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AUTOHISTORIAS IN THE BORDERLANDS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

A Dissertation

by

GRICELDA EUFRACIO

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley  
August 2024



AUTOHISTORIAS IN THE BORDERLANDS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY  
A Dissertation  
by  
GRICELDA EUFRACIO

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August 2024



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## ABSTRACT

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This study explores the lived experiences of immigrant teachers of/from the borderlands region through autohistorias. The borderlands region is rich in cultural traditions yet faces challenges in education related to cultural/linguistic mismatches with mainstream schooling. The purpose of this study is to examine how autohistorias can inform understanding of immigrant struggles in education and teaching/learning in the borderlands region called Aztlán. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) How can autohistorias inform understanding of the struggles faced by immigrant students within mainstream curriculum? 2) How do the researcher's and participants' autohistorias inform teaching and learning in Aztlán? The study utilizes Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of autohistoria and seven stages of *conocimiento* as its primary conceptual framework. Methodologically, this is a qualitative study that gathers data from the participants' autohistorias writings, follow-up by semi structured interviews and focus group. Data analysis identifies patterns across cases and contextualizes them through the framework.





## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents, Jose Cantú Amaro and Elsa Galaviz Flores viuda de Cantú, who instilled in me a love and passion for education. I also dedicate this dissertation to my family, who supported my educational journey and understood the times I was absent from family events. This dissertation is specially dedicated to my daughter, Aglae Eufrazio Cantú, whose unwavering faith, empathy, and advocacy for immigrants' rights have been my guiding light and strength throughout my educational journey. Your steadfast belief in me, coupled with your own courageous voice as a woman of color, have constantly inspired me and reminded me of the importance and potential impact of this work. I also dedicate this work to my grandson, Derek Dominic Balboa, for his loving presence. This work also honors my ancestors, whose sacrifices forged caminos y construyeron puentes, enabling a brighter future for us and generations to come.

Special dedication to my brother Juan Carlos Cantu, MD, for his unwavering belief in me and for finding inspiration in my journey to pursue higher education. His courage in defending his identities and voicing his intersectionalities makes this dedication particularly meaningful.

I am profoundly thankful to my circle of friends for their constant support and encouragement throughout this academic journey.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Pursuing a doctorate was my lifelong goal. As an immigrant, this thesis is deeply significant. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands," I felt spiritually guided throughout the writing process. Anzaldúa's work empowered me to share my immigrant experiences in education.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. James Jupp, my dissertation committee chair, whose invaluable guidance, support, and mentorship have profoundly shaped both this research and my growth as a scholar. My sincere thanks go to my dissertation committee members: I thank Dr. Laura Jewett for her insightful feedback, encouragement, and support of my writing process, which have significantly enriched this work. I am grateful to Dr. Ana Carolina Diaz Beltran for her expertise and unique viewpoint, which have been essential in refining my ideas and enhancing my research. Dr. Karin Lewis, thank you for your thoughtful input and challenging questions that pushed me to deepen my analysis and strengthen my arguments. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the educators who instilled in me a passion for learning, and to my university professors who supported my journey and believed in my intellectual capacity, each playing a crucial role in the development of this dissertation. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. José Luis Cano, whose insightful feedback and constant encouragement significantly enhanced my writing and bolstered my confidence as a researcher.



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## CHAPTER I

### RECLAIMING AZTLÁN VIA AUTOHISTORIAS

Reflecting on my past and present educational lived experiences helped me to reconstruct my memories and develop my autohistorias. My autohistorias unveil the experiences that immigrant teachers and students of/from the borderland have experienced. My autohistorias help me to find my identity and my place in education. My past and present are interconnected with my future, where I envision an inclusive educational experience for immigrants. I will include a narrative about how my family arrived in Nuevo Leon and later in the borderlands to show how history is essential to finding an individual's identity and their relationship with places. The past helped me to reconstruct myself.

#### **The Research Question**

The Rio Grande Valley, specifically the borderlands, is rich and unique in history, traditions, costumes, culture, and language. Over the years, the number of immigrant students, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and students from low-income families has grown. The problem in education is that immigrant teachers of/from the borderlands continue teaching under the mandated curriculum that was "birthed and carried out under the paradigms and dynamics of White dominance" (Howard in Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 229), which places in disadvantage students in vulnerable groups. This autobiographical research draws from auto-historias to explore my lived curriculum as an emerging scholar and educator of students who are

living in historically marginalized areas. Anzaldúa created the term autohistoria “to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformation of traditional Western biographical forms autohistoria focuses on the personal life story, but as the auto-historian tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells the life stories of others” (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 319). Autohistoria will be discussed in more depth in chapter II and again as a method in chapter III. The focus of this research is to answer the following questions:

- How can autohistorias inform the struggles of immigrant students in the Whitestream curriculum?
- How do my and the participants' autohistorias inform teaching and learning in Aztlán?

This study on autohistorias is essential because other immigrant educators of/from the borderlands might also acquire *conocimiento* (knowledge) about the educational inequalities that still exist in education and their reality that they live in the classrooms.

Sharing autohistorias with other immigrant educators from the borderlands will help us reflect on our lived experiences in education and the imperative need to transform the traditional curriculum into a more culturally sustainable one. Autohistorias have the potential to transform ourselves and the curriculum. Transformation starts with “*Conocimiento*” (knowledge) (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 15). *Conocimiento* in Spanish means “knowledge” or “consciousness,” Anzaldúa uses this term to represent a key component of her post-borderlands epistemology (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 320). My study seeks to create conscientization by sharing the autohistorias of other immigrant educators who have lived similar life stories.

Jupp et al. (2018) followed Freire (1970/2002) in defining conscientization. The authors explained that conscientization is a process through which the students and teachers critically

understand their situation as a historical reality susceptible to transformation (p. 305). In order to understand "our intertwined identities, idiosyncrasies, and personal vulnerability" (Jupp et al., 2020, p. 73), it is necessary to talk with others about our unique history, race, and culture, and our realities that we lived in education. These critical dialogues might create conscientization and transformation in the immigrant students' and teachers' realities.

The autohistoria narrated in this chapter is essential to understand my struggles that I and immigrant students and teachers faced. It is essential to situate my narrative within the history of Mexico because individuals need to see how the past, the present, and the future are intertwined. This narrative creates *conocimiento*; *conocimiento* is a form of healing our wounds and mitigating our pains caused by the figurative injuries of colonialism. "Conocimiento allows us to understand how we respond and heal from those oppressive experiences" (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 396). It is essential to share a synopsis of the history of México because each vulnerable individual's past and present connect with history.

### **Colonization and my Autohistoria**

La Conquista de Mexico in 1519 marked the life of the Aztecs. The Conquista initiated massacres, enslavement, and forced labor of millions of indigenous people. Many indigenous people survived to this day, but the Conquista also instantiated a *mestizaje* or *amalgamiento* of indigenous and European cultures and histories. The Spaniards conquered the Aztecs. The Aztecs gave up Tenochtitlan, their territory, and became a colony of Spain, Nueva España. The conquest of Mexico brought 'el mestizaje' and different social statuses. The Spaniards, born in Spain, were the first social class. The Spaniards, or the *Criollos*, born in México, were the second social class, and the *mestizos*, the children of Spaniard and Aztec parents, were the lowest social

class. Although all mestizos were third class citizens, valían más los hijos del español casado con una india que los hijos de una española con un indio. The children of a Spaniard married to an Indian woman were worth more than a Spaniard's to an Indian man. While Mexican-born Spaniards and Mestizos lived a life of oppression and inequality, the Spanish and Criollos manipulated Aztecs to adopt the language and the religion. Before "the formal colonization of lands along the lower Rio Grande," the Spanish formally colonized Nuevo Leon in 1596 (Salinas, 2011, p.1).

Nuevo Leon's territory was first colonized in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula, primarily conversos (ethnic Jews converted to Roman Catholicism) and their tlaxcalan allies, a group that promoted the colonizing work. In 1596, the first twelve Europeans who settled in Nuevo Leon displaced the Indian groups from the Monterrey-Cadereyta-Cerralvo area (Salinas, 2011, p. 4). My ancestors settled in Nuevo Leon.

My ancestors continued to travel back and forth from Nuevo Leon to Texas. My family history documents reveal evidence of the constant migration of my ancestors to Mexico and the United States. Learning about my family history helps me understand and validate my maternal grandfather's stories about Texas. He always stated that Mexicans lived here first. I discovered documents that my great-grandparents married and lived in San Antonio, Texas. Later, they returned to Nuevo Leon. Narrating my family history helps me understand who I am in the Mestizo borderlands.

History has helped me to understand how my family arrived in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Lower Rio Grande Valley sits along the northern bank of the Rio Grande River (the dividing waterway between the U. S. and Mexico border). It stretches across 4,244 square miles

and four counties – Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy. The region includes the southernmost tip of South Texas and a portion of northern Tamaulipas, Mexico. Due to the region's diverse history and transborder agglomerations, the people are generally bilingual. They use a fair amount of English and Spanish simultaneously to communicate. This practice is called translanguaging. According to García and Lin (2017), “translanguaging is an approach to the use of language. Translanguaging refers to how bilingual people fluidly use their linguistic resources to make meaning and communicate” (p. 118).

According to Garza et al. (2020), the area now known as the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) remained untouched by colonization for 250 years, until José de Escandón led an invasion in 1749. Following this, mestizo settlers from northern Mexico established an independent agricultural and ranching community in the region. This community coexisted with 33 indigenous Coahuiltecan nations, some of which were already involved in ranching activities.

After the Texas Revolution and subsequent U.S. annexation, the RGV's territorial status became ambiguous. Throughout the 20th century, it existed in a liminal space, not fully belonging to either the United States or Mexico. This uncertain status led to ideological and military conflicts, sparking several separatist movements in the region.

Understanding this history of autonomy and complex colonial occupation is crucial to grasping why RGV residents often display indifference towards both Americans from the north and Mexicans from the south. Historian Carey McWilliams noted that the border region, particularly the RGV, has developed its own distinct cultural identity, largely uninfluenced by outside forces. This unique history has shaped the RGV into a place that many of its inhabitants view as their own distinct homeland (p.4).

The complex history of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) described in the first paragraph aligns with and expands upon Alvarez's succinct summary of borderlands history. While Alvarez outlines a broad sequence of occupations - Spanish, Mexican, and American - the detailed account of the RGV reveals a more nuanced reality. The RGV's history demonstrates that these transitions were not clean-cut, but rather marked by periods of ambiguity, conflict, and local resistance.

The borderlands were "occupied first by the Spanish, then the Mexicans, then American intruders, and epochs of war and conquest" (Alvarez, 1995, p. 448). The borderlands "illustrate the conflicts and contradictions in a hierarchically organized world" where "cultures, ideologies, and individuals clash and challenge our disciplinary perspectives on social harmony and equilibrium" (Alvarez, 1995, p. 448).

The RGV's experience, particularly its long period of uncolonized existence, its mestizo settlement, and its subsequent liminal status between nations, illustrates the complexity behind Alvarez's "epochs of war and conquest." This regional history shows how the borderlands were not simply passed from one power to another, but often existed in a state of flux, with local inhabitants developing their own unique identity and autonomy in the midst of these larger geopolitical shifts.

The clash and challenges are also perceived in education, where "we continue to teach the traditional area courses that in part limit our discourse and maintain our inherent colonial past" (Alvarez, 1995, p. 449). In the borderlands, one lives in constant conflict with our chakras.

Chakra symbols are sacred and contain spiritual meaning. Its natural element is spiritual connection and transformation. One clashes with the chakras when one does not know one's

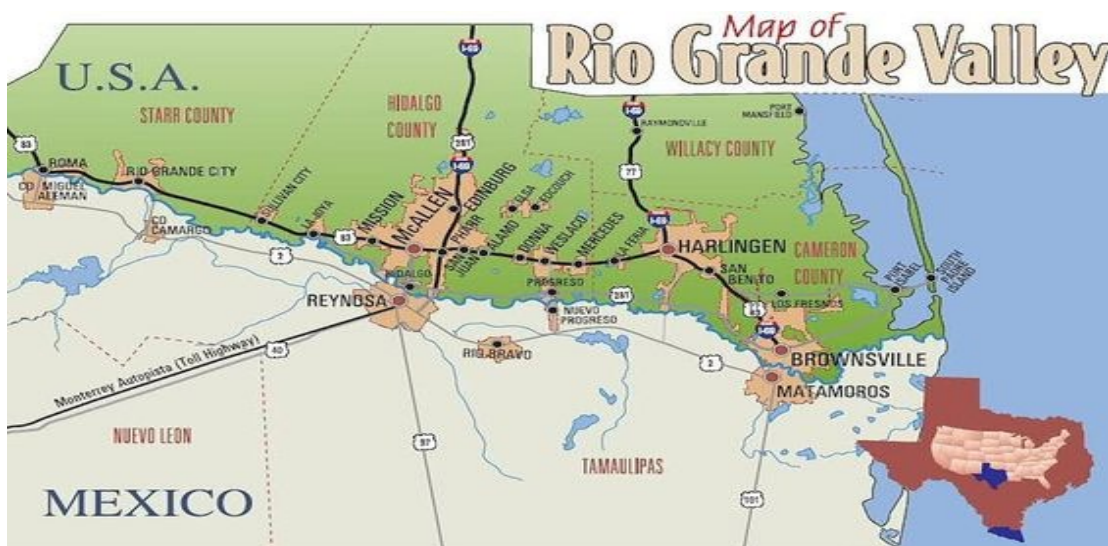
identity or where one belongs. You “struggle with the shadow, the unwanted aspects of the self” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 123). El desconocimiento (unknown) blocks one's energy, affecting one's emotional and physical well-being. When one has conocimiento, one makes meaning from our experiences. With conocimiento, you release traumas of the past, which frees up your energy (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 139). With conocimiento, one enters a whirlwind, and one's pieces are dismembered. One's pieces get scattered and land in *nepantla*. One questions identity, culture, and language with pain.

"The Mexican-US border is the best example of how nation-states negotiate, marginalize, and influence people's behavior" (Alvarez, 1995, p. 451). In the borderlands, or as Anzaldúa defines it, the homelands, *Aztlán*, one can find distinct historical backgrounds and cultural behaviors. The borderland is composed of “Indians, *fronterizos*, *norteños*, Chicanos, Chicanas, Mexican Americans, Mexican(o/a)s, Anglos, Tejanos, *gringos* and *agringados*, Texans, green carders, *Pachucos*, *Cholos*, commuters and others” (Alvarez, 1995, p. 451). *Aztlán*, in Chicano culture, refers to the mythical homeland of the Aztec people, often used symbolically to represent the ancestral lands of Mexican-Americans in the southwestern United States. In the borderlands, “people are constantly shifting and renegotiating identities with maneuvers of power and submission, and often they adopt multiple identities” (Alvarez, 1995, p. 451).

I live in the Rio Grande Valley, better known as the borderlands, where I struggle to find my identity. My past and present narration unveil my identity and my place in education. My past and present are interconnected with my future, where I envision a conscientizing educational experience for immigrants.



The Mexican-US borderlands represent a complex tapestry of cultures, histories, and identities, where people constantly navigate and renegotiate their sense of self amidst power dynamics and cultural intersections. A map has been added to this discussion to visually illustrate how these borderlands are geographically divided, serving as a powerful symbol of the physical and metaphorical borders that immigrants, like myself, must navigate in our daily lives. This visual representation not only delineates the geographical boundaries but also symbolizes the multifaceted barriers - cultural, linguistic, and socio-political - that shape the immigrant experience in the borderlands, including my own journey of identity formation and vision for a more inclusive educational landscape.



*Figure 1: Mapa de the Borderlands*

### **Autohistorias and Relationship with the Borderlands**

My family lived and worked at my great-grandfather's ranch in Raymondville. My paternal grandmother always shared stories about the years she lived in Raymondville. My grandmother was prietita (dark complexion). I only understood why she hated her skin tone once

I learned about immigrants' discrimination in the 1920s. My grandmother told me that my grandfather arrived in Raymondville when he was six. Even though he did not go to school, he knew English but did not know how to read. She told me they went back to Mexico because immigration officers visited the ranch and gave a paper to my grandfather. My grandfather was too embarrassed to tell the officers that he did not know how to read and just asked: "What is this for?"

The officers explained that he needed to stay or leave the country voluntarily. Without knowing, my grandfather signed the line where he agreed to leave the country, so the officers gave him fifteen days to pack everything and take his family to Mexico. My grandparents had children who were born in the United States and Mexico. They settled a few blocks away from the river. I have lived on both sides of the river.

I consider myself a native of the borderlands because I technically was born and lived in a neighborhood in front of the Rio Grande River. I studied my past and present history to understand my place and relationship with the borderlands. "The past is a bridge to present history that constructs memory, enabling transcultural affirmations of the feminine, the queer, the colored, the colonized, and the indigenous. It reclaims and reconstructs for them the fullness of their humanity" (Mody, 2017, p. 89). By understanding and connecting with this historical context, individuals can enter a liminal space known as *nepantla*, where they navigate between and across cultural worlds.

Past and present lived experiences help me to cross to *nepantla*. Through the history and borderlands analysis, the *nepantlera* writes to inform other educators about the status quo that immigrants live in education and our society; she writes to create spaces for dialogue with the

immigrants of/from the borderlands. The nepantlera uses historical narratives that help teachers and students to decenter Eurocentric curricula and epistemologies, deconstruct the problematic essentialist notions of identity, culture, gender, and difference, enact counter-hegemonic identities, and create spaces for synthesis and renewal within the classroom” (Cati, 2013, p.62). The nepantlera travels back and forth to nepantla through the seven states of knowledge. The main stage of *conocimiento* is *El arrebato*, where one feels anger and rupture. One gets fragmented into pieces. The state of *el arrebato* is the end and the beginning of transformation.

The *coatlicue*, is a stage where individuals resist new knowledge, and they can place both cultures side by side and see the contrast among them. The individual recognizes and starts claiming their identity. Everything is confusing in the *coyolxauhqui* stage, and all my scattered pieces are in different directions. Here, I seek to rebuild myself and others through our *autohistorias*.

The stages of *conocimiento* are *el arrebato* ... rupture, fragmentation... an end, a beginning, *nepantla* ... torn between ways, the *coatlicue* state ... *desconocimiento* and the cost of knowing, The call...*el compromiso* ... the crossing and conversion, putting *coyolxauhqui* together ... new personal and collective stories and the blowup... a clash of realities are concepts that can be used to heal and to realize that there is a need to find new ways of teaching and learning in the borderland. These stages represent a transformative journey of self-discovery and reconnection, where individuals navigate the challenges and conflicts that arise from straddling different cultures, languages, and identities. By engaging with these concepts and applying them to educational practices, educators can create more inclusive and empowering learning environments that validate the experiences and knowledge of students from diverse backgrounds.

These new forms of teaching and learning in the borderlands may lead individuals to find their identities and recover their culture and language.

One compelling concept within the stages of *conocimiento* is *coyolxauhqui*, which symbolizes the process of reintegration and healing after experiences of fragmentation and trauma. I use *coyolxauhqui* to explain the process of healing from traumatic events that fragment, dismember or wound individuals, specifically immigrants. The metaphor of *coyolxauhqui*, the Aztec moon goddess who was dismembered and then put back together, represents the potential for wholeness and regeneration in the aftermath of personal and collective struggles. By understanding and applying this concept, educators play a crucial role in supporting immigrant students in their journeys of healing, resilience, and self-determination, making them feel valued and integral to the process. The concept of *coyolxauhqui* is essential for healing, recovering identity, culture, and language, and transforming education. The seven stages cause internal shifts and external changes. In the first stage, the individual experiences pain, and in the last stage, one gives forgiveness. I use *autohistorias* and the seven stages of *conocimiento* to decentralize Eurocentric curricula and epistemologies. These terms will be explained more deeply in Chapter II.

### **Upcoming Chapters**

In Chapter I, I presented my research question, the purpose of my study, and the significance of my study, and I offered an overview of my historical lived experience through my *autohistoria*. Chapter II discusses my theoretical framework focuses on Currere, life history, and *autohistorias*. In Chapter III, I presented *autohistoria* as the primary source of inquiry in this qualitative study.

## CHAPTER II

### LIVED CURRICULUM: CURRERE, LIFE HISTORY, AND AUTOHISTORIAS AS FRAMINGS

Provides more information about my framework, autohistorias, and how it helps me explore my lived curriculum as an immigrant student and teacher of/from the borderlands. I will also discuss autobiography and the life history tradition of curriculum studies. This chapter covers the following representatives: William Pinar (1995) and Petra Munro (1995/2010). I will discuss the point of view of Pinar (1995) about reconceptualizing the meaning of curriculum by using currere. I also discuss Munro (1995) and her understanding of narratives and their power to teach us about the lived experiences of five activist teachers. After working through Pinar and Munro, I move onto the primary framing of Chapter II: autohistorias, via Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 2009). In support of her notion of autohistorias, I will also discuss the seven stages of *conocimiento* and how each stage interwinds with autohistorias.

#### **Autobiographical Traditions in Curriculum**

Per Pinar (1975, 2022), *currere* is a process of self-reflection in which the individual becomes the subject of study (Suárez, 2019, p. 137). Kanu (2013) quoted Pinar to explain the meaning of "curriculum," which is 'to run the course'—the concept of *currere* refers to an existential experience of institutional structures (p. 104). The method of *currere* is also an autobiographical and biographical narrative because it makes individuals reflect on past experiences and present experiences to help them visualize a better future. Pinar (2022) and

Pinar et al. (1995) identifies some categories of scholarship that understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text" (p. 520).

The first stream of scholarship includes autobiographical theory and practice, whose major concepts include currere, collaboration, voice, dialogue journals, place, poststructuralist portraits of self and experience, and myth, dreams, and imagination. The second stream is a feminist autobiography, and its significant concepts are community, the middle passage, and reclaiming the self. The final stream is the studies that attempt to understand teachers biographically and autobiographically, including biography and autobiographical praxis collaboratively, the "personal practical knowledge of teachers, teacher lore, and biographical studies of teachers' lives ." (p. 516)

The method of currere is a mode of critical autobiographical exploration devised to uncover experience so that we may see more of it and see more clearly" (Pinar and Grumet in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 518). Pinar (2022) and Pinar et al. (1995) present the four steps of the method of currere. These steps consist of regressive, progressive, analytical, and syntactic. Regressive focuses on past experiences, such as describing and analyzing one's intellectual biography or educational past. Pinar et al. (1995) explain that in the progressive step, "one has lived or experiential experience is a data source. In this step, one goes back to the past to "capture it as it was and as it hovers over the present" (p. 520). After meditation, through the progressive step "the students of currere imagine possible futures" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520). "In

the progressive step, Pinar looks toward what is not yet the case, what is not yet present. He notes that the future-like, the past-inhibits the present" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520). In the analytical stage of currere, "students examine both and present" and "one distances oneself from past and future to be freer of the present" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520). In the synthetic step, "one reenters the present and listens carefully to one's own voice one asks: what is the meaning of the present? These steps depict temporal and reflective moments of the autobiographical study of educational experience" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520).

Currere seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one's understanding of his or her life" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520). Pinar et al. (1995) state that currere "offers students and teachers a method by means of which greater access to their lived experiences of schools can be accomplished" (Pinar & Grumet in Pinar et al., 1995, p.523). Pinar et al. (1995) explain that "the method of currere represents a wrestling of individual experience: "from the anonymity and generalization that had dominated social science and even literary interpretation in the heyday of structuralism and systems theories and returning it to the particular person who lives it (p.521).

According to Pinar et al. (1995), currere is an interpretation of experience that involves an "examination of manifest and latent meaning, conscious and unconscious content of language as well as the political implications of such reflections and interpretations" (p.521). Currere liberates the individual from "behaviors overdetermined by unconscious impulses, defenses or

repetition compulsions" (Pinar et al., 1995, p.521). Pinar et al. (1995) also explain that voice is essential to understanding curriculum as an autobiographical and biographical text, as well as feminist and political theory. Pinar et al. (1995) remarked on the importance of autobiographical and biographical praxis to understand the curriculum. They explain that autobiographical is inherently social, and to understand curriculum "as autobiographical and biographical text is informed by feminist theory, the presence of community is powerful" (p. 548). Autobiography provides women a safe space to use their voices to inform about their struggles, spaces, and places in a patriarchal society. "Autobiography permits a vivid account of the lived experience of women scholars struggling to overcome patriarchal obstacles" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 550).

Autobiography can give voice to women and unveils their realities of struggles. Autobiographies can also create solidarity in the community when the women use their voices or writings to create knowledge about what is happening in their environments. While one voice is essential, multiple voices are needed to create change and transformation. "For certain feminist theorists, writing and reading autobiography provides a means of connecting public and private worlds in multiple ways" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 549). According to Pinar et al. (1995), "the feminist theory has enlarged our knowledge of autobiographical theory and practice, including the meaning of the community, collaboration, voice and middle passage" (p. 552).

Also, Pinar et al. (1995) explain that autobiography is a means of exploring "the experience of women that has been banished from curriculum discourses" (p.549). "To understand our lives and our experience of curriculum, we must interpret and share that experience" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 555). Using currere would constitute a fundamental reconceptualization of educational research that would then express "the teacher's voice" (Pinar



et al., 1995, p. 563). Teachers should "report their experiences autobiographically" because "their lives are essential to understanding their pedagogical practices" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 554).

"Teachers' lives are unique, even idiosyncratic, and cannot be reduced to broad social forces" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 563). "To understand the curriculum and to teach with complexity," one is required "to understand women autobiographically" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 551).

I use Pinar's (1995) method of *currere* to study myself and to reflect on my past educational experiences as an immigrant student and educator of the borderlands. *Currere* helped me understand how my past lived experiences are interwoven with my present, and the experience of analyzing my past and present helped me visualize a better future for immigrant teachers and students. My past lived experiences linger in my present. When one goes back to the past, and the memory remembers painful experiences, one reorganizes the events and writes.

Pinar's (1995) method of *currere* instilled in me the need to continue investigating my own cultural nature and keep reorganizing myself. The past and the present, when analyzed through the method of *currere*, transform one and make one envision a future that does not exist. After reading Pinar (1995), I felt the need to continue reorganizing my lived cultural and educational experiences; therefore, I read *The Borderlands* (1985) of Gloria Anzaldúa. The method of *currere* made me understand that I have many in-between spaces and my place in the curriculum as an immigrant woman and how using our autobiographies, closely related to autohistorias, may lead to the transformation of educators of/from the borderlands. Pinar's (1995) method of *currere* allows for the study of myself and the participants. It helps our memory to remember painful experiences and to reconstruct events and ourselves, and it informs my use of autohistorias.

## **Munro and the Power of Life History**

Pinar's (1995) method of currere helps one reorganize our past, present, and future by reflecting our cultural and educational lived experiences. "More specifically, currere is an autobiographical method designed by Pinar to provide a broader and deeper understanding of one's lived experience of the curriculum through a process of remembering the past, imagining the future, then analyzing and synthesizing emergent themes" (Moore, 2013, p. 12).

Autobiography is closely related to life history.

When ordinary people share their life history, they inform about the injustices and start healing and getting liberated from the oppressor. Hendry (2009) maintains that "narrative has the potential to remind us of the complex and multiple ways in which humans make meaning" (p. 78). "Symbolic narratives are those that seek to respond to questions of human experience. From the beginning, humans have sought to make meaning of their experience primarily through signs and symbols" (Riessman in Munro Hendry, 2009, p. 76). Munro's (1995) *Power of Life history* presented the lived experiences of five activist teachers' work, bringing social reform issues to the forefront, including equal pay for equal work, pensions, teacher tenure, and maternity leave (p. 274). Munro (1995) narrated the activist teachers' experience to unveil the issues they lived in the early twentieth century and how they generated change for their group. Hendry (2009) explained that narrative means "to account" and is derived from the term *gno*, meaning to know (p.72). Munro's life history unveils the struggles of marginalized people and unites them. The life histories create networking among women and feminists who seek political representation.

Munro emphasizes "[w]omen's experiences as classroom teachers provided them with a previously unknown sense of independence and financial autonomy" and "their school's

experiences encouraged the development of speaking skills, organizational skills, and networking with like-minded women" (Munro, 1995, p. 274). Munro (1995) shares the activist teachers' life history to empower educators to organize with other teachers, produce educational change, and improve teachers' salaries and benefits. Munro's (1995) life history helps teachers understand and learn that they have the power to make educational changes and "shape educational institutions based on democratic practices" (p. 275).

The life histories inform the readers about the social inequalities and struggles that minority groups or vulnerable groups live in. Munro's (1995) life history created consciousness about the active feminists and how they united to obtain "the economic rights of women, on the democratization of the institutions that dominate everyday life"(p. 278). The life histories also help take "women's knowledge and culture seriously" and generate socio-political change (p. 278). Life history is important because individuals learn about the struggles and successes of other activist teachers, and their experiences can shape their own transformation. Immigrant educators create safe spaces when they narrate their lived experiences.

Life histories create a point where activist teachers can encounter each other and have critical dialogues where they can talk about their realities and how they can solve the issues they face in their daily lives. Through their life histories, they can unite and become transformed into teacher activists. Munro (1995) mentions Dewey's concept of "a continuing reconstruction of experience" (p. 277), which means the narrative helps to continue reconstructing our experiences, which may "empower other immigrants and to validate their language, their heritage, values, and culture " (Deegan in Munro (1995), p. 277). With life histories, individuals

learn they have a voice and power to make socio-political and educational changes. Life histories emancipate the oppressed.

The need for feminist activist educators is imperative. The life histories of Munro (1995) create a space where other educators can see themselves as agents of change. Munro (1995) provides the reader with an overview of how "the teaching profession was an important source of activism and political ideas" (Clifford in Munro, p. 274). The life histories of Munro (1995) are essential because they show how "interactions between academics, women's clubs, and immigrants served as an important educational function by providing a mechanism for people of various classes to "speak together as a mean of widening understandings of different communities and enlarging active involvement in the work of social change" (p. 278). Life histories create solidarity between different voices and unite their voices to unveil the injustices they lived in and to create social and educational change.

### **Toward Anzaldua's Autohistorias in the Curriculum**

Currere means to run and follow the patterns of one lived experience in education. Life histories inform about the lived experience of educators. Although currere and life history are different, both investigate the past and present of the individuals' culture, identity, and experiences. It is possible to see the overlap between narrativized curriculum studies in Pinar et al. (1995) and Hendry (2009). The knowledge I have acquired from currere and life histories prompted me to reflect on my past and present, and this led me to develop my research approach via Anzaldúa's autohistorias.

I define autohistoria as a written narration of past experiences that heals and liberates myself and others. Autohistoria "is a term that Anzaldúa coined to describe a specific type of

self-writing” (Keating, 2009, p. 13) such as “theoretical essays, short stories, innovative autobiographical narratives” (Keating, 2009, p. 3). Anzaldúa (2009) explains that “a lot of [her] poems, stories, and essays or what [she] calls autohistorias are about “reading reality and reflecting on that process and the process of writing in general” (p. 168).

Anzaldúa (2009) explains that border art is also a form of autohistorias because the artist creates a mixture of cultures and "locates her/himself in this border ‘lugar,’ and tears apart and rebuilds the place itself” (p. 177). Anzaldúa (2009) explains that autohistorias are forms that "disrupt the neat separation between cultures [that the borderland artist] create" (p. 177). Anzaldúa (2009) explains that the artistic "ideas that have been incubating and developing at their own speed have come into their season". "Border artist and art that supersedes the pictorial. It deals with who tells the stories and what stories and histories are told." Anzaldúa calls "this form of visual narrative autohistorias” (p. 183). Anzaldúa (2009) uses the term autohistorias to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional Western autobiographical forms.

Deeply infused with the search for personal and cultural meaning or “putting *Coyolxauhqui* together”, autohistoria focuses on the personal life story. However, as the autohistoriador tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells the life stories of others. (p. 319)

Autohistorias “are informed by reflective self-awareness employed in the service of social-justice work” (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 319). Anzaldúa (2015) uses autohistorias // “to expand her previous definitions of *nepantla* and to include aesthetic and ontological dimensions and [to] posit the imagination of an intellectual-spiritual faculty” (Keating, 2015, p. xxiii).

Anzaldúa developed autohistorias “to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on this storytelling process” (p. 319). Anzaldúa as a writer of autohistorias, blends her cultural and personal biography with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and/or other forms of theorizing” (p. 319). Anzaldúa uses autohistorias "to evoke healing and transformation her desire to go beyond description and representation by using words, images, and theories that stimulate, create, and in other ways facilitate radical physical-psychic change in herself, her readers, and the various worlds in which we exist and to which we aspire" (Keating, 2015, p. xxiii).

Autohistorias help me to shift from the "old way of viewing reality to a new perception," and this new version of reality demands that I employ "alternative ways of knowing and reviewing and rewiring my ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and expressing" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 142).

Tu autohistoria is not carved on stone but drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds. Forced to rework your story, you invent new notions of yourself and reality-increasingly multidimensional versions where body, mind, and spirit interpenetrate in more complex ways. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 143)

Immigrant students are perceived as a problem in education because the forms of knowledge students and their families bring are deemed less valuable. The problem is that White supremacy does not accept other forms of knowledge. This paper draws from autohistorias to explore curriculum and pedagogies in these borderlands.

I use the seven stages of *conocimiento* to reflect on my lived experiences and how I construct and deconstruct myself. Immigrants have the experience of traveling constantly through the seven stages of *conocimiento*. The seven stages of *conocimiento* will also be developed and used as part of my study and my participants, and my own autohistorias.

### **Autohistorias and Conocimiento**

As a *nepantlera*, I use autohistorias to learn from myself and other immigrants' past educational experiences and analyze how autohistorias transform us (Hurtado, 2015, p. 44). Through autohistorias, one produces *conocimiento* about the hidden curriculum one uses in the Classroom. Fernández and Gamero (2018) say that one can employ autohistorias to create *conocimiento*, which describes “the processes and practices associated with critical consciousness, sociopolitical development, identity formation, healing, and resistance” (p.16). The educators create *conocimiento* through autohistorias, and they create resistance against the norms dictated by coloniality. Autohistorias are essential because they create consciousness about the educational injustices and struggles immigrant teachers and students lived in education. Also, sharing my autohistoria may create *conocimiento* or self-social knowledge, which liberates and unites the immigrant teachers and the students in the process of becoming agents of social-political and educational change.

### **The Seven Stages of Conocimiento**

The seven stages of *conocimiento* awaken immigrant educators' facultad or consciousness. Anzaldúa (2015) explained, "Together, the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external changes. All seven are present within the stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not" (p. 123-

124). In order to understand how conocimiento unblocks lo desconocido (unknown), it is crucial to have a deep knowledge of the seven stages of conocimiento. Also, understanding the seven stages of conocimiento helps individuals to understand how one changes and becomes an agent of change who envisions a future for education that does not yet exist.

### **El Arrebato ... Rupture, Fragmentation... an End, a Beginning**

The arrebato stage is where the immigrants question their identity and "what the world is about" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 547). When I returned to teaching, I went back into the arrebato stage. I was angry, and at the same time, I felt impotence when I met my Spanish students for the first time. My students, immigrants of/from the borderlands, feel embarrassed about speaking their native language. When they entered elementary school, these students became When they entered elementary school, these students became "deslenguados" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.80) and desculturados (deprived of our native language and culture). Valenzuela (2005) describes this as subtractive schooling in which the curriculum functions to subtract "students' culture and language, which is consequential to their achievement and orientations toward school" (p. 336). This new lived experience me volvió a romper en pedazos (broke me into pieces again), and each of my dismembered pieces hit again in nepantla. I am here again, trying to put myself together and to find balance on my siete ojos de luz or chakras. In this stage, I do not have balance and me siento impotente (I feel powerless). I am searching for more conocimiento. I am rewriting my autohistoria to find conocimiento and other unbalanced and struggling educators like myself. Autohistoria is not a solution but helps unite educators with common goals. At this point, I have the conviction that I need to take action and that I need to make other educators hear my silenced



voice and create solidarity and an agreement that we need to change for the benefit of our students and the future of education.

### **Nepantla .... Torn Between Ways**

I am here in nepantla in the in-between of those in power and the students. Reflecting on our native language deficiencies, I realized that we speak an orphan tongue and that racially, culturally, and linguistically “somos huérfanos”...we are the linguistic aberration of our native language (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80) because the education subtracted our identity. By reflecting on the educational injustices that immigrant students of/from the borderlands live, me da coraje y me entra esa “rebeldía que tenemos en la sangre nosotros los mexicanos” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). Todo en mi es conflicto (Everything on me is a conflict), and I feel how I am en medio de un remolino... me siento en el ojo del huracán when I find out that the immigrant teachers and students of/from the borderlands live multiple forms of oppression. Whenever I remember and analyze my lived experiences, I get angry and feel pain...I unveil educational injustices that create new narratives. My students struggle to speak, write, and read in my Spanish class. They feel embarrassed because they do not know their native language. They want to learn/recover their lost native language to communicate con los abuelos (grandparents). They feel frustrated because they do not comprehend Spanish.

After every day of classes, I see the need to design a new curriculum that will sustain the student's culture and language. My lived experiences in education need to be read and heard. I have the imperative need to inform other educators of/from the borderlands about the "Linguistic Terrorism" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80) that we involuntarily committed to meet the state requirements. It is time to use autohistorias to find commonalities between educators of/from the

borderland. Anzaldúa said that immigrant educators need to "rework [their]stories; they invented new notions of [themselves] and reality-increasingly multidimensional versions where body, mind, and spirit interpenetrate in more complex ways" (p. 562).

### **The Coatlicue State ... Desconocimiento and the Cost of Knowing**

In this stage, one resist with the new knowledge and we struggle. One places our two cultures side by side for a contrasting effect. In this stage, immigrants have a visual juxtaposition between both cultures; they can see the contrast. The immigrants learn about their identity and want to reconnect with their roots. In this stage, my students and I feel “separated from [our] tribe”, and we are “en el exilio en un destierro, forced to confront your own desconocimiento” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 129). My students see me as the Coatlicue and let me teach them about their culture, heritage, and language. They are reconnecting with their roots. In my class, the students learn about their culture and language. When my students learned about the Aztecs, the food, la Llorona story or Bailando con un Fantasma (They read the stories in English and Spanish) and all the traditional games of México, they reconnected with their families. They remembered the Sundays they played with their Guelas (grandmothers) Lotería. My students heard the stories from their grandmothers who speak a broken English and this second time they learned that this stories only pertain to the Rio Grande Valley. These stories are part of our culture and are passed from generation to generation.

### **The Call...el Compromise ... the Crossing and Conversion**

At this stage, I have the compromise to rewrite my autohistoria and share it with other educators. My compromise with educators and students of/from the borderlands is not an obligation; my compromise is to support them in reaching desirable standards set by the state.

This compromise is to create a union and agreement. This compromise is to find a way to meet others who are in the in-between via autohistorias. I want to create solidarity with autohistorias. I need to narrate my lived experiences as an educator and find other educators who want to be agents of change. I use autohistorias and my narratives to create critical dialogues where we can redesign the traditional curriculum into a culturally sustainable one. Through the readings in my classes and by reading the autohistorias of my classmates, I realized that we have to inform our students and colleagues of/from the borderland about our lived experiences so we can create consciousness. For example, when I wrote I live in nepantla, I live on the borderlands, my intention was and is to share part of my lived experiences to activate the minds of other educators of/from the borderlands and for them to join me in achieving a better educational future for immigrant students.

### **Putting Coyolxauhqui Together ... New Personal and Collective Stories**

At this stage, all my pieces are floating in nepantla. I will put all my pieces together when I create *conocimiento* with my autohistorias. "Coyolxauhqui represents the search for new metaphors to tell you what you need to know, how to connect and use the information gained, and, with intelligence, imagination, and grace, solve your problems and create intercultural communities" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 563). I will put myself together when other borderland educators and I work together to produce a change in education that may benefit our borderland students. !Entonces estaré completa!

In this stage, I read and rewrite my manuscripts. I am seeking to reorganize and put my pieces together. However, every time I learn about something new, my family history, the policies that affect education, specifically the ones that affect immigrant students, all my pieces

get scattered, and I land in nepantla one more time. I reflect on the experience that made me crash, then organize my ideas into new knowledge. I rewrite my self-history and will keep writing them until we, the borderland educators, unite, raise our voices, and challenge those with power in education. My pieces will be together when we, educators of/from the borderlands, have the power to dictate what to teach and what to learn in education. It is enough! Educators have sufficient capacity to govern our educational system; we are more than a bureaucratic system without a voice or vote.

### **The Blowup... a Clash of Realities**

In this stage, I expect to find other educators who disagree with me. In this stage, I am planning to create conflict. It seems that conflicts or blowups will continue if we do not find common ground where the dominant groups and minority groups know and value each other's realities. As an activist and borderland educator, I would like individuals from both sides, oppressor and oppressed, to "move from a militarized zone to a round table" and be "the other, the other is us". Educators of/from the borderlands need to be in "nos/otras position" and accept us and others to deconstruct the borderlands that divide us because this division causes us not to move forward in creating a more culturally sustainable curriculum, which may help educators of/from the borderlands to support the students in their learning. This separatism is causing more educational damage than good (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 63, 151).

### **Autohistoria: My Return to Nepantla**

This autohistoria aims to explore my lived experience critically and that of other educators of/from the borderlands to transform a curriculum designed from a White supremacist perspective toward a more sustainable curriculum that will support the teaching and learning of

immigrant teachers and students. According to Giroux (1992), "Border Pedagogy integrates processes of dialoguing, reflecting, posing problems, and position-taking as central knowledge production, understanding the ways in which borders have been used to exclude and silence" (Cati, 2013,p. 61).

In order to collect valid data, I will create critical dialogues with other educators who can pose the problems we are facing in our border pedagogies and create new forms of knowledge together. I will select the participants by having these critical dialogues with other educators. After transcribing and analyzing the participants' lived experiences in education, I will write our autohistorias, where our lived experiences are blended to provoke knowledge through the art of writing. Also, writing autohistorias helps heal some pains caused by the lived experiences as an immigrant student and teacher of the borderlands. I used Coyolxauhqui to explain the process of healing from traumatic events that fragment, dismember, or wound individuals, specifically immigrants. The concept of Coyolxauhqui is essential for healing, recovering identity, culture, and language, and transforming education.

I entered the stage of Coyolxauhqui, finally recovered all my scatter (desparramadas) parts, and I was about to put myself together. While reconstructing my whole self, I had conversations with my university students, my middle school students, and some of my colleagues. In these conversations, I found a commonality that all of us experienced. At a point in our lives, we became desculturados y deslenguados. After the conversations and reflecting on our pedagogical practices, I found that we, educators, contributed to our former students' deslenguamiento and desculturamiento and the impact of this mandated "English only" pedagogical practice caused.

Again, I was in the middle of reality and the utopic dreams of recovering language and culture and sustaining bilingual education. By listening to some educators and students and rewriting my autohistoria, I felt an explosion in my body, and all my pieces were scattered again, and I was dismembered. I am floating in limbo again, and I can see my dismembered body. I am confused; all my pieces landed in nepantla again, questioning the educational system that forced educators to continue teaching using an obsolete curriculum. I question you, my colleagues, and myself. I exhort you, educators of/from the borderlands, to become agents of change and challenge the systems of power that dictate to us what to teach and learn. Teachers, we are the ones who have the power to create a curriculum and to dictate what to teach and learn in our borderlands schools because we are the ones who have the experience in the Classroom. While I am rewriting my and other educators' autohistorias. The following question flutters through my head: How can I collaborate with other educators of/from the borderlands to create a new curriculum that will benefit all students? There is the imperative need to teach under a culturally sustainable curriculum that might create respectful citizens capable of functioning in our everyday changing and global society. A sustainable curriculum that helps immigrants to heal and recover all our scattered pieces.

I write my autohistoria because nepantleras reconstruct themselves, and they may heal "toward[s] la esperanza of upward flight [and] toward[s] achieving equilibrium" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 278). By writing and sharing my autohistoria, I call "the scattered pieces of [my] soul back to [my] body" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 155).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I focused on autobiographical traditions in the curriculum, where I discussed Pinar's methods of currere and Munro's power of life history. I also discussed auto-historias and the seven stages of conocimiento via Anzaldúa. I used Pinar's (1995) method of currere to study myself and my participants. The method of currere helps us to reflect on our past educational experiences as immigrant students and educators of/from the borderlands. I discussed Munro's life history in this chapter to create consciousness about the social inequalities and struggles that minority groups, specifically women, live in. The intention of using autohistorias and the seven states of knowledge also articulates and provides a lens on participants' experiences. This activation helps us remember forgotten parts of our lived experiences, which help us deconstruct and reconstruct ourselves over and over again.

### CHAPTER III

#### QUALITATIVE AND NARRATIVE RESEARCH, TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THROUGH AUTOHISTORIAS

I focused on the methodology chapter of my study. I used a qualitative approach, more specifically, autohistoria, as the primary source of inquiry. I opened this chapter with an introduction to qualitative research and its meanings. My qualitative research produced knowledge about educators' lived experiences and helps answer my questions: How can autohistorias inform the struggles of immigrant students in the Whitestream curriculum? How does my life in nepantla inform teaching and learning in Aztlán? My qualitative research focuses on examining narrative inquiry, the umbrella term for my more specific focus on autohistorias. In this chapter, I discussed qualitative research, narrative inquiry, and autohistorias' methodological details. Autohistorias are defined in Chapter I, explained in Chapter II, and in this Chapter, autohistorias are discussed below as research methodology. My focus on autohistorias' methodological details unfolds with the following four subsections: context of the study, participant selection, data gathering, and data analysis. This chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary of the research methods employed in my study.



## **Qualitative Research and Autohistorias**

As I propose here, autohistoria is grounded in qualitative research's epistemological assumptions and telos. Qualitative research is an approach that studies human lived experiences. Qualitative research can include the participants' lived experiences and the interpretation of the meaning of these stories from the participants' perspective within their own social context. My study is situated within qualitative research because it is based on immigrants' lived experiences in their lives and their professional teaching classrooms.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research produces knowledge about the world (p.2). "The province of qualitative research, accordingly, is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). In the words of Denzin & Lincoln (2011):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self (p.3).

My qualitative research seeks to empower marginalized or oppressed individuals to share their narratives so their voices can be heard. My qualitative research helped the researcher to interpret data and "to answer the 'So what?' question in terms of the implications of the findings" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p.567).

In qualitative research, "Data analysis and interpretation are critical steps in the research process that require the researcher both to know and to understand the data" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p.568). According to Mills and Gay (2019), "the qualitative researcher begins data analysis from the initial interaction with participants and continues that interaction and analysis through the entire study" (p.568). My qualitative research focuses on individual experiences and seeks to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences as represented in data I gathered from participants.

My qualitative research supports the following forms of narrativized curriculum studies: currere, life history, and autohistorias. My qualitative research questions seek to explore or describe phenomena, not provide a scientific explanation. It does not ask how one variable results in changes in another. My research questions for narrative help readers understand and interpret the experiences, understandings, and meanings that come from my participants' experiences. Qualitative research methods support my study because they provide an opportunity for voices to be heard and interpreted.

### **Narrative Research and Autohistorias**

Anzaldúa's concept of autohistorias serves as a decolonizing approach to research by challenging traditional Western autobiographical forms and valuing alternative ways of knowing. This methodology blends personal and cultural narratives, promotes healing and transformation, and explicitly connects to social justice work, thus centering marginalized voices and experiences often overlooked in dominant research paradigms. By embracing fluidity, complexity, and the disruption of cultural boundaries, autohistorias offer a powerful tool for

creating knowledge that reflects the multifaceted realities of borderland experiences, ultimately challenging the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives in academic discourse.

My study is situated within narrative research because it studies how different humans narrate the world around them. Autohistorias, as I propose in the following subsection below, is within the umbrella term of narrative because it allows people to tell their stories. My study is also situated within narrative research because it aims to explore and narrate educators' educational experiences.

Narrative inquirers strive to attend how a story is constructed, for whom and why, and the cultural discourses it draws upon. The term narrative carries many meanings and is used in various ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with the story (...). The narrative scholar pays analytic attention to how the facts got assembled that way. For whom was this story constructed, how was it made, and for what purpose? What cultural discourses does it draw on—take for granted? What does it accomplish? (Riessman & Speed in Trahar, 2009, p. 2).

The narrative researcher knows how the story is constructed and in what culture it is based. The researcher must also consider who and why this narrative investigation is carried out. The researcher must also know the purpose and what he or she wants to achieve in this investigation. The researcher must be meticulous about the facts assembled in the narrative or story. My study is situated in narrative research because autohistorias represent a type of narrative.

"In the last century, social scientists working in a number of disciplines decided that one way to understand human experience would be to document and study these stories. As a result, narrative inquiry has emerged as a form of research" (Murray, 2009, p. 46). By contrast, Clandinin and Rosiek (2019) stated that narrative inquiry begins with a pragmatic ontology that treats lived experience as both the beginning and ending points of inquiry (p. 246). A narrative is a way to create knowledge and change. Murray (2009) explains that in "the field of applied linguistics, researchers have used various genres, including case studies, life histories, learner autobiographies, diary studies, biographies, and memoirs" (p. 47)

Narrative research is fundamental in education and in studying teachers' lives because educators may "increase understanding of central issues related to teaching and learning through retelling teachers' stories" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 353). Mills and Gay (2019) explain that narrative research allows the researcher to share the storied lives of teachers to provide insights and understandings about challenging educational issues as well as to enrich the lives of those teachers" and "can contribute to our understanding of the complex world of the classroom and the nuances of the educational enterprise that exist between teachers and students" (p. 353).

Narrative research "assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 153). Narrative research explores "a story told by the participant" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 153). According to Marshalls, "narrative inquiry can be applied to any spoken or written account-for example, to an in-depth interview" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 153). "Narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5).

"Narrative configuration refers to the process by which happenings are drawn together and integrated into a temporally organized whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). "Narrative research is dedicated to celebrating voices of the silenced. However, more than that, it celebrates biography as an authentic reflection of the human spirit, a mirror to reflect visions of our other selves" (Dhunpath, 2000, p. 550). Even though "narrative is a relative newcomer to the social sciences and applied fields, it has a long tradition in the humanities because of its power to elicit voice" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 153).

Narrative inquiry fits my research because autohistorias are narratives about the lived experiences of immigrant educators of/from the borderlands. Narrative inquiry "values the signs, the symbols, and the expressions of feelings in language and other symbols systems, validating how the narrator constructs meaning" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 153). The narrative is an umbrella term that includes autohistorias and other types of narrative. In my study, autohistorias allow individuals to provide their lived experiences in a written narrative along with interviews and focus groups that support my inquiry into participants' qualitative experiences.

### **Context of the Study**

As discussed in Chapter I, I am from the Rio Grande Valley, and so are my participants in this study. Here, I will keep the context short since this is already historicized and discussed in Chapter I. The Valley is one of the wealthiest places in the country in history and tradition. The Rio Grande Valley, commonly known as the Valley or RGV, is a region spanning the border of Texas and México located near its mouth in a floodplain of the Rio Grande. The region includes the southernmost tip of South Texas and a portion of northern Tamaulipas, México. In the Valley, people translanguage. The culture in the RGV is a mix of American and Mexican

cultures; most of the population is Mexican or Mexican American. This study takes place in the Rio Grande Valley, and the participants are from the RGV area.

## **Participants**

I selected my participants using a purposive sample that selects for participants' lived experiences. My participants' autohistorias are convenient for this study because they "have stories to tell about their life experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 157). Below, I will discuss the selection criteria.

My participants are (1) from the RGV, (2) who share in the immigrant experience, (3) who are Chicanas, and (4) who are educators.

1. From the RGV: My participants are educators from the Rio Grande Valley who are closely related to the borderlands as students and teachers. The RGV is a place where people have two cultures and remain linked by a shared history. The purpose of studying immigrant educators of/from the RGV is because we all have lived experiences that, at some point, cross and connect us, producing countless coincidences that lead to determining that we have lived a shared history and language at the borderlands.
2. Immigrant experience: My participants are immigrants. They are the first generation in the United States, or they are descendants of immigrants and were born in this country. These educators received education in American public schools of the borderlands. The participants also had or had experience teaching in public schools situated in the borderlands' marginalized areas.
3. Chicana: The participants identify themselves as Chicana. Chicanas identify as female, and they share Mexican heritage and different levels of Spanish. The term Chicana

suggests degrees of pride for Mexican culture, heritage, and background. The term Chicana also signifies working-class heritage and family connections; many times, families are connected to agricultural work.

4. Educators: The participants are educators with five or more years of experience in education. Having five or more years of experience suggests that they have staying power in the teaching profession and have developed professional experiences working with students in the RGV.

This study presents the autohistorias of four remarkable Chicana educators—Elsa, Denisse, Patricia, and Graciela—whose unique experiences and insights illuminate the complex web of challenges faced by Chicana immigrants in education and the workforce, revealing how systemic discrimination and cultural disconnection profoundly impact their identities, professional lives, and the broader landscape of borderlands education. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. These pseudonyms were chosen to honor individuals who have made significant positive impacts in my life.

Educational inequalities rooted in systemic racism and discrimination have led to a devastating loss of connection with their native language and cultural practices, often extending across generations. This cultural disconnection is further exacerbated by assimilation pressures and limited opportunities to engage with their heritage, leaving many Chicanas feeling alienated from their own cultural roots. In the workplace, they frequently encounter discrimination based on their accent and skin color, resulting in reduced job opportunities, lower wages, and stunted career advancement. Perhaps most insidiously, their intellectual capabilities are often doubted, undermining their confidence and professional growth. These challenges extend beyond the

professional sphere, creating identity conflicts as Chicanas navigate between Mexican and American cultures, often feeling like they don't fully belong to either. The language discrimination they face not only affects their career prospects but also creates painful communication barriers within their families and communities, further isolating them from their cultural heritage and support systems. Through their autohistorias, we gain a nuanced understanding of the intersection between personal experience and educational practice in the borderlands context. In the following section, I will present detailed information about each educator's professional background, including their years of teaching experience, the school districts where they have worked, and the various teaching positions they have held.

Elsa, a seasoned educator with twenty-five years of experience in the field, currently serves in dual roles, demonstrating her commitment to education at multiple levels. She is a Spanish Teacher at Los Rosales School District, teaching at the middle school level and contributing to the linguistic and cultural education of young learners. Additionally, she works as an part-time professor in the Teaching and Learning Department at a large Hispanic Serving Institution in the region (Participant Elsa, Semi-structured interview, 2024). Elsa's love and passion for education have driven her to extend her own learning to better serve immigrant students. She ardently advocates for a culturally sustainable curriculum and bilingual education, recognizing their crucial role in fostering inclusive and effective learning environments for diverse student populations.

Denisse, an experienced educator with over twenty-four years of teaching experience, has primarily focused on secondary and post-secondary education, with extensive experience in both two-year and four-year institutions of higher learning. Her expertise lies in English and education,



subjects she has taught for more than two decades. Currently residing in North, Texas, she continues to contribute to the field of education through her diverse teaching roles across various academic levels. Notably, Denisse has taken a pioneering step by creating Latinx classes specifically designed to serve immigrant students, with the primary goal of helping these young learners discover and embrace their identities. This innovative approach not only demonstrates Denisse's commitment to inclusive education but also highlights her dedication to empowering students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring they have the tools and support needed to thrive in both academic and personal spheres (Participant Denisse, Semi-structured interview, 2024).

Patricia, a dedicated science teacher, currently works at the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) in Las Flores, Texas. Her seven-year career in education includes experience at Roberta ISD and two years teaching bilingual elementary and science at a Charter School. Now in her fourth year as a teacher of record in the Rio Grande Valley, Patricia brings a diverse background to her current role, demonstrating her commitment to education across various settings and student populations. Patricia's unique blend of experiences in traditional public schools, charter schools, and alternative education programs positions her as a versatile educator capable of adapting to the diverse needs of students in challenging educational environments, while passionately advocating for bilingual education and culturally relevant curriculum to better serve her immigrant students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Participant Patricia, Semi-structured interview, 2024).

Graciela, a dedicated educator with twelve years of experience, has been teaching fourth grade for the past eight years in a self-contained classroom. Her teaching career also includes experience in second and third grades, showcasing her versatility and deep understanding of

elementary education. Although not a bilingual teacher, Graciela has consistently demonstrated her commitment to educating young minds in her South Texas hometown, where she was born and raised. Her long-standing connection to the Rio Grande Valley and her extensive experience in the local education system uniquely position her to understand and meet the needs of students in this community. (Participant Graciela, Semi-structured interview, 2024).

Basing ourselves a bit on the history of the border where Mexico once was and then the borderlands broke us, the families were divided; some families stayed on the other side while the others remained on the border of the American side. My participants are from the RGV, of Mexican descent, identify as Chicanas, and have taught in public schools for five or more years.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data using four data sources. The first set of data was collected from my participants' autohistorias. The second data set was collected from semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to provide additional narratives and theorize about their written autohistorias. The focus group provided the third set of data. The participants and I discussed and analyzed our autohistorias in these group meetings, and participants collaborated with me in analyzing emergent patterns of lived experience. The fourth data set is the researcher's journal. Below, each data source is described. The purpose of this multi-faceted data collection approach is to capture a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Chicana educators' experiences of racism and discrimination through their autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, collaborative focus group discussions, and the researcher's reflective journal. This method allowed for a rich, participant-driven analysis of the complex challenges and triumphs faced by these educators in the borderlands educational context.

## **Autohistorias**

The participants' autohistorias (Anzaldúa, 2015) provided the first set of data collected. Coming from their academic or other personal writing, I used autohistoria as a qualitative research method because it allowed my participants to select writings representing their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and teaching experiences. In Chapter II, I already discussed autohistorias more in-depth.

Autohistoria as a data source provides self-theorizing that aims to eliminate borders, create change, and foster empathy when the participants tell stories about their lives and their professional experiences. Through autohistoria, other teachers and I recreated our lived experiences and professional stories in a thoughtful way that can help the readers reflect on their own lived experiences in education. Even though autohistorias provided me with vital information to help me answer my research questions, the participants and I followed up and collaborated on semi-structured interviews about participants' autohistorias, strengthening the narratives from the initial autohistorias.

## **Semi-structured Interviews**

I used semi-structured interviews as the second set of data collection because they helped the participants expand and explain more about their written autohistorias. The semi-structured interviews "take place on the spot, as casual conversations are entered into with individuals and/or small groups: It is spontaneous and serendipitous" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 144). The semi-structured interviews allow my participant to talk freely about their educational struggles and be comfortable sharing these experiences in a place where they would not be judged. The semi-structured interviews provided me with information about the participants' lived

experiences as immigrant students and teachers of the borderlands. Semi-structured interviews are among the most effective instruments for collecting data because they can expand the data collected from the participants' autohistorias.

In the semi-structured interviews, the participants, borderland educators, were engaged in interviews. Semi-structured interviews, I asked the participants open-ended questions to my participants about their written reflections and their teaching experiences related to their autohistorias.

In the semi-structured interviews, I recorded my participants, and later, I used a transcription service to transcribe the interviews verbatim. Recording and obtaining accurate transcriptions avoid inaccuracies and data loss. The semi-structured interviews are an individual's perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and professional lives (Saldana, 2011, p. 31-32).

### **Focus Group Meeting**

I used Focus group meetings because "Placing multiple stories in dialogue with each other can disrupt the isolation of silenced individual experiences, creating moments of shared desahogo working alongside undocumented, first-generation immigrants, and other marginalized youth" (Calderon-Berumen & Espinosa-Dulanto, 2020, p. 235). The focus group brought my participants together to discuss their stories or autohistorias and explore the themes that emerged in the autohistorias and the semi-structured interviews. The advantage of using the focus group meetings is that I gained more profound and more meaningful insight into my participants' autohistorias. Focus groups allowed me to explore emergent themes and analyze them with participants. I recorded and transcribed the group focus meetings. I integrated focus group

meetings as another data collection method because they provide a layer of reflexivity regarding the previous semi-structured interviews.

### **Researcher Journal**

I wrote a journal during my research. The purpose of using a journal is to reflect on the collected data. In the reflective journals, I recorded the participants' and my own experiences, thoughts, opinions, and feelings and make them an acknowledged part of the data analysis and interpretation processes. The journal helped me to organize my thoughts and to practice making the data intelligible. I added my thoughts and reflections on participants' data and additional personal experiences related to the data gathered. The journal provided me with a safe space to write about and make sense of data. The journal also allowed me to capture additional memories, interactions, and conversations with the participants. The journal helped me contextualize their personal and professional autohistorias.

The four core approaches to data collection in my qualitative research are autohistoria, semi-structured interviews, focus group, and researcher journal which provided me with rich, qualitative, and narrative data that help me answer my questions. The use of autohistorias moved from written academic or personal reflections to socializing the autohistorias via semi-structured interviews based on the participants writing and expanded to collective theorizing in the focus groups. The researcher notebook supplemented the other three data sources with my own process-oriented reflections.

### **All Four Data Sources**

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*Table 1: Overview of Autohistoria process*

<b>Autohistorias</b>	<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	<b>Focus Group Meeting</b>
I am documenting and theorizing the participants' writing reflections about lived experiences	The participants expand upon and refine the themes from the autohistorias	The focus group meeting expands on and refines the themes from the autohistorias and the semi structured interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

Autohistorias represent a collective production of knowledge, a process that unfolded in multiple stages throughout this study. The initial phase began in my dissertation Chair's class, where effective pedagogical practices were employed. The chair carefully selected culturally relevant books and articles, encouraging students to connect the readings with their personal narratives. A key requirement of these classes was for students to engage with their classmates' narratives, fostering a collaborative learning environment where everyone's voice was heard and valued.

The second phase of collective knowledge production drew from a group of scholars who identified emblematic books of the Rio Grande Valley's resistant traditions. These scholars, known for their significant contributions to our understanding of the region's cultural and literary

heritage, identified works by Américo Paredes, Rolando Hinojosa, and Gloria Anzaldúa as crucial resources for developing critical curricular-pedagogical praxis in our bioregion (Garza et al.).

The analysis continued with the collection of participants' autohistorias, which were examined for emergent themes. Individual interviews were then conducted with each participant, focusing on the themes identified in their autohistorias. These interviews underwent further thematic analysis, informing the development of focus group questions based on the recurring themes.

Overall, this multi-layered approach to the collective production of knowledge enriched the research process by honoring the diverse voices and experiences within our community. The richness and depth of our research were a direct result of the varied perspectives and unique stories that each participant brought to the table.

Autohistoria is a new methodology in qualitative research situated within the narrative research umbrella. In approaching autohistorias, I used analyses similar to life history method (Jupp, 2013) to develop and synthesize emergent themes from the four data sources. The discursive nonlinear analysis I used were 1) identifying emergent patterns in autohistorias, interviews, and focus groups, 2) contextualizing patterns via Anzaldúa's and other framework concepts covered in Chapter II, and 3) working reflexively through my positionality as an educator of immigrant students with my participants.

### **Contextualizing Patterns**

Contextualizing patterns via Anzaldúa and other literature in Chapter II yet another component of data analysis. Critical literature on currere, life history, the history of colonization,

history of the colonization of Nuevo Leon, and history of colonization in the borderlands provides historical and social boundedness that provides a historical and social delimitation that helps us to question, analyze, explore, and elaborate the patterns that we find in the data. Also, the seven steps of *conocimiento* will provide significant points in the participants' autohistorias which help to explore in-depth the meanings educators experience and feeling towards the lived educational inequalities.

### **Working Reflexively Through Positionality**

Working reflexively through my positionality provides the third set of data analysis. About the autohistorias, interviews, focus groups, journals, and reflections, my positionality provides me with sympathetic conversations with educators with similar personal and professional lived experiences. My positionality is a starting point for the conversations about my auto-historia, and the teachers' autohistoria research presumes that the data analysis is embedded at all levels with data generation, interviews, identifying patterns analysis of history, critical literature, and the seven stages of *conocimiento*. Considering my positionality, my autohistorias underlies data analysis, interpretation, and findings. Identifying emergent patterns, contextualizing patterns, and working reflexively through my positionality are components of the data analysis and will interact with each other to respond to the other two.

### **Summary**

This section is about the methodology used for this study. I used autohistoria as the primary source of inquiry in this qualitative approach. I will open this chapter with an introduction to qualitative research and its meaning. My Qualitative research attempts to answer the following questions: How can autohistorias inform the struggles of immigrant students in the



Whitestream curriculum? How does my life in nepantla inform teaching and learning in Aztlán?

My qualitative research examines narrative inquiry, the umbrella term for my focus on auto-historias. In this chapter, I discussed qualitative research, narrative inquiry, and autohistorias' methodological details. Autohistorias are narratives that help the readers, educators, and other stakeholders understand the educational struggles immigrant educators from the borderlands live in education. My focus on autohistorias' methodological details unfolds with the following four subsections: study context, participant selection, data gathering, and data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Overall, five main findings emerged in the study. Narratives of racism and discrimination in classrooms refers to lived experiences of institutional racism experienced in classrooms, from teachers, or from other students. School subtraction of culture and language refers to educational practices and policies that actively discourage, suppress or eliminate the cultural and linguistic diversity that students bring with them. Racism and discrimination in the workplace refer to the prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. Teaching to recover language, culture, and place is an educational approach that aims to revitalize and preserve indigenous or minority languages, cultural practices, and the connection to traditional lands. Theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar refers to the importance of developing curriculum from the perspective of the local culture and place. These comprehensive emergent themes—ranging from classroom racism and cultural suppression to workplace discrimination and culturally responsive teaching—provide a powerful lens for understanding and addressing the complex challenges faced by Chicana educators, ultimately illuminating pathways toward more equitable and culturally affirming educational practices in borderland contexts. This methodological approach will yield a deep, multidimensional exploration of the participants' lived experiences, with emergent themes and patterns visually represented in a comprehensive table for enhanced clarity and analysis.

Table 2: Sketch of Emergent Themes

Theme	Definition of theme	Emblematic data for the theme
<b>Narratives of Racism and Discrimination in the Classroom</b>	Refers to lived experiences of discrimination and racism in the classroom narrated by a person of color.	History class made me feel embarrassed of myself and my culture. I use Anzaldúa's quote "culturally crucified" because it is the way I felt when I could not recognize myself in the history books (Autohistoria, participant Elsa, 2024, p. 6).
<b>School and Home Subtraction of Culture and Language</b>	Refers to educational and home practices that actively discourage, suppress, or eliminate the cultural and linguistic diversity that students bring with them	They can understand Spanish but communicate with a broken Spanish or Spanglish. In some places, it is called español pocho. In the school, they were completely immersed in the English language and it hinders the professional goals of my friends (Interview, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 7).
<b>Narratives of Racism and Discrimination Follow in the Workplace</b>	Refers to the prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.	This same colleague also views a doctoral program for an Ed. D. as not a real degree. Finally, I was crippled by the never-ending negative circle that fixates only on low student achievement and lack of "on-level" skills (Autohistoria, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 2).
<b>Teaching to Recover Language, Culture, and Place</b>	This term refers to an educational approach that aims to revitalize and preserve indigenous or minority languages, cultural practices, and connections to the Rio Grande Valley.	The students were very proficient in Spanish, and it was easy to communicate with them and have meaningful pláticas about their culture, identity, and the importance of education. They loved the Spanish class because they did projects about their culture, brought food to the class, and did presentations (Auto- historia, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 10).
<b>Theorizing Currículo Desde la Cultura, Desde el Lugar</b>	The theory of using culture and place as teaching and learning tools to transform curriculum.	Critical-place-based learning can enhance the opportunities for students regarding ecology, sociology, and social justice within their community. Conclusively, we need to ensure that we are more like Ms. Martinez and less like Mrs. Blankenship in terms of the pedagogies that we practice within our classrooms (Autohistoria, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 4).

### Narratives of Racism and Discrimination in the Classroom

This section explores the first finding, defined in the table above, which highlights racism and discrimination in classroom. The participants' autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups consistently provided evidence of racism and discrimination in the classroom,

demonstrating how the participants theorized their lived experiences of racism and discrimination through their autohistorias.

### **Autohistorias**

In narratives of racism and discrimination in the classroom, the participants' autohistorias revealed systematic discrimination within the educational system. My lived experience as an immigrant student is similar to the immigrant students' experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Education has stayed the same since 1985. My family and I settled in the Rio Grande Valley area, Specifically in Brownsville, Texas. I received English as a Second Language Education, where my teacher did not speak my native language. I did not identify with any of the classes. History class made me feel embarrassed of myself and my culture. I use Anzaldúa's quote "culturally crucified" because it is the way I felt when I could not recognize myself in the history books (autohistoria, participant Elsa, 2024, p. 6).

In narratives of racism and discrimination in the classroom, Elsa shared her experience as an immigrant student in Brownsville, Texas, in 1985 reflects the ongoing challenges immigrant students face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as the lack of representation and recognition of diverse cultures in the curriculum. This absence can be viewed as a form of racism and discrimination that devalues and erases immigrant students' experiences and identities, highlighting how the education system often fails to acknowledge and include their diverse cultural backgrounds.

The second example also shows how the educational system continues perpetuating racial and socio-economic inequalities by denying immigrant students access to higher education.

In the 1980s, the schools' expectation for immigrants was to finish and graduate from high school and get a job. Immigrant students were

prepared for technical careers or labor jobs, and white or wealthy students were placed in advanced classes. They had the opportunity to pursue a career in prestigious universities. The immigrant students wanted to pursue a career but were often discouraged by the counselors. Most of the time, immigrant students were dehumanized and oppressed (Autohistoria, participant, Elsa, 2024, p. 6).

Elsa's autohistoria exemplified the racism and discrimination present in classroom narratives based on students' backgrounds, although she found advantages in the U.S. educational system compared to Mexico. Elsa continues:

The teachers did not provide academic support to immigrant students and did not challenge their maximum potential because they will go back to Mexico. Sometimes, teachers said, "This student will return to Mexico sooner or later. Why do I worry about this student?". I knew that the student was undocumented, and even though I felt bad for the student, I could not defend him or challenge my teacher. Immigrant students felt the tension that existed between them and their teachers. After my reflections, I learned that a diminished comment hurt and continues hurting me. Immigrant students felt the tension that existed between them and their teachers.

Elsa's autohistoria highlighted the discrimination and lack of support faced by immigrant students in the U.S. educational system.

The main example of racism and discrimination shared by the participant was that teachers often assumed immigrant students would return to Mexico, leading to lower expectations and a lack of investment in their academic success.

The difference educators made between the new immigrants and the older American generations was remarkable. The white students were placed in advanced classes and took field trips to universities in other cities. They were the ones who got accepted into prestigious universities around the country. My ESL classmates and I were set for failure because we had a teacher who could not speak our native language and only taught us English without comparing our native grammar. The administrators wanted us to be immersed in the language immediately (Autohistoria participant Elsa, 2024, p. 7).

Via Freire's (2018) in dehumanization, the bilingual programs existed for the bureaucratic process that would generate funds. The participants suggested that the racism and discrimination unconscious or conscious caused low expectations in the immigrant students who were not considered for higher education. The participants also suggested that immigrant students did not receive appropriate education that support their learning.

Patricia's autohistoria revealed instances of racism and discrimination in the classroom, such as the portrayal of General Santa Ana as a villain in Texas history books, which made her feel powerless, and the indoctrination and forced learning of the dominant language, perpetuating racial attacks against immigrant students.

Having learned about the implications of the Mexican-American War from my ancestral point of view, I knew that Mexico did not perpetuate the war as much as General Santa Ana was portrayed as a villain in most Texas history books. Knowing that the US took possession of our ancestral lands by force in the interests of a then minority, white community while perpetuating racial attacks against the native peoples and invading its neighboring country to stop aid and defense from coming cultivated a sense of powerlessness within me as I became indoctrinated to adopt a new language, a new identity, and to view the historical context with an imposed American, patriotic stance (Autohistoria, participant Patricia, 2024, p. 4).

Patricia suggested that the racism and discrimination that she experienced in the classroom made her feel powerless while she became indoctrinated and forced to learn the dominant language. In her autohistorias, she also suggested that not being represented in the history books is a perpetuation of racial attacks against immigrant students. The autohistorias documented the evidence of racism and discrimination in the classroom; furthermore, they expanded their experiences in the semi-structured interviews.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews documented and built on narrative of racism and discrimination the classroom. In the semi-structured interviews, Denisse describes how her mother experienced racism and discrimination in the classroom when she was growing up in

South Texas. She was physically punished (paddled) in class for speaking Spanish. According to Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), the physical discrimination existed in the educational setting. She remembers to be caught speaking Spanish at recess-that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler (p. 75)

My mom lived experience of discrimination and racism was traumatic for her. She was paddled in class for speaking Spanish. Because of my mom's experience in education, she quit school (Interview, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 3).

The participants provided evidence of the racism and discrimination faced by immigrant students who speak languages other than English in the classroom, highlighting the traumatic experiences that can have long-lasting impacts on individuals and their families. Graciela continues:

Graciela's lived experience in education made her doubt her academic skills, leading her to consider getting a GED and finding a job instead of pursuing further education.

I was thinking about whether school was really for me, especially in the beginning when I could not understand English. I was not academically performing the way I was expected; I did not understand things. In the beginning, I questioned myself about whether I even had the possibility of graduating. Is that possible? Is that going to be my reality? Alternatively, do I get a GED? or stopped going high schools? I did not know where I would work, just any



work. But those are some of the things that really affected me  
(Interview, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 8).

The section on narratives of racism and discrimination in classroom effectively illustrates how the lack of academic support for immigrant students causes them to doubt their potential to graduate, leading them to consider alternatives such as obtaining a GED or entering the workforce instead. In the semi-structured interviews, the participants provided solid evidence of racism and discrimination. In the focus group the participants had critical pláticas where they developed more memories of racism and discrimination in the classroom.

### **Focus Group**

In the Focus groups meetings, the participants continued to document and build on stories of racism and discrimination in the classroom.

I remember that undocumented students were mistreated. Back then, in the 1980s, when students were undocumented, they received an ID numbers. With this ID, we could easily identify an undocumented student (Focus Group, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 1).

This example of racism and discrimination in the school system involved IDs that were specifically designed for undocumented students. These IDs were used to degrade and offend undocumented immigrants. During the focus group discussions, the participants revealed and documented the challenges they faced in education and the classroom, sharing narratives of racism and discrimination.

Sometimes, other immigrant students who were legal in the country called them “wet backs” or “mojados”. The expectations for these

students were different, and the teachers knew that Mexican parents would not complain. After all the discrimination that these groups of students experienced, the identification of student numbers has changed for all the students (Focus Group, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 1).

The reflections narrated by Elsa are clear examples of racism and discrimination based on immigration status that occurred within the school setting and the racism and discrimination continued in the classroom. This collaborative exploration of experiences of discrimination enabled both the participants and myself to reshape our identities, echoing Anzaldúa's (2015) theory of identity formation through collective reflection and action.

### **School and Home Subtraction of Culture and Language**

Finding two, as defined in the table above, focuses on the subtraction of participants' culture and languages in both school and home environments. Evidence of this subtraction is present across all data sources, including participants' autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These sources collectively demonstrate how participants theorize their autohistorias, with a particular emphasis on experiences of racism and discrimination in the classroom. Each data source offers clear examples of both school and home subtraction.

#### **Autohistorias**

Graciela's autohistorias revealed clear instances of the school's subtraction of culture and language experienced by the participants in educational settings.

I delve into my experiences as a Mexican-American woman wrapped in the American world. I mainly explain it as a murky depiction of

how the “Americanized” culture has consumed some of my roots. Clear but not clear is a perfect way to put it. Numerous manifestations have played an essential role in genuinely discovering who I am (Autohistoria, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 1).

Graciela's experiences portrayed how the "Americanized" culture has consumed some of her roots, indicating a subtraction of her Mexican culture in the classroom setting.

I found highlights of how the educational system plays a significant role in the school subtraction of culture and language for immigrant students. Graciela continues:

Thinking back on those particular memories, I realize they were the ones that started my journey of acculturation because they essentially started shaping my cultural identity. As a migrant, a Mexican-American migrant, I always felt a constant connection and disconnection to the dynamics of being part of American culture (Autohistoria, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 3).

The subtraction of culture and language is a complex issue rooted in the experiences of immigrants in the educational setting. American education perpetuates colonialism by subtracting the language and culture of the immigrant students.

The cultural and language subtraction of the school also persisted in the home as well, according to participants’ autohistorias. In her auto historia, Denisse shared the traumatic experiences of that her mother faced in the classroom, which led her mother to Americanize her children and make English their primary language. This decision, influenced by her mother's

experiences, resulted in the eradication of Denisse's native language, highlighting the long history of oppression and discrimination against Mexicans. Denisse explains:

I lost it [Spanish] to my mom's choices and parenting. So, my mom grew up in South Texas. ... She was paddled for speaking Spanish in class. Because of my mom's educational experience, she quit school. I know it was traumatic enough that when she had children, she vowed to keep her children from the same pain, the same struggle, and the discrimination of being Tejano ... I now know she was a casualty of the continued historical colonization of Mexicans.

Denisse's narrative about her mother's lived experience revealed that family can also subtract language and culture due to the constant racism and discrimination they experienced in education. As Anzaldúa (1987) stated, "Even our own people, other Spanish speakers, nos quieren poner candados en la boca" (p. 54) to avoid us speaking our native language. I do not blame them because they are the product of the educational system. Denisse's return to her mother's trauma echoes currere in which the self is ruptured in reconstructed.

The "Do not speak Spanish" requirement compelled Mexican-Americans to raise their children as English speakers to avoid discrimination. Denisse continues:

My mother did accomplish saving us from an "exterior" struggle. ... Guajardo (2018) confirms "the impact the 'don't speak Spanish'" experience had on Mexican Americans who suffered from those practices in previous generations. Many of them made a deliberate

decision to raise children as English-speakers. (p. 12). (Autohistoria, participant Denisse, 2024, p. 3).

Overall, in school and home subtraction of culture and language, the autohistorias revealed experiences of cultural and linguistic subtraction in both school and home. Cultural and linguistic subtractions seemingly began in the school overlapped with cultural and linguistic subtractions that participants' families imposed on themselves.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, semi-structured interviews provided additional theorizing and documenting to autohistorias on cultural and language subtraction. Elsa's semi-structured interview revealed an instance of school culture and language subtraction, where her friends who lacked exposure to academic Spanish faced consequences such as failing language proficiency tests or being unable to obtain bilingual certifications, thus hindering their career opportunities as bilingual teachers. This scarcity of bilingual teachers, in turn, affects the quality of education for the growing number of immigrant students, exemplifying the devastating impact of discrimination and racism on the educational community. Elsa continues:

Other experiences I had about losing culture, language, and identity are throughout my friends who were not exposed to Spanish and did not learn the academic language. They can understand Spanish but communicate with a broken Spanish or Spanglish. In some places, it is called español pocho. In the school, they were completely immersed in the English language, and it hinders the professional

goals of my friends. For example, due to school culture and language subtraction, they could not pass the Texas Oral Proficiency Test (TOPT), Spanish Certification, and the bilingual certification. Therefore, the districts are suffering the consequences. There is a high need for highly qualified bilingual teachers to provide the students with academic support in their native language. The insufficient number of bilingual teachers hinders a well-rounded education that will support the students in excelling in real-life scenarios. The number of immigrants students is increasing, and there is an imperative need to provide students with bilingual education (Interview, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 7).

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, the data revealed that the native language of immigrant students was not supported in education, leading to a loss of their language as they spoke more English than Spanish. This in turn led to educational struggles and set the students for failure in the bilingual education program. The data also indicates that the lack of bilingual education or support for their cultural and linguistic background for immigrants creates *deslenguadas(os)* in the words of Gloria Anzaldua (1985).

In the paragraph below, through Graciela's interview, I provided more evidence about the subtraction of her culture and language in the school. Graciela explains:

I know I'm Mexican, but when I was put into school in first grade, I was already done talking Spanish. I speak more English now than I did speak Spanish. I spoke very fluent Spanish when I was young.

All my “*guelas*” would speak to us in Spanish, and I understood it, but I could not speak it as fluently and accurately as my fellow Mexicans or my family. My schooling here at the Valley is the one that changed me because we always lived here. My schooling was all English. It was not part of a dual program. I was just in a monolingual classroom. That is where I stopped hearing Spanish as much. Yes, I would hear it at home, and I still hear it at home, but it is more English that I like to communicate with. So, all my schooling was in English (Interviews, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 1).

Anzaldúa (1987) emphasizes that immigrant students became *deslenguados y desculturados* because they lived a systematic subtraction of language and culture through the American public education system.

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, Elsa’s interview further documented and theorized language and cultural subtraction in participants autohistorias. Elsa explicitly theorizes the explicit connection between school and home:

The system made their parents embarrassed about speaking Spanish and their culture. Therefore, their parents decided not to teach their children their native language. Their parents taught the English language because it is the language of power. When the students entered public education, they were taught in the language of power, deleting their language and culture. Hearing my students say, “I am

a no-sabo kid is sad." "My parents did not let me learn Spanish, and we started school with regular English classes". It is sad to see them struggling to learn their native language (Interviews, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 7).

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, I found that immigrants consciously chose not to teach their native language to their children so that they could protect their children from similar experiences of racism and discrimination. They prioritized teaching their children English, the language of power so they could succeed in the education system.

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, the participants documented in autohistorias and interviews stories where their language and culture were subtracted due to the lived experiences of racism and discrimination in the educational system or family setting further more they shared more examples of their lived experiences in the focus group.

### **Focus Group**

Conversations in the focus group further documented and theorized autohistorias culture and language subtraction. In the example below, Graciela explained that the school system subtracted her native language, effectively stripping students of their culture and identity.

I know my story is similar to yours, Denisse. I speak Spanish, but I do not say it as if it were my first language. I will backtrack. So, once I hit actual public schooling, I was stripped away from my Spanish. It could be discrimination. I do not know. I was small. Like, what did I know about that? Right? So, I leaned more toward English, probably because my siblings and I were younger than my



other siblings. My older siblings are much more fluent in Spanish.

Then, it could be discrimination. It had to have been part of the schooling system (Focus Group, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 2).

These discriminatory practices of the school system are described by Valenzuela (2005) as subtracting schooling because the curriculum functions to subtract students' language and culture (p. 336).

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, Elsa shared how the educational system's pressure to learn English and assimilate led to feelings of shame and loss of identity among immigrant students, who believed abandoning their culture and language was necessary for success in the United States, leaving them grieving and feeling incomplete.

In my case, I wanted to learn English fast when I arrived in this country. I felt the pressure of not being an American. I tried to eradicate my identity because I felt embarrassed about my culture. There may have been something in the educational environment that made me feel ashamed of my race. Even though I am blonde with green eyes, I could not blend with my white classmates. They had their own group. It was very marked the differences. You can see that the immigrants who have been here for more than one generation have their own group, the cheerleaders and football players have their own group, and you can see the English learners' students in their own little group, so because of that I wanted to learn English quickly and adapt to this culture. I

assimilated myself into this culture because I did not want to be discriminated. I assimilated and abandoned my Identity, culture, and language in a liminal space where my pieces floated in limbo. I left them in pain. It was the only way to be successful in this country. I always grieved, leaving those pieces of me there, in limbo. I always felt like I needed to be complete. I thought of myself when I was teaching Spanish. I was able to be myself. So many times, I pretended that I did not speak Spanish. I only used my native language with my family, but I was the reinvented individual in other spaces. Even though I tried to camouflage myself to belong to American culture, I could not. In Mexico, soy extranjera; in the United States, I am an immigrant (Focus Group, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 10 & 11).

In school and home subtraction of culture and language, the focus group allowed Elsa to further document and theorize her autohistoria on cultural and language subtraction. She demonstrated how participants experienced relentless social pressure to disavow the language and culture. They learned that their language is wrong and this leave them feeling incomplete and grieving the loss of parts of their identity.

The focus group data provided an additional opportunity to participants to document and theorize the relationship between school and family in the subtractions of culture and language. Participants provided additional autohistorias about discrimination faced by immigrant parents that led to the subtraction of their language and culture. Denisse's story exemplifies this, as her

parents' decision not to enroll her in a bilingual program led to her loss of confidence in speaking Spanish and ultimately contributed to her language loss.

Well, for me, it was growing up with English as my first language.

My parents did not put me in a Bilingual program. If they had put me in one of those programs, I would have been more confident in my Spanish. My language loss was uprooted from there. My Mom made sure to put us in predominantly White environments outside the home (Focus Group, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 8).

In the data, I found that Denisse's mother chose non-Hispanic names for her and her sister, which can be seen as an attempt to Americanize their identities and distance them from their Hispanic roots.

The lived experience that Denisse shared in the focus group provides evidence of the subtraction of the culture and language of those who suffered from them and future generations. Moreover, it started with the language, like English will be your first language. It begins with my name. My name is Denisse, you know, and not a Hispanic name. Neither is my sister's. So, anything outside the home. She would make sure to put us in white spaces. The neighborhood we grew up in and our schools were all purposeful choices. So, the subtraction came from family, but not when we were at home (Focus Group, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 8).

The experiences of previous generations can lead to decisions that further contribute to the subtraction of culture and language in an attempt to protect future generations from similar struggles. In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa (1985), racially, culturally and linguistically somos huérfanos...because we speak a poor Spanish [or we do not speak it at all; we are afraid to be] subject to burla.

### **Narratives of Racism and Discrimination Follow into the Workplace**

The auto historias revealed that immigrant women learned early in life that their language is an obstacle to success, facing various forms of discrimination in job settings, such as salary inequality and the notion that they are incapable of performing well due to their accent or gender, compelling them to work harder to deserve a place in society.

#### **Autohistoria**

Denisse's autohistoria revealed academic discrimination, where her male colleague questioned the validity of her Ed.D. doctoral program and doubts her effectiveness as a Chicana teacher. She described being "crippled by the never-ending negative circle that fixates only on low student achievement and lack of 'on-level' skills," suggesting Chicana educators face added scrutiny and negative perceptions in the workplace.

This same colleague also views a doctoral program for an Ed. D. as not a real degree. When you are a scholar and you teach higher education, you are not a former high school teacher, correct? Finally, I was crippled by the never-ending negative circle that fixates only on low student achievement and lack of on-level skills (Autohistoria, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 2).

In summary, the autohistorias provided compelling first-hand accounts of the intersectional discrimination Chicanas experience in professional settings based on their language, ethnicity, skin color, and cultural background, revealing the assumptions made about their abilities, the added pressures to prove themselves, and the devaluation of their academic pursuits.

### **Semi-structures Interviews**

In the interviews, I had powerful pláticas with the participants who shared their experiences in the workplace and how these experiences profoundly shaped them by the intersecting forces of racism and discrimination.

It is hard to be part of a minority group. A white woman will get there faster than it will be for a Mexican woman, a black woman, a Chinese woman, or any minority group. We just have to try a little bit harder (Interviews, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 6).

Overall, I found in the semi-structured interviews that cultural expectations and gender create significant barriers and challenges that shape every facet of the Chicana's lives. The participants' narratives are powerful because they illuminate the ongoing struggle for equity and inclusion.

### **Focus Group**

During the focus group meetings, participants shared numerous instances of racism and discrimination they encountered in the workplace. The Chicana educators' experiences included bias based on their language, accent, and ethnicity, as well as a disregard for their professional competence and valuable cultural insights.

I do not have a story of challenge for being Chicana. Not for myself, but I've seen it firsthand these experiences. For example, on the

campus where I used to teach, I felt like one of the administrators was very selective with this particular teacher. She had a very heavy accent. She spoke mainly Spanish. She was dominant in Spanish. That was her first language. She was a bilingual teacher. The whole idea is that you are teaching the students in English. So, the teacher needs to speak more English. His mannerisms were towards her. He would throw her low blows here and there; it was just really sad to see. I told this administrator not to be with her like that. She speaks very fluent Spanish. Like, I mean, what do you expect? She's trying her very best. So, I know there was a particular word, like when that admin was in that classroom, or she said something, and it sounded like something else, but she didn't mean to say something else. He asked her "What do you mean? Little things like that made me feel that people need to be more compassionate, especially with heavy accents. It's hard. I mean, it's hard for me to speak Spanish. I mentioned her speaking English. I mean, it's her, Damn, you know, it's just very difficult to see (Focus Group, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 30).

During a focus group discussion, Graciela shared additional instances of racism and discrimination in the workplace. She recounted the story of a Chicana bilingual teacher who faced unfair treatment from an administrator, likely due to her strong Spanish accent and the fact that Spanish was her primary language. Through this narrative, Graciela emphasized the

struggles, racism, and discrimination that Chicana educators may encounter in academic settings, especially when those in positions of authority scrutinize or criticize their language skills.

Anzaldúa recalled that when she wanted to correct her Anglo teacher on how to pronounce her name correct, the teacher stated: “If you want to be an American, speak ‘American’. “If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong” (1987 p. 75). Bilingual immigrants with accents often face discrimination in the workplace, which can hinder their opportunities for career advancement and prevent them from securing higher-level positions. A la gente no le gusta que “I spoke English like a Mexican” (Anzaldua, 1987, p.76).

Through the pláticas in the focus group meeting, Elsa recalled her own struggle to obtain an administrative job. Despite being a well-educated woman with ample experience in school administration, Elsa mentioned that her unsuccessful experience in getting the administration job was connected to her accent and higher administration’s perception that accents are signs of ignorance. She also shared the story of a Chicana administrator with a heavy accent who was pressured to retire, illustrating the discrimination based on accent and ethnicity in the workplace.

I want to share an experience of struggle that a Chicana administrator lived. She is an excellent and hard-working administrator. She has a heavy-marked accent; she has it more than I do. She was underestimated. Some teachers did not respect her. They mimicked her heavy accent and upper administrators pressured her to retire. You're right, Graciela. In some districts, they devalue educators with an accent. They do not give the opportunity to see what this individual brings to the table. They immediately

judge them when they listen to the accent and think that the candidate does not have intelligence (Focus Group, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 30).

Failing to voice concerns and address the damages caused by racism and discrimination in the work place against immigrants perpetuates systemic inequalities and maintains a status quo that disadvantages minority students and educators, making us perpetrators of colonialism. Chicana educators can thrive, contribute valuable perspectives and expertise, and create more inclusive and equitable environments in higher education by sharing their *conocimiento* through *autohistorias*. This collaborative exploration enabled both the participants and myself to reshape our identities, echoing Anzaldúa's (2015) theory of identity formation through collective reflection and action.

### **Teaching to Recover Language, Culture, and Place**

Finding four, as defined in the table above, centers on the concept of teaching to recover language, culture, and place. Participants provide compelling evidence from their teaching experiences, demonstrating how their pedagogical practices support students in reclaiming their linguistic heritage, cultural identity, and sense of belonging. This evidence is consistently present across all data sources, including participants' *autohistorias*, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These sources collectively showcase how participants theorize their *autohistorias*, focusing on the importance of teaching as a means to recover language, culture, and place.



## **Autohistoria**

In this section, Elsa reflects on her experience teaching Spanish to students in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), incorporating culturally relevant activities and discussions that helped students recover their culture, language, and identity.

The students were very proficient in Spanish, and it was easy to communicate with them and have meaningful pláticas about their culture, identity, and the importance of education. They loved the Spanish class because they did projects about their culture, brought food to the class, and did presentations. We also listened to corridos and analyzed them. We talked about the RGV stories they heard at home from the abuelos, and we had critical discussions about where the students learned academic Spanish. I prepared the students to take an advanced Spanish class at a college level. The students were successful in my class because they had a positive learning environment where they learned through a culturally sustainable curriculum. ...They recovered their culture, language, and identity. I started teaching at a time when all these lessons were part of the curriculum, and no one paid much attention to Spanish (Autohistoria, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 10).

Elsa discussed incorporating culturally relevant activities and discussions in her Spanish class, the students recover their language, culture, and identity. Elsa also used authentic materials like

corridos and stories from the students' families to help them learn academic Spanish while connecting with their roots.

In Patricia's autohistoria, I found a reflection about the importance of studying native plants and animals and how this pedagogical practice can foster ecological consciousness and a sense of identity and place. Patricia used specific terms to describe the region, such as RGV, El Sur de Tejas, Aztlán or Gran Mexico, and El Llano Grande, which are noted for their significance in representing the people's history and connection to the land.

Studying native plants and animals is another practice that can be tied back to ecological consciousness, which is derived from teachings centered around the understanding, defense, and conservation of students' sense of identity and place. This ties in with Gruenewald's idea of rehabilitation, as the insertion of these geographical terms help paint a fuller story and give back to the community that sense of belonging and inclusiveness that was somehow historically taken from them through their omission within the history contexts learned within our schools as dictated by the mainstream narrative of the dominating account that is not reflective of our true narrative (Auto historia, Participant Patricia, 2024, p. 3).

In Teaching to recover language, culture, and place via autohistoria, Patricia emphasized the importance of studying native plants and animals to foster ecological consciousness and a sense of identity and place. This practice of rehabilitation, as described by Gruenewald, helps give the

students a sense of belonging and inclusiveness that may have been lost in the dominant historical narrative. Anzaldúa (1985) expressed that when she read Chicano's literature, heard corridos or watched Mexican movies, she felt a sense of home coming as well as alienation. Anzaldúa also explained that "there are more subtle ways to internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions" (p.81-82).

In autohistoria, Graciela reflected on how the immigrant educators encouraged and engaged the immigrant students in meaningful community resources through pláticas with local individuals and visits to places like wildlife refuges and museums. They used these pedagogical practices helped the students to recover language, culture and place.

As educators, this does not mean that it will be placed on a platter for us to teach; it means that an educator must unveil meaningful community resources for students, which can be done through a simple process of relative pláticas- storytelling...Some of these pláticas can happen in wildlife refuges officers around the RGV or with farmworkers still working the field, all while identifying current injustices they may face. Alternatively, having students visit local museums, such as The South Texas Museum, exposes them to the historical events that have shaped the RGV, Aztlán, and Gran Mexico. Listening to pláticas on how these places have been shaped over time provides students with historical experiences—in essence, building a bioregional communality, to re-signify our world as it relates to the people of the RGV. By being able to focus on local

themes within the RGV, Aztlán, and Gran Mexico, students are exposed to the realities within their communities and can seek change for the future (Autohistoria, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 3 & 4).

In teaching to recover language, culture, and place via auto historia, Graciela explained that educators can engage students with meaningful community through pláticas. By encouraging students to participate in conversations with local individuals, such as wildlife refuge officers and farmworkers, and visit local museums, Graciela reports on helping the students understand their communities' realities and the historical events that have shaped the region. Graciela's intentions to educate her students' for community participation echoes Munro's feminist agency in her life history of progressive teachers.

This focus on local themes within the RGV, Aztlán, and Gran Mexico allows students to build a bioregional communality and re-signify their world about their own experiences and culture.

Denisse reflects that place-based education is not a utopian concept but a fundamental part of teachers' and students' identities in her autohistoria. She recognized the importance of being conscious of their life within their history and society and the implications of this journey across various aspects of their life

I cannot become something I already was. Place-based education is not a utopian concept at all, as I naively thought. It is why I'm a teacher. It raised me. The difference is being conscious of witnessing my life within my history and society and the implications of this journey socially, culturally, professionally, and

academically. It is tangible now; with this, I can become an advocate and a leader (Autohistoria, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 8).

Denisse, one of the participants, recognized the importance of using her personal and professional experiences as assets in her teaching by being conscious of her life, history, and society. The author discovered that pedagogies encouraging self-exploration within specific ecologies of knowing can be transformative for both students and educators.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

Followed by autohistorias, the semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to further document and theorize their teaching to recover language, culture, and place. Patricia, documented and theorized her teaching to recover language, culture, and place. She explained that bilingualism is a reality for many students in the United States, with English and Spanish coexisting as part of their linguistic repertoire. However, school districts often impose English-only policies, failing to recognize and support their students' bilingual nature. Patricia emphasized the importance of allowing students to access their entire language repertoire and inviting them to respond and participate in whichever language comes more naturally, highlighting the need for a change in the policies to embrace linguistic and cultural diversity.

Our students are bilingual. They are always going to speak in English and Spanish. It is going to be their world. It is what it is. You know there is no system, no education, no curriculum that can change that, and yet you have schools that are very ignorant of this. They impose an all-English classroom. That is inevitable, like you cannot do that or this is not who our students are, and so there are

districts out there that support the students and even their own teachers, and because of that, they do let things slide. I've had administrators observe me, and they see the English and the Spanish happening simultaneously. Everybody is collaborating, and I tell you sure, students, "Como te salga, I need a response, so what do you think of this?" I told the student: "Just say it; however, it is easy for you. You know, say it." Of course, I am bilingual, and I understand what they say in both English and Spanish. That is the beauty of it, but the teacher needs to be able to model those skills to the students and invite them to do so (Interviews, Participant Patricia, 2024, p.8).

The semi-structured interviews allowed Patricia to recount her theorizing her teaching to maintain language, culture, and place. Patricia shared her approach to teaching, which aims to recover and validate students' bilingual identity by recognizing that English and Spanish are integral parts of their linguistic and cultural identity. To recover and celebrate her students' language and identity, Patricia employed strategies such as encouraging bilingual expression, modeling bilingual skills, and focusing on meaning over perfection. Through these strategies, Patricia actively works to recover and celebrate her students' language and identity, challenging deficit-based views of language perpetuated by English-only policies and embracing the linguistic and cultural diversity of her students. Hendry (2009) stress the importance of teachers recognizing their agency and using their collective voice to "shape educational institutions based on democratic practices" (p. 275).

Followed by autohistorias and the semi-structured interviews, the focus group allowed the participants to add more documentation and theorization about their teaching to recover language, culture, and place.

### **Focus Group**

During the focus group discussion on teaching to recover language, culture, and place, Elsa shared her lived experiences in the workplace, which motivated her to actively teach her daughter about their language and culture at home. Elsa explains:

I was so afraid of my accent. Afraid that my daughter will live the same experiences of discrimination that I lived. So, I decided to do this experiment. I took my daughter out of the bilingual-program for two reasons. The first reason was that the teacher did not speak academic Spanish. So, I fear that my daughter would lose her language. The second reason was that I did not want her to grow up without an accent. I wanted her to be very successful wherever she went. The principal got mad at me because he knew I was a bilingual teacher. But, I believe in a truly bilingual program. Where the teacher knows the academic Spanish. Fortunately, my daughter had a bilingual mother and an educator at home. I let the American school to educate my daughter and teach the language of power, and I taught her academic Spanish at home. She is very successful in her career because she is fully bilingual. She can write, read, and communicate in both languages. She learned so quickly that she was an American,

and she said, "I only speak English because I am an American." I fear that my daughter would not be able to speak Spanish, so ...I gave her powerful reasons why she must learn Spanish. Her grandparents only spoke Spanish, and she needed to communicate with them. Her father spoke a broken English. For him, it was better to communicate in Spanish. I also explained her that a bilingual person has more opportunities in finding jobs. I also translanguate with her without knowing the term's name and its effectiveness. She explained to me what happened during the day at her school in English. I said, "I understand what you are telling me, but now I want you to tell me in Spanish". Now, she is very grateful. (Focus Group, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 13 & 14).

In documenting and theorizing Elsa's experience in teaching to recover language, culture, and place, I found that Elsa's decision helped her daughter to maintain her native language while learning English, providing her with enough tools to be successful in a world that now demands bilingual individuals to perform jobs where they serve immigrants. The data suggest that Elsa advocates for implementing true dual bilingual programs in schools to serve students better in their native language. The data highlights the importance of maintaining one's native language and the potential benefits of being fully bilingual in personal and professional life. These experiences collectively highlight the critical role that educators play in helping students recover and celebrate their language and culture in the classroom.



## **Theorizing Currículo Desde la Cultura, Desde el Lugar**

Finding five, as defined in the table above, explores the concept of theorizing curriculum desde la cultura, desde el lugar. The participants provided rich evidence demonstrating how they theorize curriculum through the lenses of culture and place across all data sources, including their autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These sources collectively highlight how participants engage in theorizing their autohistorias with a specific focus on developing curriculum that is grounded in and responsive to the cultural and place-based experiences of their students and communities.

### **Autohistoria**

Elsa, Patricia, and Graciela, educators from the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas, collectively demonstrated the power of place-based education through their experiences and insights. Place-based education, as shown by the educators from the RGV, is an effective tool for enhancing student engagement, improving academic achievement, and increasing social awareness.

In her auto historia, Elsa narrated how her early exposure to place-based education through her father's use of pláticas and local places provided her with a strong foundation that she carried into her teaching, collaborating with her principal and colleagues to implement a culturally relevant, place-based curriculum using the community's natural resources to create innovative, student-centered lessons.

My father always had pláticas with my siblings and me about the importance of education ...He also used pláticas to introduce the local places and to teach us the importance of learning about places.

He used places to teach us in a meaningful cultural way. Through the places, he provided us with lifelong learning. We carried this knowledge to our educational setting (Autohistoria, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 2).

He taught us to observe the universe, the world, the places, nature, and its fauna, and how to respect and value all these. Through pláticas and places, he instilled knowledge in us. For example, he asked us, "If I am driving fifty miles per hour and Bocachica Beach is twenty-one miles from home. In How many minutes do we arrive? Those math problems were simple and became easy to solve. He also taught us to take care of nature, and he was always creating problems, or maybe the problems existed, so that we could find solutions to those problems in the environment...We applied the knowledge we acquired from our father in the school (Autohistoria, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 2).

In the theorizing currículum desde la Cultura, desde el Lugar section of her autohistoria, Elsa shared a poignant memory that illustrated how her father intentionally incorporated elements of place and culture into his teaching. By utilizing their surroundings and engaging in pláticas, her father fostered the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in his children. This practice laid a solid educational foundation, preparing them for success in their academic pursuits. Elsa's experience highlights the importance of using real-life scenarios and

incorporating students' cultural backgrounds to create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

In the theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar via autohistorias, Patricia recalls engaging in place-based learning at the Casa de la Cultura by listening to local elders' stories and participating in hands-on activities, mentioning that the Aztlán and Gran Mexico regions contribute to examining the nexus between environment, culture, and education. Patricia advocates for culturally sustaining teaching practices that expose students to borderland histories and utilize linguistic, cultural, and local resources, allowing students to build connections to the subject matter through their own identity formations, reflections, and community.

I remember the storytelling of one man whose father fought at the Batalla de Matamoros (a neighboring city, also part of the Mexican-American War) and shared anecdotes passed on to him through oral traditions. Putting all these memories into perspective and tying them into the articles we have read this week, I am leaning to contemplate history, culture, community, and connection when considering critical pedagogy of place and how it relates to teaching and learning (Autohistoria, Participant Patricia, 2024, p. 3).

Patricia's autohistoria demonstrated that when community members actively participate in education, incorporating language, culture, and local resources, they enable students to establish meaningful connections between the subject matter and their own identities, reflections, and communities.

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar, Patricia elucidates her educational approach, which integrates place-based and cultural pedagogies. She posits that teaching through the lens of la cultura y el lugar (culture and place) empowers students to critically examine the intricate connections between environment, culture, and education. This approach not only enhances student learning but also equips them with the tools to identify and propose solutions to the challenges faced by their communities, environment, and educational systems, ultimately encouraging them to question the status quo that pervades their local context.

With this goal, the plan proposes an educational system that is relative to the people, their history, culture, and bilingual education.

It is with this program in mind that CPP is a crucial proponent of learning and teaching in RGV, Aztlán, Gran Mexico through the community learning exchange discussed in the Guajardo et al. (2019) article and through "resistant, transnational, and translanguaging traditions of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Aztlán" (Garza et al., 2021, p.1). After all, "a critical pedagogy of place aims to contribute to producing educational discourses that explicitly examine the place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 10).(Autohistoria, Participant Patricia, 2024, p. 3).

I found in theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar that teachers who encourage students to become critical thinkers and examine the connections between environment, culture, and education a través de la cultura y lugar are engaged in learning and sustain their learning for life.

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar, Patricia emphasized the importance of culturally sustaining teaching in multicultural and multilingual settings like the Rio Grande Valley. This approach is essential for education in the region as it allows students to build connections to subject matter through their own identities, reflections, and communities by drawing on the area's rich history, culture, and local resources.

Most importantly, teaching should be culturally sustaining through student exposure to borderland histories and using linguistic, cultural, and local resources. Critical pedagogy of place and culturally sustainable pedagogies are complementary and equally valuable to multicultural and multilingual settings like the RGV where students demonstrate an array of needs as they come from various backgrounds and bring their unique knowledge to the classroom. Then, now identified as a Mexican American, the name was also given to the war. A war in which the US attacked a military academy at *Chapultepec* that resulted in the death of boy cadets. Young children like me, Mexican. The whole thing was preposterous then, and it is still so now, as the people of the RGV continue to learn about history and subject matter from a white,

colonialist point of view. For all these reasons, it is critical for teaching and learning in our bioregion of *Gran Mexico* to adopt decolonizing curriculums that teach and draw strength from history and geography and plática and from which students learn to build connections to subject matter from their own identity formations, reflections, and community (Guajardo et al., 2019). (Auto historia, Participant Patricia, 2024, p. 4).

Overall, in theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar, Patricia's auto historia emphasized the importance of place-based learning, and culturally sustaining teaching practices in the Rio Grande Valley. Educators in this region should strive to create decolonizing curricula that recognize and celebrate the unique experiences and knowledge of their diverse student populations.

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar, Graciela focuses on the importance of place-based learning in helping students discover their self-identity and engage in social justice within their community. She argues that critical place-based learning can enhance students' opportunities in ecology, sociology, and social justice within their community.

What better way to discover self-identity if not through a place-based approach? Allowing students to learn through these subjects is imperative as it allows them to learn and engage in social justice within their community. Critical-place-based learning can enhance the opportunities for students regarding ecology, sociology, and social justice within their community. Conclusively, we need to

ensure that we are more like Ms. Martinez and less like Mrs. Blankenship in terms of the pedagogies that we practice within our classrooms (Auto historia, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 4).

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar, I found that there is the need for educators to adopt pedagogical approaches that foster critical thinking, cultural sustainability, and a strong sense of la cultura and lugar among students. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum and to teach with depth and nuance, it is essential to explore and understand women's autobiographical narratives and experiences (Pinar et al., 1995).

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

Finding five, as defined in the table above, focuses on theorizing currículum desde la cultura desde el lugar. The sources revealed that participants engaged in theorizing their autohistorias, centering on conceptualizing curriculum through the lens of their culture and location. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews provided participants with an opportunity to document and theorize their teaching practices, drawing from their cultural background and situational context (desde la cultura, desde el lugar).

Elsa shared in her semi-structured interview that teachers can develop engaging lessons using the natural resources in the RGV, history, and folk tales passed down from generation to generation. By using all these learning resources, the teachers can help the students to develop their native language and to be successful in their academics.

El mágico Valle del Rio Grande is very rich in natural resources which can be use by teachers should use to create meaningful lessons. Teachers can collaborate with other educators to plan

innovative lessons about South Padre Island. For example, the biology or science teacher can take the students to SPI and teach them about ecology. The reading teacher can provide the students with literature about SPI, the art teacher can ask the students to draw a picture of SPI, the Spanish teacher can provide literature in Spanish about SPI, the writing teacher can review grammar rules and ask the students to write a composition about SPI (Interviews, Participant Elsa, 2024, p.4).

Elsa's insights in theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar demonstrated that when teachers collaborate to create innovative, meaningful, and sustainable lessons that incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and sense of place, it can significantly enhance students' academic performance and engagement. Hendry (2009) asserts that "It is to their work as educator activists in critiquing and transforming social relations that we must turn to understand their vision of social change" (p. 274).

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar via semi-structured interviews, Elsa explained that the students construct solid knowledge when teachers use learning resources that connect with students' personal lives. Elsa shared her childhood lived experiences with culture and places and how these experiences helped her to have a solid foundation for education.

When I read "El Llano Grande" by the Guajardo brothers, I made many connections with my childhood experiences and experiences as an immigrant educator of/from the borderlands. I attribute my father's knowledge about places and his pláticas. On the weekends,



my father took my siblings and me to different places in the area. He always had a story that would provide us with a learning moment. He taught us math while driving from one place to the other. He talked about family stories and the importance of the environment. He taught us how to be critical thinkers and problem solvers. This real-life experience prepared me to function in American public education when I did not know English. I was able to use my critical thinking skills and pass all my classes. I became a problem solver, and I can deeply see the issues we experience in our region (Interviews, Participant Elsa, 2024, p.4).

I found that when teachers develop meaningful lessons that include culture and place, the students become engaged in learning. Also, when the teachers help the students connect their learning with real life, they feel a sense of belonging and commitment to the community.

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar via semi-structured interviews, Elsa mentioned that despite a growing immigrant student population, the curriculum has largely remained stagnant, adhering to an antiquated Western European model.

The curriculum has mostly stayed the same. Knowing that the number of immigrant students has recently increased, the need for a culturally sustainable curriculum is imperative, as well as implementing solid bilingual programs to provide the students with academic support. The immigrant teachers understand the need to create innovative, meaningful lessons that are culturally sustainable

and support the immigrant students learning (Interviews, Participant Elsa, 2024, p.11).

In theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar via Semi-structured interviews, I found that there is an imperative need of transforming our traditional curriculum into a more cultural and sustainable curriculum that support the immigrant students and the need of solid bilingual programs that support the students' learning.

Elsa explained that effective lessons should integrate place-based education and pláticas, allowing students to investigate and solve real-life problems while connecting with their roots, culture, and language.

The effective lesson must integrate place-based education and pláticas. The students learn more when they can investigate and solve real-life problems. Pláticas connect them with their roots, culture, and language. Pláticas and Place-based education help students become critical thinkers and problem solvers. These two approaches provide the students with meaningful learning that motivates them to learn and provides them with learning for life (Interviews, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 15 & 16).

Elsa, documented that effective lessons plans deben de integrar actividades sobre el lugar y la plática since these two approaches are part of culture. She theorized that pláticas and Place-based education are effective teaching methods that support students' learning.

Denisse is teaching in a predominantly Hispanic environment, and it allows her to relate to her students through shared cultural experiences, such as food, Spanglish, and Quinceañeras.

This connection, which she had never experienced, greatly impacted her teaching approach and motivated her students to learn and want more readings and writing reflections.

Well, it is entirely different. I teach higher education and dual credit students' classes. I created a Latinx class. So, I teach high school students, too. However, it changes everything about my teaching. I created a Latinx-themed class through writing. I am a part of an ascender program. That is a national program. Moreover, that is something I want to serve my students. The environment I choose has to be where there is a Hispanic institution or it's predominantly Hispanic because I have more to give to those students now (Interviews, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 6).

Denisse explained that her cultural background influences every aspect of her teaching, from curriculum design to empathy and communication with students. Teaching Latinx-themed classes has heightened her awareness and understanding of her students' needs and experiences.

Like I said, I developed a Latinx Class, so I'll never forget the first time I tried that too. They have to do discussion boards, and for each discussion board, I try to bring Ethnicity, so I try to bring in something from Guatemala, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, and then Mexico...My semesters are planned out, but they change every semester because I'm teaching Latinx classes...when I plan, I am intentional about that goal with what I choose in both curriculum and instruction (Interviews, Participant Denisse, 2024, p. 7).

Based on the data, integrating culturally sustaining curricula, and *prácticas* in the classroom engage students in learning and foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and a deep connection to their cultural identities, ultimately leading to academic success and personal growth.

### **Focus Group Meetings**

The Focus Group meeting's section on "Theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar" featured critical *prácticas* among participants, who shared their experiences as immigrant educators. They discussed how implementing a culturally sustainable curriculum and place-based learning effectively supported the academic success and personal growth of immigrant students by connecting their learning to their cultural identities, lived experiences, and community resources. The participant's evidence will be shared in the following paragraphs, and the data analysis will be presented at the end of each participant's section.

Elsa shared her teaching experiences at a middle school in a marginalized area. Her examples demonstrated the transformative power of culturally responsive pedagogy in engaging and empowering students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

...These students needed to connect their learning with real-life scenarios, receive meaningful instruction, and use culture, language, and all the resources they have in the community. In my Spanish classes, I taught them culture and language. Teachers used some natural resources to create lessons. I supported the students' learning by implementing lessons about the same topic, and they felt successful. The Spanish class provided me with a safe space to teach

my students in their native language. During this time, I taught them the structure of a composition. The students were able to write a composition in English and Spanish successfully. I want to say that explaining them the structure of the composition in their native language helped them. Place-based was one of the lessons that I often saw in that school (Focus Group, Participant Elsa, 2024, p. 14 & 15).

In exploring the concept of theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar, I discovered that pláticas and place-based education can serve as powerful, transformative educational tools. By theorizing curriculum through the lenses of culture and place, educators can create learning experiences that are particularly engaging and empowering for marginalized immigrant students, as this approach validates and leverages their unique cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

In Theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar Graciela illustrated how incorporating students' cultural practices into the classroom can foster a sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and extend learning beyond academics. In this paragraph, Graciela gave the example of one of her cultural activities that helped the school community, parents, and students get involved in learning.

It is super important. Not only our culture as teachers but also a variety of cultures should be implemented into the classrooms so that they can see, like, you know, the variation or the varieties of different cultures. I know that I mentioned to you that on my campus, it is like the majority is Mexican. I created a lesson where it was like, and we

built a safer place for them. We created an altar for "*Día de los Muertos*," and everyone got to bring a picture of their family members who passed. They got to draw them. Then we made a big old thing where everybody would bring something to their picture. They brought something edible to the parent or that person who passed like it. We shared, and it was an excellent experience for the kids to get to know each other better. There is more than just school. There is outside life. It is also super important for me. So, if kids are allowed to learn about their roots and extend their learning to others, that is very powerful (Focus Group, Participant Graciela, 2024, p. 15).

In *Theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar*, the data shows that when a teacher incorporates the students' cultural practices into the classroom, the teacher can foster a sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and extend learning beyond academics.

In *Theorizing Currículum Desde la Cultura, Desde el Lugar*, participant Denisse shared her reflections on her journey as a Latinx educator, from teaching in a predominantly Hispanic junior high to developing a Latinx-themed English class in higher education. She highlighted the importance of intentionality and representation in culturally sustaining pedagogy.

I am in higher education, so I have more academic freedom to specialize in thematic-like class sections ...I'd never been in an educational space where everyone looked like me, where I could see myself reflected in me. As I became that teacher in my first year, I

realized that my students were having conversations about seeing as if they were eating the same stuff I ate at home and doing things on the weekends that I was doing on the weekends. In higher ed, you talk about how different cultures should not just be, you know, just the Hispanic culture; that is what we are in Texas, and that is what I relate to, but in education in higher ed, you can specialize in all your interests. I have an English Class and It's a Latinx theme-based English class. Now that I am the only person in the big urban district with a Latinx-themed class... Since the English and the education class serve me together to teach both... The first semester, I expected my students to crave only what I had already set up in a semester. Moreover, I will tell you that I had discussion boards with Mexican American and Guatemalan themes, and maybe El Salvador was another thing they were exploring. Then I got, when are we going to do this? Moreover, when are we going to do this? Moreover, when are we going to do this? Furthermore, I was like, oh, you all want more. Thus, it opens up to them to go, oh, you are doing this, and then Afro-Caribbean app or Latinx, you know, and then I went from four to twelve discussion boards because they want more from me... Because of my education, I am culturally sustained, and they will learn... I have seen it when you are

intentional about it and its effect on the students, so I am doing it right  
now like I'm leading (Focus Group, Participant Denisse, p. 15 & 16).

In this section, the findings demonstrated that incorporating topics relevant to students' lives stimulates learning engagement. Moreover, reading analysis encourages critical thinking about the lived experiences of immigrants, including the injustices they face, and inspires students to become agents of change. The data emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant education, especially for Latinx students, and highlights the positive outcomes that can be achieved when educators deliberately integrate students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching practices.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study demonstrated the transformative potential of theorizing *currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar* in the context of the Rio Grande Valley and the experiences of Chicana educators. Through autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, participants shared compelling evidence of the impact of culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education on student engagement, academic achievement, and personal growth.

The narratives of racism and discrimination in the classroom, coupled with the erasure of culture and language in both school and home settings, underscore the pressing need for educational approaches that not only validate but also celebrate the diverse identities and experiences of students. By teaching to reclaim language, culture, and place, the Chicana educators in this study actively challenged deficit-based views of language and culture, creating inclusive learning environments that fostered meaningful connections between students' lives and the curriculum.



In theorizing currículum desde la cultura, desde el lugar is a powerful framework for educators in multicultural and multilingual settings like the Rio Grande Valley. Educators can promote a sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and extend learning beyond the classroom walls by incorporating students' cultural practices, linguistic resources, and local knowledge into their teaching. The participants' experiences highlight the importance of collaboration, intentionality, and representation in developing culturally sustaining curricula that reflect diverse students' backgrounds and experiences.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that place-based education can be a catalyst for critical thinking, problem-solving, and social justice when grounded in students' cultural identities and community resources. By engaging students in authentic, real-world learning experiences that investigate and address local issues, educators can empower students to become agents of change in their communities.

This study significantly contributes to the expanding body of research on culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education, providing invaluable insights into the lived experiences of Chicana educators in the Rio Grande Valley. The findings underscore the transformative potential of educational approaches that recognize and value the unique knowledge, skills, and experiences that students and educators bring to the classroom and build upon these assets.

CHAPTER V

RECLAIMING IDENTITY THROUGH AUTOHISTORIAS:  
CHICANA IMMIGRANT EDUCATORS' JOURNEY

In Chapter V, I highlight the pervasive impact of racism and discrimination on immigrant students and educators and emphasize the transformative potential of culturally sustaining and place-based pedagogies. I also present the implications and recommendations based on the findings. We advocate for systemic change in education, adopting culturally sustaining and place-based pedagogies, ongoing professional development for educators, and the active involvement of immigrant students' families and communities in the educational process.

I conclude this chapter by emphasizing the study's contribution to social justice and educational equity literature, the participant's personal growth, and commitment to creating more just and equitable educational spaces. It underscores the power of autohistorias as a healing, resistance, and transformation tool. The study serves as a strong call to action for educators, policymakers, and researchers to prioritize approaches that celebrate diversity, foster belonging, and empower all students to thrive.

My positionality and autohistorias serve as the cornerstone for data analysis, interpretation, and findings, embracing the research's inherent subjectivity while aiming to deliver a transparent, trustworthy, and profound account of immigrant educators' experiences. This study aims to eliminate borders, create change, and foster empathy by examining participants' autohistorias, supported by interviews and collective focus groups.

## Findings

The five main findings that emerged from the study are:

1. Participants shared poignant accounts of institutional racism encountered in educational settings, detailing discriminatory experiences from both educators and fellow students. This finding reveals the pervasive nature of institutional racism in educational environments and its long-lasting impact on individuals and communities. Participants' accounts suggest that discriminatory school experiences can have ripple effects that extend far beyond the classroom, shaping one's sense of self and place in society. The loss of cultural connections, such as language and identity, points to the systemic nature of these issues and how they can persist across generations. By sharing these experiences, participants underscore the urgent need for addressing and dismantling institutional racism in educational settings to prevent further harm to marginalized communities.
2. Educational practices and policies actively discourage, suppress, or eliminate the cultural and linguistic diversity that students bring with them. Participants shared experiences of feeling their cultural identities and languages were unwelcome or devalued in educational settings. They stated that some policies or pedagogical practices pressured them to conform to a dominant culture rather than having their diverse backgrounds celebrated and incorporated into their learning experiences. Some participants recounted instances where they were discouraged from speaking their native languages or expressing cultural traditions. Overall, they painted a picture of an educational system that actively works to homogenize the student body instead of embracing diversity, leaving many feeling marginalized and disconnected from their cultural roots.

3. Participants faced prejudicial treatment in their workplaces based on aspects of their identity.
4. They felt undervalued, overlooked for promotions, or subjected to inappropriate comments or behaviors from colleagues or superiors. Some reported feeling pressured to downplay certain aspects of their identity to fit in or advance their careers. Their stories probably illustrated a range of discriminatory experiences, from subtle biases to more blatant forms of prejudice, and how these incidents affected their job satisfaction, career progression, and overall well-being. Participants likely expressed frustration with the persistence of such discrimination despite existing anti-discrimination policies and may have discussed the emotional toll of constantly navigating these biased environments.
5. Participants employed an educational approach that aims to revitalize and preserve indigenous or minority languages, cultural practices, and the connection to traditional lands. The participants advocated for a holistic, culturally responsive curriculum integrating native languages, cultural practices, traditions, and history alongside conventional subjects. They emphasized the importance of involving community elders and cultural experts in curriculum development and delivery and connecting students with their ancestral lands through experiential learning. This approach not only supports immigrant students' learning but also has the potential to preserve cultural heritage and empower marginalized communities, creating a more inclusive and transformative educational experience. This aligns with Gloria Anzaldúa's (2009) insight that "as we create a more diverse curricula we learn ways of teaching and knowing" that better represent marginalized groups (p. 207). By incorporating diverse cultural elements and

perspectives into education, we enrich the learning experience for all students and discover new pedagogical approaches that can lead to more equitable and effective education.

6. Participants emphasized the importance of developing a curriculum from the perspective of the local culture and place, grounding learning experiences in students' cultural identities, community resources, and real-world problems. My participants discussed the benefits of using community resources, such as inviting local experts or elders to share their wisdom or organizing field trips to culturally significant sites. Participants might have highlighted how addressing real-world problems relevant to the community makes learning more engaging and empowers students to become active problem-solvers in their own contexts. They explained how these approaches have positively impacted student motivation, academic performance, and cultural pride. Overall, their accounts likely underscored the transformative potential of place-based, culturally grounded education in creating more inclusive, relevant, and effective learning environments for diverse student populations.

The findings of this study, supported by evidence from participants' autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, collectively demonstrated how the participants theorized their lived experiences and pedagogical practices. The participants' narratives served as powerful testimonies of immigrant students and educators' ongoing discrimination and injustices, highlighting the urgent need for change and validating and expanding upon Anzaldúa's theories. These findings offer new insights into how culturally sustaining and place-based pedagogies can create more equitable and inclusive educational

spaces, ultimately having significant implications for transforming educational practices and policies to create more equitable, inclusive, and empowering learning environments for all students, particularly those from immigrant and marginalized communities.

### **Return to the Research Questions**

These research questions are designed to guide the study in exploring the transformative power of autohistorias. The focus is on uncovering the experiences of Chicana educators from the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) who share immigrant educator experiences. This study is set in the specific context of Aztlán while also contributing to a broader understanding of the challenges these educators face within the dominant Whitestream curriculum.

#### **Research Question 1**

1. How can autohistorias inform the struggles of immigrant students in the Whitestream curriculum?

Participants' autohistorias, supported by interviews and collective focus groups, can serve as a powerful tool to illuminate the struggles of immigrant students within the Whitestream curriculum. As demonstrated in the collected data, the participants' personal narratives provide valuable first-hand accounts of the racism and discrimination they faced as immigrants in the classroom setting. These experiences shared through autohistorias highlighted the urgent need for more inclusive and culturally responsive curricula that acknowledge and value immigrant students' diverse identities and backgrounds. By bringing these stories to the forefront, autohistorias can raise awareness of immigrant students' challenges and advocate for educational reforms prioritizing equity and social justice. Anzaldúa (2009) reframes writing as a collaborative, communal process rather than a solitary act, viewing it as a dynamic interaction

that extends beyond individual isolation. In this light, writing becomes a powerful tool for generating socio-political and educational changes, particularly for marginalized groups, by amplifying collective voices and experiences. This perspective transforms writing from a private endeavor into a public dialogue with far-reaching potential for social impact.

Moreover, participants' autohistorias, supported by interviews and collective focus groups, reveal the pervasive erasure of culture and language that immigrant students experience in both school and home settings. The participants' stories highlight how the pressure to conform to the dominant culture and the absence of support for their mother tongues and cultural backgrounds can result in a feeling of detachment and an erosion of their sense of self. These personal accounts emphasize the importance of teaching approaches that validate and celebrate immigrant students' diverse identities and experiences rather than subtracting or dismissing them. By sharing their stories through autohistorias, immigrant students and educators advocate for integrating culturally sustaining pedagogies that affirm and nurture their cultural and linguistic assets.

Furthermore, the autohistorias presented in the study demonstrated the transformative potential of culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education in engaging and empowering immigrant students. The participants' experiences showcase how incorporating students' cultural practices, linguistic resources, and local knowledge into the curriculum can foster a sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and extend learning beyond the classroom walls. These personal narratives serve as compelling evidence of the positive impact that culturally responsive teaching can have on immigrant students' academic success and personal growth. By sharing their autohistorias, immigrant educators can inspire others to adopt

pedagogical approaches that value and build upon diverse learners' unique strengths and experiences, ultimately contributing to more equitable and inclusive educational environments.

## **Research Question 2**

2. How do the author's and participants' autohistorias inform teaching and learning in Aztlán?

The autohistorias of both the author and participants have yielded profound insights into the transformative potential of culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education within the context of teaching and learning in Aztlán. These personal narratives, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) articulates, "are informed by reflective self-awareness employed in the service of social-justice work" (p. 319). Through this lens, our collective stories not only illuminate individual experiences but also serve as powerful tools for critiquing and reimagining educational practices in our community.

Through their autohistorias supported with interviews and a collective focus group, the Chicana educators demonstrated the importance of incorporating students' cultural practices, linguistic resources, and local knowledge into the curriculum. By drawing upon the region's rich cultural heritage and lived experiences, educators can create learning environments that promote a sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and extend learning beyond the classroom walls. These autohistorias provided compelling evidence of the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching in captivating and inspiring students from various backgrounds, enabling them to reach their full potential.

Furthermore, the author's and participants' autohistorias underscore the significance of collaboration, intentionality, and representation in developing a culturally sustainable curriculum that reflects students' diverse identities and experiences in Aztlán. The narratives highlighted the



need for educators to work together to create inclusive learning spaces that validate and celebrate all students' unique strengths and perspectives. By adopting intentional pedagogical approaches and ensuring that the curriculum authentically represents the region's diversity, educators can foster a profound sense of pride and connection to the community among their students. These autohistorias serve as a powerful call to action for educators in Aztlán, urging them to actively engage in the process of decolonizing education and embracing pedagogical practices that center the voices and experiences of marginalized communities.

As activist Chicana educators, we advocate for a transformative dialogue transcending traditional boundaries. We invite individuals from all perspectives, including those historically held power and those marginalized, to engage in open and equitable discussions. This approach recognizes our shared humanity and interconnectedness, breaking down artificial divisions and fostering mutual understanding.

Drawing inspiration from Anzaldúa (2015), we envision this process as a shift from confrontation to collaboration, where diverse voices are valued equally. By acknowledging that what we perceive as 'other' is a reflection of ourselves, we can dismantle the barriers that have long divided educational spaces and approaches.

The persistent divisions in our educational system hinder our ability to develop a culturally sustainable curriculum. This is particularly crucial for educators working in or originating from borderland communities as they strive to provide effective support for their students' learning. Anzaldúa's work reminds us that such separatism in education often does more harm than good, impeding our collective progress toward a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. By recognizing and addressing these divisions, we can work towards

creating educational spaces that honor and integrate the diverse experiences and knowledge of all students in our communities.

Moreover, the author's and participants' autohistorias demonstrated how place-based education, grounded in students' cultural identities and community resources, can catalyze critical thinking, problem-solving, and social justice in Aztlán. Educators can empower students to become agents of change in their communities by engaging them in authentic, real-world learning experiences that investigate and address local issues. As Munro (1995) explains, "meaningful learning and social action [occur] only when education [allows] individuals and communities to define their own needs" (p. 277). Their narratives showcase how teaching and learning rooted in the region's cultural and ecological context can inspire students to develop a deep sense of connection and responsibility to their homeland. These autohistorias illustrate the transformative potential of education grounded in the unique history, culture, and environment of Aztlán and how it can contribute to the development of a new generation of leaders committed to social justice and the well-being of their communities.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide immigrant educators from the borderlands with *conocimiento*. Chicana educators' autohistorias, supported by interviews and collective focus groups, created a pedagogical *conocimiento*, a form of knowledge and awareness specifically centered on teaching practices, cultural identity, and place-based education in the context of the Rio Grande Valley. The collective narrative of these Chicana educators unveils a powerful journey of resilience, transformation, and empowerment within educational spaces. These stories chronicle how they have transmuted their experiences of cultural erasure and discrimination into catalysts for change in classrooms and communities.

Their pedagogical *conocimiento*, born from lived experiences and innovative teaching practices, serves as a blueprint for creating educational environments that celebrate cultural identities, root learning in place, and nurture students as critical thinkers and community change-makers. This collective wisdom not only navigates and resists institutional barriers but actively reshapes educational landscapes, embodying a transformative force in the face of systemic challenges. This deep, experiential understanding stems from personal and collective histories and struggles. Autohistorias can transform individuals and curricula by fostering conscientization, a process through which students and teachers critically understand their situation as a historical reality susceptible to transformation (Jupp et al., 2018; Freire, 1970/2002). By sharing the autohistorias of other immigrant educators with similar life stories, I aim to create a critical awareness of one's social and political reality, leading to action for change.

Engaging in dialogue about unique histories, races, cultures, and lived realities in education is crucial in comprehending the complexities of identities, idiosyncrasies, and personal vulnerabilities. These critical dialogues have the potential to create conscientization and transformation in the realities of immigrant students and teachers. I contextualized my narrative within Mexico's historical context, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the past, present, and future. Family history documents reveal evidence that my ancestors constantly immigrated between Mexico and the United States, validating my maternal grandfather's stories about Texas and the presence of Mexicans in the region long before others. By situating my study within this context, I emphasize the complexities and contradictions in hierarchically organized societies, where cultures, ideologies, and individuals often clash. These conflicts extend to the education system, where traditional courses may limit discourse and perpetuate the legacy of colonialism.

By engaging in critical dialogues that honor our unique histories, cultures, and lived experiences, we can unravel the complexities of our identities, challenge colonial legacies in education, and foster transformative conscientization for immigrant teachers, ultimately reimagining an educational landscape that embraces the rich, interconnected tapestry of our past, present, and future.

## **Implications**

Based on the findings presented in Chapter IV and the answers to my questions above in Chapter V, several key implications emerge:

1. The pervasive racism and discrimination faced by immigrant students and educators in the educational system underscore the urgent need for systemic change. The findings call for critically examining policies and practices that perpetuate inequities and implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies that validate and celebrate students' diverse identities and experiences. Gloria Anzaldúa's work reminds us that writing is an act of vulnerability and revelation, asserting that to write is to expose oneself and lower one's protective barriers. This perspective resonates with the participants who employed autohistorias—a form of self-narrative that combines personal and cultural history—to document past and present experiences of discrimination and racism faced by themselves or their family members. Through this process of writing, the participants engaged in a profound exploration of identity that ultimately led to personal transformation. Participants advocate for inclusive education in the Rio Grande Valley that respects and preserves students' cultural backgrounds and languages. They recommend developing curricula rooted in students' cultural experiences and local contexts, integrating place-

based education to enhance relevance and engagement. Emphasis is placed on fostering equitable school environments, building partnerships with families and community members, and advocating for systemic change. This echoes Munro's concept of activist teachers, whose vision of social change advocates for teaching as a democratic practice. The participants, in essence, invite fellow educators to embrace emancipatory practices and take action to catalyze socio-political and educational change. Implementation of these considerations aims to create more equitable, culturally sustaining, and effective learning environments for the region's diverse student population.

2. The erasure of culture and language in both school and home settings highlights the importance of creating educational environments that support and actively promote linguistic and cultural diversity. Educators must work to challenge deficit-based views of language and culture and foster inclusive learning spaces that empower students to reclaim their heritage. According to the participants' stories, the erasure of culture and language across generations in the Rio Grande Valley region manifests as a cyclical and compounding process. Experiences of discrimination and racism in schools led many parents to prioritize English or avoid teaching their children Spanish altogether, hoping to shield them from similar hardships. For example, Denisse's mother, who faced punishment for speaking Spanish in school, raised her children as English speakers and gave them non-Hispanic names. This cultural and linguistic subtraction pattern often persisted in schools, where immigrant students encountered pressure to assimilate and relinquish their cultural identities. Consequently, subsequent generations frequently grappled with a disconnection from their heritage language and culture, resulting in what

Gloria Anzaldúa poignantly described as "los del español deficiente" - those with deficient Spanish.

Educators should adopt culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education approaches incorporating students' backgrounds and local resources to avoid perpetuating cultural and linguistic erasure. They should promote bilingualism, allowing expression in both English and Spanish while collaborating with families and community members to integrate their knowledge into the curriculum. As activist educators, they should advocate for policy changes supporting bilingual and culturally responsive education. Employing strategies like *pláticas* and *autohistorias* can help students connect with their heritage and develop critical thinking skills, empowering them to challenge dominant narratives and engage in social justice within their communities.

3. The transformative potential of teaching to recover language, culture, and place suggests that educators can play a vital role in helping students reconnect with their roots and develop a strong sense of identity. By incorporating culturally relevant activities, analyzing cultural artifacts, and engaging in *pláticas*, teachers can create meaningful learning experiences that validate students' backgrounds and promote academic success. Schools can valorize these strategies through a comprehensive approach: implementing professional development on culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education; integrating local history, culture, and language into core subjects; fostering partnerships with community organizations and families; allocating resources for culturally relevant materials and experiences; adopting inclusive assessment methods that recognize cultural knowledge and bilingual abilities; strengthening dual language programs; organizing

cultural celebration events; collaborating across all levels to create supportive policies for culturally sustaining practices and bilingual education; and creating platforms for student input in curriculum development. These actions demonstrate a commitment to recovering language, culture, and place as integral to the educational experience, moving beyond theory to meaningful practice that enhances student engagement and academic success.

Educators adopting culturally responsive and inclusive positions face multifaceted challenges: entrenched systemic resistance, resource scarcity, colleague pushback, administrative pressures favoring standardized metrics, community skepticism, time constraints, and restrictive policies. These obstacles underscore the complexity of implementing culturally sustaining practices and emphasize the critical need for comprehensive systemic support to drive meaningful educational reform. Overcoming these barriers requires individual educator commitment and institutional willingness to reimagine and restructure educational approaches to serve diverse student populations better.

4. The findings emphasize the value of collaboration, intentionality, and representation in creating inclusive and equitable learning environments. Educators must collaborate to share knowledge, resources, and strategies that support all students' academic and personal growth, particularly those from marginalized communities. The interviews and focus groups showcased the implementation of culturally responsive and inclusive education through critical *prácticas*, incorporation of local resources, support for bilingualism, reflection on discrimination experiences, community involvement, and curriculum theorizing. These practices illustrated how educators collaboratively designed

inclusive curricula, ensured diverse representation, and shared strategies to create equitable learning environments for marginalized students. Participants' autohistorias, interviews, and collective focus groups revealed their active efforts to integrate cultural responsiveness into their teaching, demonstrating a commitment to transforming educational practices to serve diverse student populations better.

The study cultivated a strong sense of community among participants through its collaborative and reflective methodologies. By engaging in autohistorias, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, participants created a supportive space for sharing personal narratives, teaching experiences, and strategies. These interactions facilitated collective theorizing about curriculum through the lens of culture and place, reinforcing their shared commitment to culturally sustaining pedagogies. Moreover, the process of sharing lived experiences of discrimination and efforts to reclaim language, culture, and place fostered solidarity among the Chicana educators, empowering them to advocate for systemic changes in their educational settings and reaffirm their roles as agents of transformation.

5. The lived experiences of Chicana educators provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies and place-based education in multicultural and multilingual settings. Their stories serve as a call to action for educators, policymakers, and researchers to prioritize educational approaches that recognize and build upon the unique assets of diverse student populations.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the educational system, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change to address the pervasive racism and



discrimination faced by immigrant students and educators. To create inclusive learning environments that promote linguistic and cultural diversity, educators must challenge deficit-based views and implement culturally sustaining pedagogies. They play a vital role in helping students reconnect with their roots and develop a strong sense of identity through culturally relevant activities, analysis of cultural artifacts, and engagement in *pláticas*. Additionally, educators should advocate for significant changes in educational practices and policies to address the challenges faced by immigrant students.

This approach promises positive educational transformation, particularly benefiting immigrant students and Chicana educators. Potential impacts include improved student engagement and academic performance, a stronger sense of identity and belonging, enhanced teacher effectiveness, reduced bias, stronger community ties, better language skills, and improved cultural competence. Ultimately, these changes could foster a more inclusive, equitable, and effective educational system that better serves immigrant students, values diversity, and prepares all learners for success in our interconnected global society.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study provides a profound and nuanced exploration of the lived experiences of immigrant students and educators from the borderlands, examined through the lens of *autohistorias* and the seven stages of *conocimiento*. The findings reveal the pervasive and detrimental impact of racism and discrimination on the educational trajectories of immigrant students and the ongoing challenges faced by Chicana educators in their professional lives. The

study underscores the urgent need for systemic change in education to address these issues and foster more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

The study's conceptual and theoretical framework, grounded in Anzaldúa's work, offers a robust foundation for understanding the complex interplay of cultural identity, language, and place in shaping the experiences of immigrant students and educators. The participants' autohistorias, supported by interviews and a collective focus group, generated this study. This resulted in collective auto-theorizing. The recommendations that emerge from this study are concrete and actionable, focusing on implementing culturally sustaining and place-based pedagogies, providing professional development for educators, and actively engaging families and communities in the educational process.

This study contributes significantly to the growing social justice and educational equity literature by advocating for systemic change and challenging the dominant paradigms perpetuating inequity and exclusion. The insights and recommendations provided have the potential to inform future research, policy, and practice initiatives aimed at supporting the academic success and well-being of immigrant students and educators.

As an emerging scholar and educator deeply committed to advancing social justice and equity in education, this study is a transformative journey of self-discovery and empowerment. By interweaving my own autohistoria with my participants, I have crafted a rich tapestry of shared experiences and aspirations, illuminating the profound power of autohistorias as tools for healing, resistance, and transformation. This process resonates with Gloria Anzaldúa's view that writing and speaking are not just acts of expression; they're tools of transformation, resistance,

and change. Our collective narratives validate our individual experiences and catalyze broader educational social change.

As I move forward, the lessons and insights gleaned from this study will inform and guide my practice, fueling my commitment to fostering more just and equitable educational spaces. This research has reinforced my belief in the transformative potential of storytelling, particularly for marginalized voices. It has also underscored the importance of creating platforms where these narratives can be shared, heard, and valued.

In conclusion, this study stands as a testament to the strength, creativity, and wisdom of immigrant students and educators and a resounding call to action for all of us to work towards a more just and equitable future. By embracing culturally sustaining and place-based pedagogies, centering the experiences and knowledge of marginalized communities, and advocating for systemic change, we can create educational spaces that genuinely nurture and empower all students to reach their full potential. We can transform our educational landscape and build a brighter future for all through collective efforts and unwavering commitment to social justice.

### **Reflection and Final Thoughts: New Forgotten Stories**

Through vivid illustrations of the participants' autohistorias supported by interviews and a collective focus group, this study not only detailed how educational discrimination pressured them or their ancestors to assimilate into Anglo society, resulting in the erosion of Spanish language skills and, for some, a sense of shame about their Mexican heritage that drove them to seek acceptance within the dominant white culture but also provided me with a collective space for critical pláticas with the participants.

The participants gained critical consciousness of how colonialism, racism, and power structures have injured their community through forced acculturation and language/identity loss. This *conocimiento* allows for understanding and healing. The autohistorias helped the participants to understand “the psychological and physiological effects of the race-based trauma we experience as a result of systemic oppression” (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 396) and how these lived experiences molded us as a new generation of teachers that value the students' language, culture and identity. The participants' autohistorias, followed by interviews and collective focus groups, helped me to draw out and better theorize the themes of autohistorias.

Autohistorias are a powerful tool to advocate for transforming traditional curricula into more culturally relevant ones. Gloria Anzaldúa, a celebrated scholar and activist, emphasized that the act of writing serves not only as a cathartic outlet and a means of personal liberation but also as a political tool born from an innate drive to “change the status quo, to fight oppression, to raise consciousness and initiate change” (2009, p. 187), underscoring the significance of self-expression as both a personal catharsis and a means of social activism. Engaging in autohistorias, participants create a safe space to reclaim their identities, unveil the lived realities they experience in education, and resist oppression. Drawing upon the collective wisdom, personal experiences, cultural understanding, and inner strength passed down from their ancestors, they embark on a healing process that enables them to recover from the trauma and discrimination inflicted upon them due to their race and other forms of oppression. As Anzaldúa (2002) states, as cited in Huber & Cueva (2012), this empowerment through ancestral knowledge and resilience allows them to navigate both within and outside often hostile educational environments strategically.

## **New Forgotten Stories**

I am engaged in a process of self-reconstruction through writing, giving voice to untold stories that demand expression. This journey aligns with Gloria Anzaldúa's call for new narratives from outside the dominant power structures. By piecing together these hidden narratives, I am forging a more authentic and empowered sense of self.

While Patricia was talking about her effective lessons, I evoked past educational experiences. I still remember Doctor Mares teaching science on the school patio. The students were picking up stones and dirt samples, smiling and engaged. The teacher walked around and had pláticas with the students. Through this approach, I saw immigrant students become more engaged learners and find academic success. Effective teachers who know how to implement cultural and sustainable curricula and pláticas and use places as tools for teaching and learning can create critical thinkers and problem solvers (Researcher Journal, 2024, p. 5).

While we were discussing our experiences, Denisse shared the story about how her mother was paddled in the school; I recalled the experiences of racism and discrimination that my late aunt Leticia lived in the classroom. She was in a private American school; her teachers were the nuns. When mi tía entered the school, she did not know English. She asked in Spanish: “puedo ir al baño” and her teacher denied the permission because she did not ask in English. The teacher made her stand in front of the classroom until she could not hold more, and she peed in herself. She told me that she was so embarrassed that she had learned English. She told me I needed to learn how to ask permission to go to the restroom to avoid the embarrassment. I think this story is why the first thing I learned in English was “May I go to the bathroom” (meaning to the restroom). My ESL teacher never corrected or taught me the correct way of asking. It was not

until late that my baby sibling taught me how to say it correctly. My aunt did not pass 28 years. However, I cannot help but wonder how the lived experiences of discrimination that my aunt faced would have inevitably influenced my cousins' linguistic and cultural identities, shaping their sense of self and belonging in profound and lasting ways (Researcher Journal, 2024, p. 6).

I conclude my study with forgotten stories, echoing Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of unearthing and recreating silenced voices, not just for myself, but for other Chicanas. Through this exploration, I aim to inspire readers to uncover and claim their own voices, recognizing the transformative power of self-expression. Anzaldúa reminds us of writing's liberatory potential, and I hope this work catalyzes others to embark on their own journeys of discovery and empowerment through narrative.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

These questions were adapted for each interview per the content of the participant's autohistorias.

My name is Gricelda Eufracio. I am a first-generation immigrant, educator, and Chicana. I use my autohistorias to explore my living curriculum of students and teachers of/from the borderland. This research aims to transform ourselves and the traditional curriculum into a more culturally sustainable one.

There are four rounds of data collection: (1) the written reflection of the student's choice that features auto historians or biographical reflection theory, (2) the interviews about the auto historias, (3) the focus group, and (4) the Researcher Journal. Each builds on the previous. The first set of data will be collected from my participants' autohistorias. The second data set will be collected from semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to provide additional narratives and theorizing about their written autohistorias. My third set of data will be gathered from focus groups. The participant and I will discuss and analyze our autohistorias in these group meetings, and participants will collaborate with me in analyzing emergent patterns of lived experience. The fourth data set is the Researcher's journal.

## **Individual Interview**

### **Introduction**

1. Introduce yourself. Where and what do you teach? How long have you been teaching?

### Autohistoria questions

2. Let's talk about your autohistoria or autobiographical written reflection. Tell me about your experiences from the written reflection.

(These will depend on the reflections)

3. Tell me about
  - a. Theme 1- In your written reflection, you mentioned that learning about history, nature, and your environment gave you a sense of Identity. Tell me more about this.
  - b. Theme 2- In your reflection, you mentioned that you are leaning to contemplate history, culture, community, and connection when considering critical pedagogy of place (CPP) and how it relates to teaching and learning. Tell me more about this
  - c. Theme 3- Your written reflection you discuss the importance of cultural and sustainable pedagogies. You mentioned that this approach supports the RGV students' learning and moves borderland educators from subtracting schooling practices. Explain more about this
  - d. Theme 4- In your reflection, you stated that you became indoctrinated to adopt a new language, identity and view the historical context with an imposed patriotic American stance. Explain more about this and your feelings about this lived experience. Tell me about when you identified yourself as a Mexican American for the first time.
  - e. Theme 5- In your auto-historia reflection, you mentioned that Plática is critical for teaching and learning for immigrant teachers and students. Tell me more about this.

Based on your autobiographical reflection or autohistoria, tell me about your pedagogical experiences and ideas?

4. What was it like being an immigrant student or a student from an immigrant family?
5. How do you lose perception of your culture? Did you lose a language?
6. How do you think differently about your teaching after being exposed to the doctoral program?
7. How do you think about curriculum and teaching now?
8. Can you tell me about your relationship with the Valley (or Latinx culture and history)?
9. How has the thinking in the auto-reflection affected your teaching?
10. How do you plan for teaching now? Why do you plan this way?

## Focus Group Meeting

### Autohistoria questions

1. Let's talk about your autohistorias or autobiographical written reflections. Tell me about your experiences from the written reflection.
2. Tell me about
  - a. Theme 1
  - b. Theme 2
  - c. Theme 3
  - d. Theme 4
  - e. Theme 5 (These will depend on the reflections)

Based on your autobiographical reflection or autohistoria, tell me about your pedagogical experiences and ideas?

3. What was it like being an immigrant student or a student from an immigrant family?
4. How do you lose perception of your culture by losing a language?
5. How do you differently think about your teaching?
6. How do you think about curriculum and teaching now?
7. Can you tell me about your relationship with the Valley (or Latinx culture and history)?
8. How has the thinking in the auto reflection affected your teaching?
9. How do you plan for teaching now? Why do you plan this way?
10. What is an effective lesson? Why do you think it works?

## GLOSARY

Agringados: It means somebody who has acquired the habits, culture, mannerisms or way of speaking of people who were born and raised in the U.S.A..

Anglo: A prefix indicating a relation to, or descent from England, English culture, the English people or the English language.

Autohistoria: A concept developed by Anzaldúa, refers to a form of autobiographical writing and self-reflection practiced by women of color. This approach challenges and transforms traditional Western autobiographical forms. It involves a deep, introspective search for personal and cultural meaning, which Anzaldúa likens to the process of "putting Coyolxauhqui together" - a metaphor drawn from Aztec mythology to represent the reconstruction of fragmented identities and experiences.

Aztlán: the ancestral home of the Aztec peoples.

Borderlands: A far more than a mere divisor line between nations; they are complex territories subject to specific national regimes and political systems, often marked by subordination and conflicting norms. As Anzaldúa powerfully articulates, for immigrants, the concept of borderlands extends beyond geographical boundaries, encompassing multiple intersecting identities and experiences. These psychological, cultural, and social borderlands create layered spaces of negotiation and conflict, where individuals navigate the complexities of belonging, identity, and power across various aspects of their lives.

Chicano: An American of Mexican origin or descent, especially a man or boy.

Chicana: An American woman or girl of Mexican origin or descent.

Cholos: Young men belonging to a Mexican American urban subculture associated with street gangs.

Fronterizos: A Spanish word. A person who lives in the borders is call fronterizo (from the borderlands).

Green carders: An identity card attesting the permanent resident status of an alien in the U.S.

Gringos: A person, especially an American, who is not Hispanic or Latino.

Mexican Americans: Americans of Mexican heritage.

Mexicano (a): A person born in México or of Mexican descent living in the United States

Mexicanos or Mexicanas: More than one person born in Mexico or of Mexican descent living in the United States.

Norteños: An inhabitant or native of northern Mexico.

Pachucos: A young Mexican-American having a taste for flashy clothes and a special jargon and usually belonging to a neighborhood gang.

Tejanos: Descendants of Texas Creoles and Mestizos who settled in Texas before its admission as an American state.

Texans: Native persons or inhabitants of Texas.



## VITA

Gricelda Eufracio has a comprehensive educational background in the field of education. She began her academic journey at The University of Texas at Brownsville, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1997. Continuing her pursuit of higher education, Dr. Eufracio obtained two master's degrees from the same institution: a Master's in Educational Leadership in 2010, followed by a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Bilingual Education and Science in 2013. Demonstrating her commitment to educational excellence and research, Dr. Eufracio culminated her formal education by earning a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Curriculum and Instruction from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in August 2024, further solidifying her expertise in the field. [griseufracio@gmail.com](mailto:griseufracio@gmail.com)