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Throwing Out the Text and Challenging

the Master Narrative: A Chicano Educator Decolonizes

The First Year Experience

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by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to every student who was gracious enough to share their story with me. Their words inspired me and gave me direction when I was lost. I hope I have in enriched their lives as they have enriched mine. Thank you.

Throwing Out the Text and Challenging

the Master Narrative: A Chicano Educator Decolonizes

The First Year Experience

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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This dissertation examines the educational journey of a Chicano educator; from his early experiences with colonization while growing up in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas to his role as a lecturer in a First Year Experience course at a Hispanic Serving Institution along the U.S.-Mexico border. Ultimately asking the question, "what is his role as a Chicano educator?" and can the once colonized decolonize his own classroom?

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Chapter I: Introduction

With a population of over 50 million, Latinas/os represent the largest and one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Ennis, Rios-Vargas, Albert, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Historically Latinas/os have been primarily concentrated in the southwestern United States but today Latinas/os can be found throughout the continental United States. Their growth signals the potential for greater political participation and economic prosperity. It also brings a variety of challenges. Politicians, demographers, and scholars all agree the growing Latina/o population represents the future of the United States and according to demographer, Steve Murdoch, for states like Texas which has one of the largest Mexican American populations, "the future is now" (Ayala, 2011).

The growing Latina/o population may signal more opportunities for Latinas/os to take on leadership roles within their respective communities but, a chief concern is whether or not our growing Latina/o population will be properly educated. Will they possess the skills needed to lead in the 21st Century (Ayala, 2011). The reality is that the majority of Latinas/os are under-skilled and under-educated (Ayala, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). In the past Latinas/os were accused of not valuing education and historically their educational storyline is characterized by high drop-out rates and low college enrollment rates (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). This trend may be changing. Recent college enrollment numbers and research indicates the opposite. Latinas/os and their families believe in the value of an education (Cabrera, Lopez & Saenz, 2012; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Today, Latinas/os are enrolling in postsecondary institutions in greater numbers than any other group, including whites (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). But, if the growing Latina/o

population is to prosper both academically and economically they need to be highly educated and highly skilled (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Today that means more Latinas/os need to not only enroll in a postsecondary institution, they must earn a postsecondary degree. And despite the growth in Latina/o post-secondary enrollment, Latinas/os still have one of the lowest postsecondary enrollment and completion rates of any group (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). In fact, the numbers tell only one side of a very complex story. Post-secondary enrollment rates may be rising for Latinas/os but, many of them are not enrolling in the same types of universities and colleges as their white counterparts (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). Latinas/os are more likely to enroll in a two year community college versus a 4 year university and where one begins one's college journey can have an impact on the likelihood of earning a 4 year degree (Ibid).

Obtaining a college degree is the key to improving one's socioeconomic status and overall opportunities for employment (Becerra, 2010). Despite an uncertain economy, students are still encouraged to go to college to learn skills that will make them a valuable commodity for future employers, especially in fields like science, engineering, healthcare and education, which have historically been among the most stable over the last decade. The latter half of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st Century saw countless college preparation programs targeting Latinas/os in order to help get them to college. These programs have helped improve the college going rates of Latinas/os but now the focus must shift to helping our Latina/o students graduate (Closing the Gaps, 2000).

Universities with large Latina/o enrollments are exploring a number of ways to help them graduate. Many programs target the first year experience of Latinas/os because the research shows students are more likely to graduate if they can get through their first year (Excelencia in Education, 2011).

My Role

As a Chicano educator I have spent over ten years working with Mexican American and other Latina/o students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) along the U.S. - Mexico border in deep, south Texas and am positioned within the middle of the *Latino Educational Crisis* (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). I have seen the success stories of students who have overcome a lack of resources or limited support. I have also witnessed those students who for one reason or another could not complete the journey. My experiences certainly are not isolated. They are happening throughout the country, often in areas with some of the largest Mexican American and Latina/o school age populations. The challenges are familiar and are consistent throughout the country but, this is not an examination of the macro level challenges that exist. This is in an examination of my role as a Chicano faculty member working to help my Mexican American and Latina/o students complete their academic journeys at the post-secondary level.

Like the students I work with I too faced familiar obstacles and challenges as a student. And like them I sat through countless motivational speakers and participated in a number of academic programs to help introduce me to college with the hope of improving my chances of graduating from a post-secondary institution. In addition to the institutional and program support, I held on to the idea that if I worked hard and studied

and tried my best then I would not be another disappointing statistic, but a success story. It was an idea I was reminded of day in and day out by my parents and popular culture. Those ideas shaped my educational experiences from the ground up and would later influence how I taught and what I expected from my own students. And while those experiences deeply influenced my educational experiences I do not know for sure if those experiences were responsible for my success.

A Brief History of Mexican Americans and Schooling

While enrolling and completing a postsecondary education has been difficult for all groups of Latinas/os, Mexican Americans have the lowest postsecondary completion of all Latina/o subgroups and are the most under-educated of all Latina/o subgroups (www.census.gov). This is largely because Mexicans have the longest standing relationship with the United States; a relationship that has been defined by inequality and discrimination experienced by Mexicans who would then become Mexican Americans (Acuna, 1998; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Spring, 2005). Revisiting this history can provide some understanding of the struggles today's Mexican American students face in the classroom (Bartolome, 2003).

The struggles of Mexican Americans have largely been shaped by a history of colonization, discrimination, persecution and silencing (Acuna, 1998; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Spring, 2005). Mexico almost overnight became a part of the United States via westward expansion including the annexation of Texas from Mexico and the subsequent U.S.-Mexico War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Acuna, 1998; Montejano, 1987; Richardson, 1999; Spring, 2005). These series of events displaced countless Mexicans; making them foreigners in the

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homeland (Acuna, 1988; Montejano, 1987; Richardson 1999). On paper the Treaty assured the displaced the same opportunities and rights afforded all U.S. citizens, but in practice the new Americans were stripped of their lands, provided inadequate education, and afforded few economic opportunities by the controlling Anglos (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Montejano, 1987; San Miguel, 1988). Mexican Americans throughout the southwest United States experienced widespread discrimination and Mexican Americans in Texas, especially those along the border with Mexico experienced some of the most blatant forms of racism and discrimination at the hands of the Anglos (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Richardson, 1999).

Discrimination and racism was rampant throughout the southwest and in every facet of society, but nowhere was the unequal treatment of Mexican Americans more evident than in the structuring of the public school system (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Mexican American children were segregated from white children and forced to attend Mexican schools that were inferior compared to the Anglo schools (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; San Miguel, 1988; Spring, 2005). In south Texas, for example, Mexican American children attended schools that were poorly built or in disrepair.

Guajardo and Guajardo (2004) argue that the separate schooling served to perpetuate the economic, political, and class structures created by the dominant white community by limiting the Mexican Americans' opportunities for economic sovereignty (Montejano, 1987; Richardson, 1999; Takaki, 1993). Mexican Americans worked menial jobs and were paid low wages. In order to subsist on the low pay many Mexican American children had to forgo their education in order to help their families. For many

families this was the only way to survive thus, their children did not have the opportunity to continue with their education because of the low wages and limited opportunities offered by the Anglos. Without an education Mexican Americans were disqualified from better paying jobs and opportunities for economic advancement leaving most relegated to a lifetime of low paying occupations (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004).

The Rio Grande Valley of south Texas lies at the southernmost end of Texas along the U.S. Mexico border. During much of the 20th Century, Anglos controlled the major institutions of the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas including the political seats and public school houses (Montejano, 1987; Richardson, 1999). Like other communities to the north, the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas was also segregated, meaning separate facilities and limited opportunities for Mexican American children. Mexican American children were pushed out of school and into low paying jobs. Even the few that advanced to their local high schools were discouraged from pursuing a postsecondary education.

The negative treatment of Mexican Americans continued throughout much of the 20th Century but the 1960s and 1970s were an important time for Mexican Americans particularly when it came to accessing higher education (Delgado Bernal, 1999; MacDonald & Garcia, 2003; Spring, 2005). The Civil Rights Movement ushered in a new era in Mexican American history. Young, college-age Mexican Americans, calling themselves Chicanas/os, challenged the unequal educational structures which existed to limit the educational opportunities of Mexican Americans and other minority groups. In California, students staged the largest walk out in public education (Takaki, 1993). This would serve as the precursor to other walk outs held throughout the country. In the lower

Rio Grande Valley, Mexican American students led walk outs and protested against the unfair treatment they were experiencing in schools and their communities (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Spring 2005). In the wake of these protests more Mexican Americans began to challenge the Anglos for control of the area's social institutions. For example, in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, an area once controlled by an Anglo minority, is now largely controlled by the Mexican American majority.

Despite the change in the power hierarchy, educational attainment in south Texas like in other parts of the country remains a challenge for its Mexican American students. The vestiges of Anglo rule and colonialism remain as the region is one of the most economically depressed in the nation (Immroth & Luckenbill, 2007). Educationally, the region has the highest high school attrition rates of any region in Texas at 38% (Johnson, 2011). If the region hopes to grow and prosper educationally and economically, it needs to see more of its Mexican American student population pursue and attain a postsecondary education (Yamamura, Martinez & Saenz, 2010). Efforts have been undertaken at the state government level to create a seamless transition between K-12 and postsecondary institutions in hopes of getting more Mexican American students into college (Closing the Gaps, 2000; Yamamura, Martinez & Saenz, 2010). Today postsecondary enrollment in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas has improved thanks in large part to early college high schools and intervention programs like Gear Up and AVID but once these students are enrolled, challenges abound to keep them in school and see them through to graduation.

Research Setting

In the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, the University of South Texas (UST)[1] is the largest four year institution. It enrolls over 18,000 students with the majority of them coming from local high schools. UST is also designated a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) because of its large Mexican American and Mexican student population. HSIs are universities where at least 25% of their student enrollment is Latina/o and 50% of those identified as Latina/o are also low income. Nearly half of all Latina/o students enrolling in universities and colleges attend HSIs (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004; Santiago 2007). This is in large part because HSIs are often found in areas with large Latina/o populations like the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas and much of the southwestern United States and Puerto Rico (Santiago, 2007). Students choose to attend these institutions because they are often close to home, have a large Latina/o population and are perceived to be more affordable than non-HSIs (Pew Hispanic Center 2004; Santiago, 2007).

This is true of UST; where most of its student body comes from neighboring communities, including the nearby border communities in Mexico. Historically UST has struggled to retain its Mexican American students beyond their first year but has found some success with new retention efforts over the last decade. In 2000, the retention rate for first year students returning for their second year at UST was 61.8% (Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, 2011). Since then it has improved and in 2009 the retention rate for students returning after their first year was 72.5% (Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, 2011). Over the last decade UST has instituted a

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[1] The University of South Texas is a pseudonym.

number of measures to assist with retention. One measure was the creation of a first year experience course. The course, University 1301, a First Year Experience course, educates incoming freshman on the psychology of learning, provides students with skills to help them navigate their first year in college and gives them college and career information.

Since 2002 I have been an instructor at UST and have taught the First Year Experience course since 2004. As an instructor, I have witnessed the success the course has had in helping to retain students, but I have also seen the challenges of implementing such a course. In the beginning there was little guidance in terms of what needed to be taught or even what the course's intended purpose was. During the early stages of implementation I, like many of the other faculty assigned to the course, relied heavily on our textbook to guide us. With little direction in terms of overall goals the textbook would have to suffice. Along the way tests were created and assignments were developed. Both served as guideposts and checkpoints throughout the semester. While I was unsure of what I wanted my students to take away from the course, at least I could determine if they were or were not completing their assignments. And still, the question that loomed over my head was, what am I trying to do?

Before continuing, allow me to clarify my position and by position I refer to my relationship relative to the institution and to the area and my students. I am an insider and an outsider; both part of the institution and native of the area. As a native of the area I know the students well; I understand their needs and their unique situations, and yet as an instructor I have often allowed myself to become taken in by the demands and expectations the institution has placed on its instructors. For example, in returning to my

discussion of my early years teaching the course, without clear goals I was comfortable allowing the textbook to serve as my guide. I relied on it to tell me where I needed to be each week during the semester and more importantly I believed it would tell me what my students needed to know; what was important and what was not important. Unfortunately I also placed much faith in a dominant ideology that has long held, one, that Mexican American and Latina/o students are deficient and have not been successful because their culture does not foster educational success and two, that they lack intelligence to succeed in academia (Bartolome, 2003; Valencia & Black, 2002; Valencia, 2010). Without critically reflecting or assessing my role and certainly, without questioning the value of the textbook, I accepted stereotypes that have largely been shaped by a history of inequality and discrimination against Latinas/os even though such stereotypes have been disproven by academic and scientific researchers (Bartolome, 2003; Valencia, 2010). I also came to believe that in order to be successful at the postsecondary level and beyond, one must disengage from one's community and home (Tinto, 1993) and give oneself to the dominant group and give up one's culture (Rodriguez, 1968; Rendon, 1992; Valenzuela, 2005; Carrillo, 2007).

Recently I have spent more time reflecting on how easy it is to succumb to the dominant ideology or what Valenzuela (2005) calls the "Master Narrative". I have also reflected on how the master narrative has dictated how we educate our children, especially minority children. As a child growing up in south Texas, I longed to be white; often arguing with my grandmother over my identity. Imagine, a four year old boy telling his grandmother that he did not eat beans or he did not speak Spanish. Why, because I thought I was white. Other than my grandmother, I was not encouraged to

speak Spanish, especially in school where there was a definite contrast between the kind of education the Spanish speaking students and the English speaking students received. It was not until my late teen years, with the help of my high school English and history teacher that I was able to question and reflect on my early educational experiences. This transformation would continue on through college and ultimately lead me to ethnic studies and a major in Chicana/o Studies. Upon completing my Master's degree in Education I returned to south Texas eager to share all I had learned as an undergraduate and graduate student. But within a few years of teaching at UST I was taken in again by the master narrative (Valenzuela, 2005). This meant examining why my Mexican American students were not successful or why they had trouble fulfilling their academic duties and responsibilities. It meant placing the blame on the students' culture and their deficiencies (Bartolome, 2003; Valencia & Black, 2002). It also meant providing students with explicit instructions on how they should act as students; what healthy academic habits they needed to develop, and overall what it would take to be "good" students, including encouraging them to disengage from their homes and the expectations and roles placed on them by their families. Only by returning to school as a doctoral student would I be forced to reexamine my role within the master narrative.

Today I am more cognizant of how I teach and how I use the course; no longer solely emphasizing a "how to approach" to being successful in college and no longer reliant on the textbook to tell me what my students need to be learning. Instead, I consciously try to create opportunities for students to think about their educational experiences and what it means to be a Mexican American student at the university. I also encourage my students to engage their families in conversations about what it means to

be a college student and the expectations that their professors and the university places on them. I then help them manage the two; expectations placed on the student at home and the expectations placed on them at the university.

At the macro level there is the issue of Latina/o students not graduating from colleges and universities (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). It is an issue that has the attention of researchers, policy makers and institutions but at the micro level there are faculty members and instructors like me, charged with educating and helping our Latina/o students find their way at the university and on to graduation. Amidst the larger discussion there is a need to examine the role of instructors in helping Latina/o students complete the journey. Therefore unlike much of the research on Latina/o student retention which often focuses on specific factors that contribute or hinder student success this research focuses on my role as the instructor in helping to retain Mexican American and Latina/o students at UST.

This study, therefore, is an examination of my journey as an insider and outsider. It is a journey that begins with my first experiences in grade school to my current role as an instructor at UST. This journey has taken me from my first experiences with the master narrative to my first few years teaching the course, when I was strongly influenced by the text and the institution to teach skills and behaviors that alone were supposed to help our students stay in school to where I am today as an instructor, trying to provide a space where my students and I can examine our roles within educational institutions and our experiences within said institutions. Today, I practice a very different approach to teaching; one largely influenced by my students' experiences and stories. I no longer rely on a text that neglects the reality my students and I experience

every day. My goal as an instructor has always been to serve and teach my students but getting to this point has been a long and difficult journey. It has been a journey that has forced me to confront my own educational history and ask myself, what is my role within the Latina/o educational crisis (Gandara & Contreras, 2009)?

Research Question

The following research questions helped guide my research as I examined my role as a Chicano instructor working with first year Mexican American students at UST.

1. How does decolonial imaginary (Perez, 1999) reflexive praxis emerge for and from a Chicano university instructor's engagement with and reflection of the master narrative and his classroom teaching of Mexican American and Latina/o students at an HSI in south Texas?

2. What does the decolonized classroom look like?

3. How can discussions around creating a decolonized classroom inform the current dialogue and discourse on Mexican American and Latina/o student success and retention at an HSI?

Need for the Study

Since 2004 UST has instituted a number of policies and practices to help retain all of their first year students. For example, the First Year Experience course educates students about the psychology of learning while providing them with skills and habits that will help them succeed within the university environment and was one of the first programs at UST created specifically to address first year student retention. In addition to teaching students about the psychology of learning the class also gives students an opportunity to explore their given major and learn about potential career options within

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that major. University departments and resources also use the course to advertise and inform students of the services available to them. Since implementing the First Year Experience course UST's retention rates have improved dramatically (Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, 2011). This is a positive outcome for the University not only because it means more students are retained beyond their first year but the First Year Experience course could also potentially serve as a model for other universities especially other universities with large Mexican American and Latina/o populations including HSIs.

This though, is not a study of the First Year Experience course; rather it is an auto-ethnographic study of my evolution from a student who held strong beliefs about the "master narrative" to a student who questioned and abandoned the narrative and then to my role as an instructor who has struggled with the "master narrative," allowing it to dictate how I taught and what I taught my Mexican American students, ultimately, concluding with where I am today (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). My classroom today looks very different from my classroom ten years ago when I began teaching the First Year Experience course. Today I have tried to create a de-colonized space in the First Year Experience classroom. This decolonized space has allowed my students and me to examine and analyze our educational histories and ethnic identities amidst the "master narrative." So while this is not a study of the class, the class is important because since 2003, my First Year Experience classroom has served as the site for my, de-colonial imaginary (Perez, 1999), reflexive praxis to emerge.

Additionally, this study is important because universities have sought out ways of improving retention rates, particularly the retention and graduation rates of their Latina/o

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students. Many of these programs have been developed based on research that suggests students need access to information about resources on campus; students need to be more engaged in the campus community and improve their academic preparedness (Tinto, 1993). Student retention research also makes several assumptions about students and reinforces the myth of the American college student and the "master narrative" while neglecting the needs and the history of specific ethnic groups (Arana, Castaneda-Sound, Blanchard & Aguilar, 2011; Bartolome, 2003). In my story exists the stories of my students and other Mexican American and Latina/o students who struggle to fit an ideal that neglects our unique experiences and realities (Arana et al. 2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003). The study examines the needs of Mexican American students; particularly the need for faculty, especially Latina/o faculty, to create spaces where they and their students can reflect on their educational experiences and ethnic identity (Urrieta, 2008). Furthermore, perhaps in examining my experience of growing up and then teaching within the "master narrative" and my journey to create a space for reflection of educational experiences, the study can further add to the dialogue on college persistence and retention among Mexican American and Latina/o students whose experiences within the school have gone unexamined and unheard.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how I, as a Chicano faculty member, have developed a de-colonial imaginary (Perez, 1999), reflexive praxis within the "master narrative" in order to engage my Mexican American students and decolonize their educational journey.

Scope of the Study

The study will largely be composed of my auto-ethnography (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) of my schooling experiences within a colonized space and how those experiences have influenced my role as both researcher and educator; in particular, how my schooling experiences have influenced how I structure the course I teach to create a space for examination and reflection of my students' educational experiences. The use of auto-ethnography also allows me to examine and reflect upon my experiences and evolution as an instructor and graduate student, struggling to work within the "master narrative."

Additionally, I will incorporate interviews, both formal and informal, I conducted with my former students, and with other Mexican American faculty at UST. I will also rely on ethnographic field notes and other journal entries collected over the last seven years (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

The goal of the study is not to produce generalizable outcomes but to examine my role as a Chicano instructor operating within the "master narrative" while trying to create a classroom that decolonizes the educational experiences of my students. By decolonizing the classroom I am seeking to create an environment that helps students understand the current state of Latina/o education while providing them with the context and history of how Latina/o students have arrived at this juncture. The decolonized classroom also becomes a space where my students' experiences become the focal point of the course; thereby privileging their lives versus the "master narrative." Additionally, perhaps in examining my own experiences as a Chicano instructor working with Mexican

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American and Latina/o students, my story will encourage other Mexican American and Latina/o educators to examine their roles within the "master narrative" and inspire them to create de-colonized spaces within their classrooms. In so doing, maybe we can change how we educate our Mexican American and Latina/o students who are struggling to find their way and a place within the "master narrative."

Overview

The dissertation begins with an examination of the literature. The literature review begins with a brief history of the educational experiences of Latinas/os following the annexation of the present day southwest United States. I then proceed to provide an examination of the literature on student retention, Latina/o student retention, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and conclude with a brief overview of the literature used as part of my theoretical framework.

Chapter three provides an overview of the research methodology including an overview of my research, my research questions the theoretical framework and the data collection. Additionally, the methodology chapter provides a brief discussion on the use of auto-ethnography (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) as the preferred narrative form used in my dissertation.

Chapter four examines the first part of my educational life. It is here where I describe growing up along the border in deep south Texas and how growing up in this environment shaped how my parents raised me and how my earliest educational experiences shaped what I thought I knew about what it meant to be a successful student (Carillo, 2007; Carillo, 2013; Rodriguez, 1975; Rodriguez, 1982).

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Chapter five examines the latter half of my educational life including my experiences as a lecturer at UST. The latter half provides an examination of the experiences that forced me to question what I believed about being the successful student (Carillo, 2007; Carillo, 2013; Rodriguez, 1975; Rodriguez, 1982) and concluding with the need to change the way I teach in order to provide a space that privileges my first year students' experiences above the "master narrative."

Chapter six provides a discussion and examples of how I have changed my classroom and my teaching so as to make it a decolonized space. By creating the decolonized space I no longer view the dominant discourses associated with Latina/o students, especially first year Latina/o students to dictate how I teach or what I should expect of my students.

Chapter seven provides closure to my journey. In addition to bringing everything together I also provide a brief discussion of the potential impact my work has on HSIs and First Year Experience classrooms.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Over the last thirty years educational attainment for Mexican Americans has remain unchanged and more than ever the need to address this issue is now (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Mexican American students still face many of the same struggles that prevented them from enrolling and remaining in post-secondary institutions thirty years ago. At the University of South Texas (UST), a Hispanic Serving Institution located in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, University officials have instituted a number of policies and programs to help increase the retention of its student population especially its large percentage of Mexican American students (Factbook, 2010). One such program was the creation of a First Year Experience course.

This research though is not an examination of the course as a university wide attempt to help retain students; instead this is a study of my role as an instructor of the First Year Experience course and more specifically of my experiences first growing up within what Valenzuela (2005) refers to as the "master narrative" in American schools to my transformation as a Chicano educator operating within the "master narrative" of the American university, while trying to create a de-colonized space within my classroom.

The literature review first examines the history of Mexican Americans in the United States as a colonized people and their early educational experiences. Revisiting the early educational experiences of Mexican Americans is important because it provides context for the current state of Mexican Americans in the United States.

Historically, Mexican Americans have long struggled to attain the same educational opportunities afforded the white majority (Spring, 2005). For example,

countless negative generalizations have been made about Mexican Americans regarding their educational experiences, including the belief that Mexican Americans were intellectually inferior to whites and that Mexican American families did not value education like white parents (Valencia & Black, 2002; Valencia 2010). These ideas about Mexican Americans have been instrumental in limiting the opportunities for advancement and for creating a large manual labor force (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004).

After contextualizing and historicizing the educational experiences of Mexican Americans, I will then provide a brief overview of the Chicana/o[2] educational pipeline which examines the difficulties Mexican American students experience throughout their educational experiences and discuss some of the interventions created to improve schooling for Mexican Americans students, including a brief overview of what is being done in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas since this is the location of the research site. Examining the paths Mexican American students take is a vital part of my work because it shows that even though we live in a different era of educational access, far removed from the early educational experiences of Mexican Americans, in fact one could argue little has changed. I will then provide background on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) because HSIs serve a larger proportion of Mexican American and Latina/o students than the average American university. The literature on HSIs will also provide insight into how these institutions plan to address the needs of the growing Latina/o population. I will then follow with an examination of recent literature on Mexican

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[2] Yosso (2006) uses the term Chicana/o to refer to Mexican American students as they travel the educational pipeline. I will use the term when I discuss or reference the educational pipeline traveled by Mexican American students.

Americans in college including the role of Latina/o faculty in addressing Latina/o student retention. I will conclude by providing a discussion of the theoretical framework I intend to incorporate in order to analyze my research including a discussion of the "master narrative" and how my particular theoretical framework is useful for examining it.

Mexican American History

Following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 the Mexican population north of the Rio Grande became the newest "members" of the growing United States of America (Acuna, 1998). The Treaty which promised Mexicans living in the newly occupied territory full citizenship, placed numerous obstacles in the way of the Mexican population living in the new territories making it difficult for them to fully exercising those rights. In some Mexican American communities they were forced out of their homes and their communities. Some retreated to Mexico while many of the remaining Mexican Americans were forced to live in segregated enclaves (Montejano 1987). Mexican Americans and their children would face all forms of discrimination including limited opportunities for mobility and advancement in American society (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Takaki 1993).

In his examination of the history of the American school, Spring (2005) describes the early educational experiences of Mexican Americans as being reflective of the "racial attitudes of Anglo-Americans" (p. 168). Anglos believed they were culturally and racially superior to the American citizens (Menchaca, 1997). It was these racial attitudes that served as the motivation for the United States to occupy much of the current southwestern United States (Menchaca, 1997). Race based discrimination would see its

way into all aspects of the lives of Mexican Americans, but nowhere was this more prominent than in the schooling experiences of Mexican American children (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Wherever there was schooling available to Mexican American children it was separate from that of Anglo children (p. 171). San Miguel (1997) writes that Anglos were not concerned with educating the Mexican American children. Doing so ran counter to the race based economic structure Anglos had created (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Menchaca, 1997; Richardson, 1999). By not educating Mexican Americans or by providing limited access to education, Anglos could continue to exploit and control the Mexican American labor force (Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Spring, 2005). It was the Mexican American laborer who provided Anglos with a steady supply of cheap labor.

Anglo communities that provided education for Mexican American children often provided them with subpar facilities and inexperienced teachers (Montejano, 1987; Valencia, 2000). While this sort of treatment discouraged countless Mexican American children from going to school, many Mexican Americans would not allow their children to be the recipients of inferior education. Some Mexican American communities created private schools or relied on the Catholic Church to educate their children because of the neglect they were experiencing in the public, Anglo run school houses (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003; Salinas, 2001; San Miguel, 1997). In countless communities throughout the southwest the private school houses became the site of preservation and maintenance as Mexican American communities made sure their language and culture would be taught and maintained in these often small schools (San Miguel, 1997).

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In the small, south Texas community of Hebbronville, just north of the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, the Mexican American community created a community school to educate their children (Salinas, 2001). The Colegio Altamirano operated for over sixty years and served children from Kindergarten thru the 8th grade. The Mexican American community of Hebbronville valued education but also were not naïve to the newly created power structures throughout the southwest and especially in south Texas. They therefore educated their children in their native language and helped their children learn the English language as well (Ibid).

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Anglos were concerned with the education and more importantly, the Americanization of Mexican American children (Gonzalez, 1997). Gonzalez (1997) writes that this shift to the Americanization of Mexican American children was part of a larger process of transitioning the new territories of the American southwest, from an agrarian society to a capitalist one (p. 160). Mexican American children were viewed as inferior; in intellect and appearance to the Anglo children and educators believed the only way to deal with them was to keep them segregated (p. 162). Those who were "clean" were deemed worthy of an education (p. 164). Gonzalez argues that the process of segregating Mexican American children was to create uniform members of American society. In addition to segregating Mexican American children, the Americanization process also involved teaching them English and stripping them of their native language. This was done in the belief that developing a common language would help make assimilation possible (p. 161). Soon, policies which attempted to remove the Spanish language from Mexican American children became law, prohibiting the use of Spanish in the school

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house (San Miguel, 1997; Spring, 2005). In Texas, English became the language of the public schools when legislation was passed in 1918 which forbade the speaking of Spanish in the schools (Spring, 2005, p. 230).

In addition to language, even the values Mexican American parents taught their children were attacked. Valencia (2002) writes that during the 1920's academic research began to paint the picture of Mexican American families as not caring about education and not supporting their own children's education. This idea was built upon deficit stereotypes and images created by Anglos to keep Mexican Americans in subservient positions. The stereotype of the uncaring Mexican American family has endured and remains present in the public discourse on Mexican Americans and education (Arana et al. 2011).

The stereotypes of Mexican Americans would be reinforced in policy throughout much of the southwestern United States (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). In the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas for example, Mexican American children attended segregated school houses with inferior facilities and few resources (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). Guajardo and Guajardo researched the schooling experiences of Mexican Americans in the communities of Edcouch and Elsa, two communities that were developed as segregated communities during the early 20th century (2004). The Guajardo's collected oral histories from community members and examined historical documents from the area, including photographs and school records. They write that in this community, the Mexican school, as it was called, was an old army barracks that was brought in from another nearby community (2004). This school only taught Mexican American students until they were at an academic level comparable to junior high. High school was for the

Anglo students and for only a few of the Mexican American students like those whose families owned small businesses or were prominent within the Mexican American community. In one of the oral histories collected by the Guajardo's, one community member noted that only the "well-behaved" Mexican American students would be allowed to attend the high school (2004).

Despite the stereotypes and limited access to educational opportunities, some Mexican American students were able to graduate and go on to college. Many of the early college attendees and graduates of colleges and universities were Mexican American, U.S. military servicemen returning from serving during World War II. The G.I. Bill allowed many Mexican Americans to enroll in colleges and universities (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). Among those able to take advantage of the G.I. Bill was famed Mexican American scholar, Americo Peredes. Paredes would go on to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin and become one of the foremost authorities of Mexican American, south Texas, Tejano, and Greater Mexican, culture (Saldivar, 2006). Without the G.I. Bill it is unlikely many Mexican American students would have been encouraged or financially able to attend a post-secondary institution.

But for every Mexican American who earned a post-secondary education the majority of Mexican Americans remained absent from colleges and universities. This would not change unless more opportunities were created for Mexican American students at the earlier levels of education. In Texas, organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and later the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) challenged the inequitably funded and segregated schools that served Mexican American children throughout the southwest (Spring, 2005, p. 421).

These organizations challenged the educational realities of Mexican Americans in front of a court of law (Delgado Bernal, 1999). They would find some success within the courts but in some cases even court rulings did little to change the limited educational opportunities of Mexican Americans. In the 1948 case of Delgado v. Bastrop, the courts ruled that the segregation of Mexican American students was illegal and yet despite the ruling, Mexican American children continued to be segregated throughout Texas (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Spring, 2005). In fact, segregation would continue even after the Supreme Court's historic Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954. Anglo school leaders justified the continued segregation of Mexican American students by citing the limited English proficiency of Mexican American students (Delgado-Bernal, 1999).

In 1968, fed up with second-class schooling, Mexican American students walked out of East Los Angeles high schools. This initial walk out would lead to other Mexican American student walk outs throughout the country. Mexican American students grew tired of the racism and discrimination they were experiencing daily in American public schools and the walk outs were their way of speaking out against the educational system (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). The walk outs were one example of how Mexican American students fought back against oppression and the slow change promised by the American legal system.

In addition to high school students, Mexican American and other Latina/o college students also participated in walk outs and in many cases helped to lead the walk outs that took place around the country. The students gained support and energy from other social movements of the era like the Black Power Movement, the Brown Berets, anti-war

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protests, and the women's movement (Delgado Bernal, 1999). The Mexican American students protested the lack of courses relevant to Mexican American culture and demanded that universities create ethnic studies programs where they could learn about their culture and history (Delgado Bernal, 1999; MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). To help strengthen their efforts while also creating a strong ethnic community on campus Mexican American students took ownership of the term Chicana/o and created student organizations such as M.E.Ch.A., the Movimiento Estudantil Chicano de Aztlan (Delgado Bernal, 1999, p. 84). Chicana/o student organizations would prove to be powerful vehicles for bringing about change throughout many colleges and universities.

The 1960's brought about a number of positive changes for Mexican American students within all levels of education in large part due to the work of Mexican American and Chicana/o students, community activists and lawmakers. At the college level the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 created financial aid opportunities for Mexican American students and other students of color and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 extended the powers of the Civil Rights Act to all educational institutions (Delgado Bernal 1999). Additionally, the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) was created to help recruit more Mexican American students for colleges and universities (p. 85). At the K – 12 grade levels, the federal government passed Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which meant federally funded support of bilingual education programs (Delgado-Bernal, 1999; Spring, 2005). But while the 1960's proved to be an important milestone in Mexican Americans' fight for educational access and equality, the victory would be short lived.

The late 1970's and 80's signaled the beginning of the conservative backlash against many of the social policies and reforms enacted during the 1960's (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Spring 2005). Following the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in 1980, federal support of education programs was reduced including funding to bilingual education programs. With reduced funding to important programs that helped increase the number of Mexican American college students, Mexican American students and other students of color were hit the hardest (Delgado Bernal, 1999). In addition to fewer federal investments in public education, measuring school effectiveness via standardized tests also began to gain support. This support would grow exponentially following the publication of, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which claimed the U.S. was falling behind other industrialized nations in education performance. The report placed the brunt of the blame on U.S. public schools and called for more accountability and reform (Spring, 2005). The report also called for a greater alliance between the business sector and public schools. Conservatives believed since schools were charged with producing employable citizens, business leaders should be involved in helping to set goals for schools (p. 453). The involvement of the business sector in U.S. schools and the emphasis on accountability and measuring school performance would continue throughout the 1980's and 1990's and into the 21st Century, culminating in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2004; Spring, 2005). NCLB mandated state standards and accountability measures unlike any other federal measure before it. More importantly it placed an emphasis on the teaching of the dominant Anglo culture via a standardized curriculum (Spring, 2005).

The legacy of discrimination and inequality experienced by Mexican Americans has certainly shaped the current landscape of Mexican American education (Bartolome, 2003). The majority of Mexican Americans continue to attend public schools that are highly segregated and are overly represented in the poorest school districts in America (onlinecollege.org). Federal policies like NCLB have handicapped already impoverished school districts and forced them to shift already limited resources to test preparation (Spring, 2005). In a recent online posting of America's poorest schools, three of the poorest were found in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas where the majority of the students served are Mexican American and recent immigrants (Cabrera et al. 2012; onlinecollege.org, 2011). The need to retain and graduate Mexican American students has never been more important because they remain the largest and most undereducated subgroup among Latinas/os and in order to meet the demands of the 21st Century economy they need to be educated (Ayala, 2011; Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005).

Chicana/o Educational Pipeline

Given the state of Mexican American and Latina/o education, researchers and organizations have dedicated themselves to examining the plight of Mexican American and Latina/o students. Some researchers have focused their attention on the route Mexican American students travel through the educational system, examining the barriers and challenges that prevent these students from earning a post-secondary education. They also examine the programs that have helped to bolster the number of Mexican American and Latina/o college graduates, often by intervening during the course of a Mexican American and Latina/o students' academic journey.

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Researchers describe the route Chicana/o students take through the educational system as a pipeline (Covarrubias, 2011; Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, 2006). They note that the majority of the students who start out at the beginning of the pipeline encounter numerous barriers which prevent them from making it to college much less graduating from college. Like so many Chicana/o students before them, Yosso (2006) argues that today's Chicana/o students continue to face many of the same barriers earlier generations faced, including a lack of access to quality instruction, lack of resources and an educational system that does not encourage or prepare Chicana/o students for college (Cabrera, et al. 2012; Yosso, 2005). And those Chicana/o students that do make it to a post-secondary institution encounter additional barriers such as a lack of academic support, poor counseling, and overcrowding where there are far too many students and too few academic counselors or resources to provide them with the support needed to be successful (Yosso, 2005, p. 99). Given the numerous obstacles encountered by Chicana/o students, creating programs that help retain and support them throughout their educational experiences is important to their success (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Camarota, 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

There are a number of successful programs and initiatives that work to improve the educational experiences of Chicana/o and other Latina/o students and their numbers in higher education. One of the oldest is the collection of programs which fall under the title of TRIO (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). These programs were enacted during the 1960's with the intent of assisting students from disadvantaged communities (p. 372). Today TRIO is composed of seven programs that help students throughout their educational experiences. Some of the more popular TRIO programs include Upward

Bound and Talent Search. The Upward Bound program works with high school students who are struggling academically and come from low income households. Upward Bound provides its students with academic support with the overall goal of helping its students enroll in a postsecondary institution (p. 375).

Talent Search, like Upward Bound, works with similar students but targets those who might not get the assistance at their schools needed to apply to college. Talent Search provides these students with academic, career, and financial aid support. These programs, along with the other TRIO programs have had some success in helping Chicana/o and Latina/o students persist through the educational pipeline.

Another effective program is the Puente project (Gandara & Moreno, 2002). Puente was created to help increase the transfer rates of Chicana/o and Latina/o students to 4 year institutions from community colleges (Ibid). Assisting Chicana/o and Latina/o students transfer from community colleges to 4 year institutions is important because the majority of students that choose to pursue a post-secondary education enroll in community colleges rather than a four year university (Fry, 2004; Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, 2006). And while these Chicana/o and Latina/o students expect to transfer to a four year university, few of them will (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, 2006). For example, for every 100 Chicana/o and Latina/o students who enroll in a community college, only 10 will successfully transfer to a 4 year institution (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Yosso, 2006). In addition to helping Chicana/o and Latina/o students transfer to a 4 year university, the Puente project also works to provide students with information about the college going process since research indicates that all Chicana/o and Latina/o students have limited

knowledge of how to get into college (Fry, 2004; Gandara & Moreno, 1998; Yosso, 2006).

In the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, schools are working to help create a college going culture by creating a seamless transition between K-12 institutions and colleges and universities (Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). Yamamura, Martinez, and Saenz (2010), citing a gap in the literature on college going culture among Mexican Americans, examined the educational pipeline of Mexican American students along the border. They conducted focus groups and interviews with counselors, students, parents, teachers, and educational administrators from south Texas. Using a borderland cultural wealth (BCW) theoretical framework, the authors examined perceptions of stakeholders' willingness to take on the responsibility for increasing college readiness among local students (p. 130). The authors found that all of the stakeholders understood the importance of their role and were willing to take on the needed responsibility to help create a college going culture in south Texas but, argue more needs to be done to bring all of the stakeholders together to address college readiness. For instance, despite the inherent wealth found within the local communities of south Texas, stakeholders were not accessing and using these resources. In order to create a college going culture within the area, the authors believe stakeholders must work collaboratively and develop strong relationships with each other in order to build a college going culture.

Another program in south Texas that has had some success for helping students gain acceptance into college has been the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development (www.llanogrande.org). Founded in 1997 by Francisco Guajardo, the Center sent a large number of Mexican American students to Ivy League and other highly

selective universities throughout the United States (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008).

Because of their efforts, the Llano Grande gained national acclaim and recognition.

Today the Center has widened the scope of its work but continues to help students enroll

and ultimately graduate from public and private universities.

Postsecondary graduation rates for Mexican American students remain low

compared to other ethnic groups but there is hope in the number of organizations and

programs working to create more opportunities for Mexican American students to find

academic success. Additionally, universities and colleges are also doing their part to

improve the educational attainment of their Latina/o students.

Hispanic Serving Institutions: History and Policy Background of HSIs

Today nearly half of all Latina/o[3] students enrolled in postsecondary institutions

enroll in colleges and universities that are designated Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI).

According to Excellencia in Education, which publishes research briefs on HSIs, the

designation came about during the 1980s when Latinas/os' low high school graduation

rates and low college enrollment rates became a national issue (MacDonald & Garcia,

2003; Santiago, 2006). Latina/o students were concentrated in universities and colleges

located in communities and urban centers with large Latina/o populations. This is

consistent with research on Hispanic college enrollment choices (Fry, 2004; Perez &

McDonough, 2008; Post 1990). According to Post (1990) Latina/o students tend to select

colleges and universities that are close to home. Staying close allows them to continue

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[3] Hispanic Serving Institutions serve students from all Latina/o subgroups so I will refer to students attending HSIs as Latina/os.

living at home and the students often feel more comfortable within their own communities (Fry, 2004).

The designation of HSI came about partly because many of the universities and colleges serving large populations of Latina/o students could not compete with larger universities in securing federal funds; they especially had trouble competing with larger research universities to secure funding. University and college presidents with large Latina/o student populations decided to organize themselves to create a coalition of schools. This coalition became the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003; Santiago, 2006). Shortly thereafter the creation of HACU, LULAC sued the state of Texas arguing that universities with large Latina/o student populations were underfunded and being discriminated against. In 1992 HSIs were finally recognized under the Higher Education Act (HEA) which granted these institutions access to special federal funding (Santiago, 2006).

Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), the mission of HSIs is not tied to advancing the educational goals of the Latina/o student population (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). In fact many HSIs started out as Primarily White Institutions (PWIs). Hispanic Serving instead signifies that the university has a Latina/o student enrollment of 25% with half of their Latina/o students considered low income (Santiago, 2006). Since the creation of the HSI designation, the number of HSIs continues to grow as does the demand to meet the needs of a growing Latina/o student population. Soon HSIs will enroll, "more than two of every three Hispanic college students" (Flores, 2011, p. 24). And so despite the fact that serving the Latina/o population is not their specific mission, these universities remain

vital to addressing Latina/o education because they have large Latina/o student enrollments.

Examination of Current Research on HSIs

Today HSIs represent 8% of all of the universities in the country but enroll nearly half of all Latina/o students (Santiago, 2008). The University of South Texas is a designated HSI and therefore it is important to understand what it means for a university to earn the designation of HSI, how students go about choosing an HSI and whether or not they are aware of the designation. Given their importance what follows is an examination of some of the recent research on the experiences of students at HSIs beginning with how Latinas/os come to choose HSIs followed by research on Latina/o student experiences at HSIs and factors that contribute to student persistence. I will conclude by discussing the future of HSIs.

In their second in a series of policy briefs on HSIs entitled, *Choosing Hispanic-Serving Institutions: A closer look at Latino students' college choice* (Santiago, 2007), Excelencia in Education, examined the reasons why Latina/o students choose to enroll in HSIs and how these reasons compared with Latina/o students at other institutions. The study examined national enrollment data and focus group data with students at 6 HSIs. The students in the focus groups could have gained admission to more highly selective institutions but instead chose to attend HSIs. The study found that unlike earlier studies on college choice which suggest that students choose to attend the most selective institution that admits them, Latinas/os attending HSIs are often less informed about the enrollment process (Cabrera et al. 2012). Latina/o students instead choose institutions

that are close to their families and are more affordable (Post 1990; Fry, 2004; Santiago, 2007). The study found that Latinas/os were more concerned with the cost and with attending a school that would allow them to graduate without acquiring much debt for themselves or for their families. Staying close to home also allows them to go to school while continuing to live with their families (Cejda, B., Capsparis, C., & Rhodes, B., 2002; Fry 2004).

In another study on Latina/o student enrollment, Nunez, Sparks and Hernandez (2011) examined the characteristics of Latinas/os enrolled in community colleges designated HSI. As recently as 2003 – 2004, 46% of Latina/o graduates enrolled in community colleges after graduating from high school (p. 19). This is consistent with work on the Chicana/o educational pipeline which shows that the majority of Chicanas/os pursuing a postsecondary education enroll in community colleges but many do not make the transition to the four year university (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Yosso, 2006). Nunez, Sparks and Hernandez (2011) study examined characteristics of community college students from different racial/ethnic groups and then compared students attending HSIs against those attending non HSIs. The data was taken from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 2004 which is taken from first year college students (p. 22). Of the total sample, 1,650 were Latina/o. They found that Latina/o students, as in the Excelencia Study (Santiago, 2007), were more likely than other ethnic groups to choose a school based on "personal and family reasons" (Nunez et al. 2011, p. 28). Community college HSIs were also shown to enroll a greater number of first generation students. Overall, the study concluded that community college HSIs were more likely to be attended by non-White students which the researchers suggests can be

explained by the geographic locations of the community colleges relative to large concentrations of non-White students. The study also confirmed the importance of 2 year HSIs in providing post-secondary education to Latina/o students as they constituted nearly half of all students enrolled, many of whom are late enrollees who work and support families (p. 32). In closing, the researchers suggested more research be done on examining Latina/o college choice since traditional models of college choice are not consistent in explaining how Latina/o students choose colleges and universities.

Understanding how Latina/o students come to choose HSIs is important in understanding the pathways of Hispanics especially since the Excelencia (2007) study on college choice and the article by Nunez, Sparks, and Hernandez (2011) raised important questions regarding how students choose which post-secondary schools to attend. Excelencia (2007), for example asks how representative is the study of Latina/os attending HSIs? For instance, the study only examined high achieving Latina/o students yet HSIs enroll Latina/o students of all academic levels since many HSIs have open enrollments. The research conducted by Nunez, Sparks, and Hernandez (2011) which examined Latina/os at community college HSIs also raises a question regarding the sample size and the kinds of Latina/o students used in the study. Nunez, Sparks & Hernandez (2011) found that a number of the Latina/o students surveyed exhibited risk factors not often found in high achieving students. If the study is concerned with student choices it would benefit from providing a wider array of student perspectives especially in light of the fact that the incorporated focus groups were made up of only 20 -25 high achieving students from each campus. Focus groups of 20 -25 high achieving students from each campus is hardly enough of a sample for an examination of Latina/o college

choice at HSIs. Furthermore, the majority of Latina/os enrolling in HSIs attend

community colleges, yet none of the participating institutions were community colleges.

The study could have benefited by including community college students since a large

number of students who enroll in HSIs enroll in 2 year postsecondary institutions as

opposed to a 4 year university.

Nunez, Sparks & Hernandez (2011) also suggest that while Latinas/os that chose

2 year HSIs exhibited a particular set of characteristics, choice could also be explained by

geography. HSIs are often found in locations with large Latina/o populations and

information on geography could either support or refute much of the existing literature.

The results would seem expected given the history of the development of HSIs and the

existing research on how Latinas/os choose where to go to school (Perez & McDonough,

2008; Post, 1990; Santiago, 2006; Santiago, 2007). HSIs have developed because of the

growing number of colleges and universities serving large Latina/o student populations

and as already noted Latinas/os are more likely to choose schools that are inexpensive

and close to home (Fry, 2004; Post, 1990 and Santiago, 2007). A question that arises and

one that the article failed to address is do Latinas/os know which colleges and universities

are HSIs? Meaning, do Latina/o students consciously choose HSIs because it is an HSI?

The researchers are not clear in determining whether Latinas/os are aware that the

community colleges they attend are HSIs but other research on Latina/o college choice

appears to show that Latinas/os do not choose a school because it is an HSI (Perez &

McDonough, 2008; Post, 1990; Santiago, 2006; Santiago, 2007).

In another study, Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo and Williams (2007)

examined minority student experiences at HBCUs, HSIs and PWIs. The researchers

compared the experiences of African Americans at an HBCU with African American students at a PWI, and Latina/o students at an HSI and at a PWI to see how the experiences of African American students at the HBCU compared with the Latina/o students at HSIs. The researchers point out that research exists on student engagement among African Americans at HBCU, but there is little research on Latina/o student engagement at an HSI. Data consisted of two samples drawn from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) database. The first sample included 2,896 African American students; 1,852 at HBCUs and 334 at PWIs. The second sample consisted of 2,149 Latina/o students; 2,028 at HSIs and 321 at PWIs. The students were then asked to rate their experiences in six different categories of engagement; higher-order thinking, active & collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, supportive campus environment, satisfaction with college and gains in overall development (p. 47). They concluded that African American students at HBCUs were more engaged than any group examined and among the Latina/o students, the results showed that Latina/o students attending HSIs were more likely to exhibit low levels of engagement compared to their African American peers at HBCUs. Between Latinas/os attending PWIs and those attending HSIs the researchers found that their levels of engagement and overall satisfaction with their school were no different from each other (p. 49). The authors attribute this disparity to the mission specific role of HBCUs and their long history serving the African American community. HSIs are new compared to HBCUs. HSIs were also historically founded and organized as PWIs. Even with the HSI designation, their mission is often directed at serving the needs of all of their students and is not guided by a mission specific to the needs of the Latina/o population on campus (Santiago,

2008). Still, it is difficult to make any generalizations because as the researchers noted, the sample does not speak to the experiences of Latina/o students at all HSIs. Schools choose whether or not they want to participate in the NSSE survey so only a fraction of the total number of HSIs (26 total) was represented. Additionally, the researchers point out that they failed to control for pre-college measures, though make no mention of what those pre-college measures are. They believe such measure could account for some of the disparities found in the study. One factor not mentioned in the article is whether or not the students live on campus or commute. Information on where students live in relation to the campus might also help explain engagement as it is possible the commuters might be less engaged on campus. In spite of the study's limitations highlight an important finding regarding the purpose of HSIs; is the HSI designation merely a demographic indicator? If it is then perhaps HSIs are not doing enough to fully engage their Latina/o students.

In keeping with the research on student experiences at HSIs, Cavazos Jr. et al. (2010) examined resiliency among 11 Latino college students at an HSI. In this qualitative study participants were interviewed and asked about the role of family and other factors they attributed to their success in school. Chief among their findings was that the students exhibited a number of characteristics of resiliency in spite of characteristics that put them at risk of leaving. For example, students who have average high school grades were doing well in college. Many of the students were also designated as low income and noted it was difficult for their parents to contribute financially to their college education but where they could not contribute money the family was able to provide encouragement and reassurance. Some students said their

parents shared their own struggles and that this often motivated the students to continue

to persist. Among the recommendations made by Cavazos et. al. (2010) was the

suggestion that school officials and counselors should not read a strong family

cohesiveness as an indication of the family not valuing education, which seems to be a

common deficiency heaped upon Latino families (p. 184; Valencia & Black, 2002).

The study performed by Cavazos et. al (2010) provided interesting insight and

confirmed other research on the important role the family plays in providing non-

monetary resources for students (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). The research though, could

have benefited from a larger sample of students. Their final sample consisted of only 11

students. Providing more student experiences would have been more representative of

the student population at the HSI. Also, within their concluding suggestions the

researchers encourage school administrators and counselors to not view the Latino family

through a deficit lens but make no recommendations for change within the university or

college as an institution. If the study is an examination of students at an HSI then it could

have offered recommendations to help the HSI address the needs of its students,

particularly, identifying strategies to help bridge the information and relationship gap that

may exist between the institution and Latina/o families. So while the article provided

insight into the characteristics of persistence and resiliency, further examination of the

experiences of students at HSIs and the role of the institution in supporting student

persistence remains unaddressed.

Arana, et al. (2011), also examined the factors that they believe lead to student

persistence. Their study was conducted at a private HSI. The research question was,

"how do students' experiences and environmental factors contribute to retention" (p.

238). Because persistence can be explained by the interaction of the student and the

university environment, the researchers incorporated Bronfenbrener's ecological

theoretical framework (p. 239). The study included juniors and seniors, both persisters

and non-persisters, and consisted of interviews and focus groups. Incorporating both

persisters and non-persisters provided a broader perspective of the persistence picture

because so often little is known about those students who do not persist.

Among Arana, et al. (2011) findings were that unlike much of the literature on

persistence which suggests that first generation students are less likely to persist than

other groups, the 1st generation students in their study used their status as a source of

pride (p. 242). They welcomed the challenge of being a first generation student and

viewed being in college as an opportunity to "lift up" their entire families. Non-persisters

cited work and family crisis such as a family member losing a job or illness as obstacles

to their schooling. Within the school context, the researchers found that persisters felt as

though they had faculty that cared about them and supported their efforts (p. 243). This

is supported by the work of Valenzuela (1999) who examined Mexican immigrant and

Mexican American students in a Houston public school district and found that students

thrived in a caring educational environment. Non-persisters though, cited a lack of

faculty support as a hindrance to their education and some expressed never feeling

connected to the campus (p. 244). Finally in the interaction between the student and the

institution, persisters cited a common cultural connection, meaning they were able to find

a place within the university where they felt their culture was valued thereby helping to

support their cultural identity (p. 245). Non-persisters found it difficult to juggle both

work and home life with their lives as students with many holding jobs that pulled them

away from the campus and kept them from fully participating in campus life (p. 246). Arana, et al. (2011) recommended that as universities examine student persistence they could pay closer attention to the interaction between the student and the institution and identify ways the institution can better support its Latina/o students.

Another recent qualitative study, an unpublished dissertation, (Cortez, 2011) examined persistence at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), a border HSI. The purpose of Cortez' study was to examine what UTPA did to create a climate that helped its students persist (p. 65). Cortez used focus groups and individual interviews with students, staff, and faculty. Cortez spent a semester on campus and examined campus literature to develop a broad understanding of the campus climate. Among her findings, Cortez noted that students believed the campus was welcoming (p. 174). Students also noted the support they found within their academic programs. For example, students in the College of Education, were required to take classes together as cohorts. These cohorts allow students to develop close relationships and support networks where the students could study and work together. Students also noted that they were able to receive much needed academic support and advice. This was echoed in the interviews with faculty and administrators who believed they played an important role in helping the students succeed.

Cortez' (2011) research adds to the growing body of research on HSIs by providing some practical suggestions HSIs can make to help their students persist based on the success found at UTPA. And unlike many of the other articles which only look at one particular group, Cortez was able to provide the faculty and administrator perspective. This is important because persistence literature often examines the issue

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from one perspective. Student persistence does not fall solely on the shoulders of students. Faculty and school administrators are important components of the persistence puzzle. Professors engage with students in and out classes and are responsible for creating a welcoming and supportive classroom environment. School administrators create policies which can help or hinder student persistence. Cortez' understands persistence involves many people and her work clearly reflects this view.

The current literature on HSIs examines a number of the prevalent issues facing Latina/o students but much of this research looks at institutional practices and the effects such practices have on student persistence and resilience at the university. My research looks to examine not an institutional practice or the institution but rather my role as an instructor within the space of my classroom, the institution, which is designated as HSI, and the larger context of deep, south Texas and how I have worked to create a decolonizing space within my classroom. Additionally, my work seeks to examine how my experiences can create a new space for discussion within the larger conversation regarding Mexican American and Latina/o student retention and what we can do as educators to better address their needs.

Student Retention

The study of student retention and persistence has been around for over fifty years and became an important issue during the sixties and seventies when the civil rights movement forced universities across the country to open their doors to groups that historically did not have access to universities (Salinas, 2002). Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, minority students had some, albeit limited access to higher education;

African Americans had Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) but were often excluded from other institutions (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). In the case of Mexican American students, little is known in regard to how many were enrolled in colleges or universities given the little information in terms of actual number of students because that information often was not kept and the U.S. Census did not account for Mexican Americans or other Latinas/os until the 1970s (p. 34).

The 1960s and 1970s proved to be an important era for college enrollment of minority students especially Mexican Americans. It was during this time that Mexican American college enrollment increased dramatically though no numbers were given (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). But while the doors to institutions were relatively opened to accommodate more students, a number of these students were not prepared for the rigors of college and many did not graduate. Additionally, colleges and universities were not prepared to deal with students from diverse backgrounds. This was due in large part to the inequitable educational experiences many of these students had in public schools, as was the case with Mexican American students (Delgado Bernal, 1999; San Miguel, 1997; Spring, 2005). Mexican American students were seldom allowed to enroll in college preparatory courses and other advanced courses (Delgado Bernal, 1999). Today, student retention, particularly Latina/o student retention and persistence, remains a central issue for universities and community colleges. As funding to universities and colleges continues to decline, student retention rates are one of the most effective ways of securing much needed resources for universities and colleges since funding is often tied to the number of students universities and colleges serve (McLaughlin, Brozovsky, McLaughlin, 1998).

The literature on first year student success and retention is broad and has grown in recent years (Cortez, 2011). Early studies of retention suggested that students failed to stay in school for a variety of reasons such as, a lack of academic preparation, lack of motivation and or lack of direction, inability to form relationships between students and faculty and trouble adjusting to the university environment to name a few (Tinto, 1975). The importance of these early studies must not be overstated. These early studies, helped to provide a theoretical framework(s) that colleges and universities continue to use today as they seek to improve their retention rates.

One of the earliest studies of persistence was conducted by Vincent Tinto, who in 1975 conducted a review of the relevant literature on student persistence. Unsatisfied with his findings on student persistence, specifically the lack of a theoretical framework to explain student persistence, he developed his own, model of student departure (Salinas, 2002; Tinto, 1975). Tinto examined student characteristics and attributes such as race, gender, test scores, and school achievement as possible factors that impact retention. Additionally, he recognized the role the institution played in affecting retention and examined such institutional factors as the type and size of the university. He also examined how the student performed during their first semester at the institution and the student's ability to socially integrate into the university.

Tinto's conclusions of how students come to separate from the university has been criticized by educational theorists and researchers because the blame for students not remaining at the university falls squarely on the student (Allen, 1999; Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archulta, Phaoummarath & Landingham, 2006). In response to his critics and his own observations of the changing demographics of college students,

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Tinto continued to develop and build on his own model. His most recent additions to his model came in 1993 when he included the impact of external factors on student persistence (Tinto, 1993).

While other models of persistence have been developed since Tinto's original work, it continues to be one of the more widely used models for explaining student persistence. Today, researchers continue to incorporate the various components of Tinto's model while also examining external factors that might impact student persistence (Castillo, et al., 2006; De La Rosa, 2006; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nora, 1990; Nora, 2004). This shift towards external factors has largely taken place because of the focus on minority student persistence. The experiences of minority students as they transition to college are often different from those of white students. Tinto's original model focused on white college students and did not necessarily reflect what occurs when minority students go to college. Tierney (1992) argues that Tinto's model represents an assimilationist approach to the university where minority students must conform to the institutional values and norms. The argument can be made that by ascribing to an assimilationist view of the college student's expected behavior, one is ascribing to the "master narrative" (Valenzuela, 2005). For example, in Tinto's model, it is the student who must adapt to the culture of the school rather than the school adjusting to meet the needs of its diverse student population.

Tierney's critique, like so many other researchers, has allowed researchers to widen their lens and look at how other factors affect persistence (Castillo, et al., 2006; Cavazos, et al., 2010; Nora, 1990; Nora, 2004). Such critiques also open the door to examining other reasons students have trouble persisting and whether or not, institutions

are doing enough to address those issues. Some of these factors include financial planning and paying for college, the university community, pedagogy, and student obligations and roles beyond being a student and family expectations. The addition of these factors now allows researchers to look beyond just what the student is or is not doing as a college student and instead shifts the focus to the things around them including their interaction with the university environment.

Latina/o Student Retention and Persistence

Research on Latina/o college students has grown significantly over the last decade, largely in part to the growing number of Latina/o students enrolling in universities, the expanding Latina/o population and the persistence of low graduation rates (Allen, 1999; Arana, et al., 2011; Fry 2004). A number of the earliest studies on Latina/o student retention focused on the "deficiencies" of Mexican American students, claiming the students lacked the experiences, skills, and social capital that white students possessed (Arana, et al., 2011; Barajas & Pierce, 2001). Other studies looked at how factors that affected the traditional white student might also affect Latina/o students such as financing their college education, institutional structures such as bureaucratic hurdles and support. For instance, when choosing a school Latina/o students often look at cost (Post, 1990, Fry, 2004). What recent research suggests is the cost of school may adversely impact student stress. Additionally, having to take out loans to help pay for school may prevent Latina/o students from engaging in the campus environment beyond the classroom (Post, 1990; Fry, 2004). Below is a brief discussion of some of the research on Latina/o student persistence and some of the factors which impact persistence including college choice, financing college, and support.

Choosing a College: Financial Aid, Family and Support

How students feel about a campus; whether they feel as though they belong or the campus climate is welcoming, affects student enrollment (Nora, 2004). Unfortunately, researchers suggest that early literature on college choice is not reflective of how Latinas/os go about selecting the right college for them (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006; Post, 1990). Nora (2004) examined the role of habitus, which she identified as the congruence between student's values and those of their academic environment and cultural capital on college choice. Incorporating quantitative data, Nora examined college choice among students at 3 diverse universities. He concluded that contrary to previous research, how students feel at the university is an important factor and it is often overlooked in examining college choice. Students who are most engaged in identifying which college provides the best fit are more likely to be happy with their college choice. And a student who is most content with their college tends to reenroll and persist (Nora, 2004).

Other studies have also challenged traditional theories on college choice (Nora, 2004). Person and Rosenbaum (2006) and Perez and McDonough (2008) examined the effect of chain migration on college choice among Latina/o students. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) studied Latina/o students attending two year colleges. They define chain migration as following a member of one's social network and liken it to immigrant migration patterns where migrants follow a member or members of their social network. Their study used qualitative and quantitative student data from fourteen two year institutions; seven community colleges and seven occupational colleges. The authors examined chain migration because they hypothesized that Latina/o students follow

someone from their social network to college. This may be an older sibling, friend or other family member. Person & Rosenbaum (2006) found Latina/o students in the study chose their respective institutions because someone from their peer network attended. This person could serve as a source of information and support particularly when the student had questions or concerns. The researchers found that using a chain migration to choose an institution could be both positive and negative. One positive was students entered the institution having some familiarity with it because of their peer network. A negative aspect of following a friend or relative was students were less likely to use campus resources when faced with questions because their peer was often the primary source of information. Additionally, students with social contacts at the university were less integrated into the campus culture. This was problematized further if the students were still living at home because the home became their support network and if the family was not well informed of the college going process the family might be limited in the kind of support they could offer. The researchers concluded that colleges with small minority populations should provide more support programs to help assist minority students by creating a welcoming campus environment and making information and help more accessible, though no discussion of what would doing so look like, especially in lieu of the possibility that the family may feel apprehensive about going to the university in the first place.

Following Person & Rosenbaum (2006), Perez and McDonough (2008) also explored chain migration theory but in addition included a social capital framework to examine college choice among 106 Mexican American high school students in the Los Angeles area. Incorporating Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, Perez

and McDonough (2008) define social capital as social networks and local resources (p. 253). They found that family played a central role in helping students decide where to go to college in that, extended family or family friends provided information from their own experiences of going to college or of dealing with a family member who had been through the process. But just as with Person and Rosenbaum (2006), they too found that while the family relationships can be very helpful, the quality of the information is important because if the student's networks do not have the "requisite social capital" then they may be limiting the student's college choices (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). Despite this cautionary finding, the authors conclude that traditional college choice theories may not adequately explain how Mexican Americans and other Latinas/os go about choosing a college (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

In addition to existence of support networks, cost is also a crucial factor Latina/o students consider when choosing a college (De La Rosa, 2006; Nora, 2004; Post, 1990). In the studies on chain migration, the students not only relied on family to provide support and information but being close to that support was also viewed as a way of keeping college costs down (Perez & McDonough, 2008). Post (1990) conducted a longitudinal survey of seniors at a large high school. The survey asked students what kind of information they knew about college and how they would make their decision in choosing where to go. He found that Latina/o students were the least informed about the expected costs of attending college and being misinformed about costs often discouraged the Latina/o students from applying especially if they felt like going to school would be too expensive. Post concluded that cost and perceived cost of attending college was most important to the lower and middle income students, which were largely minority.

A more recent study on access to information on financial aid by De La Rosa (2006) suggests that Mexican American students and their parents are still largely misinformed about the costs of college and how to access financial aid to help pay for it. De La Rosa surveyed juniors and seniors at seven Los Angeles area high schools. Students responded to questions which measured their perceived awareness of the financial aid process, whether they believed they would be able to access financial aid, and whether they aspired to attend a 4 year university (2006). De La Rosa found that while the students were given information about financial aid, 45% of students remained pessimistic and agreed that their grades would prevent them from receiving financial aid thus, reinforcing the need to further educate students of the financial aid process. De La Rosa recommends that schools work with communities to help "create a sense of opportunity" especially given that many of the low income students surveyed in this study were still misinformed about financial aid (2006). In doing so, students would be provided more information than they were already receiving about how to pay for school.

In addition to understanding the nuances of financial aid, other work has examined the role financial aid has on student retention. One of the earliest studies on financial aid as a determinant of student retention was conducted by Nora (1990). His quantitative study was conducted at a two-year community college in south Texas where he was able to survey and interview 170 Mexican American students. Unlike earlier research on the effects of financial aid on retention, Nora argued that his study is unique because it was more representative of Mexican American students. Earlier studies were often conducted among the traditional college student; residing on campus and immersed in the campus culture. The majority of Mexican American students surveyed on the other

hand, were enrolled in two year colleges and lived with their families off campus. Nora found that Mexican American students who received higher levels of aid completed more hours and received some form of certificate or credential (p. 325). Unfortunately, according to Nora, these programs were often the most likely to be cut from federal funding. He suggested universities and colleges increase their portion of aid while decreasing aid that is dependent on federal monies. Such an increase may also prevent Mexican American students from working more than needed in order to pay for school.

Longerbeam, Sedlacek, and Alatorre (2004), reinforced Nora's findings in their quantitative study with 2,991 students at a university located on the east coast. Of the students surveyed 175 self-identified as Latina/o. The Latina/o students were the students most concerned about financing their education (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). They found that Latinas/os were more likely to work long hours to pay for school. They determined that in order to help improve the retention rates of Latinas/os, more needed to be done to provide financial assistance for them. Additionally they suggested increasing the opportunities for Latinas/os to work on campus rather than leave to work an off campus, minimum wage, job which pulled them away from the university environment.

Many Latina/os battle the high costs of higher education by staying close to home (Fry, 2004; Post, 1990). Fry (2004) believed this may be counterproductive to helping Mexican Americans and other Latinas/os graduate. In a report looking at 25,000 students, Fry (2004) suggested that overall Latinas/os tend to select less selective universities compared to white students. This is important, he noted, because these less selective universities have lower degree completion rates. Like most of the literature already discussed, Fry suggests Latina/o students tend to choose universities that are

close to their families and are less expensive. He also noted that Latinas/os are also more likely to delay enrollment because some choose to enter the workforce immediately after high school. He concluded by suggesting if Latina/o students attended more selective universities, their persistence rates would improve and the graduation rates of Latinas/os would be similar to the graduation rates of Anglos. He also provided a seemingly easy solution to improving the graduation rates of Latinas/os but one that is still largely ignoring the reasons why many Latinas/os choose to remain near their families when considering their post-secondary options. Leaving is not always an option for many Latinas/os and even in leaving Latina/o students still face numerous obstacles in obtaining a college degree. The following sections discuss how merely attending the same colleges as Anglos still presents a different set of challenges including increasing the likelihood of encountering a hostile campus environment (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Cammarota, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002).

Institutional Structure and Climate

In addition to cost, research shows that the institution itself can also have an impact on student retention. If the students feel supported within their institution they are likely to stay enrolled (Nora, 2004). In their quantitative study on the effects of university climate on ethnic identity conducted at a predominantly white institution, Castillo et al. (2006) found that those Latina/o students with a strong sense of ethnic identity were more likely to identify a hostile university environment. Their findings challenge Tinto's model of persistence which suggests students will persist so long as they get involved. They argue that Latina/o students will not persist if they feel the environment is not supportive of them and their culture. Among their suggestions for

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improving the environment was that universities hire more counseling psychologists who are sensitive to cultural differences.

Campus climate as affecting how students feel at a university was also supported by Gonzalez's (2002) work where he examined the effect of campus environment on student persistence and sense of belonging. He conducted an ethnographic study by following two Chicano[4] students at a predominantly white university to see how they perceived their campus culture. He also sought to understand what it was about a white institution that created tension between itself and its students of color. What he found was that there were a number of instances where the students' culture contrasted and even conflicted with those of the university thereby creating a sense of alienation. Gonzalez identified three different cultural systems that affected persistence; the social, physical, and epistemological (p. 201). Each of the systems was dominated by a white value system that did not support or place equal value on Chicano culture. The conflict generated within each system created a sense of alienation among the Chicano students and powerlessness since they were in the minority amidst the white college campus (p. 203). Gonzalez asserts that white universities have a legacy of exclusion. These institutions historically have not been as welcoming to students of color making it difficult for the university to fully accept them.

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) also examined institutional climate by conducting a longitudinal study of the effects of campus climate on Latina/o students at nine universities. They were chiefly concerned with understanding how students perceived

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[4] Gonzalez uses the term Chicano to identify his two informants.

their university's climate, how this then affected their sense of belonging and then the impact the university had on helping students develop a "pluralistic orientation" (p. 236). Hurtado and Ponjuan suggest a hostile university environment can affect student academic performance but surprisingly while a hostile university environment affected student sense of belonging it had no clear impact on their "educational outcomes" (p. 248). The authors also noted that students did not respond in a consistent manner in dealing with discrimination. How students responded to a hostile campus climate depended on the types of support mechanisms available to them. For example, on one campus students formed a multicultural student organization to deal with racism and social justice (p. 248). In addition, those students who participated in support programs on campus were able to foster a greater sense of belonging on their campus. So, even though the university environment was perceived to be hostile, the Latina/o students took advantage of programs and support networks on campus and among themselves in order to combat hostility.

Other research has looked exclusively at how universities have dealt with providing a better environment for its minority students (Maldonado et al., 2005; Santiago, 2008). Maldonado, et al. (2005) looked at how universities have addressed creating a better environment in their examination of student initiated retention programs. These programs were unique because unlike traditional retention programs which are often directed from the top down, these models were generated and implemented by the students. They conducted a qualitative study of two student initiated retention programs; one at the University of California Berkeley and the other at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. What they found was that even when universities attempt to change the

culture, they often do so superficially by creating cultural awareness weeks that do little to make minority students feel at home and instead serve to isolate students while reinforcing stereotypes. The inability of the university to create a safe, nurturing and supportive environment for Latina/o students, the researchers argue, is one of the reasons why universities have consistently failed to retain and graduate their Latina/o students. The student initiated programs on the other hand were able to create a supportive environment because they validated the experiences of other Latinas/os, built connections to their communities and challenged the norms established by the larger university. The researchers concluded the programming must be meaningful and programs created by minority students, especially upper class students who have experienced a hostile campus culture, can make a big difference in helping other minority students feel welcome and safe.

Cultural Incongruency

While Tinto (1975) and others have developed persistence models which place student engagement and assimilation within the university as the key to persistence, one issue that comes up often when addressing Mexican American and Latina/o students are their cultural differences. Unfortunately the picture painted of Mexican American students is often a negative one informed by false assumptions and the idea that Mexican American students are somehow deficient when compared to the traditional, often white, college student (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 2002). When Mexican American students' culture does not "fit" the culture of the university then culture becomes the scapegoat and the chief reason for Latina/o student failure (McDermott, 1987; Trueba, 1988).

A common misconception of Mexican Americans is they do not care about their education. It is a popular myth particularly among conservatives. For example, Sosa (2002) blames the struggles of all Latinas/os on the family and culture. He laments that Latinas/os believe education is important but are not willing to pursue it (p. 88). Sosa's argument, though not supported by data or facts, blames the Latina/o family and argues that Latinas/os need to be bombarded with messages over media outlets to take education seriously. Unfortunately this type of deficit thinking remains pervasive in the study of Latinas/os in education and only serves to reinforce stereotypes while providing a narrow view of the real experiences of Latinas/os (Valencia, 2008). Today countless studies exist which aim to disprove stereotypes of Latina/o students (Cabrera, et al., 2012; Ceballo, 2004; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

Cabrera, Lopez and Saenz (2012) examined the concept of "ganas" as it relates to motivation and the will to succeed. Their study, which was part of a larger study examining college going aspirations in south Texas, sought to challenge the stereotype that Latina/o families do not value education. The researchers interviewed students that were enrolled in one of seven area high schools and students who were recent high school graduates. They found that even in the face of adversity and limited resources, students from the area still aspired to attend a post-secondary institution, emphasizing the importance of a college degree to reaching their goals. Additionally, the students found support from their parents, even though most parents did not have a college education. The parents consistently supported their child's college aspirations with some parents going so far as not giving their children the option of not attending college. The parents believed college was the best way for their children to have more opportunities than they

themselves have had (Ceballo, 2004). Furthermore, what the authors conclude is what is lacking is not a will, desire or "ganas" on the part of the students and their parents, as suggested by individuals like Sosa (2002) but instead a lack of information about what it takes to get into college is what students need.

Having the support of the family is further supported by work conducted by Ong, Phinney, and Dennis (2006). They examined the role of the family among Latina/o college students as it relates to academic support and success. They examined 123 Mexican American students at a large urban university in southern California to measure parental support, family interdependence, ethnic identity, commitment and exploration. What they found was that for low income students the family was an important factor to helping them succeed and in some cases the family unit helped to offset the lack of financial stability (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Families provided students with strong ethnic identity development and helped students developed resiliency in dealing with a hostile university environment.

Chiang, Hunter, and Yeh (2004) also found that family networks and friends were also crucial to helping students deal with stress. College is often a stressful time in a young person's life and the stress can be amplified if students perceive the college environment to be unwelcoming. They examined 130 Black and Mexican American students to identify their coping attitudes and practices. What they found was these students were more likely to take advantage of family and friends to discuss stressful situations more so than the professional counselors often provided by the university. Some of the participants acknowledged a willingness to visit with a counselor but overall the students felt more comfortable dealing with stress via their already established

familial and peer networks. This finding suggests the Mexican American family plays a

crucial role in helping their children succeed in school and in college. The family is

where the Mexican American students often turn to for support thereby negating the idea

that Mexican American families do not care about or value education. As the research

shows, while Mexican Americans face numerous obstacles to obtaining a college degree

the family provides important support that is often overlooked by much of the retention

literature (Delgado-Bernal 2001; 2002).

Teaching and Mentoring

Teaching is also a factor that affects campus climate, in fact, Vasquez and

Wainstien (1990), argue that while professors write about persistence little is said about

the role faculty and their teaching practices play in keeping students engaged. They

argue faculty have often parlayed Latina/o students' differences into deficits making the

students struggles all about what they lack rather than what the professor is or is not

doing to help the student succeed (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Faculty, they argue, need to

be aware of the students' values and teaching should build on those values rather than

neglect and ignore them. Furthermore, the faculty, as a member of the university should

be available to answer students' questions outside of the course. Latina/o students often

struggle to ask for help but perhaps if faculty offered to answer their questions after class

that too could help the students feel more comfortable on campus (Vasquez & Wainstien,

1990).

Tied to the role of faculty is the need for role models and mentors (Arana, et al.,

2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo; 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004). In his

ethnographic study of a Chicana/o male's journey from gang member to college student, Reyes (2006) discussed the importance for marginalized students to have access to mentors who can help them navigate the university. These students often do not have access to mentors or "communities of practice" where the students can learn from and engage with more knowledgeable people. Reyes characterizes these communities as sites of legitimate peripheral participation. It is within this context where the student not only has access to knowledgeable adults but also becomes empowered because learning and developing a sense of identity are combined. It is in this sort of environment where Latina/o students feel safe amidst the larger and often unwelcoming environment of the university.

The struggles of Mexican American students in education are well documented and the research on these students' experiences in the educational pipeline continues to grow. Today universities and colleges, especially those identified as HSIs are looking to establish programs and policies to help their Mexican American students (Dayton, et al. 2004). Much of the work these universities are doing to improve retention efforts deal with many of the findings discussed. These universities are trying to secure additional funding for their students; many are working to improve their academic and career advising and some are trying to improve their efforts to create a better campus environment. Unfortunately there appears to be a dearth of research on the role of faculty in retaining Latina/o students. My research thus seeks to build on the existing work on Latina/o and more specifically Mexican American and Mexican student retention via an auto-ethnographic examination of my experiences as a Chicano faculty member situated within the colonizing space of a south Texas border HSI. In addition to examining my

role as an instructor I will also reflect and examine the role my educational experiences growing up and being educated within the larger colonizing space of south Texas influenced my teaching and my ability to create a decolonizing space for my students (Delgado Bernal, Aleman Jr. & Garavito, 2009; Perez, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

Today Latina/o students are enrolling in postsecondary institutions in greater numbers than any other ethnic group including whites (Lopez & Fry, 2013). Unfortunately the graduation rates remain among the lowest. Improving retention and overall graduation rates is an important question and is vital to the well-being of future generations of not only Latinas/os but of all Americans. I have examined and reviewed some of the recent literature on Mexican American and Latina/o student retention and persistence. These articles have looked at a number of issues including motivation, access to information, financial assistance, campus climate and mentorship as not only explaining why Latinas/os struggle but also how addressing such issues might help with retention and graduation.

My study does not aim to provide an answer to the retention, persistence and completion dilemma that our Latina/o students' experience, especially Mexican American students, but it was important to examine the literature so as to provide context to my study. We need to know what the educational landscape looks like for Mexican American and Latina/o students today in order to understand the demands placed not only on me by the institution which employs me but to also understand my own educational journey amidst the landscape. Therefore, my study looks at this issue via my experience

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not only as a Mexican American student but also as an instructor at a Hispanic Serving Institution along the U.S. Mexico border. More importantly the study examines how, via my educational and teaching experiences within a colonized space, I have made a concerted effort to make my class a site of decolonization (Delgado Bernal, Aleman Jr. & Garavito, 2009; Perez, 1999). In order to do this I will incorporate a few different theoretical lenses which will allow me to examine my experience and reflect upon how those experiences have shaped me and my teaching as I work with Latina/o students during their first year in college while also trying to create a classroom environment that serves as a site of decolonization (Perez, 1999).

In order to privilege my experiences and the experiences of the Mexican American student and their families, I will use a hybrid of borderlands analysis, Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory (Lat Crit) theory and Perez's (1999) Decolonial Imaginary to guide my study. Using a borderlands and Critical Race/Lat Crit theoretical framework will privilege the voices of my informants/students and my own voice as opposed to the voice of the dominant ideology (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). One could argue that my perspective is representative of the dominant ideology but I would argue my theoretical lens provides me with the best tool to examine my experiences against and within the dominant ideology. Additionally, while I am a part of the dominant ideology as an employee of the institution, I am also a member and product of the local community; well experienced in the ways educational institutions have worked to silence local histories, culture, and values in favor of the dominant ideology (Ibid).

A borderlands analysis provides an alternative to mainstream educational theories and privileges the experiences of the marginalized (Anzaldua, 1987; Elenes, 2006). The

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borderlands analysis allows us to look at hierarchies and power relations and how these relations have been historically created. Additionally, the concept of space is critical to a borderlands discussion and can deal with anything from physical space to the positions we hold in society. In the case of this research, space is important since I will be examining my experiences and the experiences of my students and colleagues within a classroom and the larger space of the educational institutions along the south Texas-Mexico border. It will be important to understand how power, ideology and opportunity have been constructed within educational spaces, hence the need for a borderlands analysis. Additionally, in examining the classroom space, a borderlands analysis, can be a powerful tool in observing how students use the space to examine and reflect upon their experiences within the hierarchies of the school and how I as the instructor have utilized the space to either reinforce power hierarchies and the university prescribed ideology or created a space that allows the students and myself as instructor the opportunity to reexamine and critically analyze the institution and what and how we learn (Bartolome, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Delgado Bernal, Aleman and Garavito (2009) employed a borderlands analysis to examine the experiences of first year Latina/o students in an ethnic studies course at a predominantly white institution or PWI. The researchers interviewed 68 Latina/o participants of the program. In addition to being enrolled in a year-long ethnic studies course these students also participated in a mentorship program at a nearby elementary school. The researchers found the course serving as a space where students could reflect upon their educational experiences within the colonized space of the university. The students could then remake their identities and challenge the norms created by the

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university and traditional schooling by placing themselves at the center of the educational narrative. Often the educational narrative places students of color especially Latina/o students along the margins but here the students became empowered by learning about their history and their struggles in education (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings; 1995). Once at the elementary, the college students served as the model for their younger charges; showing them that it is possible to see themselves at the center of the educational narrative.

Like the research of Delgado Bernal, Aleman Jr. and Garavito (2009), I too wish to examine the classroom as a decolonizing space and my role as a Chicano faculty member in helping to foster a safe space for my students (Perez, 1999). The difference in my research is in the location and why location matters. Their research was conducted at a PWI whereas my work will be conducted within an HSI along the U.S. Mexico border. While the university is an HSI and has a number of local Mexican American faculty and Mexican American leadership there still exists the presence of a dominant ideology which can dictate pedagogy and practice (Urrieta, 2009).

In addition to a borderlands analysis I will also incorporate Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Theory (Lat Crit) as part of my theoretical framework. Critical Race Theory is a form of critical theory which developed from Critical Legal Studies. CRT seeks to redress the racial inequalities in American society, particularly those inequalities that we perceive to be part of the cultural norm (Covarrubias, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT seeks to further challenge the slow progress of civil rights legislation and argues that racism remains pervasive in American culture and is such a

part of our culture that we easily take it for granted and seldom recognize its effect on minorities and all people (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Latina/o Critical Theory (Lat Crit) works in conjunction with CRT but acknowledges the multidimensionality within the lives of Mexican Americans and Latinas/os beyond race. These include language, immigration, gender, culture and sexuality (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Oppression and subordination often operate via a number of these issues therefore Lat Crit provides an appropriate lens for critically analyzing them. Together CRT and Lat Crit provide a framework that privileges the voices of the oppressed as opposed to the voice of the dominant ideology that informs traditional theoretical frameworks that reinforce deficit views of Mexican American and Latina/os in educational research. Ladson-Billings (1998), Solorzano and Yosso (2002) and Villalpando (2004) provide a rationale and framework for incorporating a CRT and Lat Crit framework to analyze the educational experiences of the Mexican American and Latina/o youth. CRT and Lat Crit operate via five basic tenets or guiding principles (Delgado & Stefancic; 2012).

1. Reliance on trans disciplinary approaches – which allows educators and researchers to draw from a variety of disciplines. This allows researchers to examine racism and oppression as it operates in different arenas.
2. Emphasis on experiential knowledge – recognizes students of color as creators and holders of knowledge by privileging their stories.
3. Challenge dominant ideologies – Question what counts a knowledge, norms, standards and practices.

4. Centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression – recognizing that racism does not operate independently and often works in conjunction with other forms of oppression.

5. Commitment to social justice – seeks political and social change.

The first guiding principle of CRT suggests that racism does not work in isolation. It often works in conjunction with other forms of oppression including class, gender, sexual orientation and even citizenship. Secondly, CRT challenges the master narrative which suggests that everyone can be successful in America regardless of who they are, where they come from, or what they believe. Thirdly, CRT is committed to social justice and does not seek to merely reveal racism but works to address it and liberate those affected by it. Fourth, CRT also incorporates the use of storytelling to critique the dominant myths that permeate American society. While the narrative is persistent and entrenched in American culture, providing a counter narrative can disrupt what we take for granted in society or that which we identify as the "norm" (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Researchers argue that our assumptions, those ideas that make up the master narrative, often inform policies and practices that are advertised as being race neutral but in fact work against minority students (Villalpando, 2004). Creating a counter narrative is also useful in challenging categories institutions use to identify students as deficient or lacking in skills. The fifth principle, providing a trans-disciplinary approach, challenges the master narrative by using multiple disciplines including gender studies, history, ethnic studies and sociology, just to name a few. Using a trans-disciplinary approach is effective at understanding the complexity of racism and oppression (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Researchers are now using CRT and Lat Crit to examine the educational experiences of Latinas/os beginnig with the educational experiences of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This is important because if we are looking at the overall state of Latina/o education we must begin by looking at where the pipeline starts; inside the homes and in the early educational experiences of Latina/o children as they are consistently examined against the prevailing Anglo norm (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado-Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

Villenas and Deyhle (1999) used CRT to review seven ethnographic studies on Latina/o families to show how they break from the traditional, often stereotypical ways Latina/o families are discussed in research and policy. Researchers and policy makers still incorporate a deficit model when discussing the Latina/o family and suggest that Latina/o culture is to blame for the state of Latina/o education (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Trueba, 1988; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Villenas and Deyhle (1999) present examples that show Latina/o families as firm believers in educating their children, contrary to the deficit model. They chronicle how learning is an ongoing process even within the confines of the home. The learning being done within these Latina/o families may not be consistent with the kind of learning that might happen in a white middle-class home or the classroom but it is still learning (p. 422). The authors argue that within the school, children are often put in a position where they have to choose between their family and culture and school success. This is further complicated by cultural notions of education. The Latina/o family often subscribes to a broader definition of education compared with the "white" view of education. Among the families examined and as often is the case of many Latina/o families, education or *educacion*, as it is called in Spanish, is meant as a

holistic way of learning that includes how one conducts him or herself and the values

they uphold (Rendon, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). *Educacion* therefore goes beyond just

book learning or academic learning and places importance on respecting all humans.

This definition of education is also contrary to the workings of the American school

where competition and individual determination and success are lauded and encouraged

(Rendon, 2011). Deficit views of the Latina/o family often fail to understand the nuances

of the family including learning as it occurs in the home. CRT and Lat Crit allow us to

acknowledge and privilege those differences because they privilege the often silenced

voices of the oppressed.

Delgado-Bernal (2002) also incorporated CRT, Lat Crit, and a critical-raced

gendered epistemologies framework to examine Chicana/o[5] students' experiences within

the classroom. In her ethnographic study, she argues that the Eurocentric/middle class

view of knowledge discriminates students of color while privileging those whose

knowledge is most consistent with the Eurocentric/middle class norm. Privileging

Eurocentric/middle class forms of knowledge, she says, does not begin with the

pedagogical practices in the classroom but with the curriculum and with the creators of

the knowledge. Chicana/o history, she points out, is often omitted from the traditional

history textbook. By removing Chicana/os or just never acknowledging them in the

history books we devalue them and their place in the making of America (p. 106).

Delgado-Bernal writes that CRT and Lat Crit provide an appropriate lens for

understanding how the dominant knowledge is constructed, first by contextualizing its

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[5] Delgado Bernal refers to her participants as Chicana/o as she is referring to the Chicana/o educational
pipeline.

development within history, and then deconstructing it. Using this particular framework she demonstrates how the Eurocentric/middle class view of knowledge devalues the knowledge of Chicana/o students. CRT and Lat Crit though recognize Chicana/o students as holders and creators of knowledge and works to legitimize that knowledge. By legitimizing the knowledge Chicana/o students possess, the knowledge is no longer along the fringe but becomes valued.

Covarrubias (2011) also uses the inter-sectionality framework of CRT to examine the Chicana/o educational pipeline. Covarrubias suggests that in using the inter-sectionality framework he can examine how race, class, gender, and language operate to create or limit educational opportunities for Chicana/o students. He builds on the work of Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera (2005) who introduced the concept of the educational pipeline and suggest that the problems which continue to plague Chicana/o students is in large part due to the fact that institutions of higher education continue to employ policies and practices that limit their opportunities. Covarrubias believes intersectionality will help policy makers create more effective policy because it provides a more nuanced view of the Chicana/o student. A more complex view of the Chicana/o student takes into account how they are impacted by the intersection of race, class, gender, language and citizenship. Covarrubias suggests that while the pipeline has been effective for demonstrating the educational pathways of Chicanas/os, it has not effectively shown how these other factors work at various points throughout the pipeline. Through his work he is able to support the research that shows the overall state of Chicana/o educational attainment but more importantly he was able to create a more accurate picture of the educational pipeline of Chicana/o students by showing how issues

such as gender discrimination, class, and other factors including undocumented status create diverse experiences for Chicana/o students along the pipeline. A traditional view of the pipeline would never account for the complexity and nuanced picture created by Covarrubias and other researchers who have incorporated a CRT and Lat Crit lens to examine the educational experiences of Chicana/o students.

Fernandez (2002) also incorporates CRT and Lat Crit to examine the educational experiences of Latina/o students. She writes that when policy makers and researchers discuss Latina/o education they frame it as "crisis talk" and only focus on the educational failures of Latinas/os. This research often neglects the voices of Latina/o students and only presents a partial examination of the problem. There is never any discussion of how the system has failed students and limits their opportunities for success. Her research attempts to provide a voice for Latina/o education and an opportunity to push the discussion away from the negative discourse. Fernandez' study is the story of Pablo, a college graduate, reflecting on his high school educational experiences. Pablo's story is one of success. He came to the country as an immigrant and transitioned from bilingual classes into mainstream classes. He graduated and went on to college where he obtained his degree. Fernandez is careful to not just highlight his success story because conservatives often latch on to and hold up students like Pablo as an example of the effectiveness of schooling while also reinforcing the "master narrative." Instead, Pablo offers a critical analysis of his experiences within his high school. Pablo believes minority and second language learners were often underestimated and seldom challenged. He notes that if it had not been for a teacher who noticed his talents, he might not have ever gained admission into college. Even his upper level courses did not prepare Pablo

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for college and he recognized that if he felt unprepared he can only imagine how those students not in his classes must have felt if they went on to college (p. 54). In spite of his success within the school, Pablo also recounts how he exhibited behaviors outside the margins of the successful student narrative when he chose to cut class numerous times while in high school. He says most students did not feel like they were missing much by not being in class. Overall, Pablo's story details the experiences of a Chicana/o student within a school that fails to challenge students of color or adequately prepare them for college. While Pablo was able to succeed within the culture of the school, one can only imagine what happens to those students who were not adequately served because of the school's lack of support, rigor, and low expectations. The dominant narrative often fails to show how schools fail minority children by subtracting their culture, language and valuable resources including access to quality teachers (Valenzuela, 1999). Instead the dominant narrative focusses on the individual student and or their culture to explain the academic underperformance of Chicana/o students. Such a picture ignores the realities of the marginalized. By using a CRT and Lat Crit framework Fernandez was able to place Pablo's story at the center and provide an accurate sense of Pablo's reality. Ultimately, there was nothing wrong with Pablo's will or determination. At numerous junctures Pablo was denied access to opportunities students who did not look or sound like him were getting. If we are going to try to explain and more importantly understand academic success then we have to take a closer look at the obstacles Chicana/o students face in schools (Bartolome, 2003).

Other authors though not formally calling their work CRT or Lat Crit, have utilized counter-narrative to deconstruct their own experiences within the university and

the colonized self (Carrillo, 2007; Rendon, 1992). The American university, like the rest

of the educational system, has been shaped and informed by this concept of a master

narrative (Valenzuela, 2005). The master narrative, roughly explained, is the idea that in

order to be successful in school and in America one must forgo one's cultural traits and

assimilate into the larger American culture (Ibid). There are also expectations that this

student must disengage from their home and fully assimilate into the culture and life of

their university (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). The master narrative also espouses individual

achievement and success which is often purportedly in opposition to the expectations

espoused by the Mexican American and Latina/o family (Rendon, 2011). CRT and Lat

Crit seek to challenge the master narrative and displace the power by giving power to

Chicanas/os seeking to create and center their own narrative of success.

In her essay on her college going experiences, Laura Rendon (1992) speaks

directly to author Richard Rodriguez's (1974) discussion of the expectations of the

master narrative. Rodriguez laments over what he has sacrificed in order to be successful

within the university. Rendon argues that Rodriguez's experience is typical of the way

universities treat students of color. Mexican Americans and other minorities must often

make a choice between assimilating and adopting the culture of the university or

maintaining their own culture. Like Rodriguez she writes, "subconsciously" she did not

believe the language of the school was compatible with her home language and she too

would have to choose one. This idea of being forced to make a choice, Rendon argues, is

pervasive in the thinking of policy makers and academics throughout the country who are

guided by the master narrative. Throughout her academic career, she is often asked why

more students cannot be like her, the successful Latina; they assume that she chose to

adopt the dominant culture of the university (p. 59). Instead, Rendon believes academic

success can happen without having to disconnect from one's culture. Like practitioners

of CRT, Lat Crit and a borderlands analysis, Rendon recognized her knowledge as being

legitimate and she could find success in the university without having to let go of her

culture. Rendon closes by recommending that universities and colleges reassess the way

they educate their Mexican American and Latina/o students (p. 60).

In his reflection, Carrillo (2007) laments on all that he has lost in his quest to earn

a doctoral degree and describes many of the same feelings as those characterized by

Rodriguez (1974) and Rendon (1992). He says, he is America, "… raceless, spaceless,

humbled by academia's harsh lesson: I do not have a home" (Carrillo, 2007, p. 348). He

then asks what his accomplishments within academia have afforded him and wonders

whether his newly earned title will allow him to go back home or if he will be relegated

to talking about home from behind the walls of the academy. Shaken and distraught over

all that he has lost Carrillo closes by suggesting that if it is not too late, then it is time the

institution changes the way it educates "young Latinas and Latinos" lest the master

narrative continue to strip us of that which is most important to us.   Mexican American

college students every day experience the pressure to adopt the dominant culture and

succumb to the master narrative and for what?

The roots of these "values" and "norms" discussed by Rendon (1992) and Carrillo

(2007) can be traced to notions of "whiteness" where being white becomes the standard

against which everything else, particularly those who are not white or the "other", are

measured. In her work, "Whiteness as Property", Harris argues that in America our

notions of "whiteness" began during colonization and conquest (1993). "Whiteness"

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became a way of validating the Anglo's social standing within the developing racial hierarchy of colonial America. It was a way of identifying who was free and who was a slave. Racism therefore did not operate independently or in isolation but instead was used to create a form of economic exploitation and domination where "whiteness" became more than just a physical identifier but a form of property (p. 276). Harris states, "White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits and it was jealously guarded as a valued possession, allowed only to those who met a strict standard of proof" (p. 279). That proof of course, was a person's ability to prove they were white. Today, though America appears to be different, our conceptions of norms and values have been shaped and formed by a "white supremacy" (Urrieta, 2006). Whiteness is the standard bearer against which we are all measured.

The subconscious feeling of inadequacy felt by Rendon (1992) and Carrillo (2007) with their own cultural heritage, is driven by the concept of the master narrative and the "white" legacy that permeates our institutions. It is also commonly felt among the colonized that have had their histories, traditions and values challenged and in many cases erased (Rodriguez, 1974 – 1975). Rendon (1992) and Carrillo's (2007) reflections serve as counter narratives to the traditional "master narrative" and are critical to decentering and de-colonizing the "master narrative" as the norm (Valenzuela, 1999). Their reflections are also critical to examining the colonized self; when they ask what it is they are trying to achieve and what have they given up or have been asked to give up in the process of becoming educated. CRT, Lat Crit, a borderlands analysis and Perez' de-colonizing imaginary (1999) are important tools for deconstructing the master narrative and challenging the basic assumptions we, as a society, make and certainly the

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assumptions the institutions make about Mexican American youth. As long as we continue to allow the master narrative to dictate not only who Mexican American students should be but also the role faculty of color, especially Mexican American and other Latina/o faculty should play in the classroom, we will continue to ignore the history that has created the situation we now are working tirelessly to improve and neglect the real needs of our Mexican American and other Latina/o students.

Building on the work of Rendon (1992) and Carrillo (2007), by examining my own experiences along the educational pipeline and reflecting on my struggles with the master narrative, affords me the space to examine my experiences within the colonizing spaces of educational institutions. It also allows me to examine my experiences as a Mexican American student growing up in the colonized space of south Texas, my current role as a Mexican American faculty member within the colonized space of a university and the space of a class which one can argue is meant to teach students how to meet the demands of the master narrative. Additionally, my story set alongside Rendon (1992) and Carrillo's (2007) work allows others to ask, even over the course of time Rendon (1992) first reflected on her experience to the completion of this work, has anything changed in terms of what Mexican Americans and Latinas/os experience in college?

Incorporating a CRT, Lat Crit, borderlands and the de-colonizing imaginary as a theoretical framework also allows me to see beyond the discourse of neutrality which claims that every child in America has an equal opportunity for success. Given the history I already reviewed, including the fact that Mexican Americans and Latinas/os continue to attend secondary schools that are inequitably funded, we know the discourse not to be true (Cabrera, et al., 2012).

This theoretical framework also challenges the persistence of deficit thinking that undergirds explanations of Mexican American and Latina/o student underachievement (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Valencia, 2010). More importantly it allows me to conduct research that privileges my voice, my students' voices and the experiences of my colleagues thereby opening the possibility of creating a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative being produced by the institution (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

While more faculty of color, research and publish articles and texts that challenge what we know about Mexican American and Latina/o student achievement, the dominant discourse that labels our Mexican American and Latina/o youth as deficient, continues to persist and in many instances maintain its prominence in American society. This makes it ever more important that we remain vigilant in providing counter narratives that continue to challenge how we talk about Mexican American and Latina/o college students and the role of faculty of color in creating counter narratives to the dominant discourse within these institutionalized spaces (Urrieta & Villenas, 2013).

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Overview

The focus of my research is self-examination as a Mexican American faculty member and my experiences through an auto-ethnographic lens and methodology reflecting on my racialized educational experiences within the colonized space of the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). I have spent most of my life in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, hence, all of my primary and secondary schooling also took place in the region. Today, I am a faculty member at the one of two four year universities in the region. As an instructor, I am tasked with teaching first year students how to be successful college students. To be more specific, I teach them about the psychology of learning as it relates to their learning and studying habits and practices. While my self-examination addresses my experiences within my classroom and my role as the instructor, it also explores how growing up and being educated in an area with a history of colonization has influenced me as an instructor, particularly, how I have been expected to teach students how to be "successful" students. A concept and expectation which is largely based on an antiquated model of the traditional college student. As such, what happened when these students did not fit the role of the traditional college student?

The University of South Texas (UST) is a Hispanic Serving Institution. Since 2004, I have taught a First Year Experience course created to help orient incoming freshmen to university life by introducing students to the psychology of learning and providing them with information about potential majors and careers. However, this study is not an examination of the retention program or of other changes the university has

implemented to address retention. Instead, this is an examination of my role within the colonized space of the university as an instructor who teaches this class and works primarily with first year and often first generation, Mexican American and Latina/o college students. It is also an examination of my journey. My journey began through the educational pipeline of south Texas' public schools, then away to college and then back home and to UST.   I was most interested in examining my educational experiences and how those experiences have ultimately shaped, for better or worse, me as an instructor, including, how those experiences have shaped what I do in my course and the goals and expectations I set for my students.

In my time as instructor I have always tried to create a space that best fits the needs of the students. Some of the themes and topics change from semester to semester but I have consciously tried to create a safe place, where students can discuss their educational experiences both prior to enrolling at the university and as university students (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008). This course, which was created to help improve the University's retention rate for first year students, has largely been driven by a text and a mission to teach students skills and behaviors that will help them become successful students, e.g. students who go to class, set goals, develop positive study techniques and overall fit into the expectation of what a successful student is and does. The successful student has also been defined as one who willingly disengages from the home and the home culture while integrating into the culture of the academic institution (Tinto, 1975). Put succinctly, students are expected to follow the expectations of the master narrative. While all of these skills and behaviors are positive; what is easily overlooked in the course is the reality the students face every day, particularly that these are not traditional

college students and that we need to expand how we characterize, identify and ultimately teach this particular group of first year students (Cammarota, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Delgado-Bernal, 2001). What then is my role as a Mexican American faculty member who shares similar life and educational experiences with what these students are expected to do (Urrieta, 2008)? While I have always tried to create a safe space for students in the past, I have overlooked the power the institution has had in reinforcing the concept of the master narrative on me and therein how I teach. This is why it is important to examine what that looks like, not only on my teaching but on the sets of expectations we create for Mexican American and Latina/o students.

Background

I came to this research early in my doctoral program. During one of my earliest advising meetings I was asked to identify a potential research project which could eventually become my dissertation. Having already spent four years working with freshmen and really students of all classification at UST I knew I wanted to study my students. Early in my teaching career I began to notice students who were highly capable and talented stop out. I would see them one semester and the following semester they were no longer enrolled. I would run into them at convenience stores or in and around the community. This led me to my first question, why do our (UST) Latina/o students leave or not return following their first year? I had my own theories but I was eager to see what the literature had to say. The topic was set and the first research paper I wrote attempted to answer this question. The result was an examination of the reasons why all students leave college but was not specific to my students; Mexican American, often first-generation, and largely poor and working class students. Instead, the work

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reinforced what the university was trying to do with the course; teach students the "necessary skills" that would help them be "good" students and provide them with information about resources like tutoring and financial aid but void any examination of them as people. The paper, like many early intervention policies was highly impersonal. This view was reinforced not only by the crude literature review I had compiled during my first semester but also by other faculty members when we met to discuss the course. I latched on to this work and the belief that if only we could make our students better students, we would solve the university's retention problem and possibly the larger Latina/o attainment gap (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). I also never bothered to ask what I could do as an instructor to help my students.

Fortunately, my peers and my instructors in my doctoral program challenged my views and questioned the direction I was taking my research. In my haste to answer my question I had neglected the socio-political history of the area and really the entire history of Mexican Americans and Latinas/os in the United States (Bartolome, 2003, Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Richardson, 1999). I had even neglected my own experiences growing up in south Texas, always holding on to the belief that if you followed the master narrative (Valenzuela, 2005) you would find success. I also never bothered questioning what the University or we, as faculty, were doing to help or hinder our students (Urrieta, 2008).

The experiences of Mexican Americans and Latinas/os in college have been well documented (Delgago Bernal, 2001; Gonzalez, 2002; MacDonald & Garcia, 2003; Pino & Ovando, 2005) but this study is different because it is an examination of my educational experiences as an insider/outsider and my educational experiences within a

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colonized space (Banks, 1998; Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001; Villenas, 1996). Additionally, this study proved to be an examination of how growing up and being educated in a colonized space shaped what I believed about education and how those beliefs have shaped my teaching.

South Texas has a unique history; characterized by colonization and conflict between Anglos, Mexican Americans and Mexicans (Richardson, 1999). This history can be seen in the way schools have developed in south Texas and in who historically did and did not have access to local schools. For many years Mexican American and Mexican students attended segregated schools (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). The university is no different. The University of South Texas began as a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and later gained the designation of Hispanic Serving Institution or HSI, once such a designation became available. While studies on HSIs have been conducted, including several on HSIs along the U.S.-Mexico border (Cortez, 2011; Salinas, 2002), no such study has used an auto-ethnographic lens and methodology to examine the role of Mexican American instructors within the colonized space of south Texas and a border HSI.

Historically Mexican Americans have not fared well compared to other ethnic groups in educational attainment (Arana, et al., 2011; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Mexican Americans have the lowest attrition rate and represent the largest college age minority group in the country (www.uscensus.gov). Mexican Americans have historically experienced discrimination, underfunded schools and an overall lack of support at all levels of education (Cabrera, et al., 2012; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 1999). Today the effects of these experiences continue

to impede the progress of Mexican American students' at all educational levels. The situation is no different in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas where the majority of the population is Mexican American and much of the current school leadership, including elected officials are Mexican Americans (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). This alone makes it a unique location to study.

Research Questions

1. How does decolonial imaginary (Perez, 1999) reflexive praxis emerge for and from a Chicano university instructor's engagement with and reflection of the master narrative and his classroom teaching of Mexican American and Latina/o students at an HSI in south Texas?
2. What does the decolonized classroom look like?
3. How can discussions around creating a decolonized classroom inform the current dialogue and discourse on Mexican American and Latina/o student success and retention at an HSI?

Research Paradigm

This study was based on auto-ethnographic research methodology (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). An auto-ethnographic research methodology was best suited for this work because I examined my own educational experiences as they have helped inform my pedagogical practices. In addition to reflecting and analyzing my educational experiences, the use of the auto-ethnographic methodology allowed for the juxtaposition of my experiences with the theories that define or describe my experiences.

Additionally, I incorporated an ethnographic research component which allowed me to examine the experiences of my peers and my students rather than an emphasis on statistical analysis which might offer a more generalizable outcome (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The use of an ethnographic component allowed me to use student interviews and narratives alongside my own auto-ethnographic narrative thereby creating a dialogue between the multiple experiences.

The study was also informed by a collection of field notes, conversations, unstructured interviews, in class and out of class observations and personal reflections I have collected over a span of six years. These notes and artifacts allowed me to examine students' reflections and perceptions of their schooling experiences and my own personal journey; which I suspected were better reflected via a qualitative analysis and more specifically, via an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methodology (Gonzalez & Padilla, 2008).

I have always been drawn to and concerned with the individual perspectives and stories that arise out of qualitative studies because of the uniqueness of each story and because every participant's story and experience matters. I also believe qualitative studies can provide a rich description and analysis of a particular occurrence such as the experiences of students within the classroom and community space.

I was not concerned with proving a universal truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), nor did I assume or posit that I was Rosaldo's lone ethnographer looking for my "native" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 30). Instead I was both the "native" and the dominant and my position itself was much of what was examined (Merriam, et al., 2001).

Therefore, my goal was never to speak from an objective and neutral position because I fully acknowledged my own position and relationship to my informants and the institution (Banks, 1998; Behar, 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Only in acknowledging my subjectivity to my work was I able to ensure that my research was examined honestly and vigorously (Banks, 1998).

My research has been guided by a combination of borderlands analysis, Critical Race Theory, Latina Critical Theory and Perez's Decolonial Imaginary (1999). It was difficult to identify one theory that provided the tools to both examine the master narrative and provide a counter to the master narrative, therefore, I chose these theories because each provided a unique lens for examining south Texas and more specifically my educational experiences and those of my informants within a colonized space. Furthermore, taken as a collective, I believed these theories provided me with the best tools for examining south Texas, its history, its people and the socio-political-historical forces that have shaped the area and created today's educational reality.

My research recognizes the subjective and privileges the local. It also recognizes that reality has been constructed by societal, historical, economic, ethnic and gender values; and these values have or do not have meaning within the dominant society depending on which side they lie. Borderlands analysis, CRT and Lat Crit and the Decolonial Imaginary, acknowledge that those values have power regardless of how the dominant society may view them and they are concerned with the "identification, examination and transformation" of that power (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

My research uses a borderlands (Anzaldua, 1999; Elenes, 2006) analysis, CRT and Lat Crit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Villalpando, 2004) and the decolonial imaginary (Perez, 1999). A borderlands analysis is multidisciplinary and incorporates the theoretical foundations of Chicana/o studies, women's studies and cultural studies to examine educational policies and practices (Elenes, 2006). It was useful in my research methodology and enabled me to examine the formal and informal spaces of schooling, focusing on my own educational experiences within the colonized space of south Texas. A borderlands analysis was also appropriate given that Anzaldua developed a borderlands analysis based on her experiences growing up in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, while also experiencing many of the same schooling experiences as I (Anzaldua, 1999). In addition to examining educational spaces, a borderlands analysis also looks at how the individual responds to and reflects upon policies that impact their educational experiences (Elenes, 2006). Ultimately, a borderlands analysis looks to transform educational policies that reproduce inequality and maintain oppression (p. 216).

CRT and Lat Crit have also been incorporated as part of the analysis and were used to examine the existing university student success narrative. CRT and Lat Crit work in contrast to traditional research methodologies which operate under the guise of objectivity but merely work to validate and support deficit views of students of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

The principles of CRT and Lat Crit were essential to my research methodology because they challenged the dominant narrative around the role of faculty and the educational experiences of Mexican American and Latina/o students by not only

acknowledging but privileging their voices (Yosso, 2006). This was accomplished by recognizing that the master narrative has been fashioned over time by oppressing people of color via racist practices like segregation, deficit labeling, and colonization (Valenzuela, 2005). Furthermore, by privileging the stories of the oppressed, CRT and Lat Crit also seek to change the system; in the case of this research, by rethinking what it means to be a Mexican American faculty member and the relationship between a faculty member and his or her Mexican American students.

The third aspect of my theoretical framework is the use of the decolonial imaginary as posited by Perez (1999). The decolonial imaginary brought the first two theories together because it forced me to examine what the decolonized looks like. If what is occurring in south Texas is the vestiges of colonization informed by racism, then what does a decolonized south Texas look like and more importantly, what does the decolonized classroom look like? The decolonial imaginary (Perez, 1999) provided me with the tools to answer the questions, how does one begin to go through the process of decolonization and what do the decolonized do to decolonize others? Additionally, in the colonized space of the university what does a decolonized classroom look like?

Statement of Positionality

As I shared earlier in the Introduction, I am a product of the American "master narrative." Growing up my parents believed if I spoke English and only English then I would be successful in school and more importantly would avoid being punished for speaking my native tongue (Rodriguez, 1974). I believed and held on to the promises of the narrative, following it by behaving in school, being subservient, participating in numerous activities and being an overall "good" student. Along the way I also denied my

heritage; often discounting the value of the Spanish language and the culture that nurtured me every day (Anzaldua, 1999). The narrative took me to one of the most prestigious universities in the country. And then I came face to face with reality. It was in college where I was reminded that I was brown and carried with me a foreign surname. No matter what I did to gain acceptance within the larger society, my position as a student in college and as an American would always be questioned. I was reminded that, to others I looked more like a gang banger on television than a student at the university.

"I want to see everyone's ID!" the officer shouted to us as we waited on our knees with our hands behind our heads. I had always espoused and supported the master narrative. If you work hard, speak the right language, do everything asked of you, you will be successful (Rodriguez, 1974). The night my friends and I became suspects first and students second was the night I discarded the narrative. I began to ask why the narrative had not guaranteed my protection or spared me the shame of being treated like a criminal. I could have left the University but then again I also could not. I did not want to go home, like so many before me, Latinas/os already have some of the lowest postsecondary graduation rates, and I wanted to be one of the success stories (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). I had come too far. But had I come too far that I could never go back (Carrillo, 2007)?

I doubted the narrative and questioned my entire educational experience up to that night when my friends and I came, up close and personal, with the campus police officers. My experience reminded me of my grandmother's experiences growing up along the U.S.-Mexico border when it was still common to walk across without the threat of deportation or even so much as the need to show your papers. I remember my

grandmother telling me stories about the Rangers or the Rinches, as she called them. She

used to tell me how they (Rinches) would ride into town and the women would gather the

children and hide. That was another time; I was always quick to remind her. Things like

that did not happen anymore, right? I cannot attest to experiencing the same fear my

grandmother felt as a young child but I can tell you I was worried…worried about the

next time the police would stop me. Ask me to show them proof that I belonged. I knew

I belonged at the university and I was not about to let anyone else make the decision for

me.

I graduated from the university but I also diverged from the path I had always

suspected I would take during my first two years. Instead of majoring in business as I

had planned during the first semester of my freshman year. I chose to major in Chicana/o

Studies. If I could find comfort and safety it was in knowing and learning about my place

in this country (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For my final two years of my undergraduate

career, Chicana/o Studies provided the security and support I desperately needed.

Villenas (1996) discusses being both the colonizer and the colonized and how it

presented problems for her as she was studying Latina/o families in North Carolina.

While conducting her research, she found herself accepting the all too common role of

"public translator and facilitator (p. 730)." Instead, she argues, we (the historically

oppressed) should work to free ourselves from these prescribed roles in order to better

help our communities (p. 730). I find myself in a similar situation. I came to my

research first as the instructor for the course created by the university to help retain

students. As such, I quickly came to embody the values and beliefs I was expected to

teach my students. I forgot about my own experiences with the "master narrative" and

instead became the ideal salesperson for the course, the brown face with the successful narrative.

As a young lecturer I was eager to share my experiences and help other Mexican American students find their way in the university. At first I found my work and role as instructor to be very difficult. My students missed class often and were often placed in situations where they held multiple roles and responsibilities (Cammarota, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Their situations were different from my own college experiences, or so I thought. I found myself quickly becoming the colonizer to their colonized (Memmi, 1965); blaming my students' failings and struggles on them, on their families, their culture and their inability to prioritize what was important; their academic lives. Why were they not following the narrative? If only they followed the narrative, I thought. If only they would embody the lessons from the text; become the "master narrative" themselves. Then I remembered that night when my existence on my campus while I was an undergraduate was questioned. The narrative does not care about my students. It did not care about me. While my university experience was different it was also the same. Our paths through college were being dictated and driven by a narrative that failed to acknowledge our collective history and reality (Bartolome, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2006).

When I became a graduate student and was asked to develop an idea for a dissertation topic the first thought that came to mind was to study my students; or students like those enrolled in my course. It was a topic I had already found myself deeply invested in. Early on, the weight of the master narrative pushed down on me; telling me that what I needed to do was examine the multiple roles my students inhabited.

But in the examination I found myself being critical of those roles, often thinking back to Tinto's (1975) separation stage and questioning why my students were not letting go. Why could they not tell their parents no? Why were they not following the narrative?

It was only after several conversations with other faculty, faculty outside of the university where I was employed, and after much reflection that I was able to see and examine the master narrative which I knew all too well. I knew I had to change how I was examining my students and I needed to provide them with an opportunity to share their own experiences with the master narrative (Yosso; 2006).

As I moved forward with my research I had to acknowledge that I understood how my values, my gender, my ethnicity and my experience influenced my research; largely because I was familiar with many of the students' struggles and with the realities they faced every day (Banks, 1998; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). And while my participation in this research may be viewed as contaminating my study, I would argue that my participation is what has allowed my ideas and experiences and those of my students' to come out (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). I believe only in developing relationships with my students have I been able to be a witness and listener to their experiences within the educational pipeline (Yosso, 2006). Listening to them has also helped me reexamine my educational experiences and how they have shaped me as an instructor and now researcher. I have always believed in education as liberation but I have also learned liberation does not happen when one earns a degree. Liberation occurs in conjunction with being able to examine the realities of our own educational journey and then take what we have learned and put it into practice (Freire, 2007). I am the indigenous-insider (Banks, 1998; Merriam et al., 2001) and while I am familiar with my

students' lives and experiences I also had to remind myself that I was also the instructor and the researcher. In spite of my multiple roles, I was committed to sharing my story as well as a bit of my students' stories.

Data Collection

I used auto-ethnography as the focus of my research and support my auto-ethnography with autobiographical semi-structured interviews with thirty seven former students at UST who were previously enrolled in my 1st year retention course. I incorporated auto-ethnography to share my own experiences within the master narrative and to explore evidence of colonialism via my experiences. As I noted earlier, I came to embody the master narrative and was the poster boy for all Mexican American students. The only way to tell my story was via an auto-ethnographic study because I could not separate my experiences from those of my students, partly because the stories were similar on a number of levels but more importantly because they were being governed by the same set of norms and expectations laid out by the institution long before either of us stepped foot onto a college campus. I also understand by presenting my work as an auto-ethnographic text that the validity of my work is immediately called into question but this research is not the type of research that can and should be neatly organized and categorized (Bochner, 2012). This research is dirty and messy and it has been all about exposing myself via my narrative to the world. Additionally, my choice in using auto-ethnography has been about bucking the system; a system that would like nothing more than for me to conform.

Originally, much of my research was going to be informed by semi-structured interviews with my students (Willis, 2007). After much deliberation and reflection I realized I was at the center of much of this research. Yes, the research is about my students and has always been about my students but it is also about my role as the instructor, my evolution and most importantly, my relationship with my students.

Understandably, there are questions regarding my own biases and ability to be objective but as stated earlier, this work is about the larger structures that define and shape what it means to be a success in school and I could not discuss my students without examining my role within the larger structure. This is why auto-ethnography is an essential part of this research (Bochner, 2012; Gonzalez & Padilla, 2008).

Participant Observation

While in the classroom, my chief role has been as an instructor but I also observed student interactions among each other and listened for what they said about the university. While I was limited in my ability to take field notes during class, after class I often returned to my office to write down what I heard and observed in class. I have done my best to create a safe environment within my classroom and in the past students have felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and relating their experiences with university policies, programs and their experiences in other classes with me. I also encouraged students to discuss and examine their educational experiences prior to enrolling in the University and how those experiences have shaped them into the students they are today.

Additionally, I collected notes from my many informal and unstructured meetings with students. Since I began teaching the First Year Experience course I have met with

over 2000 students during a required one on one meeting. I have also collected several notebooks worth of notes from these meetings. While I was limited in what I could and could not use for the research, I was able to refer to particular ideas or experiences that were shared by numerous students. These meetings have been invaluable in assisting me with my teaching and in creating a space where students feel as though they can share their thoughts, concerns and general experiences. In the past students have often shared their opinions regarding the university or schooling in general and have even used the time to share their frustrations in dealing with other University instructors.

Field notes

Field notes were generated during my First Year Experience courses and from my experiences in and around the university. Some of these notes came from events such as my interactions with faculty and or events I witnessed on campus or conversations I heard students having around the campus. While there is no one way of describing an event (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) I did my best to write down as much as I could without disrupting the event. In addition to writing down what I saw and heard I also documented the reason for recording the event including how the event made me feel or why I felt compelled to document said event (p. 11).

The field notes also included my observations from faculty meetings or informal conversations had with other faculty as we talked about our courses, our role as teachers and our students. Some of my earliest observations regarding the "master narrative" have come during faculty meetings and in conversations with other faculty. It was during these early exchanges where the values and expectations of our students were clearly laid

out. Additionally, field notes were also taken from other meetings or informal gatherings where education was discussed. Opportunities to talk about education in south Texas came up often.

Setting

The research took place on the University of South Texas campus. UST is located in Hidalgo County. It is the only four year public institution in the county and has been a part of the state's educational system since 1989. I chose this university because of its role within the community as the chief source of higher education and its history as first a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and now Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). I have also worked as an instructor at UST for the last twelve years, ten of which have been as an instructor for the First Year Experience course and the University's Institutional Review Board granted me access to the students participating in the course.

Participants and Selection Criteria

As the main informant, I incorporated an auto-ethnographic research methodology for the dissertation (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). As a Chicano educator, I was once a student who operated within the master narrative. I was told how to speak, how to behave and act and constantly reminded of what I needed to know. Today, I am still expected to operate within the master narrative as a university instructor (Villenas & Urrieta, 2013). Now, I have the power to reinforce and teach students how to speak, how they should behave and act and remind them of what they should know. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) characterize auto-ethnography as a political act because

it challenges traditional forms of research which claim to be neutral and objective. I

make no apologies for being the subject of this dissertation because my story serves as

the analytical tool for exposing the master narrative. It is only in telling my story that I

am able to poke holes in the master narrative and provide a critical examination of my

success story as a scholarship boy (Carrillo, 2013; Rodriguez, 1975).

I also incorporated Mexican-American and Latina/o students who were enrolled

in one of my sections of the First Year Experience course at the University of South

Texas between 2004 and 2010. Once I received IRB approval I identified potential

participants by sending a mass email to my former students, asking if they would like to

participate in research I was conducting among students in the First Year Experience

course. Those that showed an interest were asked to come in for an audio recorded

interview. In my time at the university I have developed what I believe to be good

relationships with my students; many former students often visit my office well after

having taken my course. I was not sure how many students would be interested in

participating but in the end I had 37 participants. Students did not need to be completers

of the course since the reasons for not completing the course was often based on prior

educational experiences or other roles and expectations not consistent with expectations

of the model college student.

In addition to students I have also incorporated informal interviews and

discussions with two Mexican American instructors from UST. During our conversations

we have discussed out students, our expectations of our students and how we should

educate them. There was no formal selection criteria for identifying instructors; these

participants were my colleagues and had over five years of experience teaching the First

Year Experience. They were also the few instructors with whom I spoke openly about

our work. Over the last two years the three of us had all become much more aware of our

teaching methods and found ourselves questioning whether what we were doing in the

classroom was not only effective but was actually liberating. We became very cognizant

of the "master narrative" and how it had shaped much of our early teaching experiences

but we were committed to changing.

Given that my auto-ethnography examined my experiences growing up in the area

and how many of those experiences, including my experiences at UST, influenced much

of my teaching, I was most interested in talking with some of my colleagues who were

teaching the same course and dealing with the same population of students. These

conversations were informal and occurred during our faculty meetings and during

conversations outside of the organized work activities.

Interview Protocol

As part of the semi structured interview protocol, participants were asked to

participate in one semi-structured interview. The students were asked questions

regarding their upbringing, class background, family history, and educational experiences

before leading to questions regarding their experiences at the university. The questions

were broad thus allowing for the space to develop new questions based on their

responses.

The participant's early history about schooling informed me about their

(students') introductions to the schooling process; what did their parents teach them or

tell them about school. Did they encourage or discourage particular types of behavior,

for example, did their parents encourage them to speak Spanish or discourage them and why? What did they teach them about language? These early experiences told me about structures, behaviors, or attributes (social capital) that they have developed throughout their educational history. The lessons of the home can be powerful instructors and have been shown to provide Mexican American youth, especially Latinas, with a unique set of resources for navigating the school (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado-Bernal, Villenas, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

I also learned about the resources they developed formally through the school. Stanton-Salazar (1997) calls this, "learning how to engage socially those agents and participants in mainstream worlds and social settings who control or manage critical resources" (p. 33). I also asked them to reflect upon what they remember about their early schooling experiences especially as it related to learning about local and regional history and how that history or possible lack of history made them feel about their own sense of identity. Additionally, I learned how having those experiences shaped their view of language, nationality, immigration and what it means to be an American.

After transcribing the first interview I conducted member checking by sharing the transcription with the participant. This ensured that I transcribed the recording correctly and that I did not take what they said out of context. This also ensured that I remain true to privileging the voices of my informants.

Below is a sample interview protocol used for all of my participants. What is not shown are the questions generated based on responses given to the original questions in the protocol. These first set of questions appear superficial but often a response generated

a different series of questions that allowed for deeper examination and reflection by the students.

Additionally, since much of my research is an examination of my own educational experiences within the master narrative, I participated in a semi structured interview where I had one of my former students interview me. I provided her with the same set of questions and encouraged her to ask any additional questions she felt appropriate based on my responses. While transcribing my own interview I was able to elaborate on things I said and reflect on particular experiences.

Sample Interview Questionnaire

1. What is your name?

2. Where were you born?

3. What do your parents do for a living?

4. What is the highest level of education attained by your parents?

5. Do you have any siblings?

6. Have any of your siblings attended or completed college?

7. Tell me about your early educational experiences. What do you remember about school?

8. Was school a positive or negative experience for you? Please describe.

9. What do you remember your parents telling you about school?

10. What is your native language?

11. Do you remember if your parents encouraged you to speak a specific language in school?

12. Do you remember studying or learning about the local history or culture?

13. Do you remember learning about Mexican or Mexican American history?

14. Describe your earliest memories of learning about college?

15. Did your parents talk to you about college?

16. Who else talked to you about college?

17. What did you want to be as a child/teenager?

18. Did you understand how you could achieve your goal?

19. How did you choose which school to go to?

20. What was your first year in college like?

21. What have been some of the challenges?

22. Do you think you are a good student? Why or why not?

23. What does it take to be a good student?

24. What did your high school teachers tell you about college?

25. What did they tell you about being a good student?

26. What kinds of resources does your university make available to students?

27. Have you taken advantage of any of those resources?

28. Describe your relationship with your instructors. Do you speak with them?

29. Do you have any Latina/o instructors?

30. Do you visit your faculty during office hours?

31. Have you ever had a negative experience with your instructors? If so describe the experience.

32. What kind of role has your family/community played in your life as a university student?

33. Do you think your high school adequately prepared you for your first year in college?

34.   What are some skills that you feel are essential to helping students have a successful first year?

While the questions may appear rather sanitary and neat, I was committed to allowing the student to take the interview wherever they wanted. So even though I had these questions to guide me, I did not always stick to the script and deferred to the natural progression of our conversation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was comprised of several components. Because I committed to the auto ethnographic text, the first component involved reflecting on my early educational experiences. This involved examining educational artifacts from my early educational years to papers and other assignments I completed throughout my years in public school. I then progressed through my experiences in college, paying close attention to the classes I was choosing and the experiences and feelings I was having at the time.

Next, I examined my field notes which were recorded after class meetings, after faculty meetings or interactions, and after conducting the student interviews. In class I did my best to take note of the conversations, both formal and informal, that occurred between students and between me and the students. After class I often returned to my office where I revisited what occurred in class and wrote down as much as I could with regard to what I heard in class. The field notes were kept on a word processing document which allowed me to easily access them as I developed themes or concepts that emerged over the course of the research project.

During faculty meetings informal discussion often occurred between instructors and administrators where they discussed the students in their First Year Experience courses. These conversations were often full of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) about race, gender, culture, etc. After these meetings I often returned to my office to take down any additional notes or reflected on what I heard.

Interviews were the second component of the data analysis. Students were interviewed in my office or at a location of their choosing. Student participants had the option of meeting at an alternative location if meeting in my office proved to be inconvenient but all of the participants were able to come to my office for the interview. In total I conducted thirty seven student interviews. After the interview, the recordings were transcribed. I listened to the tape to review what was said and before transcribing I typed in any notes or additional comments into the transcription. This served as an opportunity to think about possibly conducting follow up interviews with a student. I reviewed the transcriptions and coded them based on themes consistent across other interviews.

The use of a borderlands analysis, CRT and Lat Crit and the de-colonial imaginary allowed me to look through the interviews to identify moments when students discussed or alluded to a dominant narrative. Examples of this included when the students discussed the lack of exposure to local culture and Mexican American history when they were in primary and secondary schools. This was also evident in how students talked about themselves in relation to other upper class and or Anglo students or how they discussed their relationships with their instructors now that they were at the University. Stories were not limited to students being treated a certain way but also

included countless narratives of students who were finding success at the University even though they did not fit the traditional characteristics of the successful college student. My students' success stories filled with examples of students who worked far too many hours or fulfilled numerous home responsibilities and expectations all while fulfilling the University's expectations of them. These stories ran counter to the traditional success stories so often exhorted in First Year Experience literature.

Data Management

The field notes were logged via word processing software Microsoft Word. This afforded me the ability to create columns to allow for coding or organizing themes. It also allowed me to highlight particular quotes offered by the students. I provided each student with a pseudonym to protect their identity and provided a code for each interview. All of the interviews were kept in my campus office and on my computer which is password protected.

Coding

I coded each interview to identify emerging themes or concepts and potential quotes. I understood that the act of listening and coding the interviews is subjective and acknowledged I was influenced by not only my position but also my experiences. I was mindful of how I viewed each interview and relied on multiple visits with each transcript. Each time I tried to use a different perspective when reviewing the interview. This helped prevent me from ignoring or overlooking data that upon first examination did not appear consistent with other themes or general findings. Revisiting each transcription also allowed me to consolidate codes. For example, during the initial coding and viewing

process I assigned multiple codes to the transcriptions but as I reviewed other transcriptions I found it better to consolidate based on meaning and or theme. This was accomplished via cross case and within case analysis. Within case analysis allowed me to identify any themes within a given transcript. The cross case analysis allowed me to check themes against transcriptions and helped generate new themes based on analysis.

Chapter IV: Colonization

In her seminal work, The Vulnerable Observer (1996), Behar writes, of traditional research, "The tendency is to depersonalize one's connection to the field…" (p. 25). As I was compiling student interviews and reading articles on Latina/o student retention, I worked to disconnect myself from the research because this is what I was always told I needed to do (Bochner, 2012). I had to be objective and take myself out of my work. I always felt it was a dubious demand. How was I supposed to remove myself from something I cared about (p. 161)? And then, is that not what research is; identifying a topic or issue that demands our attention and our care? Ultimately, what I learned was my work, my research, was as much about me as it was about my former students. I shared so many similarities with my students; from where I grew up, to the schools I attended, and even many of the lessons my parents shared with me (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Unlike my students, I was able to leave and was afforded an opportunity and the space to reflect on my experience growing up in south Texas. I was able to see that while I learned so much in school, I never learned much about where I was living or the historical significance of its geography (Anzaldua, 1999).

Upon my return I assumed a position with the local university as an instructor, I could not have imagined the power of the area; particularly the power the institutions have in prescribing behavior (Urrieta, 2008). My new found liberation of the mind, gave way to the dominant view, over only a few short years, dictating, how my peers and I should teach and what we should expect our students to know. Only in stepping away and reflecting upon my role was I able to see that I was always a participant in my own research (Behar, 1996). Here then is my story, outlining where I have been and where I

am now, and what this means for me as a Chicano educator working with Mexican American students at an HSI, struggling to avoid being overcome and co-opted by the master narrative (Urrieta, 2008; Valenzuela, 2005).

My given name is Jose Luis Saldivar and I was born on December, 1978, in Edinburg, Texas to Jose Luis and Elizabeth C. Saldivar. Edinburg is located in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas and is a short fifteen to twenty minute drive from the Mexican border. Both of my parents grew up in the Rio Grande Valley; my father, north of the small community of La Villa, while my mother was born and raised in Edinburg. Both of my parents came from working class families. My paternal grandfather was an overseer for some farmland while my fraternal grandfather was a butcher and then later worked at a paper company. My paternal grandmother was a homemaker and my fraternal grandmother was a classroom aide at a local elementary school and cleaned the Methodist church the family attended. I fondly remember accompanying her when she went to clean the church. The church had several classrooms for Sunday school so I would pass the time playing and coloring.

My grandparents did not have much of a formal education. My paternal grandmother, Florinda V. Saldivar was born and raised in Mexico and completed most of elementary school but did not continue with her education. I remember her telling me about her experiences in school. She told me she enjoyed school and was always eager to respond whenever her teacher called upon her. Unfortunately she said she could not continue with school. My paternal grandfather, Pablo Saldivar was born in Alice, Texas and raised in south Texas, but I do not know very much about his educational background. My fraternal grandfather, Pablo Carcano was born and raised in Mexico and

my fraternal grandmother, Rebecca G. Carcano was born and raised in south Texas. I do not know how much formal education either received though I know they both began working at a very young age and neither of them earned a high school diploma.

Even though my grandparents did not continue with their education they instilled education within their children and definitely encouraged me to do my best in school. One of my earliest memories of when my paternal grandmother encouraged my educational aspirations was when she told me that one day I would attend Harvard University. I did not know what Harvard was but she assured me that it was a great school. I was very young when she told me this and I have never forgotten it. In many ways my grandmother established a level of expectation I would only fully comprehend when I learned more about college and the different types of schools available to students.

Many of my father's siblings did very well in school, with some of them eventually earning a college degree. My father was a good student and strong athlete and had many athletic scholarship offers for track. Unfortunately, his track coach left during his senior year so he was not able to take advantage of any of the scholarships. He says he did not have the guidance or knowledge of the college application process so he did not know how to apply and he did not have the help he needed (Cabrera, et al., 2012). My father was still able to enroll at nearby Pan American College in Edinburg but stopped attending after two years. Despite doing well in college my father told me he never felt like college was for him. After leaving the university he returned to his first love, working on motorcycles and automobiles. He was known in town for his motorcycle shop since he was customizing and chopping them before it was popular. He

had to close his shop down and began working for a local auto dealership but returned to his dream and today owns an auto-body repair shop not far from our home.

On my mother's side, several of her siblings attended and earned a college degree. My mother was a good student at Edinburg High and then attended Pan American College on a music scholarship. She played for a few years with the university orchestra and then gave it all up. She took time off from school but would return while I was in elementary. I still remember her picking me up from my elementary school, John F. Kennedy Elementary in Elsa, and leaving me with my aunt who lived near the university. I would stay there at least once a week while my mother attended evening classes. I would often ask my mother why she was going to school, like me, and she would tell me that she needed to finish college so that she could earn a degree and become a teacher. I think those conversations served as my introduction to the idea that earning a college degree gave adults more opportunities (Cejda, et al., 2002). I already knew school was important but I did not understand the concept of degrees or what value they had in the real world until my mother told me. When I asked her why she could not just teach, she told me she needed the degree because no one could teach without one.

The thought of my mother as a teacher always excited me because I wanted her to be my teacher. Unfortunately, my mother did not finish school and stopped a semester short of graduating but, the experience of seeing her work hard encouraged me and instilled in me the need to go to college (Cabrera, et al., 2012).

As a child I have vivid memories of being very curious; always asking questions and eager to learn new things. I learned to read at an early age and would try to read

anything I could get my hands on. I remember my mother lying in bed just before turning in, reading her Harlequin romance novels. She tells me I used to pretend to read because I wanted to be like her but I could not understand some of the words so I would just fake it. Not long after I learned to read my parents would buy me my own set of books; from *Sweet Pickles* to *Highlights*, to *Go Dog Go*. I had a nice collection of books and I loved every one of them. Not long after amassing my collection of books my parents invested in an encyclopedia set. I fondly remember going through the set, learning about a variety of things and visiting faraway lands.

When I entered kindergarten I could read well above my grade level; so much so that I remember my kindergarten teacher providing me with first and second grade books so that I could read to my classmates. It was at this point that I clearly remember the power of being educated (Rodriguez, 1974). I remember sitting there in the middle of the classroom reading to my peers and thinking how cool it felt to be the center of attention. I felt like a teacher. Later, as I grew older I realized that being able to read, and read well in English, afforded me a number of opportunities the other students who could not read English well, did not have. I quickly became one of the teachers' favorite students since I was always eager to please my teachers and show them that I understood what I was being taught.

The language of my house was English and at home I was not Jose but rather Jay; which I believe created the foundation for future identity development. As I noted earlier, my given name is Jose Luis Saldivar Jr. but, for as long as I can remember my parents and every member of my family referred to me as Jay. My mom says the

nickname came from one of my cousins who could not spell Jose and only knew the first letter, J.

Both my parents were fully bilingual but I think my first language was English. I say I think because I do remember reading a children's Spanish book when I was first learning to read. My parents had me read a page from the book to them before going to bed. I find this significant because I do not remember speaking very much Spanish and I do not remember my parents using Spanish at home but there is that memory of the Spanish book. This is why I do not know if English or Spanish was my first language but English was the first language in which I was functionally literate. In fact, when we would visit with my grandparents, Spanish was the only language spoken but I always had trouble communicating with them. The only Spanish I knew were simple words so when my grandparents spoke to me in Spanish I would respond with a simple, "si" or "no." And yet, I could understand enough of what they were saying to respond.

During the early grades I do not remember speaking or reading very much Spanish but feel like it was an important part of my childhood because I always felt like there were two groups of students, the Spanish speakers and the non-Spanish speakers. I was a member of the non-Spanish speakers. Early on, I remember other kids at school speaking to me in Spanish and rather than answering them in Spanish I would stand there looking at them with a confused look on my face or ask them to repeat themselves in English. At the time I never bothered asking my parents why I did not speak Spanish or why they did not communicate with me in Spanish. Or why my vast collection of books was entirely in English. When I was older and it became painfully obvious that most of my peers spoke Spanish; it was often the preferred language for telling jokes or sharing

humorous stories. I often felt out of place and left out of many of the conversations between my peers because of the language barrier (Krashen, 1998). As I progressed thru grade school I tried my best to learn more Spanish just to improve my relationships with my peers. Eventually I asked my parents why they never taught me Spanish.

Both my parents said they witnessed their classmates and their peers get punished for speaking Spanish in school; a sentiment echoed in the writings of Mexican American authors who grew up in south Texas during the fifties and sixties (Anzaldua, 1999; Ovando, 2000). This was typical of the era since Spanish was often not allowed in schools, even in schools in the Rio Grande Valley where for most of the students, Spanish was their home language (Blanton, 2004). The use of Spanish, according to my mother, controlled by school officials that the children often took to hiding on the playground so their teachers would not catch them using Spanish. If caught, my mother told me some of the teachers and administrators would try to make an example of the students so as to dissuade other students from speaking Spanish. For example, my mother says she remembers seeing students being hit across the knuckles. Seeing this was enough to keep my mother from ever speaking Spanish in school (Anzaldua, 1999).

My father also shared similar stories; while in elementary school, the students who could speak English well, had the benefit of being instructed by the Anglo teachers. The Spanish speaking students though had the teachers with Spanish surnames. He said it was understood that the best teachers at his elementary school were the Anglo teachers and so students, even the Spanish speaking students, wanted to be in the Anglo teachers' classrooms. Based on their experiences, my parents believed speaking Spanish at the

school could be a hindrance to my success and they did not want me to struggle or experience any of the shame they saw their peers go through when they were in school.

I never resented my parents for not teaching me Spanish; I could see how it benefited me in the classroom and more than anything I wanted to be a successful student (Rodriguez, 1982). I valued academic success more than my early relationships with my peers; so while I wanted to understand my friends' jokes and stories, especially the Pepito jokes, I never lost sight of being a good student. I knew I needed to maintain my hold on the English language and never wavered from operating as a monolingual English speaker. The English language and my faith in the language became so much of how I identified myself that it even became a point of contention between my grandmother and me. After school I would stay with my grandmother until my parents came home from work. She always had food ready for when I arrived. The food was always so delicious; homemade tortillas and gorditas, I always looked forward to my after school snack. One afternoon I came home to find my grandmother had prepared beans and tortillas. I remember telling her that I did not eat beans. I can still remember her laughing and saying of course I ate beans, all Mexicans ate beans. Only I did not think I was Mexican; I told her I was white, a "bolillo." She laughed, but deep down I believed I was white and I witnessed the benefits of being white, or at least being English dominant, especially in the classroom (Rodriguez, 1974; Rodriguez, 1982). My perceptions of English and of whiteness and the association of speaking English with being Anglo or white were reinforced throughout much of my schooling. Combined, the school and my English language proficiency, allowed for me to be a successful participant in the Americanization process (Gonzalez, 1997; Valdes, 2006).

One of the most profound experiences where I saw the difference between the English speakers and the Spanish speakers occurred early in elementary school. I loved going to the library to check out new books with my classmates; it was something we would do once a week. During one of these visits I vividly remember seeing Spanish speaking children in the corner of the library. They were far enough out of the way so as not to disrupt the other classes from checking out their books but within enough of a view that everyone could see them and wonder what they were doing. What stood out to me was the student who was crying. His eyes were filled with tears and a fearfulness I knew I never wanted to experience.   I remember feeling sorry for him and thinking he was probably being punished for not knowing English; what else could it be? There he sat, struggling to sound out English words. It was a powerful image, one that I know I will never forget and more importantly, it was an experience that I later imagined was not unlike my parents' own experiences with language in school (Anzaldua, 1999). My bilingual classmates were never punished for speaking Spanish but it was clear the preferred language of my school was English (Rodriguez, 1982). So while I enjoyed the attention I received for being able to read and write in English, I knew I never wanted to experience the kind of attention I saw with the Spanish speaking student in the library.

Seeing the student in the library reassured me that what my parents were doing was right but it also made me afraid. I had this fear of being put on display like that student. That fear also instilled a feeling of self-hatred (Anzaldua, 1999). I wanted to be white (Rodriguez, 1982). I do not think it had to do with the color of my skin instead, it had everything to do with the language I spoke and the differential treatment I witnessed between the monolingual English students and the Spanish language students; wherein

the Spanish language was the second class language to the preferential treatment of the English language (Smitherman, 1998). You might ask how I could have even thought about those things as an elementary student but I did. I learned very early on that my Spanish dominant peers were treated differently; from being housed in different wings or in portable buildings in my elementary school to the very vivid picture of the student in the library (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Perhaps the worst part was I began to believe I was better than my Spanish speaking peers because I had a command of the English language. The way my teachers treated me, encouraging my reading and writing and allowing me to read to the class, only reinforced my feelings of superiority (Rodriguez, 1974; Rodriguez, 1982). Even as I felt like an outsider among most of my peers, I still believed I was better because of the language (Krashen, 1998).

I continued to excel in school and would soon be identified as a Gifted and Talented student by my teachers and counselors. This meant I would have access to all of the resources my small school district could provide; exclusive field trips and generally more opportunities than those students who were not identified as Gifted and Talented. As I got older my entire academic success could not make up for the difficulties I had communicating with my Spanish dominant family members or friends. While I was never openly mocked by my peers I still felt left out of many conversations (Krashen, 1998). I also could not take part in the natural exchange of jokes and good natured ribbing among friends at least not early on in my educational life. By not being able to participate in such verbal transactions I felt like many of my relationships were hindered because of my poor Spanish.

I did my best to learn Spanish from my friends. Over time I learned some of the language, particularly some of the slang terms used among my peers. In junior high I had the opportunity to take a Spanish class. It was here that I learned the rudimentary basics of Spanish. It was difficult but I enjoyed it because it meant I could better communicate with some of my bilingual peers and more importantly, members of my family (Schreffler, 2007). After junior high I looked forward to continuing with Spanish but once again I was forced to decide between my community language and another language that was given more value within the academic setting of the school (Smitherman, 1998).

I still remember the high school counselor gathering all of the 8th graders into our small auditorium. It was the end of the year and the counselor was there to pre-register us for our freshmen year courses. There were not a variety of courses to choose from; there was the usual selection of core courses but there were some additional electives from which we could choose. One of the classes was the language requirement. At the time there were two language options at the high school, Spanish and German. Based on my experience in my Spanish class I had made up my mind to enroll in Spanish but the counselor told us that we would not receive honors credit for taking Spanish. We would only receive honors credit if we enrolled in the German language course. So in keeping with my commitment to taking the classes that would allow me to graduate ranked among the top students I, along with most of my friends, decided to register for German. I always found it interesting that we (the students) would receive honors credit for German but not for Spanish. Later I thought what is the school telling our students when there is greater value placed on German over our own native language? The devaluing of Spanish had been occurring all throughout my educational life. Smitherman (1998) argues that

this has always been the intent of America's formal and informal language policies wherein any language but English is seen as a form of second class language. This was definitely the case in my own school where English had always been the more valued language and Spanish, as Rodriguez (1982) notes, was to remain the private language of the home.

Over the next two years I would take German and other honors level courses. During my final two years I would also enroll in my school's few Advanced Placement courses. Socially I was involved in numerous student organizations and trying to build my resume in order to make myself more attractive for colleges and universities since that was always the end goal. At this point in my life I would not have called myself bilingual. I could struggle through conversations with my grandmother and could now participate in some of the banter that occurred among my peers, but I still avoided longer conversations especially with Spanish speakers whom I did not know (Schreffler, 2007). I still wanted to improve my Spanish but was embarrassed because here I was in south Texas and I did not know Spanish well. In fact, during those uncomfortable moments I often felt like an outsider in my own community. It is an experience that has been discussed thoroughly in education literature where heritage language learners often feel like outsiders in their own community because of their lack of confidence with their heritage language (Krashen, 1998; Schreffler, 2007). Even among my own family, I cringed at the thought of seeing specific family members at family gatherings because I knew they would speak to me in Spanish. At this point I was well aware that I was not white and I felt as though I should be speaking more Spanish. I did what I could while in

high school and with my family but I never felt like it was enough; at least never enough to feel satisfied with my Spanish or feel like an insider.

I always battled with my sense of identity while I was in school; early on it was my belief that I was white and wanting to speak English in order to find success in school and eventually trying to piece together my fractured identity (Carrillo, 2007; Rodriguez, 1982). As a student the process was not easy. While there were constant reminders of American exceptionalism and the benefits of being white, in our history books there was no sign of Mexican Americans, and Mexicans were often portrayed as ruthless bandits and criminals or bloodthirsty military leaders such as Santa Ana at the Battle of the Alamo (Anzaldua, 1999; Urrieta, 2004). I remember viewing the Disney film on the Alamo featuring John Wayne in my Texas History class. By the end of the film my classmates and I were cheering on Davy Crockett and James Bowie and the other "patriots" who lost their lives at the Alamo. There was never a discussion surrounding the events that led to the battle. There was no opportunity to question what happened and certainly never an opportunity to think critically about what was being presented to us (Urrieta, 2004).

The lack of representation of Mexican or Mexican Americans continued throughout the remainder of my early school experiences. In my high school English classes we read British and American literature and read poetry but never any works by Mexican American or Mexican authors (Anzaldua, 1999). My junior year in high school proved to be a pivotal point in my education. It would be the first time I read anything by a Mexican American author. Early that year we read *Hunger of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez (1982). The book is Rodriguez' memoir of growing up in Sacramento,

California to Mexican parents who did not speak English and who had a strong working class background. Rodriguez (1982) details how he gave up much of his culture and his identity in order to adopt an American identity in order to find academic and professional success. I know my English teacher assigned the book because he saw similarities in Rodriguez's life and the lives of many of his students. I clung to Rodriguez's (1982) arguments and saw in them a validation for my own choices and for the choices my parents made. I did not see anything wrong with Rodriguez's (1982) experience and neither did many of my peers. I also think most of us were not ready to have a conversation about our identity or if what we were doing in order to be successful was wrong; how could it be, we, my peers and I, had found acceptance among all of our teachers and our campus administrators. We could do anything we wanted without repercussions so how could denying our identity be wrong. We had the "best" teachers including access to faculty from the nearby university. My introduction to Rodriguez (1982) would only be the beginning to a very different school year than any I had ever experienced before.

In addition to introducing us to literature written by a Mexican American author, my English and U.S. History teacher also brought a friend of his to class. He was an author and had just finished publishing his first book, a collection of short stories about growing up in my hometown. I think it was the first time any of us were introduced to an author, in person, and certainly the first time any of us had met a Mexican American author who was essentially writing about things and places specific to our own experiences (Anzaldua, 1999). In spite of the authors relationship to our hometown we were not allowed to read his stories in school. They were not part of the standard

curriculum, but we read his stories anyway. Our teacher asked that we not tell anyone we were reading the stories. Like the Spanish speaking children during my parent's youth, we had to learn about ourselves in secret. Unlike Rodriguez (1982), who was an established name in literature, this new author had yet to be accepted as part of the school curriculum.

Reading the short stories was exciting. For the first time I could see myself in many of the stories. There were people and places I was all too familiar with because they were the same places I saw and experienced growing up. I had been to the bakery he spoke about and I saw the water tower any time I was in town with my friends or family. The stories empowered me (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For the first time I felt empowered by what I was reading and learning and along with my peers, we felt as though we could speak about this as if we were experts because in many ways we were. My experience is characterized and supported by researchers who argue for the need to take advantage of the resources and knowledge minority children have at home (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Elenes, et al., 2001). This is in stark contrast to the traditional way of teaching and learning which often views minority students as being deficient in their knowledge base and their supposed lack of cultural capital (Valencia, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The information was not disconnected or taking place in some far off place as had often been the case with most of our assignments. Everything we were reading about took place in our own backyard. Unfortunately, it was an experience that was short lived and one I would not have again until I was in college.

My junior year in high school also was the first time I had ever heard the term

Chicano. My U.S. History teacher asked the class if any of us had ever heard the term

before and if we knew what it meant. One of my friends raised his hand and with

complete certainty said, "A Chicano is a Mexican from Chicago." The class was quiet as

we waited for our teacher to respond and then he laughed and informed my all too eager

friend that he was incorrect. Chicano, he said, was a term used by Mexican Americans

during the Civil Rights Era to describe themselves. It was a political term adopted by

Mexican Americans; mainly Mexican American youth and Mexican American college

students, as a way to mobilize against the injustices they were experiencing in many

institutions like schools. I was fascinated. I wanted to learn more but we had to move on.

We spent the class period, fifty minutes, learning about the Chicano Movement but we

had to keep to the curriculum (Urrieta, 2004). Although I would continue to learn more

about Chicanos and the Chicano Movement, it would be the last time I would ever learn

of it in my high school courses.

During the spring semester of my junior year I was selected by my English and

U.S. History teacher to attend an East Coast college tour. He selected ten students whom

he thought had the best chance to get into some of the country's most prestigious

universities. All my hard work had paid off. I had been positioning myself to graduate

among the top of my class and attend a top university and here was my first opportunity

to visit some of the elite universities in the country. Like Rodriguez (1982), I saw the

sacrifices I had made had paid off. The trip was amazing; it was my first time on an

airplane and only the third time I had ever left the state. While on the east coast we

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visited New York University, Columbia, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, MIT, Brown and

George Washington.

While visiting each campus we met with some Latina/o students including alums

from my high school. It was inspiring to see other Latina/o students like me on these

campuses but what I think struck me most was every student we met encouraged us to

develop our own unique story. They told us every student that applied to these

universities had outstanding grades and were very involved in both extracurricular

activities and community service. We needed to separate ourselves from the rest of the

outstanding applicants. This new piece of information challenged everything I had

learned about what it took to be a successful student. I had always learned that I needed

strong test scores, a long list of extracurricular activities and strong grades but every story

we heard from the students challenged what I knew to be true. While we still needed to

do all of the typical things for academic success, I was now faced with trying to develop

my unique story (Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006).   For the first time I began to ask, why am I

different? I had worked so hard to be the perfect student with the perfect language and

the ideal grades but what universities were looking for was the imperfect. For the

remainder of the trip I thought about my story; trying to figure out why any university

should accept me.

The trip was supposed to reinforce all of the things I had done to excel in school

and eventually set myself up for the long term academic and economic success that had

eluded my parents. Instead it was the culmination of a school year in which I began to

question everything I had been taught and believed to be true. Earlier in the year when

we had been assigned to read *Hunger of Memory* none of us were ready to talk about

what the book meant and the choices Rodriguez made in order to find his own success (Rodriguez, 1982). On this trip a few of us were ready to have that conversation. During a ferry ride to Ellis Island I noticed a group of women huddled together in a nearby bench, crying. I asked my teacher why they were crying and he said Ellis Island is special for Americans because the Statue of Liberty was one of the first things immigrants saw when they came to the United States. I asked him why I was not crying or didn't feel like crying. Was there something wrong with me? He reassured me; there was nothing wrong with me. I thought about the experience and later in the trip I told him I did not find it as moving because many of my ancestors never saw the statue and moreover, many of them were never welcomed with open arms as so many immigrants seemed to have been at Ellis Island. He was taken aback by my comments. He said he had never thought about that. Later, when we returned home, several of us reached out to a student organization at the local university to see about getting help to have a memorial built along the U.S. – Mexico border. We presented our ideas to the students but the energy and excitement that we had built while on the trip quickly dissipated as we all got caught up in the lives of high school students.

When senior year came around, our English and U.S. History teacher was no longer working with the school. He had decided to return to school to complete his doctorate. He did find time though to come by at least once a week to help us apply to universities. At this point I knew I was going to college but was not sure where and for the first time I had doubts as to whether or not I would get in. I was not convinced that I had done enough to develop my own story.

I always wanted to go to school away from home. In fact, if I remember correctly I often told my friends I wanted to get as far away from south Texas as possible. I always resented south Texas. I thought I was better than south Texas and did not think the area had anything to offer me in terms of future opportunities. I never equated the area with success; success was always found somewhere else. I do not know where that feeling came from. My sense is popular culture and media had a lot to do with it. Successful people lived in big cities and unfortunately there were so many stereotypes associated with south Texas. The stereotypes combined with the poor reputation of the local university and the fact that the area was and still is among the poorest in the nation, made it all too easy to want to leave.

When it came time to finally apply to schools my attitude changed a bit. My first choice was Rice University in Houston. I did not know very much about Rice except that it was a terrific school and was only five hours from home. Even though I always wanted to go away to college I was still an only child and as senior year approached the thought of being far away from my family started to worry me. In addition to Rice I also applied to 13 other schools, hopeful that I would get in to one of them. At that point I figured I had done everything I could to get into a good school. All I could do was hope some of the universities thought the same and would offer admission.

During the spring of my senior year I learned that I would not be attending Rice while I was visiting Notre Dame. My parents called and told me I had received a letter from Rice. I asked them to open it and read it to me. At this point I had already gained admission to a number of universities and since one of them was Notre Dame I was not disappointed. As a kid I knew more about Notre Dame than any other university largely

because of their football team. As a student athlete in high school I always dreamed of playing at Notre Dame. There was so much history and tradition at Notre Dame and even though in 1997 it was not the football power it once was it was still one of the best academic institutions in the country and I had already gained admission. It was further away from home than I had planned but nonetheless it was Notre Dame (Urrieta, 2008).

I was visiting Notre Dame over a weekend during the spring along with other minority students. The minority community had planned a number of activities and events to showcase Notre Dame and the ethnic minority student organizations. It was not unlike my trip to the East Coast. I was paired with a current Notre Dame student from south Texas and he showed me around and stressed that even though Notre Dame was largely white there was a strong Latina/o community on campus. I did not know how to take that. Was that a good thing and was it something I wanted especially given where I was coming from. I had a feeling like, "I've lived the Mexican/Mexican American experience, and I need something different." But why, why did I feel this way. It would be years before I would critically reflect on my feelings of my home. My overall sense was there was so much good happening in south Texas and it was rich with history, but as noted earlier, it was a history that was often kept from all of us as students (Urrieta, 2004).

A few days after I returned from Notre Dame I went to the post office to pick up the mail. At that point I had already decided that I would be attending Notre Dame even though I still had not heard from a few of the other schools to which I had applied. When I retrieved the mail I saw packages from Princeton, Stanford, Penn and some of the other universities. I got in to all of them. I rushed over to my father's auto body shop,

packages in tow, eager to show him all of the acceptance letters. I do not know who was more excited him or me. He gave me a big hug and congratulated me but then he asked, "So where are you going to go?" After being denied admission to Rice I thought I had decided on Notre Dame but now I had so many choices I did not know what I was going to do. Ultimately my decision came down to Princeton and Stanford. Both were world renowned universities so I knew either one would be good (Urrieta, 2008).

One afternoon not long before the decision deadline I received a call at home from the admissions director at Princeton. I was surprised by the call. Had they made a mistake; maybe they were calling to rescind my admission. The gentleman asked how I was doing and if I had given any thought as to where I would be attending college. I told him my decision was between Princeton and Stanford. He reminded me that they were both good schools but before ending the phone call he told me, "Whatever they offer you, we can match it." I was speechless. I was not a blue chip athlete; I was just a Mexican American student from south Texas. I never thought I would ever hear anyone tell me that let alone someone from Princeton. Once again, everything I had ever thought about education and about who I needed to be as a student was reaffirmed by that one phone call. At the time I could not even recall what I wrote on my application but I figured I must have done enough to earn Princeton's attention. I had succeeded in my journey.

When my parents got home I told them about the phone call and they were giddy with excitement and they thought I was going to be attending Princeton in the fall. Instead I chose Stanford. It was not even that Stanford offered a better financial aid package; my choice came down to climate. When I visited Princeton in the spring of my junior year of high school it was in March and there was snow everywhere. This south

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Texas boy could not see himself surrounded by snow in the spring. And so I was off to Stanford, California. Stanford was one of the few universities I visited but it had a stellar reputation and like Notre Dame I knew quite a bit about Stanford.

Before arriving on campus I received a letter from the university asking me if I wanted to live in an ethnic themed house during my freshman year. They had several options including a Mexican American theme dorm, Casa Zapata. I chose not to live in Zapata or any other ethnic theme dorm. The way I saw, much like my experience at Notre Dame, I had spent my life in south Texas and Mexican American culture was what I knew. I thought it best I live in a "normal" dorm and really take in the diversity I was expecting to find at an institution like Stanford. Reflecting on it today, I have to ask myself how much of my hesitancy to live in an ethnic theme dorm had to do with wanting to experience diversity and how much of it had to do with still feeling like I needed to distance myself from my culture in order to be successful (Rodriguez, 1982). I could not put a percentage on it but I know the thought that I still needed to disconnect played a role in my decision. Additionally, I have to think, never placing value in my cultural heritage or history, also allowed me to develop a negative perception of south Texas (Anzaldua, 1999; Delgado-Bernal. 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Urrieta, 2004; Yosso, 2005).

Before getting to Stanford I thought I wanted to major in business and make a lot of money. Once I was on campus and I looked over the course catalog I was overwhelmed by the number of majors and courses offered. Business quickly went out the window as I instead chose classes that sounded interesting.

My first semester one of the courses in which I enrolled was a poetry class. It was a terrific course but at first I felt overwhelmed. During the first class meeting the professor came in and gave a thorough introduction of the course and briefly discussed some of the types of poetry we would be discussing. As he did this he code switched from English to Chinese. Some of my peers laughed and I sat there, in silence. I did not know what he said but given my peers' reactions I thought they knew Chinese. How was that? I could not even speak Spanish fluently and here they were acknowledging my professor's Chinese commentary. Needless to say, early on I felt a little underprepared for the academic expectations placed on me.

I spent the first several weeks trying to keep up and then trying to catch up. For the first time in my academic life I went to tutoring and sought out help from others. In high school I was the student offering the help to my peers. This was no longer the case. I read more than I had ever read in my entire high school career my first semester at Stanford. For all I had done in high school, I had not done enough.

Nowhere was this more glaring than in my poetry course. In high school we studied poetry in one of my English courses and even had a professor from the local university come in to provide instruction and still I struggled. My peers all seemed so well read and knowledgeable and I was lost. Then, during my spare time I picked up a book I received from a family member. The book was by Americo Paredes, Mexican American scholar and south Texas native. His book, *With his pistol in his hand*, chronicled the story of Gregorio Cortez and the corrido or Mexican American ballad that was composed to detail Cortez's story (Paredes, 1998). I was hooked. I could not put the book down but more importantly the poems we were reading in class started to make

more sense because I was able to relate them to the structure of the Mexican American corrido. I wrote my final paper on the corridor and earned an A in the course. More importantly the course helped me begin to see how the culture from which I tried to distance myself was rich and valuable (Anzaldua, 1999; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Over Thanksgiving I came home for the first time since leaving and because of what I was learning in my poetry course and my own study of the corridor I was able to have a great conversation with my grandmother. It would be the richest conversation I would ever have with her. When I returned to Stanford after the short break I could not help but feel a little guilty for never attempting to talk with my grandmother in that manner (Schreffler, 2007).

Our conversation was aided not only by my renewed interest in my culture and heritage but also by the fact that I was now taking a Spanish course. Since I was required to fulfill a language requirement I thought it best I work on my Spanish. I enrolled in Spanish for beginner's course and to my surprise I knew much more Spanish that I ever thought. My professor encouraged me to enroll in a Spanish class for native speakers but I shared my story with him and asked if I could be allowed to complete the sequence. The following year I continued to work on my Spanish and enrolled in the Spanish for Native Speakers sequence of courses.

Stanford had a strong Latina/o community and these students participated in a number of campus organizations and activities but, during my freshman year I chose not to get involved. I set out to create my own path and as I noted earlier I was committed to experiencing more diversity. I do not know why I felt like I had to choose between the two; being a part of the Latina/o community or experiencing college life in my dorm but I

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did. I think much of it stemmed from my belief that my culture was not something in which I found value (Urrieta, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Even after my experience in the poetry course I still hesitated to embrace the Latina/o community on campus but I found myself learning more about my culture.

Throughout the year I continued to try to use my knowledge of south Texas and my experiences in my classes. In my first year writing course I wrote my semester project on high school football in my hometown after my roommate bought me a copy of *Friday Night Lights* (1990). I was mesmerized by the book but I also felt like my experiences playing high school football in south Texas were a bit different than the story chronicled in the book. I found the research rewarding and my instructor was impressed with the topic and work I put into it. By the end of my first year I had come to appreciate my culture, particularly my knowledge of the subject matter and how with it I was able to make sense of many of the concepts I was learning in many of my classes. I had not been this excited about learning since my junior year when I was reading the short stories about my hometown. I felt empowered and very much like I did when I was in elementary school; eager to pick up and learn about anything. And finally, I could learn about something I knew and cared about (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

I was eager to continue to learn about my culture and heritage, so much so that I asked my poetry professor to sponsor an undergraduate research project where I would collect my community's oral histories. It was not the most organized project but I was excited to go home and learn more about my community. I worked out of my high school and worked with high school students and local researchers and community members. I visited with my informants at coffee shops and restaurants and at their

homes. I was also exposed to a number of historical photographs and documents which opened my eyes ever more to the rich history of my area (Yosso, 2005). Every day I asked myself, how so much history had been kept from not only me but countless other students like me who had come to view the area negatively (Urrieta, 2004).

That summer after my first year in college was what pushed me to reexamine myself. Even though the process began slowly during my final two of years of high school and continued during my first year of college, the summer brought everything together for me. I was so excited to be working in my hometown and felt like, for once I was the expert on something and instead of learning about it in a textbook I was actually experiencing it first-hand and creating new knowledge. As the summer came to a close I was excited to be returning to Stanford and was eager to share what I had learned with others. I was also looking forward to finally getting involved in the Latina/o community.

After years of denying who I was and where I came from I embraced my culture, my heritage, and my identity. The history which had been denied to me and others like me had finally been made available to me (Urrieta, 2004). Unfortunately, I had to leave in order to gain access and the opportunity to learn much of that history.

My newfound interest in my community and my history forced me to change much of what I had long believed. For so long I thought my strength was found in my command of the English language and my commitment to becoming Rodriguez's New American Scholarship Boy (1974). Instead, my strength all along had been in the language and culture I wanted to ignore and outright deny. It was only in looking back and in going home that I was able to find myself (Carrillo, 2007).

Chapter V: Decolonization

Before the start of my sophomore year I was fortunate enough to be admitted into a sophomore seminar. The seminar met for two and a half weeks prior to the start of my second year and it would give me the opportunity to work closely with one of the tenured faculty members on campus. This class provided me with the space to further explore the identity I started building my first year and the following summer. Entitled, Remapping the Americas, the class explored the way different ethnic groups created spaces within the colonized areas of the United States. We examined art, music, theater, literature and other mediums, used to create spaces of decolonization. It was perfect for my continued growth because I was encouraged to incorporate much of what I was learning at home and it provided me with new ways of examining my history, culture, and the space of the south Texas-Mexico border. The class also introduced me to Gloria Anzaldua and her text, *Borderlands La Frontera* (1999). The book would be instrumental in helping me understand some of my experiences growing up in south Texas since my home is the area about which she was writing. Why had I not been introduced to her sooner, especially while I was in high school? I knew the answer to my question but still could not understand how this amazing author grew up just a few minutes from my hometown and yet I had never heard of her. Once again I was reminded of the kind of knowledge prized within the curriculum of public high schools in south Texas (Yosso, 2005). Gloria Anzaldua's work; did not fit the criteria and thus, was not part of the standard curriculum. She challenged the master narrative, particularly what was valued knowledge and why English was privileged over Spanish (Anzaldua, 1987; Yosso, 2005).

Anzaldua's work was really only an introduction to the countless other texts and authors from south Texas I had never heard of. More importantly, many of them spoke of a history of which I was only vaguely familiar. I had spent some of my first year exploring some of the history of the area but there was so much more I did not know. The history of south Texas had been taken up by a number of scholars (Foley, 1990; Limon, 1994; Paredes, 1998; Saldivar, 1990). Why had it taken me so long to be introduced to their work? It was a question I can only now answer with any certainty. We were never meant to see their work or learn about the history because it was not part of the standard curriculum (Anzaldua, 1999; Urrieta, 2004; Yosso, 2005).

The class was the perfect start to the new academic year. Bolstered by the success I had in the class, I decided to continue to reexamine my life and learn more about home. I joined some of the Latina/o student organizations on campus and even looked into joining a Latina/o organization loosely modeled after the Greek fraternity. I say loosely because the organization and its membership did not want the same stigma associated with the traditional fraternity; a group of young men engaged in binge drinking and hazing. The group also believed Latino men already had a number of stereotypes attached to them and they did not want to reinforce those stereotypes. Instead the organization was housed out of the University's community service center and held a strict policy that forbade alcohol at all group events. Having grown up without as an only child I developed strong bonds with my friends back home. I could confide in them and trusted them. I was looking for the same in college.

Coming Face to Face with Racism

Through the organization I met other Latinos, many of whom had similar experiences to my own and throughout the process of becoming members I built strong friendships unlike any other I had developed at Stanford. Everything seemed to be going well for me until one fateful night during the winter quarter of my sophomore year.

Late one evening all of the potential members were taking part in a scavenger hunt around campus. That night some of the fraternities on campus were also holding similar events as part of their own pledge activities. During the event, just before midnight, our group of ten was walking along campus drive when we noticed a campus security vehicle following behind us. The officer did not signal to us to stop but instead continued to follow behind us for several minutes. On more than one occasion we stopped and looked back at the officer, but he never signaled for us to stop nor did he bother asking us any questions. After walking for a few minutes we noticed that we had to get to the final location of the scavenger hunt before the deadline or else we were going to have to complete a series of pushups for every minute we were late. We started jogging; across the front of the campus and onto the grounds of the campus art museum. Just as we reached our destination we were surrounded by campus police vehicles; their sirens blaring and lights flashing. The officers emerged from their cars and we were quickly instructed to drop to our knees and place our hands above our heads.

The lead officer asked us what we were doing out at that hour. One of the other potential members sarcastically responded, "We're jogging." The lead officer was not amused. We informed him that we were students participating in a group activity. He did not believe us and proceeded to ask us for identification. After we were all able to

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prove we were Stanford students the officer did not offer an apology; instead he warned us about conducting any activities late at night and then suggested we were stopped because we, in his words, "looked like a gang." According to him there had been a spike in bicycle thefts on campus and we, unfortunately, fit the description of the thieves. The officers returned to their cars and left, leaving us to resume our activity and to think about what happened.

We were left wondering, what did he mean we fit the description of "a gang"? Were they clean cut, Latino males with Stanford sweatshirts and windbreakers? Or was it that we looked, not white? I was shaken. I had never experienced anything like that and I could not help but feel wronged. Some of the older members of the group told us this was not the group's first run in with the campus police (Cammarota, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002; Pino & Ovando, 2005). A few members talked about being racially profiled by police officers and being stopped while driving on more than one occasion because once again, they fit the description of a criminal. While this was my first experience with racism and racial profiling it would not be my last, but this initial experience really shook me (Cammarota, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002). If what I was going through before the events of that evening was self-discovery and self-reflection, that night would be the tipping point.

Even though I had committed myself to learning my culture, heritage and language, there were still those moments when I questioned whether what I was doing was right (Rendon, 1992). I wondered whether or not I would find the "success" I was hoping to achieve by traveling my newfound path (Carrillo, 2007; Carrillo, 2013). For so long the idea of success that I had longed for and that I think we all long for as

Americans had been ingrained in my head (Rodriguez, 1974; Rodriguez, 1982). It was as if there was a checklist. Graduate? Check. Go to a top university? Check. Obtain a high paying job? Would pursuing this new path allow me to achieve the success promised by the master narrative (Valenzuela, 2005)? Doubt crept in.

After that fateful evening, I learned some important things about myself and society. Prior to that evening I had done everything I thought I needed to do to find acceptance and success in school, yet for all of my work and commitment to the master narrative, it did not matter to those police officers that evening and no matter what I did to change or deny who I was I could not find acceptance from everyone (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). What was even more unnerving was, for as hard as I worked to make it to an institution like Stanford, the place where I sought the ultimate acceptance, it would be here that I would come face to face with racism and with others questioning whether or not I belonged (Cammarota, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002).

A few weeks later the events and feelings of that fateful evening would be further reinforced. One Sunday afternoon the pledges and members of the group were playing football on one of the athletic fields on campus. In the field next to us were a group of white students playing Frisbee. While we were playing, a man rode up to one of our members studying on the sidelines. The man told the student that the athletic fields were reserved for Stanford students only. Our member informed him that we were all students. The man said he didn't believe him and told him to make sure we all had our IDs ready because he would be back to check all of them. He then rode off. Our member went over to the white students in the adjacent field and asked them if they had been warned by the man in the golf cart about using the athletic fields since according to him they

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were only accessible to Stanford students. The white students said no but they also did not know they could not use the fields since they were not students. As a group our reactions varied. Some of our members were upset while some of the older members reminded us that this happened often and would not be the last time (Cammarota, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002). Needless to say none of us expected it to happen so soon after the first event much less in broad daylight.

For years I had placed so much faith in the master narrative. Like Rodriguez (1982), I too believed that if I sacrificed my culture I would find success and acceptance. Racism was something I believed happened to other people, not me. I believed not only that my actions would shield me from racism but I also thought as a Stanford student, somehow I would be immune to such an experience (Urrieta, 2008). I was wrong.

After those two events, I recommitted myself to the organization and other organizations within the Latina/o community on campus. I also continued my journey of self-discovery (Rendon, 1992; Torres, 2003). From that moment on I reflected more on my education; what I saw and learned and what I remembered while growing up. I also thought more consciously about race and racism and stereotypes, especially how, for much of my life I was always second guessing the "other" and how I often believed it was my responsibility to keep an eye on the "other" (Memmi, 1965). For instance I can recount countless times where I would sit in a restaurant, always facing the door and looking out for people who looked like me but who I never thought of myself as having anything in common with. It was as if I thought of myself as some sort of protector; a protector of whiteness, against the "other" (Memmi, 1965). It was not until I had that

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experience that I realized I was the "other." Little did I know, every time I was watching the door someone else was always watching me. I had been duped.

I will not place the blame on Stanford because I was still able to find acceptance and support within the institution. I found mentors and friends who helped me understand what I was experiencing and encouraged that exploration (Arana, et al., 2011; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). Furthermore, the institution gave me the tools to analyze and examine my experiences and gave me the strength to deal with them. It also allowed me to build a community of like-minded individuals who were also trying to understand the world around them. I also believe what I had experienced was not isolated to Stanford. It happened every day somewhere in America only I had often been immune to it in south Texas. This is not to say that racism or discrimination did not exist in south Texas (Anzaldua, 1999; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Richardson, 1999). As I reflect upon my experiences I can say that racism and oppression were very real, only much of the racism was embedded in policies and the structures that governed what we did, especially what and how we learned in public schools (Anzaldua, 1999; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Richardson, 1999). It was embedded in policies that prevented Mexican American students from learning their history and in rhetoric and pedagogies that prevented and discouraged us from asking "why" (Urrieta, 2008)? I needed to continue unlearning what I had always taken for granted.

Finding a Home on the Farm

By the end of my sophomore year I needed to declare a major. When I entered Stanford I thought I wanted to major in business, but my experiences, combined with the classes I had taken and my early exposure to research inspired me to do something

multidisciplinary and certainly closer to what I was learning through many of my informal experiences beyond the classroom (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001). With the help of a few friends, I was encouraged to meet with the chair of Chicana/o Studies. After meeting with her for an hour I knew Chicana/o Studies was what I needed to do. It was everything I was looking for in a major. It allowed me to continue to take courses that facilitated my growth and gave me the tools I could use to examine the world around me (Torres, 2003).

Of course by declaring Chicana/o Studies my parents, friends and family all had questions about what I was going to do with that major or what exactly Chicana/o Studies was. My father was encouraging and supportive. Early on in my college life my father told me to do what I enjoyed and to do it for myself and not for anyone else. If this is what I wanted to study, he was behind me.

The next two years I continued my studies and spent more of my time examining my experiences and learning about my community. If I wrote a paper on poverty it was about poverty in my community (Ladson-Billings, 1995). If I wrote about educational policy then I examined a particular policy and its effect on my local school district. I realized that while I was not an expert on many things I could be an expert on my community and in so doing translate broader experiences and phenomenon to a smaller, more familiar scale; namely, my hometown and my region (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). The best part was, most if not all of my professors encouraged my work. Several were fascinated with the work I was doing and the analysis I was conducting via real experiences. I was writing about things few people could write about or had written about (Delgado-Bernal,

2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). While I was studying my home I grew to love my culture, my home, my heritage and everything I fought against while I was growing up. I learned to love all that the master narrative had taught me to distrust (Yosso, 2002).

My grandmother passed away during the spring quarter of my freshman year in college but I knew she would have been proud of my transformation. Before she passed she and I had long conversations over the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays during my freshman year in college. We had never had conversations like that; where I asked her about corridos and stories about the area. I asked her what it was like growing up along the border and she recalled amazing stories about the Texas Rangers. When she passed, I was devastated by the fact that it took me so long to accept who I was and share that with my grandmother (Torres, 2003). She had so many stories to share and it was only over the last few months of her life that I was willing to hear those stories.

After the loss of my grandmother, my determination to learn more about myself and my community was stronger than ever (Torres, 2003). Every summer I would return home and further develop my research skills while learning about the local history. I also learned community organizing via a service learning internship I received from Stanford. It was during the internship that I was able to work with local high school students (Delgado-Bernal, Aleman & Garavito, 2009). I helped them conduct community surveys and asset map the community. I was becoming the expert I never thought I would be. This time I felt like all of my work and effort was constantly being supported by my professors, my mentors and my peers (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). This was

never more evident than during my senior year at Stanford when I was meeting with one of my program advisors to discuss my honor's thesis.

I did not have a close relationship with my program advisor. Those of us who had chosen to enroll in the education honors program met once a week. We talked about our research and he provided advice and guidance. I used the meetings as a chance to share what I was writing about with my peers but when faced with challenges or questions I often turned to my academic advisor. I had worked with him for over a year and he had a familiarity with my work like no one else. In spite of my relationship with my academic advisor I still had to fulfill the program requirements so I had to meet with the program advisor.

My program advisor sat across from me and offered advice on a few of the chapters of my thesis. It was terrific advice until he came to his final suggestion. My program advisor was not happy with the tone of my paper. He said there was too much of me in the work and it was far too subjective (Banks, 1998; Behar, 1996; Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). For two years I collected data and interviewed over 40 individuals from my community about their relationship to the local high school football team. The project grew out of the small research project I had completed as a freshman for my writing course. I was trying to write my *Friday Night Lights* (1991) and as a member of my high school football crazed community. Of course I was a part of the paper. I had lived it as a player and as a spectator. I could not leave my voice out of it (Banks, 1998; Behar, 1996; Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

I left his office with my paper in hand and proceeded to walk over to my academic advisor's house, disappointed. I had spent so much time working on those last

few pages and I was fearful that I would have to turn around and change everything. I told my advisor about the meeting and the last piece of advice offered to me. He sat there looking at me for a moment and then told me, "Tell him to go f@$& himself." I let out a big laugh and then caught myself and asked if he was serious. My advisor reminded me that this work was about me and the people of my community. It was my work and I had every right to the language I used, especially if it was my own (Banks, 1998; Behar, 1996; Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). At that moment I could not have felt more empowered and certain of the path I had taken. I left his home feeling good about my work and my decisions. I finally felt like I had arrived.

When the day arrived that I had to deliver my thesis presentation to a panel of College of Education faculty and invited guests I could not have been more ready. I spoke passionately about my research and my community while a series of old game and yearbook photographs and other artifacts flashed behind me on a screen. When I was finished several faculty members commended me on my work. All of my hard work had paid off and even though I strayed from the path laid out by my program advisor, the advice offered by my thesis advisor was what I needed to get me to that moment (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006).

I remained at Stanford for another year after completing my bachelor's. During the spring quarter of my senior year I thought about my next step and the all-important question of, "What am I going to do after graduation." I decided to stay one more year and complete a Master's in Education. I was not ready and did not know what I was going to do so fear played a big role in keeping me at Stanford. I had worked so hard to

find myself and yet I was not ready to leave. I felt like I had more exploring and self-examination to do (Torres, 2003). I was also fearful of the master narrative. I thought about teaching elementary school after graduation but I was apprehensive about working within the master narrative. Everything taught in public schools seemed so prescriptive and I did not think I could do that to myself and more importantly, to my potential students (Yosso, 2002). I applied to one of the Master's programs in Education at Stanford, hopeful that after the program was complete I would have a better idea of what I wanted to do and if I did choose to teach, that I would have more confidence of being able to challenge the master narrative.

My final year at Stanford I continued much of my earlier work; expanding on my undergraduate honors thesis while also establishing new relationships with other professors (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). During the winter quarter, my undergraduate advisor and I attended a teacher conference in my hometown organized by my mentor and former high school English and history teacher. While at the conference I met the Dean of the College of Education from the local university near my community. We sat on a discussion group together and after speaking for a while she asked if I was interested in a position at the university. The end of my Master's program was fast approaching and once again I was fearful of facing the all too familiar question of, what's next. Here was my next step. My advisor encouraged me to take the position. I agreed to meet with the Dean when I completed my program and go from there.

My time at Stanford was memorable for so many reasons but perhaps the most important was because I was given the space and the tools necessary to find myself

(Rendon, 1992; Torres, 2003). For most of my academic life I believed in the master narrative. I worked tirelessly to change who I was and deny where I came from. At Stanford I found myself and relinquished my hold of the master narrative. Or so I thought.

Homecoming

I began teaching at UST in the fall of 2002. Given my interdisciplinary background I was asked to teach a course entitled Foundations of Multicultural Education. I was eager to share what I had learned at Stanford but my excitement was tempered by things I heard being said by some of my new colleagues. One new professor told me not to try to give my students too much work because they just could not handle it (Rendon, 1992; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2002). I prodded him further but he would not elaborate. What did he mean? Should I not have high expectations for my students? I forged ahead and prepared to expect the best from my students, all the while thinking about what my colleague had shared with me. The University certainly had a reputation of not being the most rigorous of institutions but I had already learned that was largely based on the same perceptions I had and others like me had been encouraged to adopt while we were growing up. Because it was a university with a large Mexican American and Latina/o student population somehow spoke to the quality of the students or the institution itself (Menchaca, 1997; Rendon, 1992; Trueba, 1988; Valencia & Black, 2002).

I arrived to class on my first day well before my first group of students arrived. I used the extra time to arrange the chairs into a large circle so as to encourage dialogue and conversation. The students entered the room with trepidation. I could hear many of

them talking about the arrangement of the chairs; many of them did not even suspect I was the instructor. Once they were settled I introduced myself and talked briefly about my expectations of the course. I then asked each student to share their own expectations and what they hoped to learn from the course. What followed left me speechless. One after another each student shared the same expectation, "Whatever you tell me to know is what I expect to learn." I should not have been surprised since I had that same mentality as a student growing up in south Texas. I always placed a great deal of faith in my teachers in that they would give me everything I needed to know in order to pass any given exam, eventually gain their acceptance and hopefully one day find success in the real world (Rodriguez, 1982). In fact I remember placing so much faith in my teachers that I often placed my teachers' words above those of my parents.

What surprised me though, was that these were not elementary students or even high school students; these were college students. I expected my students to be independent thinkers, but I quickly learned everything seemed so prescriptive (Urrieta, 2004; Yosso, 2002). Even the readings I was expected to use had been assigned to me by my department. It was the banking system of education at its worst (Freire, 2007). After I told my students we would not be using the textbooks my chairperson called me into his office and asked if I had told my students to return their textbooks to the bookstore. I answered affirmatively and he proceeded to explain to me that the book store was upset. I did not know what to think. I thought I had been hired to teach a course but I questioned how much autonomy I really had.

In class I chose to stray from their expectations and did my best to encourage my students to question what they were learning (Freire, 2007; Hooks, 1994). I relied on

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articles and selections from a variety of texts to guide my teaching. Early in the semester one of my students asked to speak with me after class. She demanded that I begin lecturing in class. She told me she did not learn the way I was teaching and she learned best when the instructor stood in the front and lectured (Freire, 2007). I asked her to be patient and to trust me. It was not long before the students became comfortable with my teaching methods and even took to the articles I was assigning them. At the end of the semester I was happy with the outcome and was encouraged to see that the students were eager to stray from the conventional teaching and learning they were used to but getting there had not been easy. The student who questioned my methods went to visit me during finals week and thanked me for the course. She said she enjoyed the course and learned more than she anticipated. As in much of my own undergraduate experience I had to teach them how to rethink what they knew and encourage them to question information (Freire, 2007; Hooks, 1994; Rendon, 2011). As the semester progressed it was empowering to see students think openly and critically about what occurred in schools. When students went into the field to observe classrooms they came back eager to share what they had seen. They were excited but also dismayed to see that what we were discussing was actually occurring in local schools. At the end of the semester I wondered whether my students would have more opportunities to question what they were learning in their other courses. I feared they would not. I decided to try to change that (Urrieta, 2008).

After the fall semester I went to my department head and asked if I could teach a course on the foundations of American education or if one existed since I felt as though our students could benefit from such a course. He informed me that no such course

existed and creating a new course would be difficult. A few weeks later and just a few days prior to the spring semester, my department head asked me to meet with the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education regarding a new course. I met with her and she informed me of a new course entitled Introduction to Teaching. The course would be for Education majors but the target student population would be freshmen. I told her that I would gladly teach the course but was nervous because I felt the University was vague in defining what they expected from the course. The only guidance I had was the textbook I received at the end of the meeting. The meeting was on a Friday and spring semester classes were to begin the following Monday.

I had a small number of students in the class, no more than 15 which made teaching the class manageable but saying it was a difficult class to teach would be an understatement. The class was entitled, Intro to Teaching, but the text was an educational psychology text. It was filled with information on time management, goal setting, motivation and learning theory. If the class was meant to be an Intro to Teaching course the material did not fit the description. The students and I struggled with the text and I did my best to supplement the text with additional readings and creative exercises and activities to keep the class engaged. This was not what I had in mind when I accepted the opportunity to teach the course but I also did not want to squander the opportunity I had with these students.

In addition to my teaching responsibilities, I was also asked to attend several meetings with the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education and a group of faculty who were a part of the committee given the charge of overseeing and contributing to the development of the course. It was during my first visit with the group that I learned the

course was being looked at as potentially helping with first year student retention. The administration was looking at a number of changes to help improve retention. The Introduction to Teaching class was one of those changes.

At one of the meetings one of the faculty members asked what I was doing to keep the students engaged. I told him I was supplementing the readings from the text with short stories by Latina/o authors and articles on Latina/o students (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). I also told the panel I was requiring the students to meet with me, one on one, throughout the semester so that I could better understand their needs and perceptions of the course. I also used the meetings to identify what was and was not working. Since this was the first semester the course had been taught I wanted to know how I could make the course better. After this meeting a Latino faculty member of the committee pulled me aside to offer some advice. He said, "Jose, I've been here for many years. When I started here I would meet with my students just as you're doing. But I stopped because it took too much time." And with that he wished me good luck and walked away. I was left thinking about his advice; wondering if I was wasting my time. I was also disappointed. I was disappointed by what this tenured professor had shared with me because at that moment I felt as though he had given up on students. It's possible that I was assuming much but at that point, after showing that I was committed to the course and my students and to their learning, hearing those words led me to the conclusion that this person had given up. As the semester came to a close I reminded myself why I was meeting with my students.

Where did my desire to know my students come from? And why did wanting to know about my students seem so novel to my peers? As an undergraduate, I remember feeling overwhelmed by some of the courses I took. Sometimes the material seemed more advanced than anything I had ever been exposed to, other times I felt as though I was outclassed by my peers. To help deal with my shortcomings and lack of self-confidence I forced myself to visit with my professors (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). I found these meetings to be very useful because it was here where I could show them that I was engaged in the course and the material and let them know I was doing all of the assigned readings, but my self-confidence was not on par with that of my peers'. Meeting with my professors became so much of my routine that my friends frequently asked me, "Who are you meeting with this week?" The frequency of my meetings became a running joke among my friends but it was a practice I was more than happy to maintain. Furthermore, during my most challenging times in college these meetings always served as encouragement. When I needed a sympathetic ear there were several professors who provided it. It was this experience that inspired me to encourage my students to come and visit with me. I knew each student had a unique story and set of circumstances that had an impact on them as students. I wanted to know what their stories were. I believed just as my story helped my professors better understand me; hearing my student's stories would allow me to better understand, advocate and serve as a mentor for them (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006).

In fall of 2003, I continued to teach my Multicultural Education course but I also picked up two more sections of the Intro to Teaching course. This time I felt better prepared for the course because I made the individual meeting and the individual student the focus of the course. The course began to take the shape of a self-reflective, self-help course. We would continue to examine most of the topics including, time management and goal setting, but it became more about how the course could serve the students and help them realize their goals and aspirations. There were still some bumps along the way but overall I was very pleased with the progress I had made from the previous semester. The one on one meeting continued to be the hallmark of my course. I learned the most about my students during these meetings and it was here where the plan for the direction of that semester's course took shape (hooks, 1994).

The University took the course campus wide in the fall of 2004. That semester every department had a section of the introductory course only now the title changed. The change signified a shift from an introductory course to an educational psychology course aimed at helping students understand how they learn and how they could improve on their learning. The course also became a requirement for all incoming freshmen. And since the course was now a requirement there was a concerted effort to standardize the material covered in the class. Standardization involved frequent meetings between faculty members teaching the course and the Vice Provost. We were encouraged to make the course our own but at the same time there was pressure to ensure everything in the text was being covered and that much of the material could be transferred across disciplines.

I continued to try to teach the course focused on addressing the needs of my students and did not worry about what my colleagues were doing. I did offer suggestions as most of the instructors had not taught a course like this before. I told them meeting with the students seemed to help with absences and gave the students the sense that their instructor cared (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). A few of the instructors incorporated some of the things I was doing but only one agreed to make the individual meeting part of the course. The others thought, much like that professor who pulled me aside a few years earlier, meeting with the students took too much time.

During our faculty meetings we also discussed some of the challenges each of us faced with our respective sections. Some faculty members had trouble with student attendance, others with engagement, and then there were groups of students who challenged faculty because they did not believe they needed the class. The class quickly assumed a reputation as a study skills course and a blow off class. Even some of the instructors in various departments were not happy the course had become a requirement and some openly challenged the course's importance. Often the argument among many faculty members was that students should already come to the university with many of the skills we were trying to teach them. And while our course was much more than just a skills course, erasing that stigma would be daunting.

I never paid too much attention to what other professors thought of the course. I was fully aware of what was being said since at the beginning of each semester, often during the first class session I asked my students if they had heard anything about the class. Many said the same thing, "we're going to learn how to take notes and study."

Others openly said the course was an easy course. I used those particular moments to talk about the value of the course and how they needed to attain particular skills in order to be successful but beyond that I did not allow what others thought of the course to influence what I taught or how I taught (Rendon, 2011).

I discussed the course with some of my colleagues in the College of Education and invited them to visit with my students but overall I think I tried to remain focused on teaching the course. I allowed the battle for legitimacy to be waged by the administrators who created the course and would assist whenever I was called to do so.

In addition to finding acceptance among the faculty, attendance and engagement continued to be issues in many of our sections. While I think I had good attendance, every once in a while I would have a class with a handful of students with poor attendance. These were often students who I had not yet met with. Still, I was not immune to experiencing some of the same difficulties my colleagues were experiencing. We struggled to find a solution but as the problems continued more of the blame was focused on the students (Rendon, 1992; Sosa, 2002; Trueba, 1988; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006). It was common to hear us, myself included, say things like, "They just don't care about school." Or, "School isn't their number one priority." Wanting to know why my students were out, I began to ask them to email or contact me anytime they were absent. I found that most of my students were out because of additional responsibilities they assumed within their household, many of which were beyond their control and even those within their control proved to be much more complex than I ever anticipated until I returned to school (Cammarota, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Espinoza, 2010; Torres, 2003).

Re-education

Initially when I took the job at UST I told myself I would teach for three years and then return to school to begin working on a Ph.D. I never thought I would enjoy the job as much as I did. I did not want to leave so I postponed applying for a graduate program until 2006 but even then I only applied because I thought I could take courses and still continue to teach. In 2006 I was accepted into a PhD program in Cultural Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. And for those first two academic years I continued teaching my full course load while also commuting once a week to Austin to attend my classes. Most thought I was crazy to do such a thing but I really enjoyed working with my students and I did not want to leave my job. I also felt as though I was making a difference (Urrieta, 2008). My students' experience with me was usually one of the earliest of their college life. I wanted to make sure that experience was positive and I wanted them to know that in me they had an advocate and mentor (Arana, et al., 2004; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Longerbeam, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). Without my own advocates I do not know what my college experience would have been like.

During my first meeting with my advisor at UT he asked me about potential dissertation topics. I told him I taught freshmen and really wanted to study retention at UST. Between 2003 and 2006 I had seen countless students stop out midway through the semester or not return for their second year and I wanted to know why. Many of these students were very intelligent and committed to school but for one reason or another chose to stop out. He encouraged me to pursue this work since he understood how much time I had already invested in it via my position at UST. Over two years I read countless

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articles on retention; many of the studies examined retention from the perspective of the

traditional college student profile and was informed by the work of college retention and

attrition authors like Tinto (1975, 1993). For example, Tinto (1975) examined students

who left their hometowns to attend college elsewhere and their success depended on their

ability to engage in the university culture while disengaging from their home lives, which

became one of the seminal research texts in explaining student retention and attrition. I

also examined why students chose to attend the colleges they attended (Perez &

Mcdonough, 2008; Nora, 2004; Post, 1990; and Santiago, 2007). These early works,

combined with the persistent blaming of our students failings on Latina/o students

themselves had me subscribing to this same rationale (Rendon, 1992; Sosa, 2002; Trueba,

1988; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006). It was amazing

how over a period of three to four years I had forgotten everything my students had told

me and were telling me and began to believe that the retention problem was their (the

student's) problem (Rendon, 1992; Sosa, 2002; Trueba, 1988; Valencia & Black, 2002;

Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006).

Like so many of the studies I was reading I began writing papers on retention at

UST which described how the students did not place a high priority on their education

(Sosa, 2002). I wrote about how they often chose family and family obligations or their

community over their classes and how if they wanted to find success at the post-

secondary level that it was them that needed to change.

Meanwhile, there was still a sense that many of the tenured faculty and even some

in the University's administration doubted the course. Those doubts and this growing

sense of a need to legitimize ourselves and more specifically the course would manifest

themselves in our approach to the class. The rhetoric at our faculty meetings grew louder and the push for more standardization continued as we looked for a new text to meet our needs and silence the critics of the course. I do not recall a discussion about finding a text that met our students' needs but rather whether or not we could find a text that covered all of the topics we were expected to teach and qualified as an educational psychology text. While it was never said during any of our meetings I was getting the sense that we were looking for a text that would help to legitimize the course.

In the midst of all of this I was still teaching and meeting with my students but I believe I was not listening to them as well as I had in the beginning. I was not ready to abandon my meetings as that other faculty member had done, but my meetings were certainly influenced by some of the research articles I was then reading for some of my graduate courses. I heard countless stories of students who had to provide for their families or were dealt difficult circumstances and were merely trying to keep their heads above water. But the talk among us, the faculty, continued. We talked about creating a stronger absence policy and dropping students after a given number of absences. More and more we talked about students as if trying to mold them into the types of students they needed to be not just to be successful but to fit a specific expectation of what a successful, often as dictated by the literature, student was (Carrillo, 2007; Rendon, 1992; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007).

That successful student was not unlike the student I had been while I was in high school and throughout much of my education until college. I had always managed to keep school front and center and whenever I strayed my parents and my teachers did a good job of steering me back. I also began to forget about the experiences that had

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helped change me while I was in college, instead I took on the role of the faculty member who says, "I made it, why can't they?" Over time I neglected how important it had been for me to share my story with my peers and my professors. I told my students of how I was able to disengage from the home and make college my number one priority; whereas for many of my students, school and being a student was sometimes second or third on a list of many other priorities as evidenced by an activity I would have my students complete during the first week of the class (Cammarota, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Espinoza, 2010; Torres, 2003).

I would provide my students with a sheet of flip chart paper and ask them to draw themselves in the middle of the sheet. I would then ask them to list all of the roles they inhabited around their drawing. I encouraged them to list any role that took up time. Some of the roles included son or daughter, friend, brother or sister, student, employee, and others. I then asked them to number them based on what they felt was the most important role in their life. For many of my students being a student was typically not first on the list. Many numbered being a son or daughter as being the most important. I would then draw a picture of me on the board and list all of my roles while I was in college. My list typically included the following roles, son, student, friend, and employee. I told the students that my role as a student was my first priority since my role as a son at that time really only required me to make a phone call home every other day. In my example I was the embodiment of the college student early researchers on student retention and attrition wrote about (Tinto, 1975). I was the student who had disengaged. Or had I. It was only after further reflection and time during my graduate studies that I was able to look at the activity and even my life while I was a college student and

ultimately conclude that I had never disengaged. In fact, I was more engaged in my home, family and community than ever. I knew exactly what was going on in south Texas even though I was two thousand miles away. Physically I was far from home but I had never been more engaged in my home life and unfortunately, the reality was many of my students could not disengage from their lives. Every day they were expected to fulfill a number of roles in addition to being a student, but I found myself using the class to help them disengage (Cammarota, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Espinoza, 2010; Torres, 2003). That was what the textbook prescribed and more and more I felt like that is what we as faculty were working towards. If we could get our students to disengage then they would find success.

At this time I was also working on a draft for my dissertation proposal. In it I discussed how much of the research on Latina/o student retention did not focus on the multiple roles Latina/o students inhabited and that it was these multiple roles which often prevented them from fully engaging in the university thereby making it easier for them to stop out and not return to school (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). I shared a very rough and early draft of the proposal with a few members of my committee hoping to get some positive reinforcement and feedback. But one faculty member asked me to rethink my position and suggested I look at Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as a way to examine retention.

The email I received forced me to rethink all the work I had done to that point. I had interviewed well over 30 students, asking most of them about their roles away from school. I had to ask, why was I now so committed to changing my students? It was a difficult question to answer but relevant since instead of really changing as a college

student I had to understand my history, my heritage and ultimately accept more of myself in order to be successful (Torres, 2003). I was now expecting my students to do the opposite of what I had done to find success. The master narrative which I had accepted so thoroughly early on in my educational life was something I had to disengage from in order to find success; but I, as an instructor, was forcing the master narrative on my own students (Carrillo, 2007; Rendon, 1992; Valenzuela, 2005).

As I outlined earlier, my success was not predicated on my ability to be like everyone else; it was dependent on my ability to stand out and develop what I knew so well. I made connections to what I was learning in my classes to my experiences of growing up in south Texas and the experiences of others in my community. I was successful because I was able to embrace who I was and where I came from (Torres, 2003). I was telling my students I was successful because I disengaged from home but I was successful because I was more rooted in home than ever before and I had faculty members who encouraged my engagement in my community (Arana, et al., 2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). I was also never surer of my identity; who I was and where I wanted to go (Torres, 2003).

Turning the Corner on the Master Narrative

In the fall of 2011, I began to reevaluate how I approached the course and what I taught my students. I no longer tried to get my students to fit into the framework of the master narrative and instead I returned to examining how my class could best serve the needs of the students (hooks, 1994). I began to ask, "How can I help my students be successful not in spite of their multiple roles but because of their multiple roles?" I also began to look more critically at my own thoughts about the course and my role as the

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instructor (Freire, 2007; Hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Urrieta, 2008). Early on in my teaching career I was committed to listening to the needs of my students but the longer I taught the First Year Experience course, the easier it became for me to get caught up in the rhetoric around why our students were not returning to school and why it seemed so hard for many of them to fully commit to their roles as students (Rendon, 1992; Sosa, 2002; Trueba, 1988; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006). I had been overcome by the master narrative and the literature around college retention that often idealized the college student; this teen who could fully disengage from their homes and completely invest in their lives as university students (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). It was easy to make assumptions about my students and even when I was meeting with them and hearing their stories I was not critically reflecting on what I was hearing. My students were different and would never fit the profile of an idealized college student. The retention model which outlined what successful students did, was meaningless when it came to my students. I needed a new model (Rendon, 2011).

If my students held multiple roles then instead of expecting them to fully commit to the role of the student and disregard their roles away from school I had to help my students learn how to manage their multiple roles and figure out how they could use what they knew; their cultural wealth, to help them navigate their lives as university students (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). Fulfilling this new expectation I had created for myself involved rethinking everything I taught and reframing it within the context of the south Texas college student (Bartolome, 2003). I started to incorporate outside readings and articles on Latinas/os in

higher education to supplement some of my original readings. For example, during the semester we often discussed motivation. I always struggled to teach motivation because the students struggled to connect with it. They knew what motivation was but often narrowed it down to a motivational quote or something they saw online like a motivational video. They could relate to the concept but it was not until I incorporated an article on ganas (Cabrera, Lopez & Saenz, 2012), the Spanish word for will, that my students were able to make a deeper connection. Now they could contextualize motivation, often in their parents' or their own stories of struggle and perseverance.

After a year of trying to change my course I realized my textbook was a hindrance. I had been teaching the course for so long and knew the material well but I knew it so well that I felt as if it had permanently inhabited my teaching of the course. Something had to give.

Over the past year, several of my colleagues and I explored the idea of doing away with our textbook and any ideas of standardization all together. We sought the approval of our supervisor and received the go ahead. We talked about what we wanted the course to be like and in those early meetings we all realized that what brought us to that point was the same thing. We all knew that what and how we were teaching was not helping our students. My colleagues and I talked about our experiences as students and the role faculty played in our success (Arana, et al., 2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006) and even discussed how our homes and our families provided support that we could not get anywhere else (Cabrera, et al., 2012; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Torres, 2003). These discussions proved vital to informing the new direction each of us wanted to take our courses. There was no

standardized reader but there was a common approach to what we would be doing and how we would do it. There was also a commitment to creating an ongoing dialogue about our students and our teaching (Freire, 2007; Hooks, 1994; Rendon, 2011).

The spring of 2013 was the first semester where I did not use the textbook. I changed the dynamics of the course; breaking up the daily use of small groups and mixing it with group discussion. I returned to the circle I had set up the first time I ever taught at the University (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008). I also assigned more research articles and reframed some of the assignments. The results; I found my students were more engaged in reading and in the course than ever before. They were eager to come to class and were ready to participate. Discussions were lively and thought provoking and even drew comparisons to therapy sessions from my students.

The course will continue to evolve as I struggle with finding ways to better serve and support my students. My hope is that my colleagues and I will struggle together so that more students can benefit from this course.

For me the experience has been a journey of transformation (Urrieta, 2008). When I arrived at UST I was eager to implement many of the teaching practices I experienced as an undergraduate and share what I had learned with my students. I arrived with a love for learning because I saw firsthand the transformative power of learning, particularly learning that did not privilege one type of knowledge over another (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). But for all of my excitement and enthusiasm I was not prepared to revisit the master narrative. Once again, just as when I was a student growing up in south Texas and during the early part of my undergraduate experience, I found myself operating by

the master narrative's rules (Valenzuela, 2005). My ideas, hopes and expectations for my students were overtaken by the expectations of the master narrative. Instead of helping I found myself blaming them for their shortcomings and their failures (Rendon, 1992; Sosa, 2002; Trueba, 1988; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006); often blind to the larger system within which my students and I were forced to operate (Bartolome, 2003; Valenzuela, 2005). It was a system that ignored the reality of my students' lives and rather than help them navigate the system I became complicit in blaming them and the lives they led for their failures.

Chapter VI: Creating a Decolonized Space

What does the decolonized classroom look like? In her work, Perez (1999) writes of decolonizing as it refers Chicano History in terms of the need for more Chicanas to not only be degreed but to write the history that is not being written. At the time of her writing there were few Chicana historians and consequently the task of writing Chicana history fell on the few. As I thought about what my decolonized First Year Experience class would look like, I immediately reflected on the countless volumes of literature on student success, the first year experience, and other texts related to first year student success. For years I had allowed the text and the institution to dictate what the students needed to know and what I needed to teach. It was the classic banking model of education (Freire, 2007). Instead, if thinking about Perez (1999) and her call to Chicana historians to rewrite not only history but even Chicano history, my students and I needed to rewrite the First Year Experience curriculum. We had to change how I taught and what I taught and the students needed to be active participants in that process.

Decolonizing my First Year Experience course has been a process. It has taken time, years in fact, and it continues to be an evolution. Each semester I face new challenges and new obstacles to the decolonization process. Fortunately, I have had help in the way of the theoretical foundations of Chicana/o Latina/o Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, Borderlands and the Decolonial Imaginary (Perez, 1999). These theories have provided guidance and have forced me to examine what I teach and how I teach (Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Urrieta, 2008). They have also served to remind me of my experiences growing up in south Texas, believing firmly in the master narrative until I learned to question it. Without these theories, who knows, I

might be writing about how by strictly following the textbook of the moment one can find success teaching a first year experience course. Instead, I attempt to lay out what I have done to create a decolonized First Year Experience course. Here then is how I have tried to move my course away from the traditional First Year Experience course and create a decolonized classroom.

First, I had to recognize the dominant or master narrative (Rendon, 1992; Valenzuela, 2005). This is the narrative that often guides how we teach, what we should expect of our students and their deficiencies (Rendon, 1992; Trueba, 1988; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006). Second, there is a conscious choice to go without a textbook or an explicit guide. For years I relied heavily on the text to tell me what and sometimes even how to teach. Teaching, I have found, needs to be organic and must address the needs of my students (Freire, 2007; Urrieta, 2008). Using a textbook made teaching difficult not easier and made me lazier as an instructor. Furthermore, it provided a set of norms that did not value my students' lives (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). Third, as an instructor of a decolonized course, I have chosen to be a mentor. Every instructor must hold office hours but I require my students to visit with me. It has become part of their grade but more importantly the meetings often give me the opportunity to learn about the students and try to foster meaningful relationships with them (Arana, et al., 2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). Fourth, I am willing to relinquish power in my classroom. I am the instructor of record but I am not the sole authority or expert. In fact, I encourage my students to share what they know and become the experts they are (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, Elenes, et al., 2002; 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). Prior to

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becoming an instructor I had doubts as to my qualifications. I never felt like I knew enough and consequently would open myself up to questioning. I had to learn to accept and in fact embrace that quality.   I also choose to stray from the traditional lecture model in favor of a discussion based model of instruction. This has created an environment of shared power and horizontal relationships. Finally, I substitute the traditional text with articles and academic writing the students can relate to (Anzaldua, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2002). I choose articles that foster critical thinking and self-reflection versus expecting them to know information that can be tested via any form of standardized examination whose results on a scantron will somehow tell me what my students know.

1. *Acknowledging the Master Narrative*

Creating a decolonized course is not simply a process of an instructor saying, "I'm going to create a decolonized course." First let me offer my definition of the "decolonized course." I believe the "decolonized course" is a course that implores students to question everything, even the instructor. The "decolonized course" should also stray from any sense of what the traditional and normative course should look and feel like, this is because the "decolonized course" acknowledges that the traditional and normative course often operates in a manner meant to control students while providing a clear hierarchy between the instructor and the students.

When I set out to create the decolonized First Year Experience classroom I began by examining every aspect of my course; from my syllabus to the assignments and exercises I use throughout the course and even my own teaching style. I reflected on why

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I did what I did in my class and examined the sources that influenced my behavior and my expectations. For example, at the end of each semester and throughout the semester, I spend time reflecting on what is occurring in class. Are certain assignments working or are students connecting with the readings? In reflecting on my teaching, my expectations and the expectations fostered by the University, I had to acknowledge the work of the master narrative (Valenzuela, 2005). I had to admit that the expectations I had of my students, how I taught and certainly how I should teach, what I should teach and what my students "needed" to know, were not coming from me (Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994). I felt the pressure; sitting in meetings discussing what we were doing in class; from attendance policies that punished students for living complex and often complicated lives to the lessons I should be teaching. That was not me and that had not been what I learned good teaching to be (Bartolome, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rendon, 2011; Urrieta, 2008). Once I acknowledged the work of larger forces; institutional and cultural expectations (Urrieta, 2008), I could begin to think about what I needed to do to decolonize my classroom.

I have strategically placed this as my first step in establishing a decolonized classroom because it is everything. It is the macro to my class's micro. And acknowledging the master narrative at work in my teaching and in class took time and numerous conversations with other faculty, including two of my colleagues. Two years ago two of my colleagues and I began to engage in conversations about our First Year Experience course. At this point I was well into my graduate program and had already been encouraged to examine the expectations I had of my students, including where those expectations came from. I found those expectations to be coming from the University

and they were being thrown around during our conversations during faculty meetings (Urrieta, 2008). I knew I needed to make some changes to my teaching and at the time I felt like I was going to go it alone. It was at that moment that we were told we would not be required to use the standard text. Given this option I could not say no and much to my surprise I found that two of my colleagues also chose not to use the text. Perhaps they had come to the same conclusion I had; my teaching needed to change (hooks, 1994).

Since then I have found that they also saw some of the same things I was witnessing. One of my colleagues said she decided to change when she saw that what she was teaching and how she was teaching was not reflective of her students' culture (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2002). In fact, she found that her lessons were not attentive to the students' needs and the expectations she had of them often conflicted with their culture. For example, she said during Semana Santa, or Holy Week, her students from Mexico often missed several days of school. What she did not realize was in Mexico the students and their families often took the entire week off in observance of the holiday. This proved to be just one example of many that she had during her first few years teaching the course.

My other colleague had been with the University longer than either of us. He shared that he had always viewed the role of the teacher as a very formal role but while teaching the First Year Experience course he spent more time reflecting upon his role as instructor (Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994; Urrieta, 2008). He remembered that for most of his life his father had served a very prominent role as an informal teacher. He knew he needed to change his class and his teaching by acknowledging the knowledge and

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learning his students were experiencing beyond the classroom (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001; Torres, 2003).

This was exciting. Others had come to the same conclusions I had. We knew the institution and the expectations placed on our students had neglected their lives and their culture (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). In order to best teach our students we needed to recognize and privilege the knowledge they were bringing with them (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Elenes, et al., 2001; Torres, 2003). I could no longer deny or overlook the fact that the majority of my students were Mexican American and Mexican. Why was this important? I found that for all of the years I had spent teaching the course, there seemed to be a disconnection between the stories my students were sharing and the information my students received via the textbook.

The textbook always read like an instruction manual; if students do A and B, then they should move on to C and ultimately find success. I was finding that I was spending time trying to help them fill in the gaps. For example, the text encouraged students to take a proactive approach to their learning. This included developing healthy academic habits like, joining campus organizations or visiting with faculty members during office hours. The reality could not have been more different from the text. How could I convince a student whose family had one automobile and needed to leave campus immediately after their final class in order to pick up their siblings from school or a parent at work that they needed to skirt their responsibility and stay? And this example was more often the norm than the exception.

Mariana, while taking my course, was a full time student and worked over 30 hours a week. Mariana was not the exception; at UST she was the rule. During a typical day she would attend class and then go work at a local grocery store. She often worked till closing and then drove home where she would study for a few hours before going to bed. When she told me about her work commitment and her demanding schedule I asked if she had to work or if she was working to have extra money. She informed me that she had to work because she had to help her single mother with some of the household bills (Arellano, 2001; Castellanos & Jones, 2003). More importantly, Mariana did not want to be a burden on her mother so she put her success largely on her own shoulders. For Mariana, getting involved or fully engaging in the University community was not something she realistically could do. Yet, she was successful. She was very good at managing her time and prioritizing her needs but she also did not fit the model of the successful student described in the academic success literature (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993).

Instead of ignoring who my students were I made it a point to talk about it. I wanted to put their lives front and center (Bartolome, 2003). I have since begun each semester by looking around at my students and reminding them that the majority of them are Mexican American or Latina/o. And I ask, what does this mean? Then I share the statistics regarding college enrollment rates and graduation rates. I want them to know what the numbers are, not to discourage them but so that we have a starting point. We also have our first discussion.

Talking about being a Mexican American university student

I begin by asking students about their expectations and graduation goals.

How many of you plan to graduate in 4 years?

As I look around the room, nearly every student raises his or her hand.

What percentage of UST students graduate in 4 years?

At first the students are hesitant. I encourage them to offer a guess. The numbers come. Sixty percent? Forty percent? Twenty-nine percent? I stop them and thank them for their responses and then I share the information; over the last five years an average of 17% of UST students will graduate within four years. My students are astonished. They seem stunned and some share a look of disappointment.

When I ask why they believe the average UST student will take six years to graduate they begin to shout out a variety of reasons. Some say a lack of discipline, others say students do not take a full load and others say procrastination or an unwillingness to study or do homework. Some suggest that those graduating in six years maybe do not take college seriously (Sosa, 2002; Valencia & Black, 2002).

At this point the conversation can go in a number of directions. If I choose to follow a dominant narrative or if I were to recall the numerous conversations had with my fellow instructors, then I might confirm the idea that student success rests entirely on the student and that somehow the Mexican American students in my course and at the University are lacking whatever it is (insert popular deficit explanation) that is necessary (refer to student success textbook) to find success in college (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2002). In returning to the question of why our Mexican American students are taking longer than four years to graduate, no one, not a single student ever suggests that at some level the University is culpable or that there are a host of factors, many of which

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work in concert, often making the journey difficult. Instead of talking about deficits we talk about the difficulties students experience because of the rising cost of tuition or books, or the lack of support students say they receive. For example, every semester I email my former students and ask them to provide an update on their academic journey. I consistently receive emails from students who thank me for checking in and lament that I am one of the few professors who bothers to keep up with them. By creating a decolonized First Year Experience course I no longer allow the dominant/master narrative to dictate and direct. I no longer allow the narrative to tell me to forget who my students are or that even after they leave my class they may still need my assistance. Instead I encourage not only the class to question the dominant/master narrative but I, as the instructor must also be reminded to question the master narrative (Freire, 2007; Urrieta, 2008).

2. *Throwing Out the Standard Text*

Not long ago I might have chosen to follow the master narrative by turning to my textbook. For years I placed faith in the textbook to provide guidance and direction as I taught the course. I relied on the textbook the first time I taught the course. Without a discussion of expectations or goals the textbook was my Bible. If students had a problem I referred to the book. If students had questions about studying, taking notes, or doing well in class, I leaned on the book. In fact, on the top shelf of a book case in my office sits a binder which has activities and lesson plans for every chapter in the textbook. Everything I ever needed to know was right there. Fortunately, it has remained on the top shelf for several years. It did not take me long to realize the book and the binder filled

with lesson plans did not have all of the answers. More importantly, they were not what my students needed.

Over the course of several years of teaching the course I learned my students needed much more than a manual. They needed to be heard and they needed help understanding how they could best navigate two worlds; the university and the home (Torres, 2003).

Early in the semester I ask my students to complete the following in class activity. The activity begins by asking my students to draw themselves on a sheet of paper. My students draw themselves. Some draw themselves from head to toe, others simply draw a face. After they complete their sketches I then ask them to list their roles and responsibilities. For the sake of this activity I ask them to define their roles as those activities that take up their time. The students begin to list; brother/sister, son/daughter, boyfriend/girlfriend, employee, student, friend, etc. Once they have completed their lists I ask them to reflect on the responsibilities associated with each.

What does it mean to be a son or daughter?

For Araceli it meant caring for her mother (Espinoza, 2010). Her mother does not drive and she was responsible for driving her mother and helping her run errands every Tuesday and Thursday. On one occasion she said she needed to study for an exam on Friday but could not tell her mother she could not drive her around on Thursday. She knew Thursday was the day reserved for taking her mother to the Catholic Church in a nearby community. She took her book and her notes with her, hoping to get some studying done in the car while her mother was busy running her errands. Araceli was not

an only child but as the youngest of three girls, and the only one not working, it was her responsibility to take her mother wherever she needed to go.

A few years ago, before I had spent time reflecting on my students' stories against the dominant expectations of who college students are and what we as instructors expect them to be or what the institution expects them to be, I might have encouraged Araceli to tell her mother that she could not continue to drive her around. I would have emphasized the need to say 'no.' Then I remembered not only my experience in college but a more recent experience where the night before one of my weekly commutes to Austin, my mother called me late in the evening asking me to help her with some remodeling she had started. It was late, after 10 p.m. and I knew I needed to get my rest for the long drive in the morning. I should have said no, but I could not. My mother was very familiar with the demands of both school and work, seeing as how I was doing both, but she needed my help and my father was unable to help her. How could I say no?

The textbook wanted me to encourage my students to learn to say "no." It was my responsibility to remind students that the more involved they were the more success they would have. But the textbook did not acknowledge the complex lives my students led. They were deeply committed to their families, their homes, and their communities (Cammarota, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Torres, 2003). Who was I to tell them something was wrong with their commitments? But this was the expectation. In their research on Latino student persistence, Sciarra and Whitson (2007) recommend that Latina/o students develop their locus of control so as to develop greater independence from their families. Why? What we know is that for many of our students, family is

what has helped propel them to the university and in most cases, family provides

tremendous support (Cabrera, et al., 2012).

Hidalgo (1998), writes of developing a Latino family research paradigm that does

not view the Latino family as a deficit. In reviewing much of the literature, particularly

any literature on why Latinas/os are not completing college, one of the reasons identified

shows that Latinas/os are more likely to suspend their schooling in order to provide

financial assistance to their families (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Sy, 2006). Presented as

such it is easy to view this information in terms of a deficit orientation. Instead of

viewing the family structure and the expectations Latina/o families have of their children,

it is important to examine the complex relationships that exist among families. For many

of my students, working means they can help to provide for the family while in other

cases it means that the students no longer see themselves as a burden for their parents

(Castellanos & Jones, 2003). So where others might view this behavior as a deficit, I

would argue these students are exhibiting the ultimate form of responsibility.

CRT and Lat Crit, privilege the voices of the oppressed and marginalized rather

than the dominant. As I examined the text in my course I began to view it as part of the

dominant narrative. It promised success while often neglecting the real needs of my

students. Ultimately, my choice to forgo the standard text became about providing my

students with readings and material that respected and acknowledged their lives and their

reality (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso,

2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). By providing these resources my students were able to

contextualize the material in terms that were familiar to them. Just as I struggled to

connect with vague and often difficult academic terms, once I was able to connect with

academic knowledge in terms and contexts I could relate to I became empowered and engaged in my learning. Providing material that is culturally relevant gives Latina/o students a connection they might not otherwise get (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

3. *Make a Conscious Choice to be a Mentor*

As a college student I remember being lost and confused about a number of things, especially fitting in on a campus that looked very different from home (Gonzalez, 2002). I worried about my major or lack thereof and about my abilities and my courses and the fact that I had so much trouble saying something in class. I had all of these preoccupations and insecurities and I was supposed to be one of the top kids. I learned early on that no matter how prepared I was, I was not prepared enough. Fortunately I had a number of faculty who believed it was their responsibility to provide positive mentorship (Arana, et al., 2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006). It was so powerful and positive that I told myself, I want to be that kind of teacher/instructor. All faculty members are required to keep office hours but not all faculty choose to develop mentoring relationships with their students. During my first year in college I was incredibly shy and unsure of my abilities. I often quietly sat in class hoping I would not get called upon, not because I had not read but because I lacked confidence in my abilities. In fact, I often share with my students that during my first two years in college I had this fear that at some point the University would find out they had made a mistake and realize I did not belong (Carrillo, 2013). Early in my teaching career I had forgotten about my experience and did not relate it to what many of my students might be experiencing (hooks, 1994).

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During one of my classes a few years ago one of my students shared an incident that occurred during one of his science lectures at UST. He said the professor chastised the class and their intelligence. This student was tired of the professor talking to the class in such a manner and finally decided to say something. He challenged the professor, forcing him to take back what he said and apologize to the class. He believed the professor talked to the students in such a disparaging manner because they were all insecure and fearful of the instructor. My student's experience was a powerful reminder of what I felt, sitting in the back of a lecture or on the periphery of a small discussion class because I was afraid. I was fortunate because I had professors, some Latina/o and others who were Anglo, who were willing and eager to serve as mentors. They reassured me and provided guidance and most importantly they listened. When I first started teaching the First Year Experience course one of the key components of my course were the required meetings with the instructor. During the meetings I ask the students about their families and their lives before coming to the University. We talk about their fears and the obstacles they might face or are currently experiencing. I have found that in many cases my students are eager to open up about their lives, their struggles, and their triumphs. All they want is someone to listen. These meetings have allowed me to develop strong relationships with my students and have given me great insight into my students' lives (Arana, et al., 2011; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ceballo, 2004; Dayton, et al., 2004; Reyes, 2006; Torres, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). I believe they have also helped my overall teaching because they, the students tell me what they need (hooks, 1994; Urrieta, 2008).

4. Be Willing to Relinquish Power

My senior year in college I became more and more apprehensive as graduation neared. My plan was to become a teacher but I was afraid of not having all of the answers. I feared not knowing everything would delegitimize my power and my ability to control my classroom. Why was I so concerned with power? Power is such a part of the expectation of good classroom management we believe we cannot have one without the other. Since I started teaching, possessing or exercising power does not guarantee classroom management and possessing power certainly does not mean your students will learn and will engage in their education. But the expectation is powerful; so much so that in my experience as an instructor students have had difficulty transitioning from a lecture style class to a discussion based class. I learned this early on; the first day on the job, when one of my students pulled me aside after class and asked me to lecture. It was not so much a request as a demand. Mr. Saldivar, you can't teach like this. Why, I asked her? Because I don't learn like this. When I asked if she had ever experienced a discussion based class she told me she had not. I asked her to trust me. During the final week of the semester she stopped by my office and thanked me because she enjoyed the class and believed she had learned.

Over the last year I have incorporated the use of a circle and platica as a way of organizing my class and sharing information including discussions around the readings and student experiences (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008). Guajardo and Guajardo (2008) compare the platica to a traditional Latina/o family or communal gathering where in stories are shared. The space is important because there is no hierarchy. Everyone has an opportunity to share and tell their story. I have found the platica format to be particularly

useful because it lends itself so well to the area. Most of my students are familiar with platicas since many of them have engaged in them throughout their lives. Just as one of my colleagues recognized that much of our education happens informally, the platica is a way for my students to share knowledge they own and they themselves learned via platicas with their family members (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008). Part of giving up power is recognizing the students as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006). It is a central tenet of CRT and Lat Crit, and has been an invaluable part of my teaching. I, as the instructor am not the only one with a story to tell; my students must also be heard and be given the space to teach (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The platicas and the circle configuration provide that space because power is displaced. I am no longer situated in the front of the classroom behind a podium or desk. In the circle and during platicas I am seated anywhere in the circle thereby changing the power dynamic in the room so that any student knows and understands that they have an opportunity and space to share their stories and their experiences.

Providing my students with the space to teach and share has had an impact on what and how I teach. In fact I would not be writing on this issue had I not relinquished my power. Over the years I have changed how I teach and this has largely been in response to what the students tell me they need. While many students have expressed a need for more assistance with study skills, time management and goal setting techniques; the things that have been absent from the textbook are what have been most important to my students. My students would like to know how to navigate the university and balance their lives at home. They want to know how to help their families and their parents feel a

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as though they are a part of this process. The circle and platicas have been instrumental in allowing for these questions to be shared because it is a familiar and safe environment.

5. *Provide Students with Culturally Relevant Content*

Another aspect of the decolonized university classroom has been the need to provide students with culturally relevant content. One of the critiques of culturally relevant content is the notion that it is "feel good" material (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The debate around culturally relevant content is hardly new especially its use in primary and secondary education but it is largely overlooked at the postsecondary level. In fact, as we speak, UST is completing its first year of a common reader program which has been used by freshmen in many of their first year courses. During its first year, numerous faculty, myself included criticized the choice of the textbook used by the University because it was not culturally relevant given our student population (Yosso, 2005).

As an undergraduate I found I was able to connect with much of what I was learning because I had access to culturally relevant content (Anzaldua, 1999; Yosso, 2005). In reflecting on my experiences I found the use of culturally relevant content served two purposes. The first, I was able to relate to what I was reading and studying. For example, while taking an educational policy course I was able to read articles about the effect education policy had on minority communities. And this was not limited to one or two classes, this happened throughout my undergraduate experience. I often tell my students, I had to leave south Texas to learn about south Texas.

The second benefit of being exposed to culturally relevant content was it showed me that there were others like me; who looked like me, had similar experiences, and were

producing academic work (Anzaldua, 1999). We were creating knowledge and I wanted

to be a part of that. Ladson-Billings writes, "The trick of culturally relevant teaching is to

get students to "choose" academic excellence" (Ladson-Billings, p. 160, 1995). By being

exposed to culturally relevant content I chose academic excellence and for one of the few

times in my educational life, I was excited about learning.

Even though I had the benefit of engaging in culturally relevant content, I have to

admit, early on most of my teaching was not culturally relevant. As I noted earlier, I

relied heavily on the text. I knew I could show up, sometimes unprepared and rely on the

text to get me through the day. When I decided to include more culturally relevant

content I found my students to be engaged and more students were completing the

reading. They came to class with questions and ready to lead and participate in class

discussions. It was a change from my earlier classes where we were having discussions,

but they were often uninspiring and lacking in energy. Now students were debating and

eager to discuss the readings. More importantly, they were making connections to their

own lives (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

At the end of the fall semester of 2012, Joseph, one of my students, approached

me after class. At this point I had not completely abandoned the text but I had

incorporated more culturally relevant articles. These were often articles that offered a

more nuanced look at Latina/o students and their educational experiences. Where I was

expected to teach students about university engagement and networking, I introduced the

concept of capital and engaged the students in a discussion about the value placed on

different forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). If we were discussing learning then I introduced

the work of Valencia (2010) and Menchaca (1997) and the concept of learning deficit

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theories to provide context. Joseph thanked me for sharing the articles with them. He said he did not know many of the things we talked about in class or had ever learned about any of the information found in the articles. He said Latinas/os were often portrayed negatively (Menchaca, 1997; Sosa, 2002) when he learned about them in school but he was happy to see positive information on Latinas/os. I encouraged him to continue learning about his culture and reminded him that he too could produce similar work.

Creating the decolonized classroom has been a challenging process. For the most part, I did not know where I needed to take the class. I knew I needed to change my class but there was no textbook or map but, I think that was a good thing. Instead I relied on the existing theories of Critical Race and Latino Critical Theory, Borderlands Theory and the decolonial imaginary (Perez, 1999). These theoretical lenses guided me by encouraging me to listen to my students who unlike the traditional college student inhabit the margins and whose voices and stories are often silent in the larger discussion of First Year student success (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). By privileging my students' voices and experiences and by not relying on the guidance of a text I have been able to create a more democratic classroom that is better suited to address my students' needs. Students have input in what is taught and certainly in how I teach it.

Over the last ten years that I have taught the First Year Experience course, I have learned many things; about the students, about the institution and about myself. Early on I found that it was easy to blame my students for any shortcomings or for the struggles they were experiencing. I also found it very easy to say, "I made it. Why can't they?" Along the way I forgot that I had help as an undergraduate. I had countless instructors

and professors who saw me struggling and who made themselves available to me. There was my Remapping the Americas professor who I went to because I could not make sense of the readings. She encouraged me by suggesting I try to make connections to what I knew. Or my advisor who always supported my research even though I was criticized and encouraged by other professors to research other things and not my home. I graduated and found success because of this support. Without them who knows what would have happened. Maybe I would have still managed to graduate but I do not think I would have had the same experiences.

As I reflect on my position at an HSI and as an instructor of a First Year Experience course I must remind myself of my journey. In fact, I have made it the basis for my teaching. Without it I can easily fall back into the trap of the master narrative. I can quickly blame my students for whatever perceived short comings the literature uses to describe and characterize my students. I encourage other instructors and professors to explore and examine their experiences as students. I believe, just as I have done here, it is possible to learn about our teaching by examining our educational experiences and we must not be afraid to remake the classroom so as to create an open space that respects every student's experience. Doing so will go a long way to helping our Mexican American and Latina/o students find their way at the University.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Since 2011 Latinas/os have outpaced all other groups including white students in college enrollment (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). And while the numbers of Latinas/os enrolling in college is significant given their history in higher education, what remains unchanged is the rate at which they are completing a post-secondary education (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). Within the group, Mexican Americans have one of the lowest retention and completion rates and in states like Texas where Mexican Americans represent the largest minority group it is important that they are educated and fully capable of participating in the democratic process (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004).

While this dissertation has served to highlight the need to educate Mexican American and Latina/o college students, it was never intended to be an answer to the Mexican American and Latina/o educational crisis (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Instead, this paper examined my role as a Chicano educator, working within a one size fits all system many have termed the "Master Narrative" in order to create a decolonized classroom (Valenzuela, 2005). In the process I had to explore my own colonization and decolonization process as I struggled within the narrative. Over the last twelve years I have learned, for me, decolonization is an ongoing process and it is not an either or proposition. Such is the power of the narrative in that just when we believe we have it figured out we are reminded of its immense power (Valenzuela, 2005). This is especially true if one is operating in education.

Over the last year I have applied for promotion and for a new position at UST and as part of that process I have had to participate in the master narrative (Urrieta, 2008;

Valenzuela, 1999). Even as we make strides in our classrooms; creating an environment that acknowledges the colonizing history of American education, we must often revert to the rules and expectations of the narrative. But I have faith that we can accomplish both, with the hope that ultimately we can create more spaces of decolonization within the institution.

My work has been a political project (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011); asking instructors, professors and teachers who work with minority students, especially Mexican American and Latina/o students to examine their role as teachers (Freire, 2007; Hooks, 1994; Urrieta, 2008). Too often I believe we place a great deal of faith in our training and in our understanding of content and skills that we neglect to ask what we believe good teaching to be; more specifically, we neglect to ask, is this good for my Mexican American and Latina/o students?

Implications

What I have presented is not "the" answer for HSIs or other institutions. It may not even be the answer for other Latina/o instructors. My expectation is not that another Chicana/o or Latina/o educator will take what I have done to decolonize my classroom and merely try to do the same in theirs. I caution anyone from undertaking such an exercise. Bartolome (2003) reminds us of our obsession as educators with a one size fit all model. We do so often at the expense of the real needs and or a real understanding of the socio-political realities that contextualize our students' educational experiences. This work thus has been my journey from a firm believer and follower of the master narrative to a Chicana/o educator committed to listening and understanding my students' realities

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while challenging the narrative via my pedagogy and curriculum (Urrieta, 2008). This has involved changing how I teach and what I teach. It has meant listening to my students and their needs and figuring out the best way to serve them because in their education their voices have often been oppressed (Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). It has also meant recognizing my students as creators and possessors of knowledge (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). So, even though this paper was never "the" answer to the Latina/o educational crisis (Contreras & Gandara, 2009), perhaps in my experience, other Chicana/o and Latina/o educators may be inspired to examine their teaching and ask whether they are accomplices to the crisis or are they liberators, working to challenge the "master narrative" that has created unrealistic and often oppressive expectations of our Mexican American and Latina/o youth (Urrieta, 2008)?

For the institutions who serve our Mexican American and Latina/o youth the lesson to take away is the need to listen to our students. Historically our Mexican American and Latina/o youth have struggled to complete the post secondary journey. Institutions, particularly HSIs, should examine whether or not they are doing all they can to meet the needs of our Mexican American and Latina/o students. They should examine their practices to determine whether or not these policies and practices have hindered our students by creating unrealistic expectations that fail to recognize and acknowledge our students' realities. And if they find that they are inhibiting our students, what must they do to help them.

In terms of higher education policy, more critical assessment and evaluation of larger policies and the effects such policies have on Mexican American and Latina/o

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students are warranted. This is especially true of policies and programming created to

address Mexican American and Latina/o student retention. Only when we can examine

these practices and policies critically can we truly determine their real value and

effectiveness.

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