Huber and Cueva, 2012). I contribute that utilizing students' past poetry became a useful platform in producing these *testimonio* expressions. The emotions tied to experiences that students recalled or willfully resisted connected to another scholar's work:

Memory is a key factor that underlies all the fear of arrest and deportation experienced by the undocumented immigrant population. It involves not only what people remember themselves but also the transmittal of concern from the individual to the family and the rest of the community. Memory outlines the landmarks of their past. These shared recollections between individuals and groups are invoked and then rationally adapted to the present. To put it simply, undocumented immigrants live with one foot in the past and one foot placed firmly in the present. What they think and believe of the future relies on the collective traditions and recollections assembled together with knowledge derived from the present (Talavera et al., 2010, p. 183).

Resonating with these scholars, the students in my study marked significant periods in their lives surrounding past concerns, present fears, and future anxieties concerning deportation. Circumstances of family separation because of immigration status is incredibly traumatic, resulting in physical, emotional, and mental pain (Brabeck et al., 2014; Dreby, 2012; Talavera, Núñez-Mchiri, & Heyman 2010; Zayas et al., 2015). Emotionally embodying their family's and friends' experiences, including their own, is more than any student should ever endure on top of navigating the school system. Supported by other scholars, mixed-status families with undocumented loved ones maintain precarious positions in the United States, resulting in continual fears of deportation (Talavera et al., 2010). Not just actual deportations, but this unknown anticipation has emotional consequences for children (Talavera et al., 2010).

Educators must understand these severe consequences on students' feelings of how they experience the world. In classrooms, we have the opportunity to open up ourselves to listen to Latinx bilingual's student extremely complicated lives. We can stand in solidarity with Latinx

youth; we can humanize their families, by lovingly honoring the emotions they tie to their border crossing experiences.

Chapter 6. Giving students an opportunity to express themselves visually can offer educators an astonishing glimpse into identity trans/formation over time. As Anzaldúa (2015) describes, “Border artists inhabit the transitional space of *nepantla*. The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, and of putting together the fragments. By disrupting the neat separations between cultures, Chicana artists create a new culture mix, una *mestizada*” (p. 48, my italics). The bilingual Latinx students in my study were border artists, as they understood the sociopolitical spaces they dwell, at home and at school. In our *nepantla*, the students assembled, onto blank canvases and boards, visual symbols representing their bordered lives. As critical scholars in the field have highlighted, students’ art and writing serve as windows into their points of view, narrating their lives (Anzaldúa, 2015; Alvarez, 2017; Richardson, 1992; Soto & Garza, 2011). Borders meet externally and internally, physically and metaphorically. Crossing and straddling these borders, into unexplored spaces, affords new transformative knowledge, as we embrace distinctions and contradictions (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 4). Latinx students’ visual expressions revealed these tensions, as they made sense of their experiences with peers, friends, and family. Through a creative process, Latinx students showed their inward emotional and mental border crossing struggles. Granting them opportunities to translate their lives visually – trans/forming their identities through artistic symbols and representations – revealed invisible facets educators may miss through conversation alone. The Latinx youth in my study wrestled with the external forces through relationships with others at home and in school. Creating this physical space, the *nepantla* in our study, with artistic tools, allowed students to find themselves in their own mental “shaky” *tierra desconocida*.

Anzaldúa (2015) also described how when border artists find themselves in *nepantla*, they can deconstruct and reconstruct themselves and the *nepantla* itself. Using artistic tools, the students trans/formed the pieces of their mental and emotional identities, reassembling themselves colorfully onto the blank canvases and boards. Students' trans/formed their identities physically and metaphorically through their visual memories and dreams – they emerged, grew and changed. When granting access to artistic possibilities in constructing the self, students designed powerful expressions rendering their identities trans/formations visible. In general, this study's creative process opened cracks and windows to peer into students' lives (Anzaldúa, 2015; Alvarez, 2017).

Recommendations

My study contributes to the scholarship and possible pedagogical approaches in the education of Latinx bilingual students, including teacher preparation, ELD program design, and second language acquisition strategies and instructional methods.

Teacher Preparation. In accordance with my conceptual framings, *acompañamiento* informed how teachers could move alongside students (Sepúlveda, 2011), accompanying them in co-constructing *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 2015) with love and care (Valenzuela, 1999). We need to prepare teachers by showing possible outcomes of using these humanizing conceptualizations. It is essential the message is clear, working with bilingual Latinx students requires a deep commitment. This must be modeled and revealed through critical preparation programs for teachers. I recommend we prepare teachers using some of the possible research-based approaches, in which I engaged during my time as a teacher and as researcher, including welcoming and inviting students' lives into our class space, and bridging home and school through “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006). Another possible way is to

teachers sharing their own life stories vulnerably and reciprocally with students (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Romero, Arce, Cammarota, 2009). As scholars recognize, when students feel loved and cared for by their teachers, and when their language and culture are valued, they are more inclined to share themselves, and thus build stronger relationships with their teachers (Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006; Curry, 2016). I also urge using loving and caring approaches (Valenzuela, 1999), and accompanying their lives, elevating each other in solidarity, as there is no real liberation from oppressive practices in education and society until all students are humanized (Sepúlveda, 2011).

Furthermore, there is potential in encouraging and establishing opportunities for more moments of *acompañamiento*, by looping up with students for multiple years. These are suggested opportunities, knowing not all teachers desire this type of work experience. However, in this study, I demonstrated the potential for engaging in this process. If moving up each year with students is not desired or possible, we must develop better ways to hold on to the pieces in students' portfolios, revisiting their past work and lives. As schools move towards building electronic bodies of evidence and portfolios of students' digital work, there is potential in capturing the written and visual expressions created each year. I thoroughly advise that schools create systems of organizing student work, cherished bodies of evidence, in accessible and artistic ways, granting each teacher talking points for students each year. One possible way to do this would be to have students and teacher pick a few written and drawn pieces that represent each child's life in that school year (be it a poem or personal narrative). Then through *acompañamiento*, have teachers and students record and document their individual and collective conversations surrounding these pieces. These art and written pieces could then be scanned or photographed, becoming a tool for individual and collective conversations the following year.

Once a child gets to the end of their elementary schooling time, with their teacher they could reflect over the pieces collected over all of their years in the school. The culminating product (written and visually created), could then move on with them to middle and high school, creating a body of collected work over a child's academic journey. I would urge this become a practice explained in teacher preparation programs, as it is vital to establish spaces for teachers to engage in *pláticas y encuentros* with their students, revisiting their past expressions along with artistic tools. Through my findings, I show the potential of such a process – involving students and listening to them express understanding of their own lives. The opportunity of inviting students in the navigation of school requirements, by listening to their critiques, could be eye-opening. In essence, students have much to contribute to their academic journeys, and teachers have a lot to learn from their students. These practices of listening and allowing students access to their work over the years, can yield potential positive outcomes, as students feel affirmed.

Furthermore, we know that teachers are predominantly White, female, and monolingual English speakers (Milner, 2005). As more diverse students enter our classrooms, it is likely teachers will not share the same language, cultural or ethnic backgrounds with the children in front of them. The impetus is on the teacher to establish humanizing conditions, to build safe, loving communities. Our Latinx bilingual youth face too many harms from societal and educational issues described in Chapter 1. They must take up the charge of *in loco parentis*, to establish collaborative, loving, and caring relationships, shielding them from the racist and deficit practices weighing on our Latinx communities. Daily, teachers must be ready to take the place of parents temporarily in the classroom. We must instill a *heart's rage* in teachers to do what is right for our bilingual Latinx students; to stand up for and stand with their students. I recommend critical conversations about damaging racist practices hurting Latinx youth with pre-

service teachers and teacher candidates, inviting them to engage with their Latinx students in humanizing artistic learning experiences, honoring home language and culture.

It is also imperative when training teachers that we explicitly discuss positioning bilingual Latinx students in strength and asset-based ways, affirmed by the literature (Handsfield & Valente, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999), principally applying the four conceptual frameworks used in this dissertation. For example, future teachers must be presented models of loving, caring, *acompañamiento* strategies, accompanied in supporting the connections they make with the students they plan to teach (Sepúlveda, 2011). When teachers choose to work with Latinx populations, there must be a critical component in the preparation, involving and elevating the honoring of Latinx knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Providing this kind of opportunity requires a new space in teacher education programs, where training teachers enter into a *nepantla*, giving them access to border crossing literature. Some possible ways to accomplish this include, replicating some of the methodological aspects of my study with pre-service teachers, gathering together with artistic tools and pieces of their lives, remembering and critically reflecting on their own experiences. In addition to visiting the past self, it is imperative to revisit public education's past, examining the oppressive history which has produced racist narratives and practices negatively influencing students in the present. As other scholars have mentioned, it is essential for teachers to spend time critically reflecting and understanding their privilege to teach culturally relevant approaches (Howard, 2003). It is imperative to arrange time periods and spaces for teachers to grapple with these tensions, of privilege and oppression, making sense of how for too long we have taught teachers through dominant White perspectives (Delgado Bernal, 1998). By elevating this critical knowledge, stemming from Latinx scholars, we create possible alternatives for preparing teachers.

Consequently, based on other Latinx scholar's findings and my own, working with our Latinx bilingual students requires a deeper level of commitment, digging deeper at embedded structures of inequality through love (Alvarez, 2017; Sepúlveda, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999).

ELD Curriculum Design. Additionally, my findings inform my recommendations for curriculum design and second language acquisition instruction, specifically English Language Development (ELD). As described in Chapter 3, the school district in which my students attend school is under federal mandate to grant students access to the all courses through appropriate language supports. As I described earlier, we should not eliminate ELD; instead, we must improve it for all students. ELD must comply with the legal requirement of providing quality instruction. In other words, the district has a legal obligation to take affirmative steps to properly advocate and proactively address the needs of bilingual students (Roos, 1983). The consent decree insists the program for developing English be thought-provoking, and at a minimum match the curriculum students receive in other classrooms (Roos, 1983). Thus, ELD courses must be strengthened to the highest-quality, granting students access to the curriculum. Based on students' descriptions of their ELD experience, this was not the case. Findings showed that students described unengaging, unmotivating, and lacking in engaging material in their ELD classes.

It is imperative that we maintain the purpose of ELD, to assist bilingual students in learning content while acquiring English. What if teachers taught ELD through critical, historical, political lenses to examine how bilingual education came to exist in the country? What if students learned by looking over legal cases, understanding for themselves the federal mandates which led to ELD requirements in their district? These approaches could potentially make the class more engaging, challenging, and elevate the status of bilingualism for Latinx

students. Consequently, if ELD had these critical, historical, political components, could it not meet other high school requirements? Preparing aspiring and licensed teachers, through critical approaches, could potentially transform education for Latinx students. It is imperative teachers critically understand the underlying historical and racist political structures that have been put in place, negatively influencing how bilingual students develop their second languages. What if students could get credit for history and civics, alongside developing their language? By taking a page out of Tucson Unified School District (TUSD)'s Arizona's Mexican American Studies (Cammarota, Romero, & Stovall, 2014) teachers could teach ELD using Latinx lenses and resources. Modeling ELD after TUSD's program, offers an example of how to design ELD in a way that is not stigmatizing. In fact, research shows students benefited from the Mexican American programming, including stronger self-esteem, higher graduation rates, and increased college attendance (Howard, 2003; Cammarota, Romero, Stovall, 2014). Through a change like this, ELD's reputation and position could be elevated as an inspirational course, assisting students in their language development, while critically learning the history through culturally Latinx conceptualizations. There is potential in redesigning ELD courses so that there is not a cost of losing native languages or feeling devalued.

Furthermore, I advise that the ELD curriculum have an added component of using artistic workshops while helping students piece together pieces of their lives – spoken, written, and visual – over the years they are required to take ELD. This way, students could track their linguistic progress, accompanied by their teachers. Using poetry and art gives students a different medium for expressing and developing their language while honoring their identities. By employing these methods, and offering students various art tools, educators can aid in students expressing their lived experiences and their imagined goals, which are potentially tied to their

cultural and racial realities. My research, along with other scholars' work indicate the potential for educational opportunities to support students' engagement in critical ways.

Our Latinx students have meaningful and complicated lives; I learned this through their shared spoken, written, and visual expressions of their bordered lives. Bilingual Latinx students want to maintain their linguistic identities in the classroom; they shoulder heavy emotions at home and school. We can advance ways to help them make sense of their lives and experiences.

Second language acquisition strategies and instructional approaches. Not only should we revisit the curriculums for students, but educators must also think about the strategies and approaches in teaching and acquiring second languages. Since other scholars and I have seen the adverse outcomes of low-quality English language instruction on bilingual students' identities, including obstructing their future aspirations (Cohen 2012), it is imperative to not only improve ELD curriculums but the instructional approaches.

I encourage educators to push for more critical language acquisition pedagogies, which could include listening to students' *testimonios*. In my investigation, I found that students desired clear communication and established relationships with their teachers. For this reason, I recommend teacher candidates, interested in working with bilingual students, have a required minimum level of proficiency in a second language themselves. Although Spanish would be preferred and beneficial in building solidarity and community with the Latinx community, I do not argue it must be the same language as the students. Instead, teachers can share their experiences with students, understanding the process of learning a second language. This shared language or knowledge of learning a second language can serve as a bridge and break down barriers when building relationships that students need.

Furthermore, the students in my study believed their teachers were unaware and insensitive to their language needs. Students expressed their teachers were unaware of their positions of power, reproducing negative ideologies tied to teaching ELD. Not only must teacher be properly trained to teach English thoroughly understanding second language acquisition theories, but they must also use pedagogical methods already available in the field (Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010; O'Malley et al., 1985). I also propose teachers engage in critical conversations with students about the status of Spanish language, and how acquiring English as a Second language is associated to the race of the speaker (Kibler & Valdés, 2016; Kubota & Lin, 2006). I encourage teachers to discuss the perceptions of superiority tied to language status, especially when it comes to languages other than Spanish. Teachers should be explicit with students, identifying their position, their experiences in learning other languages, and explain to their qualifications in working with bilingual students. Significantly, teachers do not need to be all-knowing experts in all languages or every single aspect of second language acquisition theories. However, as referenced earlier, vulnerable sharing and allowing students to understand the teacher's position is beneficial in building relationships with students (Romero, Arce, Cammarota, 2009).

The bilingual Latinx students in this investigation understood they needed and deserved more from their ELD teachers. It is imperative to their language learning and linguistic identities that students engage in active oral language development. Teachers must develop critically challenging and developmentally appropriate lessons for bilingual populations using research-based and research-tested approaches already available. Bilingual Latinx students cannot sit quietly in a language development class, without interaction with the teacher or peers, doing mundane worksheets. The costs of unengaging instructional practices are too high. Some

relevant examples include using clear and explicit instruction (Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010; O'Malley et al., 1985) and providing meaningful opportunities to develop oral language (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005), with purposeful language instruction ((Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010; Escamilla et al., 2014). Research also shows coupling this explicit instruction with metalinguistic and cross-language connections support students' second language learning (Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010). Given my students' experiences in ELD, it is imperative that teachers use appropriate scaffolds and procedures to increase student engagement in language acquisition. All of this said, teachers are positioned in precarious and vulnerable positions as well when they are not adequately trained to work with purposeful strategies in education.

Limitations

This study was productive and rich with data when it came to the relationships and methods involved. However, there were limitations and challenges when it came to designing and conducting this investigation. First of all, the small number of students was potentially a limitation. In the past, a few of the students who left our classroom in fourth grade came to the fall interest gathering. I wished they had participated in the research, as it would have been fascinating to get a more profound sense of why students chose the charter school, over staying with us one more year in fifth grade. We did, however, have a representation of various schooling environments, as multiple students attended three different charter networks either in middle or high school - Antonio, Jaelyn, Camila, Jose, Valeria. Although the findings in this study are not generalizable to other students, they are significant in acknowledging Latinx students as experts of their own lives (Delgado Bernal, 1998), giving me a glimpse to their experiences in this school district.

Secondly, the fact that study was only four weeks in length could be seen as a limitation. However, in actuality, the data was, in essence, a compilation of many years, through our memories and treasured poetic and artistic pieces. Finally, because of the richness of the four weeks and the years of our lives together, the investigation had extremely complicated layers producing an enormous amount of data. Overall, the time to process all of the information, transcribing the data, and analyzing it all was limiting. I believe in my heart that every single one of my youth participants (and even all of my former students who were not a part of the study) are special, unique and have incredibly profound lives. I would have loved to explore and present every student, everything they said, and everything they created. Unfortunately, because of time limitations, this was not possible. Below I explain the possibilities and imaginations in my research trajectory, and hopes of analyzing the data in new ways in the future.

Future Imaginings

I will continue to cherish my students' lives and their *testimonios* carefully in the future. Based on what we accomplished and what we learned in the investigation, there were rich moments still left to explore in the spoken, written, and visual expressions I collected. I would like to examine further aspects of humor and comedy, the use of metaphors, and students' family dynamics. I imagine a potential step would be to gather again with this group of students in other *pláticas y encuentros* as we all continue to grow and change. It would be a natural extension to examine how students positioned themselves at school after our research study, their visions for college and careers during their sophomore, junior, and senior years of high school. Ideally, I am interested in coming together again with my former students after they graduate from high school, especially to get a sense of their plans. The idea of gathering again was also suggested by one the students when Cristiano asked, "When are we getting together again, Miss?" on his last

day of the *pláticas y encuentros* with us. We did, in fact, gather for a small artistic celebration, as a way to thank the students and their families for their time. It was at this celebration that a couple of the students' mothers mentioned how much it would mean for them if we continued gathering, for their children to stay motivated, and how this group supported them in their engagement in school.

I hope to ask central questions surrounding the *consejos* [advice] parents give their children as they navigate high school and beyond. Another aspect I would like to investigate further is gathering with students' mothers and the dreams they have for themselves and their families. When developing relationships with students in schools, it is imperative we connect with families to contribute to the available scholarship in acknowledging the invisible labor and tremendous involvement of Latinx parents with schools. We must continue disrupting the deficit views that Latinx parents do not care about their children's education (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Additional investigations I would like to conduct are working with Latinx bilingual teachers who have returned to the same school districts where they learned English (similar to my academic journey). It would be particularly thought-provoking research into Montessori and Waldorf models, in which they loop up with same groups of students. These models use student-centered philosophies, and I would like to examine how these approaches work with Latinx bilingual students. I would also like to work with teachers interested in moving up with the same group of students, preferably from kindergarten through fifth grade, to get a sense of an entire elementary trajectory. Furthermore, it would be fascinating to explore different group of bilingual Latinx students, investigating how teachers stand and walk with their students, moving towards pedagogies of *acompañamiento* (Sepúlveda, 2011; 2018) and critical love and care (Valenzuela, 1999), as we transform education in acknowledging Latinx knowledge (Delgado

Bernal, 1998). Important to note, there are limitations and drawbacks to moving up with the same group of students, like clashing personalities between students and teacher and difficulties in letting go (Grant, 1996). Looping up is an area that has the potential for more research with Latinx youth.

Final Remarks

Contrary to many deficit narratives about Latinx students, this study rejected deficit narratives and practices about Latinx students. In actuality, I used strength-based and humanizing framings in understanding the compelling artistic, linguistic, and emotional trans/formations of Latinx youth. It is crucial to the future of these students that we create fluid spaces, breaking down educational barriers that serve to diminish Latinx youth (Valenzuela, 1999) rather than bolstering and supporting lives. The scholarly research in this investigation legitimizes constructing a *nepantla* space, which ultimately trans/formed into prospective pedagogical practices in the classroom. Providing these opportunities are ways to recognize long silenced Latinx voices (Elenes, 2011), lovingly seeing them as experts of their own experiences (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Together, we remembered our lives in the past, we witnessed each other's present realities and imagined ourselves in the future.

In this study, the Latinx youths' perspectives were well-warranted; their voices were informative and insightful. There was value in our *pláticas y encuentros*, benefitting us all. We learned unexpected and surprising information about each other, helping us affirm and share in our collective experiences. Our *testimonios* were discursive tools, in which we critiqued the educational systems in place, and saw ourselves and our peers in a favorable light. There were awareness and an appreciation in our communion, validating our linguistic abilities tied to our culture, through complex emotional and social influences. We engaged collectively and

independently in these alternative times and spaces, legitimizing our knowledge as Latinx community members and imaginatively re-conceptualized education. We first began years ago as teacher and students in the classroom. We bridged our experiences and collapsed boundaries through memories of our individual and collective past, which encouraged us to make sense of our lives and imagine transformative ways of knowing and being in the world (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Dutro, 2013).

What I perceive in the photo above is the significance of centering Latinx bilingual students in education. Looking back at this image in the opening of the chapter, I see that it epitomized this dissertation. At the commencement of our study, the teens ran over to the swings from our former playground; their laughter transported us back to the past during their elementary school days. I admire my students, as they have had an uncanny ability to balance the array of contradictory emotions, expressed at one moment through devastating heartbreak and immediately recount an experience with pure happiness and gratitude. In our new present space – our *nepantla* – we took a step back in time. As they swung back and forth, the metaphor of cycling through time emerged. When the students leaped off the swings, they flew through the air, like butterflies. The students and I have developed, we emerged trans/formed by our experiences. We learned together, embracing our linguistic identities, honoring our embodied emotions, and preserving our memories and dreams, through art.

I also learned from students their incredible ability to express feelings fully and freely. I attempted to capture how the youth grew out of their pain and joys, sharing together and connecting their emotions to their profoundly incredible life experiences. By valuing and embracing all of the feelings, expressed through their *testimonios*, of the memories shared and imaginations, we resisted, grew and changed together.

I want to trans/form education. I wish for society and the educational system to see and embrace students, the way I have had the opportunity to see them. The public school system has the potential to grow and change as well, by encompassing all of the contradictions and pains in its history, it too can trans/form. In my imaginations and dreams for the future, I picture education in this country as brilliantly and beautifully humanizing. I envision my students' bright futures. Teachers need more time and space to embrace students, holding space to engage in these imaginations, expressed through speaking, writing, and art. These imaginations of what is possible, this is what has connected us over the years. Our experiences produced memories and dreams. What the image conveys is not just the future potential for me, but what the possibilities of centering all Latinx students in education in the future. Nine years ago, I leaped myself; I went to work in unknown, unfamiliar shaky grounds. I met a unique and brilliant group of students. *Los seguiré acompañando con amor y cariño en el future* [I will continue accompanying you through love and care], as together we remember and imagined a more creative and equitable educational system for Latinx bilingual students. ♥

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Appendix A:
Literature Review Search Process

Term(s):

Population

Various Synonyms:

“Mexican”
“Mexican American”
“Latinx”
“Latina/Latino”
“Hispanic”
“Guatemalan”
“Emergent/Bilingual”
“Spanish Speaker”
“English Speaker”
“English Language Learner”
“High School Student”
“Adolescent”
“Teen”
“Youth”

Term(s):

Methodology

Various Synonyms:

“*Testimonio*”
“Qualitative”
“*Auto-historia*”
“Arts-Based Research Methods”
“Poetry and/or Art”
“*Pláticas y Encuentros*”
“*Testimonio*”

Term(s):

Conceptual Framework

Various Synonyms:

“Chicana Feminism”
“Chicana Feminist Epistemology”
“Love & Care”
“*Acompañamiento*”
“*Nepantla*”
“*Testimonio*”

Appendix B:
Session #1: Past

Location: Rhopalocera Academy Playground & Local Library

Date: Tuesday, 07.25.2017

Attendance: Jaelyn, Camila, Jose, Ignacia, Valeria, Antonio, Stella (7 students)

<p>9:00 am Snacks</p>	<p>Meet Again and Mingle</p>
<p>9:30 am Our Past</p>	<p>Coming Back Together</p> <p>Purpose of the Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What three words best describe your past? <p>Puzzle from our Past</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were the “rules” from our class? - What should be our norms for the present? <p>AGREE ON THE NORMS: if we can’t think about maybe if you need a different space?</p> <p>“Mi Pasado Mi Presente” Los Traviesos de la Sierra https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt1i8AISWt0</p>
<p>10:30 am</p>	<p>Break</p>
<p>10:45 am Flash Backs Memories</p>	<p>Memories of our Childhood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sitting in the playground - What do you remember sitting in the playground? - What do you remember from our time in our classroom? - What did you like/dislike about elementary school? - What subjects did you like/did not like? - What do you remember about learning language? <p>Memories of Photographs in the Playground</p>
<p>11:15 am</p>	<p>Walk to the Library</p>
<p>11:45 am</p>	<p>Memories of our Middle School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did you like/dislike about middle school? - What was your favorite subject/least favorite subject in middle school?
<p>12:00 pm</p>	<p>Art Workshopping – Painting & Drawing</p>

Appendix C:
Session #2: Past

Location: Researcher's Home

Date: Thursday, 07.27.2017

Attendance: Jaelyn, Jose, Ignacia, Valeria, Cristiano, Stella (6 students)

<p>9:00 am Living Room Bagels & Coffee</p>	<p>Mingle 4th Grade Favorite Things vs. Favorite Things Today</p>
<p>9:30 am “New Norms”</p>	<p>Re-establish Norms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you want/need from this time and space? - What would you want from yourself? - What do you want from others? - What do you want from the Miss Paty? <p>Differences Elementary School norms Middle/High School norms Study Space norms</p> <p>In La’Kesh poem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does this poem mean to you? - How does it relate to what we want from space?
<p>9:45 am Patio Snacks</p>	<p>Stories of your Name Pseudonyms Choosing</p>
<p>10:30 am</p>	<p>Break (order pizza)</p>
<p>10:45 am Work from the Past</p>	<p>Re-visiting 4th grade Poems</p> <p>Individual Poetry Conversations (Jaelyn, Jose, Ignacia, Valeria, Cristiano, Stella)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you remember about what you wrote? - What did you feel then? What do you feel now? <p>Meanwhile Others Art Workshop – Painting & Drawing</p>
<p>12:30 pm</p>	<p>Lunch Break</p>
<p>12:45 pm</p>	<p>Collective Poetry Conversations (Jaelyn)</p>

Appendix D:
Session #3: Present

Location: Miss Paty's Home

Date: Tuesday, 08.01.2017

Attendance: Jaelyn, Camila, Jose, Ignacia, Valeria, Antonio, Cristiano, and Stella (8 students)

<p>9:00 am Living Room Burritos & Coffee</p>	<p>Mingle</p>
<p>9:30 am Imagination Past to Present</p>	<p>Imagining Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you imagine education? - What would your school/classroom look like? - What would you teach? - What is it like in your high schools now? <p>Sharing Past Objects in the Present</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What object did you bring? - What do you remember about this object? - What did/do you feel about this object? <p>Camila (letter to parents) Jose (CU T-Shirt) Valeria (jar of notes; rubber band) Cristiano (soccer medal; CU T-Shirt) Stella (stuffed bear)</p>
<p>10:30 am Patio</p>	<p>Break (put lasagna in the oven)</p>
<p>11:00 am</p>	<p>Individual Poetry Conversations (Camila & Antonio)</p> <p>Meanwhile Others Art-Workshop</p>
<p>11:15 am</p>	<p>Collective Poetry Conversations (Antonio, Cristiano, Jose)</p>
<p>12:00 pm</p>	<p>Art Workshopping – Painting & Drawing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is going on right now in your life? - Who are your friends? - What do you do for fun? - What is your high school like?

Appendix E:
Session #4: Present

Location: Local Playground and Library

Date: Thursday, 08.03.2017

Attendance: Jaelyn, Camila, Jose, Ignacia, Valeria, Antonio, Cristiano, and Stella (8 students)

9:00 am Burritos	Mingle in front of Library
9:15 am	Walk to the Park <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What sounds do you hear? - Playing Games (tether ball, swings, monkey bars)
9:45 am	Walk back to Library
10:00 am	Collective Poetry Conversations (Ignacia, Valeria, Stella)
10:30 am	Spoken Word Poetry “My Blood is Beautiful” – Mercedes Holtry https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiOyn6NQEEg "Off White" – Venessa Marco https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Okkr4zH2jqI Student’s Choice
11:00 am	Re-Write Old Poem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you change your new poem? (order pizza to library)
11:30 am	Re-Writing New Poems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What poem would you write today? - Black Out Poetry
12:00 pm	Lunch Break
12:30 pm	Art Workshopping – Drawing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high school life - current events

Appendix F:
Session #5: Future

Location: Miss Paty's Home

Date: Tuesday, 08.08.2017

Attendance: Jaelyn, Camila, Jose, Valeria, Antonio, Cristiano, and Stella (7 students)

<p>9:00 am Bagels & Yogurt</p>	<p>Mingle</p>
<p>9:30 am Living Room</p>	<p>BINGO – Play and Discuss Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Favorite subjects in high school - What do you like to do/not do? - Relationships with parents
<p>10:30 am</p>	<p>High School Missions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does your high school hold up its mission? - What does it do well? What does it not do well? <p>Small Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe your family - Who influences you the most in your family right now? - Which relationships support your future dreams? - Nature of relationships at home vs. relationships at school
<p>11:45 am</p>	<p>Lunch Break (Bake Pizza)</p>
<p>12:00 pm</p>	<p>Art Workshopping – Painting & Drawing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is a dream? - What are your dreams? - How are you preparing for future in school right now? - What three words would best describe your imagined future self? <p>“Ser Multilingüe: Realizando Mis Sueños (Being Multilingual: Making my Dreams come True)”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liliana Isabella Honeywood Sánchez

Appendix G:
Session #6: Future

Location: Miss Paty's Home/University of Colorado at Boulder

Date: Saturday, 08.12.2017

Attendance: Camila, Jose, Valeria, and Stella (4 students)

9:00 am	Drive to Boulder
9:45 am	<p>School of Education Courtyard Share memory of Dr. Ofelia Miramontes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who has or what experience has impacted your future dreams? - Who are the people/places/objects significant in shaping your future?
10:30 am	Walk around Campus
11:15 am	<p>UMC Walk and Talk about our Future Dreams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the steps and plans to make dreams come true? - What would make you happy in the future? Why? - What do you hope to be/do when you get older? <p>Art Workshopping –Drawing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping Out – Future Journey
12:15 pm	Walk to Pizza Restaurant
12:30 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm	Drive Back Home

Appendix H:
Session #7: Wrap Up

Location: Miss Paty's Home

Date: Tuesday, 08.15.2017

Attendance: Camila, Jose, Valeria, and Stella (4 students)

9:00 am	Mingle
9:15 am	“I needed color” - Jim Carrey https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21CEOIBq2YI
9:30 am	Small Group Discussion - What would you tell your past self?
10:45 am	Break
11:00 am	Small Group Discussion – Past - What would you tell your past self?
12:15 am	<p>Art Workshopping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would you tell your future self? - What did you think of this entire study experience? <p>Past and Memories Collage and Paper</p> <p>Present Typing and Printing Poems</p> <p>Imagined Future Ink Blots</p>

Appendix I:
Session #8: Wrap Up

Location: Miss Paty's Home

Date: Thursday, 08.17.2017

Attendance: Camila, Jose, Valeria, and Stella (4 students)

9:00 am	Mingle
9:15 am	Books "All the Places you Will Go" – <i>Dr. Seuss</i> - What memories does this book bring up? - What words/thoughts come up for you?
9:30 am	Poetry and Art Workshopping - Finish up Celebration Discussion
10:00 am	Discussion Jenga Past, Present, and Future
10:30 am	Small Group Discussion – Future - What would you tell your future self?
11:30 am	Walk to Restaurant
12:00 pm	Study Conclusion 1. Which teachers do you remember from RA? 2. Which past teachers from RA would you want at art celebration? 3. Who else should we invite? CU Boulder Thank you Gifts

Appendix J: Camila's colección de arte guardada

Two 4th Grade Poems; One New Poem and Three Collages made during the Study

My Life with MEXICO

I am an Mexican and a Latina
I wonder how Mexico takes care of to many Mexican people.
I hear people scream ¡Viva MEXICO! all the time.
I want to go this year again.
I am an Mexican and an Latina

I pretend to be a American
I feel happy because I am an Mexican and a Latina.
I touch the land and water in Mexico.
I worry about problems in Mexico.
I cry of happiness.
I am an Mexican and a Latina

I understand that I don't live in my ranch
I say ¡Viva MEXICO!
I dream of growing up there.
I try my best every day.
I hope I go.
I am an Mexican and a Latina.

Mi Vida

Vivo con mi mama y mi papa,
el esposo de mi hermana y mi hermana,
mi hermano y yo.
M preocupo por mi hermana
porque no quiero que se muera
en Chihuahua donde
ay peligro.
Yo deseo
ser una veterinaria cuando sea grande
porque quiero aprender
como cuidar los animales.

Poem written during the Study

Camila's New Poem, I am a Dreamer

I AM A DREAMER		
<p>I am just a dreamer Who thinks life would be more interesting inside one's head Who has heard being said that to dream is a waste of one's time, for dreams are our realities in wait Who sees paths of success ahead of her Who wants to plant the seeds of her future</p> <p>I am a dreamer, unsupervised, within a world of eyes</p>	<p>Who pretends to know how to go through life, when she knows so little about it Who feels so many emotions yet doesn't know how to go about without them Who touches many hearts yet only lives to love certain ones Who worries how far she'll go Who cries while destroying the girl she was told to be</p> <p>I am a dreamer, fighting for what lies beyond appearances</p>	<p>Who understands so little about what life holds yet makes the best of each day to dream of a better tomorrow Who says so many things yet only certain words will stay within the ears of others Who dreams of a future in which everything she wishes for, will become a reality Who tries to be better everyday for the better of herself and those she loves Who hopes that her future is filled with love, hope, and happiness</p> <p>I am a dreamer trying to find the way... to somewhere, I belong</p>

Camila's Collages, "The Journey"







Appendix K:
Jose's colección de arte guardada

Two 4th Grade Poems and Two Paintings made during the Study

March 15 2012

My I am poem

I am American and half Mexican.
I wonder if I am a whole American.
I hear allot of English and Spanish.
I want to be both things.
I am American and half Mexican.

I pretend to be Mexican.
I feel I am a whole Mexican.
I touch my stuff if I am Mexican.
I worry about losing my Spanish.
I cry if I don't understand my family.
I am American and half Mexican.

I understand my mom, dad, brother, and my family.
I say I am a hole Mexican.
I dream to be a hole American and Mexican.
I try to speck more Spanish.
I hope I am Mexican.
I am half American and Mexican.

Vivo con mi mama, papa,
y con mi hermano chiquito.
Yo me preocupo de visitar
Mexico en 15 días en las
vacaciones porque mis
padres quieren que
visite Mexico y yo tengo miedo
de que alguien me va robar.
Mis padres quieren que
visite mi familia. Yo deseo
que me quede en Denver
Colorado con mi familia
porque me gusta aqui en
Denver Colorado. Yo voy
a extrañar mis padres
cuando voy a Mexico.

Jose's First Painting



Jose's Second Painting



Appendix L:
Ignacia's colección de arte guardada

Two 4th Grade Poems and One Painting made during the Study



Mexican American

I am Mexican American
I wonder how Mexico [looks]
I hear from my mom [details] of Mexico.
I want to change [things] in Mexican
[I'm] Mexican and American

I pretend love [all Mexicans]
I feel sad for what Mexicans [there] are to [state]
I touch my Mom when she [cries] for my Uncles
[because] they [die] in [Mexico]
I worry [about] my family [getting]
[deported] to Mexico

I cry When someone in my family [die] in Mexico
I [am] Mexican American
I [understand how] my Mom [feel]
I say way do they do [this] to me
I dream [stuff] was [different] in Mexico
I try to Change things in Mexico
I Change things
I am Mexican



Mi vida

Vivo con mi mamá, papá dos
hermanos, dos hermanas. Mi
Deseo es que sea una
Veternaria. Para que ayude
A mi familia en problemas
The dinero lo que me preocupa
Es perder a mi familia. Mi
Familia es lo major que he
Tenido i voy a tener

Appendix M:
Valeria's colección de arte guardada

One 4th Grade Poem; One New poem;
Two Paintings and one Self-Portrait made during the Study

4th grade poem

My I am poem

I am a cancer helper
I wonder why people do not help
I hear the [expression] in [their] heart
I want to kids be happy
I am a cancer helper
I pretend to be a normal person
I feel sad when [suffer] I touch my hart and it sey to me to chir
I worry that kids [will] die
I cry when kids have cancer
I am a cancer helper
I understand how kids feel
I say to [people] help kids that have cancer
I dream that people [will] help
I try to [cure] kids that have cancer
I hope kids get [better]
I am a cancer helper.

Poem Written during Study

Blood of Two Colors

I am the blood of two colors
I wonder why people are against Mexico
I hear people yelling and screaming
I see a lot of conflict between two races
I want an even opportunity for two races
I am Mexican American

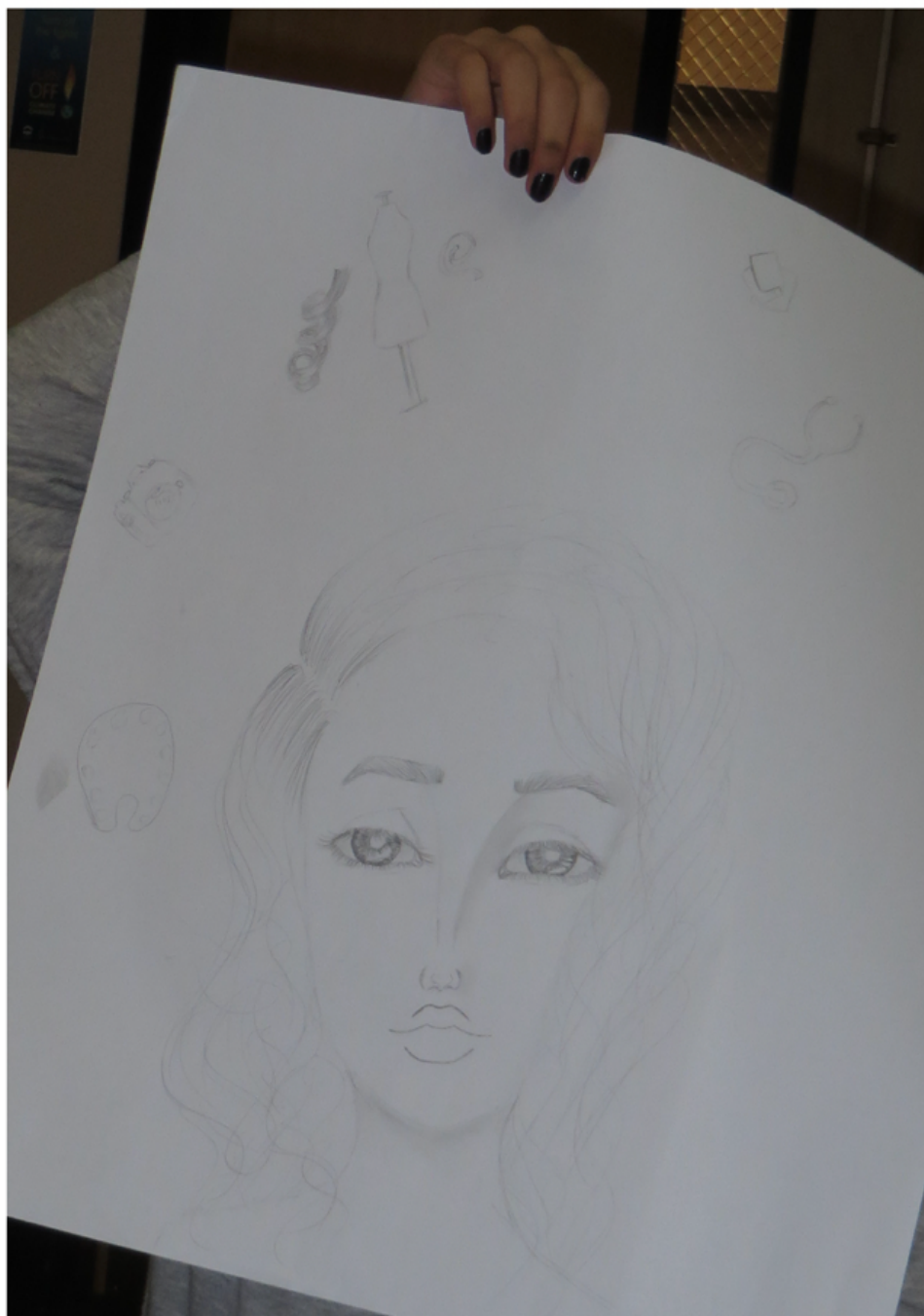
I pretend to be one and another
I feel the fear in one's eyes
I touch my skin and ask who I am
I worry that someday my family
would be taken away from me
I am Mexican American

I understand the fear of being lost
I say nothing for fearing of saying
the wrong thing
I dream that someday there
would be a balance between people
I try to speak out and protest
I hope someday we will be equal
I am Mexican American

Valeria's Paintings, "A Short Time"



Valeria's Self-Portrait



Appendix N:
Antonio's colección de arte guardada

One 4th Grade Poem

The [War]

The [War]

I am a kid I dream to help people
I wonder if they will stop doing wars
I [hear] a gun wean ever I am border [starts]
I want to be a [soldier] so I could help people
I am a Mexican and American

I pretend to be a solder
I feel I am going to be a [soldier]
I touch my face and I say [if] I am a [bad] person
I worry if I am going to be a [soldier]
I cry when people die, and I don't won't people to die
I am a Mexican and a American

I understand we should kill but killing is never the answer
I say we should be friends and [care] of each other
I dream of helping people but they [just] don't want my help
I try to be a nice person in the war
I want to be known as a good man
I [hope] people try to be nice to other people

I am a Mexican and a American

Appendix O:
Cristiano's colección de arte guardada

One 4th Grade Poem

GUATEMALA POEM

I am Guatemala Spanish [speaker]
I wonder that I could [talk] with the Indians
I hear the birds doing music
I want that they could not [fight]
I am Guatemala Spanish [speaker]

I pretend that I could stop [people]
I feel like I am a very powerful to stop [people]
I touch the rock, the grass and all more things

I worry about that people to not [fight]
I cry then kids fight at school
I am Guatemala Spanish [speaker]

I understand that the people and kids [lied]
I say that they could not fight
I dream that the [people]to not [fight]
I try to save the [people]
I hope that the people to try [there] best
I am Guatemala Spanish [speaker]



Appendix P:
Stella's colección de arte guardada

Three 4th Grade Poems and Two Paintings made during the Study

My personal staff

I am a American and a Mexican
I wonder if people can stop taking kids
I hear in the news kids are lost
I want people to find their lost kids
I am American and Mexican.

I pretend to be a Mexican
I feel that I don't have any friends
I touch my face and hands
I worry that I am falling behind in school
I cry when I see my ankle and finger
I am American and Mexican.

I under stand that my mom and dad work to get
money
I say that my friends are haiting each other
I dream that I can be a singer
I try to be every bodies friend but thy all fight
I hope I can live for ever with my two family's
I am a American and a Mexican.

Our class room

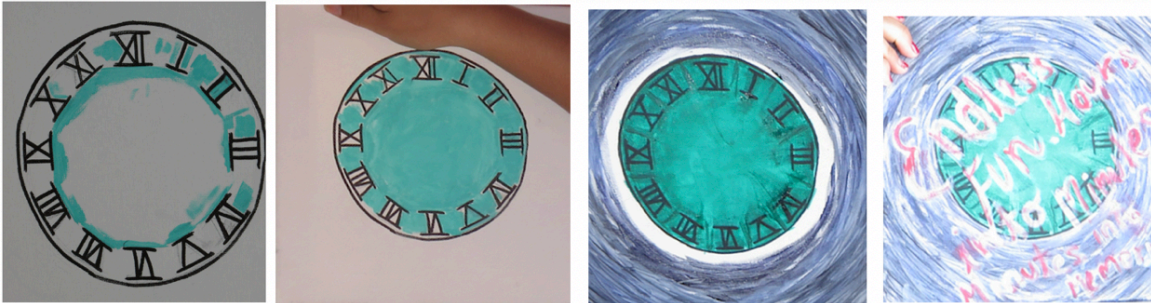
Our classroom.
family is sad, silent
upset really sad.
because our
friend Alondra left to Mexico
and she is not coming back for
another year starting when she
left. Also, without her
we can only hear
the wind blowing
like this sssshssshsssh

Mi Vida

Vivo con siete personas en mi casa.
Mi casa esta localisada
En Denver, Colorado.
Yo vivo con mi mama
Papa mi hermana, abuelita
Mi abuelito, mi perro y yo .
Mi sueno es de ser una
Cantente porque me gusta cantar.
La cosa que me preocupa es
Mi Amistad con mis amigas
Porque nos estamos peliando con cada
Una y a que mi familia la manden
para Mexico o adonde mis papas nacieron
porque hay problemas en la familia de mi mama
Y en a familia de mi papa.
En la familia de mi papa mi
abuelita Antonia se resbalo en
agua y en la familia de mi mama
mi madrina amparo se
Cayo en una rampa.

Stella's Art:

Paved in Time



Distorted



APPENDIX Q:
Start List of Codes

		Conceptual Frameworks			
		Chicana Feminism	Love & Care	<i>Acompañamiento</i>	<i>nepantla</i>
<u>Primary Codes</u>		<u>Subcodes</u>			
EXPERIENCES		<i>sociopolitical realities testimonios knowledge</i>	<u>positive</u> <i>feelings loving caring supportive</i>	<i>convivir moving together home school</i>	<i>time space memories dreams crossing borders</i>
		<i>ancestral familial community convivir* consejos</i>	<u>negative</u> <i>feelings not loving or caring</i>	<i>family teachers solidarity</i>	<i>time space</i>
RELATIONSHIPS		<i>legitimate</i>	<u>in-between</u> <i>feelings embracing contradictions</i>	<i>loving caring affirming</i>	<i>contradictions tensions transformations un/masking</i>
		<i>self race ethnicity nationality citizenship heritage ancestry language written expression</i>	<i>loved cared for affirmed not loved nor cared for</i>	<i>supported developed</i>	<i>negotiated border crossing nepantlera artist</i>
ABR LANGUAGE TEMPORAL DISCOURSE	POETRY ART	<i>visual expression cherished treasured</i>	<i>symbolically expressive</i>	<i>guardado/ held on to</i>	<i>metaphors symbols imagery imagination figurative</i>
	TIME	<i>past present future</i>	<i>long-term</i>	<i>across time moving & walking</i>	<i>memory dream imagined future</i>
	SPACE	<i>home school community</i>	<i>loving caring</i>	<i>home school community</i>	<i>borders boundaries middle ground</i>

*Spanish words are often italicized, in the code list they are no longer italicized for visual clarity.

Appendix R:
I am Poem

My I Am Poem:

*I am an African and a Muslim.
I wonder if Americans consider me as a son of terrorist.
I hear my parents yelling at me to pray on time and
hear a sound of a gun on the background.
I want to be who I am for the rest of my life.
I am an African and a Muslim.*

*I pretend to be an African.
I feel like I am a terrorist.
I touch my face and
I worry if I am a terrorist.
I cry when I see Africans and Muslims suffer.
I am an African and a Muslim.*

*I understand my background.
I say I am an African and a Muslim.
I dream about being an African and a Muslim for the
rest of my life.
I try to be who I am.
I hope to be who I am for the rest of my life.
I am an African and a Muslim.*

By Alpha Oumar Diallo