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"Building The Plane As We Fly It": Tesmonios Of First-Time Mexican American Studies High School Teachers During The 2021-2022 School Year In Southwest Texas.

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“BUILDING THE PLANE AS WE FLY IT”: TESMONIOS OF FIRST-TIME MEXICAN
AMERICAN STUDIES HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS DURING THE 2021-2022
SCHOOL YEAR IN SOUTHWEST TEXAS.

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Jesse S. Arrieta

2022

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AMERICAN STUDIES HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS DURING THE 2021-2022
SCHOOL YEAR IN SOUTHWEST TEXAS.

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

This study is dedicated to my beautiful family: my four children, my wonderful spouse Hilda, and to all my students, past, present, and future. To my parents, Mario and Yolanda, thank you for always valuing education and for your sacrifices to make my education your top priority. To my wife Hilda, I am grateful for your unwavering support and encouragement. I couldn't have done it without your unconditional love and belief in me. To my friends, classmates, teachers, and colleagues thank you for your help, your wisdom, advice, and your sharing of knowledge with me. To my committee: Dr. Edna Martinez, Dr. Isela Peña, Dr. Penelope Espinoza, and Dr. Timothy Cashman thank you for your guidance, your feedback, and your work to help me in this doctoral program. As a first-generation college student, your help and support were most important in helping me navigate the university. To my Godmother, Alma Calderon, thank you for helping me heal on my journey to wellness. Your work helped me reinvent myself, reframe my reality, and helped me get on a path to becoming who I always wanted to be. Through your tough love and guidance, I accomplished my goals and realized my dreams. To all Ethnic Studies teachers like me, keep challenging the status quo and engaging students with CRC and CRP as we struggle for social justice, equity, and a decolonized social studies curriculum.

In gratitude,

JSA

Abstract

Mexican American Studies, as a course, was approved by the Texas State Board of Education in 2019. However, there were no provisions on how the course would be implemented or supported by school districts in Texas. Further, in 2021, Texas House Bill 3797 and Senate Bill 3 were passed into law, aiming at the heart of Ethnic Studies - Critical Race Theory (CRT). Utilizing testimonio as methodology and method, I sought to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies high school teachers implementing Mexican American Studies during the 2021-2022 school year in Southwest Texas. Testimonio interviews with six teachers across five campuses in Southwest Texas shed light on the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities presented to them as the 2021-2022 school year unfolded. Conceptually, this study was guided by Critical Race Theory, Latino/a Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Curriculum, and Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Conocimiento. Four salient themes are addressed in this study: 1.) Building the Plane as we Fly It, 2.) Taking the Wind Out of Our Sails - Damper on the Momentum, 3.) Identity/Conocimiento, and 4.) Dumping Ground. The study concludes that MAS class was systematically marginalized and devalued, but there is pragmatic optimism to remedy the challenges of implementation and pedagogical practices. Recommendations for policy, practice, and future research are advanced.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The summer of 2021 saw the passing of “The Critical Race Theory” bill (House Bill 3797) in Texas, followed by Senate Bill 3 in the fall of 2021, effectively banning the teaching of race in K-12 classrooms (Texas Legislature Online, 2021). SB 3 came as several campuses around Texas were implementing Social Studies elective courses in Ethnic Studies, including Mexican American Studies (Perez, 2021). HB 3797 and SB3 aimed at the heart of Ethnic Studies - Critical Race Theory (CRT). As Valenzuela (2022) argued, an attack on CRT is an attack on Ethnic Studies. Without Critical Race Theory, Mexican American Studies is voided of critical thought and analysis and becomes a museum exhibit or curio of artifacts for students who stand to benefit from learning their history. Senate Bill 3, proposed by Sen. Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola), removed the requirement to teach Native American history, work by civil rights activists Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, Martin Luther King Jr, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, writings of the Chicano movement and women’s suffrage. It also removed the requirement to teach “the history of white supremacy, including but not limited to the institution of slavery, the eugenics movement, and the Ku Klux Klan, and the way in which it was morally wrong” (Fernandez, 2021, p. 3). According to Silva-Fernandez (2021):

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and high-ranking Republican officials have passed bills in the Texas Senate that would prevent the teaching of CRT in K-12 public schools and prevent teachers from speaking about certain past and current events. New laws have been passed by Texas Republicans to ban the study of CRT in public schools and remove requirements to teach certain aspects of women’s rights,

Native American history, and civil rights activists, as well as examine the negative implications of omitting CRT from the teaching curriculum. (p. 3)

The 2021 school year was the first time many schools taught Mexican American Studies courses in high school since Mexican American Studies was approved by the State Board of Education in Texas in 2019 (Perez, 2021). According to Zou (2021), teachers and experts say that [critical race theory](#) is not being taught in K-12 schools — and that the phrase is being used as a catch-all for any mention of racism, which is an integral part of teaching history truthfully. “Critical race theory itself critiques the focus on individual blame in contemporary discussions of racism and shifts the focus to legal and social systems that perpetuate inequity” (Zou, 2021, p.3).

SB 3 is more restrictive and broader than HB 3979, stating that the TEA has the authority to enforce how Social Studies will be taught in schools including race and racism, as well as a long list of prohibited concepts pertaining to social studies in K -12 (Pollack & Ura, 2021). The bill's text states that SB3 would remove the requirement to teach slavery and the ways it is morally wrong, women's suffrage and equal rights, the emancipation proclamation, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech to name a few. Texas Lt. Governor Dan Patrick stated on July 16, 2021,

Texans roundly reject ‘woke’ philosophies that espouse that one race or sex is better than another and that someone, by virtue of their race or sex, is innately racist, oppressive or sexist. Senate Bill 3 will make certain that critical race philosophies, including the debunked 1619 founding myth, are removed from our school curriculums statewide.

Texas parents do not want their children to be taught these false ideas. Parents want their

students to learn how to think critically, not be indoctrinated by the ridiculous leftist narrative that America and our Constitution are rooted in racism (KVUE, 2021, p.2).

The following section focuses on the original Texas anti-CRT House Bill 3979 that led up to the more restrictive SB 3 within a six-month period in 2021.

TXHB 3979

In May of 2021 Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a controversial bill prohibiting teachers from engaging in race or sex stereotyping, which prescribes how Texas teachers can discuss racism historically to include discussions of current events (Mcgee, 2021). This bill went into effect on September 1, 2021, stating teachers cannot be compelled to talk about current events and if they do, they must “give deference to both sides” (Mcgee, 2021, p. 3). This bill prohibits the teaching of white supremacy and the history of the KKK. The bill prohibits people from getting credit for participating in civic activities like lobbying elected officials or political activism. In addition, HB3979 bans the teaching of *The New York Times 1619 Project*, which discusses the initial date when enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia (Mcgee, 2021). Advocates of the bill argue it aims to combat teachers’ personal biases being implemented into public education. Furthermore, advocates argue teachers are blaming white people for historical wrongs and distorting the founding fathers’ accomplishments (Mcgee, 2021). Anti-CRT legislation has swept the nation with many states adopting similar bills. As of November 24, 2021, 29 states have introduced bills or taken steps to restrict teaching CRT using the same verbiage as Texas, i.e., “prohibiting race or sex stereotyping” (Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack, 2021). The states are Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin, South Dakota, South Carolina, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Ohio, North Dakota,

North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Montana, Michigan, Missouri, Maine, Louisiana, Kentucky, Idaho, Indiana, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, Arizona, Alabama (Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack, 2021).

It is within this context that I set out to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies high school teachers in Southwest Texas implementing Mexican American Studies during the 2021-2022 school year. In this chapter, I discuss the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

A society founded on genocide, built on the labor of African slaves, developed by Latino serfs and Asian indentured servants, made fabulously wealthy through exploitation and masterful manipulation and mystification—a society like this is a society built on race. (Chandler & McKnight, 2009, p.32)

The journey to pass the Mexican American Studies curriculum in Texas was a long hard-fought battle spanning over a decade in the Southwest United States (Valenzuela, 2019). The battle between the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and “the people” harbors deep wounds, countless court battles, and activism in favor of implementing Mexican American Studies in Texas high schools (Valenzuela, 2019). This journey is not merely a battle between the TEA and proponents of Culturally Relevant Curriculum (CRC) but has much deeper roots going back to the Chicano Movement and the Plan de Santa Barbara, calling for CRC in public education from high school to the college level (Cabrera, 2014).

Students of color often must wait until they reach college and university to have the opportunity to study Culturally Relevant Curriculum if they are lucky enough to get there (Cabrera, 2014). Ethnic Studies bans between 2010-2020 were rampant in Arizona and Texas bringing to light the constant struggle for representation and resistance to white supremacy in

textbooks and the public-school curriculum. “The personal is political” is the cry of the many movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Ruiz, 2000, p. 10). Now that Mexican American Studies (MAS) curriculum has been passed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), how will MAS be implemented in Texas public school districts widely? Especially, on the US/Mexico border, in Southwest Texas, where the population is composed of approximately 85% Mexican American students (census.org, 2020). Southwest Texas is home to some of the largest school districts in Texas. According to the Texas Education Agency's Educational Service Center (2022), it serves nearly 58,000 students on 89 campuses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies high school teachers in Southwest Texas implementing Mexican American Studies during the 2021-2022 school year. I investigated the reality of teaching Mexican American Studies classes for the first time at five campuses in Southwest Texas. I conducted testimonio interviews with six teachers to explore the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities presented to them as the school year unfolded.

Research Questions

The research questions (Agee, 2009) guiding this study were:

1. What are the experiences of first-time MAS high school teachers in Southwest Texas in 2021-2022?
2. How do first time MAS high school teachers describe the implementation of MAS curriculum?
3. How does implementing MAS curriculum for the first-time shape teacher consciousness?

Significance of the Study

“[We] know Ethnic Studies courses have the potential to improve educational experiences and outcomes for historically disenfranchised students” (Sacramento, 2019, p. 167). Yet, the challenges teachers and districts face when establishing Ethnic Studies courses are not well known as it is relatively new (Parker, 2019). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by providing insight into the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies teachers in Texas and how they implemented the curriculum. In addition to highlighting the challenges and opportunities participants faced as first-time MAS teachers, the findings of this study provide an opportunity for reflection and subsequent action in terms of both policy and practice regarding the practical uses for MAS curriculum, such as professional development, curriculum guides, culturally responsive teaching, and adequate funding and support for MAS and MAS teachers. Exploring the experiences of MAS teachers has elucidated how the class will continue to exist or not, and how it is used as a Social Studies elective course. The way MAS is scheduled will determine when and how it will be taught and how the credit will be used in Texas. This study is unique in that it explored teachers’ experiences teaching the course, as opposed to students taking the course. There is a lack of research on the teachers' experiences in the classroom teaching MAS for the first time and this is a contribution to the field for implementation of MAS curriculum.

Educational research affirms that Ethnic studies helps foster cross cultural understanding amongst all students, aids in valuing students own cultural identity, and helps students appreciate differences around them (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). “These studies also confirm that students who participate in ethnic studies are more academically engaged, develop a stronger sense self-efficacy and personal empowerment, perform better academically and graduate at higher rates”

(Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, ethnic studies curriculum produces higher levels of critical thinking. By infusing knowledge that is culturally relevant to students, teachers who take a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning connect students' knowledge with new and unfamiliar academic knowledge (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Fewer studies have observed effective practices in preparing teachers to teach Ethnic Studies in high school classrooms (Curammeng & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2017; Daus-Magbual, 2010; Dos Passos Coggin, 2014; Sacramento, 2019). Ethnic Studies teacher professional development models center on critical inquiry and dialogue. "Critical approaches urge Ethnic Studies practitioners to view their role with a critical lens and reconsider the purpose of their praxis as it relates to place, social transformation, and decolonization" (Sacramento, 2019, p. 169). Sacramento (2019) argues access to critical professional development can connect teachers to transformative experiences and methods, but support for this exists primarily at the grassroots level. These statements echo the research questions that I asked, which was to understand the first-time experiences of MAS teachers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed how Ethnic Studies has been questioned and affected by the anti-CRT movement. The ensuing anti-CRT legislation has brought into question Social Studies curriculum namely, Ethnic Studies courses like Mexican American Studies. The problem is studies on the implementation of this new curriculum have not been published yet leading to a need to understand teachers' experiences in teaching MAS classes. The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies high school teachers in Southwest Texas implementing Mexican American Studies during the 2021-2022 school year, within an anti-CRT movement in Texas. The research questions were: 1). What are the

experiences of first-time MAS high school teachers in Southwest Texas in 2021-2022? 2). How do first time MAS high school teachers describe the implementation of MAS curriculum? 3). How does implementing MAS curriculum for the first-time shape teacher consciousness? The next chapter details the journey of ethnic studies programs historically going back to their inception in the late 1960s during the Chicano Movement and beyond. The Ethnic Studies ban in Arizona between 2010-2020 will be discussed as well.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review describes how Ethnic Studies programs became part of the educational landscape in higher education as well as PreK-12 levels. To understand how Mexican American Studies in K-12 came to be it is essential to understand the history of the political and social upheaval of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement which gave birth to the student group, M.E.C.H.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil, Chicano/a De Aztlán) and their own battle for more equitable education from a more representative faculty. The activists and students of the 60s and 70s pushed for Mexican American Studies to become part of the curriculum as a legitimate part of the study of history, literature, the arts, and sciences. Today we are finally seeing the fruits of their labor and of those that have come since then. "Because Eurocentrism and White privilege appear to be the norm, many people continue to believe that education in the United States is a meritocracy, unbiased, and fair process" (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p.120). Therefore, it is essential to investigate how Mexican American Studies came about and how it functions in Texas High School curriculum today.

This review of literature details a historiography of Arizona's ban of Ethnic Studies between 2010-2020 and the Texas State Board of Education signing into law Ethnic Studies curricula in 2019. I present the history of Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory in education, a brief history of M.E.C.H.A., and the struggle for a Culturally Responsive Curriculum during the Civil Rights Movement. Then I discuss the battle for Mexican American Studies in Arizona, at the state and local levels and how it led to a nationwide movement, influencing, and informing the MAS program in Texas. Finally, I present elements of Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Curriculum, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and LatCrit, which served as my

conceptual framework to analyze teachers' experiences implementing Mexican American Studies. Finally, I discuss the theory of Conocimiento as Gloria Anzaldua (1986) formulated.

Ethnic Studies- What is it and Why We Should Care?

Ward (2019) gave us a good definition of what Ethnic Studies programs are in higher education, why and how they were established, and their current significance. Ethnic studies programs are courses devoted to the history and culture of various ethnic groups, which are valuable for members of the ethnic group being studied and for members of other ethnic/racial groups. Essentially these programs develop a sense of belonging from learning about their group's cultural history. They also develop a sense of pride and self-esteem from learning about the contributions that members of their group have made to society. "When people study the achievements and histories of groups other than their own, they develop an appreciation of the contributions that all groups have made to the development of the United States and Canada." (Ward, 2019, p.3). Ethnic studies programs help students see themselves, and others, in history which can help eliminate prejudice and racial conflicts.

In the 1970's universities particularly in California and Texas, began to offer Chicano (Mexican American) studies courses, focusing on history and literature, to include The University of Texas at El Paso, in 1970 (Ward, 2019). In the late 1960's and early 1970's, students of color demanded access to higher education, changes in the curriculum, faculty of color, and the creation of ethnic studies programs (Ward, 2019). This was happening in an era of social and political upheaval in the United States, i.e., the Civil Rights Movement. Hu-DeHart (1993) argued, "The civil rights movement might have removed the last vestiges of legal

apartheid in the United States. However, other ways have been invented to deny equal opportunity to the historically marginalized communities of color” (p. 52).

Definitions of ethnic studies programs have varied from campus to campus and changed over time, but the legitimacy of these programs was always in question due to its subversive agenda. What the programs have in common is a specific or comparative focus on groups viewed as “minorities” in American society (Mendez, 2015, p. 380). The purpose of Ethnic Studies is to counter Eurocentric culturally nationalistic curriculum from its inception. Ethnic studies scholars focus on the central role that race and ethnicity play in the construction of American history, culture, and society (Cabrera, 2013). “Ethnic studies sought to recover and reconstruct the histories of those Americans whom history has neglected; to identify and credit their contributions to the making of U.S. society and culture; to chronicle protest and resistance; and to establish alternative values and visions, institutions and cultures” (Hu-DeHart, 1993, p. 52). Ethnic Studies is easily tied to cultural pedagogy and cultural nationalism in the way that it reflects the idea that students’ cultural strengths are nurtured and valued to promote achievement and a sense of well-being (Lynch, 2011). Delgado and Stefaniec (2001) argued the creation of ethnic studies was to challenge the dominant discourse and paradigms of traditional academic discipline through interdisciplinary scholarship.

To further understand why and how ethnic studies came about Sleeter (2011) offered five consistent themes to consider:

1. Explicit identification of the point of view from which knowledge emanates, and the relationship between social location and perspective.
2. Examination of U.S. colonialism historically, as well as how relations of colonialism continue to play out.

3. Examination of historical construction of race and institutional racism, how people navigate racism, and struggle for liberation.
4. Probing meanings of collective or communal identities that people hold; and
5. Studying one's community's creative and intellectual products, historic and contemporary (p.3).

The above-mentioned components were part of the creation of Mexican American studies in the Arizona K-12 curriculum (Valenzuela, 2019). Ethnic studies scholars realized the importance and limits of perspective in shaping and understanding the world which is positioned in relation to power (Hu-DeHart, 1993). It is important to note the way higher education and K-12 approach Ethnic Studies is very different (Cabrera, 2013). Historically, K-12 education focuses on heroes and holidays. Banks (1993) argues, by focusing celebratory attention on non-dominant groups outside the context of the rest of the curriculum, the teacher is further defining these groups as "the other." Curricula at this stage fail to address the real experiences of non-dominant groups, instead focusing on the accomplishments of a few heroic characters. The special celebrations at this stage often are used to justify the lack of effort at more authentic transformative measures. The Heroes and Holidays approach trivializes the overall experiences, contributions, struggles, and voices of non-dominant groups, consistent with a Eurocentric, male-centric curriculum (Banks, 1993). In higher education ethnic studies is taught by someone who has established expertise in the field and or conducted scholarly research based on theoretical foundations and historical analysis used to deconstruct gender and racial frameworks (Hu-DeHart, 1993). In K-12 the teacher may or may not have training or in-depth knowledge on ethnic studies topics. The next section will examine the Mexican American student movement which laid the foundation for MAS in Texas public high schools in 2021.

Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlan: A Struggle Against Educational Subtractive Practices in the U.S. in the 1960's and 1970's

To deny anyone their expression, their own expert language, is to disempower them; and it is this unequal distribution of power in the U.S. that catalyzed the Chicano Movement of the 1960's (Doran & Hengesteg, 2019). The movement, one can say, was the convergence of multiple movements for political power, farmworker rights, educational equality, and land entitlement among others (Ramirez, 2020). This section will focus on the student movement which sought educational equality in both K-12 and post-secondary institutions. The student movement was collectively called Movimeinto Estudantil Chicano de Aztlan or MEChA and represented the ideas and struggles of Chicanos in mostly, higher education although Mechistas were also active in the community outside of education (Ramirez, 2020). One of the key goals of MEChA was to revolutionize the curriculum, which at best, provided a stereotypical image of Mexican Americans within a historical context (Garcia, 2014).

The students of MEChA comprehended an important reality about the power structure in the U.S.: That there are rules and codes for participating in power and the attainment of an education was one of them (Garcia, 2014). The culture of power, Delpit (1996) explained, is a set of five features that define power relationships in society: 1) Issues of power are enacted in classrooms, 2) There are rules and codes for participating in power, 3) The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power, 4) If you are not a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rule of that culture makes acquiring power easier, and 5) Those with power are frequently least aware of-or at least willing to acknowledge its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (Delpit,

1992, p. 2). The refusal of those in power to historically and culturally disenfranchise the *other* in the curriculum through “subtractive schooling” measures is common (Valenzuela, 1999). Angela Valenzuela argued subtractive schooling is the process that “divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999, p.20). The movement sought to overturn the status quo and hegemony in education, both which have a symbiotic relationship with subtractive practices (Valenzuela, 1999).

The culture of power that is practiced in schools relates to subtractive schooling in the way that U.S. born Mexican youth are not being taught the codes and rules of power so that they too are empowered. Instead, those that are in power strip the youth of their social and cultural identities, thereby alienating them from teachers and other groups (Yomantas, 2021; Delpit, 1992). Those who are in power teach what they know, and it is not sensitive to multicultural perspectives, because it is not what they know as a participant in the culture of power (Delpit, 1996). Delpit (1996) explained that those in power are least aware of it, so then, subtractive schooling, in a few cases may be a subconscious manifestation of being in power.

In his presentation to the National Institute on Access to Higher Ed for the Mexican American, Martin H. Gerry also made a correlation between the socioeconomic status of Mexican Americans, K-12 education, and inequalities in access to higher education in the 1970’s (Gerry, 1971). He also expressed that, often, symposiums ignore the linkages between secondary schools and colleges and universities (Casso & Roman, 1976). Gerry goes on to name three forms of institutionalized discrimination that have bred disparities for minoritized youth in

education: the unequal distribution of resources to minority schools (human and financial), educational dumping grounds, and language and culture of minorities (Gerry, 1971).

The unequal distribution of resources to racial/ethnic minority schools in the 1970's and earlier was a well-known practice; it was not a secret that "fewer dollars per child are allocated from the public treasury for the education of minority children (Casso & Roman, 1976. p. 25), and thus fewer dollars for experienced teachers, textbooks, health programs, and facilities. The system practiced/es educational dumping by placing minority students in lower-level ability groups, remedial textbooks, and special ed classes that are for the mentally handicapped (Yomantas, 2021). Furthermore, our language and culture were marginalized, if not all together ignored in content and pedagogy. According to Gerry, in 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Serna vs. Portales*, made an important decision pertaining to multicultural education and the importance of equality: "minority children are entitled to meaningful education services, that using English as the only language for instruction is not equality when students do not understand the language" (Casso & Roman, 1976, p. 24). When considering culture and language in a subtractive context, it can be perceived as a concept in terms of the *self* and *other* (Todorov, 1986). Todorov (1986) explained that for one to identify the *self* and create an identity one must identify the *other*. History has shown that when establishing the notion of the *self*, one often applies negative-value judgments to the *other*, and consequently catalyzes an explosion of social dominance and imperialist movements (Todorov, 1986). Next, I explain critical pedagogy of Mexican American Studies to understand the conceptual underpinning of social justice liberationist pedagogy and praxis.

Conceptual Underpinning of Mexican American Studies

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is one of the foundational texts in the field of critical pedagogy, which attempts to help students question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate. Paulo Freire's development of *conscientização*: the combination of critical consciousness, self-reflection, and engaging in anti-oppressive, collective action is what Mexican American Studies is based upon (Cabrera, 2013). Cabrera (2013) argues the basis of this Arizona high school Ethnic studies curriculum becomes effective "by situating themselves as historical subjects, seeing themselves as potential agents of social change and developing praxis while being critically self-reflective," (Cabrera, 2013, p. 1090). Freire (1970) argued students are co-creators of knowledge, essentially developing a different power structure between students and teachers. The banking concept hinders intellectual growth and is oppressive in that students are the receptors or collectors and never the creators of knowledge. Students possess funds of knowledge and teaching and learning now becomes a two-way street, where students are also responsible for teaching and debunking the banking system. Freire states:

Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator. In this view the person is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he or she is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside (Freire, 1970, p. 247).

In this view, Freire claims that by assuming the roles of teachers as depositors and students as receptors, the banking concept thereby changes humans into objects with no autonomy and

therefore no ability to rationalize and conceptualize knowledge at a personal level. The method itself is a system of oppression and control (Micheletti, 2010, p. 4). The banking concept is a negation of joint enquiry involving both the teachers and student, and ‘the scope of action it allows to the students extends only as far as receiving’ (Cabrera, 2013, p. 1091). Freire argues liberating education consists of acts of cognition, not transferal of information (Freire, 1990, p. 56). The roles and relationships in the liberation of praxis means that ‘The teacher is no longer the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach’ (Freire, 1990, p. 61; Cabrera, 2013, 1091). The stifling and conditioning behavior attached to the banking concept indoctrinates students to the world of oppression and regulates the way they ‘enter into’ the world (Cabrera, 2013, p.1091). Angela Valenzuela argues Freire’s critical pedagogy, deliberately bringing issues of race, difference, and power into central focus (Valenzuela, 1999; Cabrera, 2013). Using Freire’s work in Mexican American studies helps students examine power structures, issues of neoliberalism, and various forms of oppression. Camarota and Romero (2014) asserts Mexican American studies pedagogy centers on examining other forms of racism to include sexism and homophobia which increases academic engagement and performance on traditional metrics, i.e., standardized tests and graduation. In the following section, I explain the theory of subtractive schooling to give context to how students of color experience education as opposed to how Ethnic Studies programs are meant to combat deficit thinking in education.

Subtractive Schooling

Angela Valenzuela described how the intersections of caring and education, subtractive schooling and the social capital theory can contribute to the success or failure of students, in

particular Latino and immigrant children at Seguin High School in Houston, Texas. Valenzuela (1996) described what it means for an educator and the system he or she belongs to, “care” by giving vivid examples of how some educators *do not* care (p. 205). To deny one of culture and language in schooling is to set a student up for failure in a society that demands full assimilation. Furthermore, it perpetuates cycles of racism, internalized racism, institutionalized racism, and the negative-value judgments that are a product of subtractive practices (Valenzuela, 1996). Valenzuela discussed the educational achievement of recent Mexican immigrants versus the achievements of U.S. - born students of Mexican origin.

The later generations of U.S. born students tended to achieve less in schools and even retaliated with their various expressions against the idea of schooling and exclusionary practices. The instances of subtractive schooling coupled with their perspective that teachers, especially those outside the culture (Anglo), do not “care” about the culture, experiences, and tribulations of minority students, cultivate a retaliation/rebellious subculture (Valenzuela, 1996). Moreover, minority students are caught between binary categories, or dichotomous thinking that the schooling has created for them: black-white, wrong-right, assimilated-non assimilated, American-non-American, etc. These destructive binaries or dichotomies do not allow for any interpretation in identity regarding schooling; the many shades in between are non-existent (Valenzuela, 1996; Yomantas, 2021). It is a question of the assimilation binary where the message is: one can assimilate and have access to power and resources or choose not to assimilate and remain powerless, with no room for anything in between. In this binary, the in between would be acculturation. Mix this divide and conquer tactic with the perspective that as students we should mistrust uncaring teachers and the resulting cocktail is a toxic one. This is the intersection between subtractive schooling and the politics of caring (Valenzuela, 1996). In

understanding subtractive schooling and deficit thinking we can compare Ethnic Studies programs and goals to see how they benefit students academically and emotionally. To further illustrate how this notion is employed in Texas K-12 curriculum I will use Teddy Roosevelt's *Rugged Individualism* as an example to illustrate how this notion informs society, politics, and education.

Teddy Roosevelt's notion of *Rugged Individualism* has historically been employed to ignore racist ideologies and systemic racism. Teddy Roosevelt's presidency and rugged individualism is part of 11th grade U.S. History Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEA, 2020). According to Meriam Webster dictionary the definition of rugged individualism is, "the practice or advocacy of individualism in social and economic relations emphasizing personal liberty and independence, self-reliance, resourcefulness, self-direction of the individual, and free competition in enterprise." Westfield (2017) argued the U.S. educational system, "functions to uphold societal tenants of individualism" which is a cornerstone value of whiteness and patriarchy (p.1). This idea that everyone can pull themselves up from their bootstraps and succeed, fails to recognize the playing field is not even. The notion of individual failure ignores the inequities in all parts of our society due to systemic racism and oppression. Rugged individualism in a historical political context incorporates Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis (1883) which informs how History is still taught through a white racist lens. The Turner thesis based on an Anglo Saxon racially nationalistic interpretation of colonization of North America is the basis for how we continue to teach U.S. History in the United States (Cooper, 1996). This is the lens through which all students are taught indigenous people are inherently savages and people of color are foreigners.

For all non-Anglo groups in the 1800's, "Euro-American expansion and opportunity meant the contraction or denial of their own ability to achieve individual advancement and communal stability" (Cooper, 1996, p.1). Giroux (2020) argued, "they're told that they live in a world which is about the survival of the fittest, a war of all against all. They are constantly bombarded by an ideology that says there are no such things as social problems, only individual problems" (p.140). Furthermore, Giroux asserted, the United States has been in love with the myth of Rugged Individualism, "It creates all of these myths around notions of freedom that not only get absorbed in a neoliberal ethic where freedom means freedom from government regulation and freedom to consume, while increasingly displacing any notion of the social" (Giroux, 2020, p.139).

In the Texas accountability system, which places an overwhelming emphasis on testing, students of color are at a huge disadvantage, in a system where equal educational opportunities do not exist. Valencia (2001) argued achievement based on standardized test scores fails to treat the root causes of poor achievement which are inferior schools (Valencia, 2001). By using the lens of deficit thinking, "many educators view the educability of low-income students of color as limited and see them as makers of their own academic problems" (Valencia, 2001, p. 320). Furthermore, deficit thinking places the onus of academic improvement and achievement on the individual and the family not taking into consideration the political, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds informing the situation (Valencia, 2001, p. 322). This is how rugged individualism is seen and practiced in public schools, to the detriment of students of color.

Issues of access and equity in higher education were being examined and demands for change in higher education were increasing in the 1960's and 70's. "Throughout the late 1960's

and 1970's, Latinx and Chicanx students, families and community-based organizations participated in protests that demanded equity in educational access in K-12 and higher education and the establishment of MAS programs" (Doran & Hengesteg, 2019). Cabrera (2019) argues for decades Ethnic studies has struggled for educational self-determination through Ethnic Studies which was meant to disrupt white supremacist structures and ideologies by returning control to the marginalized communities and centering their histories (Cabrera, 2019). Linking Ethnic studies courses with students' personal lives and communities is essential in their academic success (Cabrera, 2019; Doran & Hustedeg, 2019). It is evident that many of the same issues still exist in Ethnic Studies programs nationally. Instituting Chicano Studies courses at the college and university levels was not the end, but the beginning of the constant struggle that persists.

Undoubtedly the student movement made remarkable progress toward equality by asking for the induction of ethnic studies/Chicano Studies into the curriculum; however, that was only the beginning of years of struggle for Mexican American youth (Garcia, 2014). Ahead were issues of accessibility, unequal distribution of resources (human and monetary), among other issues that still oppress our ethnic population (Doran & Hustedeg, 2019). James A. Banks (2005) explained that a current issue in multicultural education is the misperception that multicultural education entails only curriculum reform because it was the focus at the beginning of the movement in the 1960's. He presented five dimensions of multicultural education that must be enacted to better serve minoritized groups: 1) content integration, 2) knowledge construction process, 3) prejudice reduction, 4) equity in pedagogy, and 5) an empowering school culture and structure (Banks, 1995). In the next section I will discuss the connection between Ethnic Studies and CRT.

Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory

Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory are intertwined as Ethnic Studies relies on CRT for its objectives and purpose (Banks, 2006). Racism, Eurocentric narratives, and disenfranchisement of students of color have kept subaltern essential knowledge from being seen as a legitimate part of U.S. History's narrative (Fukumori, 2014); Ethnic Studies seeks to resolve this inequality by seeking out the lens of CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) asserted that race, law, and power are intrinsically tied to one another and determine our experience in America; White supremacy is the foundation of this power dynamic. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a line of academic inquiry which seeks to uncover how superficially race-neutral social policies can and do recreate systemic racial oppression. CRT challenges the objectivity of social science research while concurrently highlighting the value of experiential knowledge from communities of color, which was originally developed within the legal field and has been applied to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Fukumori (2014) put forth that “there is credence to the idea that college administrators across the state established ethnic studies as concessions to forestall further student agitation” (p. 64). Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argued that CRT becomes relevant in the law and organizations when concessions are made, not because there is a change in attitudes about equality, but rather because of some ulterior motive. The example they discussed is the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*; the Brown plaintiffs were successful in the Supreme Court, not because America felt it was “right” to desegregate schools, but because we were in progressive STEM race with other empires like the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, the desegregation of schools took many years after the Board decision was

made by the Court. A 2019 report titled, *Harming our Common Future: America's Segregated Schools 65 Years after Brown* argues segregation today is worse than it was immediately following the Brown v. Board decision. Fukumori added that University of California Los Angeles was interested in marketing institutional growth, legitimation and gaining prominence as a research institution. So, although the education movement within the broader Civil Rights movements goal was eventually met, the motives of the university to acquiesce to the demands were corrupt (Fukumori, 2014).

Following the historiographical trend, Hu-DeHart (1993) wrote that ethnic studies struggle for legitimacy within academia is a constant battle, one that continues to be fought in universities and community colleges. Doran and Hengesteg (2019) argued faculty of color advocate for, manage, and sustain Mexican American studies in whitestream community colleges in Texas (Doran & Hengesteg, 2019). Doran and Hengesteg's case study used interviews and surveys to reach these findings. Furthermore, this case study noted that the struggle to build up and legitimize MAS programs in Texas community colleges often falls to faculty of color's emotional labor and ability to navigate campus politics for survival due to lack of funding and low priority for MAS programs (Doran & Hengesteg, 2019).

Doran and Hengesteg noted that anti MAS attitudes, lack of advertising for MAS courses, and transferability of MAS classes were challenges for faculty of color to take on in isolation from the rest of the college (Doran and Hengesteg, 2019). "This reality underscores the lip-service nature of support of these curricular forms of diversity in favor of structural diversity" (Doran & Hengesteg, p. 29). Despite the benefits for students of color, "MAS programs by themselves are unable to break through the hegemonic whitestream culture of the academy to

create the transformative experience they seek to provide” (Doran & Hengesteg, 2019, p. 30). Since ethnic studies programs are usually isolated from the rest of the institution, it is not enough to merely have the presence of ethnic studies programs, especially without the investment of faculty and staff across the campus (Doran & Hengesteg, 2019).

An assumption that Critical Race Theory makes is that one should be suspicious of why public and social institutions participate in cultural diversity, multiculturalism, etc. One should be suspicious, since oftentimes policies are not implemented correctly or for the right reason of correcting a social problem such as racism, sexism, and ethnic inequalities (Knaus, 2009). CRT is more on the side of truth-telling or lending a voice to those silenced in historical phenomenon, such as women and subaltern groups (Annamma, 2017). Cultural hegemony in education is a powerful trend that has deeply scathed Chicanos and other minorities through practices of marginalization that assist in the rendering of a less combative and powerless minority (Knaus, 2009). All of this is simultaneously occurring as the Eurocentric grand narrative which excludes people of color is being taught all throughout the educational system in the United States (Valenzuela, 2019). To begin to untangle and interpret this history it is necessary to commence with an introduction and overview of the Chicano Movement and its goals pertaining to the education of Chicanos. The next sections will detail the roots of Critical Race Theory and how it is employed in education.

Critical Race Theory: An Introduction

Critical Race Theory emerged due to a lack of emphasis or voice of race in the legal studies. CRT seeks to account for the role racism plays in the American legal system. The grandfather of Critical Race Theory, Derrick Bell a lawyer and activist, developed a theory called interest convergence (Elnaiem, 2021). Bell argued that Black people achieve civil rights

victories only when white and Black interests converge and includes the ideas of unconscious racism and retrenchment. In the 1970s and 1980s it became apparent that civil rights legislation failed to bring about structural changes as promised. Bell (1980) argued, interest convergence is an attempt to quell activism, appease people, and to give the optics of being on the right side of morality and history by desegregating public schools. Much like the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was made to address criticism from the global community pointing out our hypocrisy after fighting a World War for equality and democracy (Delgado & Stefansic, 2001). All the while, the U.S. practiced racial segregation in its institutions, including schools and the military. The *Brown v. Board* decision made no sustainable provisions for the implementation of desegregation as it lacked the necessary degree of social reform (Bell, 1980). Bell, an anti-racist legal scholar at Harvard argued that the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case intervened in people's right to associate with whom they wish. Furthermore, he asserts that implementing *Brown* was impossible segregation as it continued to exist due to racialized income disparities (Bell, 1980). In addition, schools were and are funded through property taxes in states such as Texas, where the priority is not education. This deepens the disparities as low-income neighborhoods receive less resources (Aleman, 2007). Bell (1980) also points out that white flight contributes to segregation and can never really be fixed unless we achieve income equality. His work focused on the subordination of law to interest group politics that are racially configured (Elnaiem, 2021).

Other critical race theorists like Stefancic and Delgado (2010) suggest critical race theory is characterized by seven characteristics. (1) insistence on “naming one's own reality”; (2) the use of critical social science research; (3) doubts about the foundation of moderate/incremental civil rights law; (4) the belief that knowledge is power; (5) the debunking of myths used by

powerful groups to support racial oppression; (6) criticism of liberal legalism; and (7) an interest in structural determinism. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2018) elucidates that the overarching theme of CRT is *interest convergence principle*:

The interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites; however, the fourteenth amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for Blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle -and upper-class whites. (p. 475)

Racism cannot be a neutral issue when discussing education. Besides inequalities in funding racism in society adds to the oppression students of color face, not only in the education system but in society at large (Ladson-Billings, 1997, 2018). A critical race perspective always foregrounds race as an explanatory tool for the persistence of inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1997, 2018). White dominance and unequal race relations that rejects equality under the law, neutrality, and color blindness uses the notion of white privilege. White supremacy encompasses the cultural, psychic, and physical systems that not only ensure white privilege, nearly effortlessly perpetuate it (Rector-Aranda, 2006). According to Rector and Aranda (2006), the issues of standardized tests, school funding, school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies are discriminatory practices due to a racist society and education system which blames the student instead of the larger oppressive social and institutional systems. Furthermore, the standards for students of color to be judged and measured by are based on white, dominant norms. The only way to empower teachers who employ critical pedagogy is as Giroux and Simon (1989) believe,

That pedagogy refers to a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among sets of social relations...As both political and practical activity, it attempts to influence the occurrence and qualities of experiences. When one practices pedagogy, one acts with the intent of creating experiences that will organize and disorganize a variety of understandings of our natural and social world in particular ways... (p. 128).

Confronting racism and pervasive oppression is a form of empowerment, scholars agree the aim of critical race theory (CRC) is to expose racism and fight it, since racism cannot be eliminated (Banks, 1991). The following section will discuss Critical Race Theory in the classroom to understand the issues of self-reflective teaching, intersectionality, and social justice.

Critical Race Theory in the Classroom

Applied Critical Race Theory in the classroom focuses on self-reflective teaching using Freire's model of teaching, i.e., students express critical and culturally rooted analysis and students are part of framing the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom (Freire, 2003). This is referred to by scholars as mirrored reflections (Knaus, 2009). In this model the culture of caring is implemented to reinforce the two-way street that engages teachers and students. The national trend in education is a limited curriculum focused on STEM education, consequently the shift away from history, geography, and language arts has left a void and promoted dropout rates, teacher apathy, and student disengagement, including higher rates of student absenteeism (Knaus, 2009). CRC is supposed to not only address these issues in education but also engage students with curriculum that has meaning and purpose (Knaus, 2009). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) describe five central tenants of a CRT framework in education, including:

1. The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination.
2. The challenge to dominant ideologies.
3. The commitment to social justice.
4. The importance of experiential knowledge; and
5. The use of interdisciplinary perspectives

Through these tenants' researchers can describe how multiple forms of subordination and intersectionality must be examined to understand experiences of people of color (Huber, 2008). This study will also utilize Latina/o Critical Race Theory framework, or Lat Crit. LatCrit is an “anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project that attempts to link theory and practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community” (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p.312).

Student disengagement stems from the rejection of limited official school curriculum which is culturally designed to maintain White supremacy (Delgado, 2001). Ladson-Billings (1999) argued the mainstream curriculum: “silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, White, upper-class, male voicings as the ‘standard’ knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation” (p. 341). Delgado (2001) asserts, Critical Race Theory centers on the notion of racism as normal, as the typical way in which life in the US is structured in terms of laws, policies, procedures, and practices. Knaus (2009) focuses on de-centering Whiteness as a means of decentering racism. To challenge the educational model which fails students of color to serve the interests of a segregated US; to maintain an economy

dependent on cheaply paid labor, an unending source of people must be trained and prepared for academic failure (Knaus, 2009).

CRT frames the purpose of the US as serving and continuing its capitalistic roots, creating a perpetual need for subservient populations to work menial labor for artificially low wages. As a core function of society, then, education becomes the public process for maintaining the status quo while purposefully not educating large masses (of students of color and low-income Whites) that are forced to work as cheap, manual labor (Brown, 2003, p. 20)

CRT must also be applied to White schools not only urban schools serving predominantly students of color. CRT aims to develop an equitable system of education that is community centered and democratic. “Applied critical race theorists/practitioners begin with race as a foundation to center voices that illuminates realities for people of color, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, people with disabilities, all faith-based communities, poor communities, and folks of all body types, shades, and shapes” (Knaus, 2009, p. 140).

James Banks argues race as a social construction to “other” groups and defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities (Huber, 2009). “Race is used as a vehicle to allocate and deny power, knowledge, and rights to particular groups through racism” (Huber, 2009, p.642). Utilizing a CRT framework allows educational researchers to expose racialized structures, practices, and discourses that maintain and perpetuate educational and racial inequality (Huber, 2009).

In the above-mentioned studies by Knaus and Brown that investigate and/or discuss CRC in the K-12 classroom, little is said about how CRC is experienced and defined in the higher

education classroom; and what does exist provides us with conceptual framework and ideas empirical studies that stem from actual field research. In the pieces that I chose to incorporate into my study and take into consideration for my analysis, I uncovered three lines of argumentation regarding CRC and its meaning in education: 1) CRC as a seg-way to critical consciousness, social justice, and the knowledge of social conditions for students, 2) CRC as a curriculum that validates the culture of students by being an inclusive curriculum, and 3) Personal narratives/self-reflexive assignments as a mode of CRC enactment in the classroom (Knaus, 2009, p. 140). The above tenants will be used to analyze the perspectives of teachers implementing Mexican American Studies curriculum for the first time at various campuses in Southwest ISDs to investigate how three teachers perceive MAS curriculum during the 2021-2022 school year. These guiding principles will illuminate teacher's curriculum implementation practices as first-time high school Mexican American Studies teachers engaged with the curriculum and their own reflexive teaching practices. The focus of the following section is Latino Critical Theory or LatCrit which builds on Critical Race Theory to include an investigation of language, culture, identity, ethnicity, and sexuality (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Latino Critical Theory

In addition to using Critical Race Theory, I will use Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) for my study to analyze multidimensional identities and intersectionality. LatCrit expands on and complements Critical Race Theory by investigating categories of analysis such as immigration, language, culture, identity, phenotype, ethnicity, and sexuality (Solórzano and Bernal, 2001). “LatCrit theory is conceived as an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Solorzano and Bernal, 2021). LatCrit and CRT theories challenge the dominant discourse on race and

racism they relate to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate and marginalize Chicano/a student's (R. Barnes, 1990; Bell, 1992, 1995; Calmore, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; "Critical Race Theory in Education," 1998; Delgado, 1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Espinoza, 1990; Harris, 1994; Lawson, 1995; Matsuda, 1989, Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Montoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990; P. Williams, 1991). There are five themes that form the CRT and LatCrit framework in education.

1. *The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination.*

For example, race and class discrimination and oppression alone cannot account for oppression based on gender, language, or immigration status (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993).

2. *The challenge to dominant ideology.* CRT & LatCrit framework in education challenges the traditional claims of the educational system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunities. Furthermore, the above-named theories challenge the deficit frameworks used to explain Chicano/a educational inequality (Calmore, 1992).

3. *The commitment to social justice.* "A critical race and LatCrit framework are committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991).

4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge.* Experiential knowledge and in this case of teachers are legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. This type of knowledge is considered a strength by including students of color in methods of storytelling, family history, testimonios, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Olivas, 1990; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Villapando & Delgado-Bernal, 2002, Villenas & Dehyle, 1999).

5. *The interdisciplinary perspective.* “A LatCrit framework in education challenges ahistoricism and the uni-disciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods” (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990).

The next section focuses on the notion of meritocracy in education and how it is harmful to marginalized people.

Meritocracy

The U.S Educational system is based on a Eurocentric epistemological perspective based on White privilege. This entails believing that the perspective of Euro-Americans is the norm. Furthermore, the views, experiences, and motivations of people of color are delegitimized and ignored in a covert and overt way (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). “The notion of meritocracy allows people to believe that all people – no matter what race, class, or gender- get what they deserve based primarily on an individual’s own merit and how hard a person works” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). White privilege or as McIntosh suggests, “an invisible package of unearned assets” (McIntosh, 1997, p.120). This can be understood as a system of opportunities, privileges, and benefits that white people enjoy, simply for being white. This notion of White privilege becomes invisible, especially to whites, and is legitimized and viewed as the norm (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p.111). “Standards (especially those in education) are based on this norm, and individuals or knowledge(s) that depart from this norm are often devalued and subordinated” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p.111). Eurocentric epistemology continues to adversely affect students of color and the education system at large. Next, I discuss the battle for Mexican American Studies in Arizona and how it influenced and laid the foreground for a similar battle in Texas.

The Battle for Mexican American Studies in Arizona High Schools

Nolan Cabrera asked, “to what extent can non-Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy be sanctioned as “legitimate” education? Can critical approaches to oppression be part of public secondary education?” (2013, p. 1086). In 2010, Jan Brewer Arizona’s governor signed HB 2281 into law effectively banning Mexican American Studies curriculum in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) (Cabrera, 2011, p. 20). The then states’ school superintendent, Tom Horne, said the courses were “harmful and dysfunctional” and led to resentment of the United States, by learning about oppression (Cabrera, 2011, p. 22). Arizona threatened to cut funding which led TUSD to stop offering the courses and ban some of the books that were being used in Mexican American Studies courses, to include Paolo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. The struggle for Mexican American Studies in Arizona was based in Tucson. The next section outlines how scholars, teachers, and community came together to demand MAS classes.

Mexican American Studies in Tucson Unified School District

As previously stated regarding Chicano/a student’s ability to create change the same is true in our contemporary era regarding demanding change and representation in their education (Cabrera, 2013). The youth coalition in Tucson, Arizona called UNIDOS (United Non-Discriminatory Individuals in Demanding Our Studies), comprised of local Tucson students played a central role in the battle against Arizona’s House Bill 2281, designed to dismantle Ethnic Studies Courses in public institutions (Cabrera, 2013). Cabrera (2013) argued that the battle in Arizona hinges on the denial that racism still exists and by teaching about racism, it equates to the victimization of white people. Furthermore, he asserted, “racism is so systematically engrained in society that color blindness actually becomes a form of racism”

(Cabrera, 2013, p. 1086). Using the Critical Theory paradigm, Cabrera asserted, the more Latino/a students' see themselves and their experiences reflected in the curriculum the more likely they are to be engaged in school, leading to greater educational success (Cabrera, 2012; Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997). "When students read literature written by authors of the student's racial ethnic background, engagement increases, literacy is enhanced, and more positive thinking academically leads to higher achievement. When ethnic studies are implemented in the social studies, students had a sense of agency" (Cabrera, 2013, p. 1089).

Taking Down Raza Studies

In the first weeks of 2011 a student group called UNIDOS began a weekly political discussion group to address the issue of HB2281, prohibiting the teaching of Ethnic Studies classes in K-12 schools. At a February 8, 2011, school board meeting UNIDOS demanded to meet with all school board members to discuss HB 2281 (Cabrera, 2013). On March 8, 2011, UNIDOS asked for a public statement from the TUSD to protect Mexican American Studies, but they refused.

On April 26, 2011, the student youth group UNIDOS, in an act of civil disobedience, took over a TUSD Board meeting to disrupt and delay a vote to implement HB2281, in which they were successful. The students chained themselves to board members' chairs to physically disrupt the meeting and preserve their classes, by delaying the vote, which garnered national attention (Cabrera, 2013). Despite UNIDOS efforts as well as community protests in January 10, 2012 TUSD officially eliminated MAS classes. In the days that followed, school administrators began confiscating so called banned books, essentially banning MAS teachers and students from forbidden curriculum. Some other notable banned books include *The House on Mago Street* by

Sandra Cisneros, *Bless Me Ultima* by Rodolfo Anaya, and *Borderlands: La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa, to name a few (Cabrera, 2013). These are seminal works by Chicana/o authors which provide a medium for Chicana/o representation in literature to challenge the dominant narrative. In these two examples, not only was Mexican American Studies curriculum banned but so were books which effectively banned voices, stories, and knowledge.

Students reacted by staging walk outs in protest for two weeks, in January of 2012, and created a symposium called UNIDOS: the School of Ethnic Studies. This symposium was born out of student resistance and with the help of university professors and community members was revolutionary. Strategically the organizers identified January 24, 2012, as the first day to open the School of Ethnic Studies as this was the day TUSD would use to report daily attendance to receive state funding. “Youth resisted the boundaries the district had created by eliminating MAS. For one day, students chose to participate in youth-led education, demonstrating to TUSD and the community that MAS was going to exist in one form or another” (Cabrera, 2013, p. 18). Transformative resistance is epitomized in this event as it was, “concurrently a critique of social oppression coupled with resistance meant to promote social justice” (Solórzano et al. 2001, p. 315). Simultaneously in Arizona the passing of the SB1070, known as the “show me your papers bill,” which required state law enforcement to ask those deemed suspicious of being undocumented to present proof legal immigration status during routine traffic stops, leading to racial profiling (Reznick, 2020). Furthermore, in the summer of 2010, an anti-immigration law banning bilingual education was passed, Proposition 203 (Mendez & Cabrera, 2015). The next section will discuss Arizona House Bill 2281, the banning of Ethnic Studies.

Arizona HB2281

HB2281 allows the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction to withhold 10% of a district's funding if it is determined that a district offers classes that “1) Promote the overthrow of the United States Government, 2) Promote resentment toward a race or class of people, 3) Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group, 4) Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (Cabrera, 2013, p. 9). The initial spark that led to Mexican American studies in Arizona began in 2002 when then TUSD superintendent Dr. Becky Montaña appointed Augustine Romero as head of the Hispanic Studies Department to address the White / Latino/a achievement gap (Cammarota & Romero, 2014).

Later the name of the department was changed to Mexican American/Raza Studies Department. Born in one TUSD classroom, Augustine Romero and Dr. Julio Cammarota developed the Social Justice Education Project which was a yearlong class which counted as a social studies requirement. In this class, lower performing students were identified to participate in action research for social change (Cabrera, 2013). In the 2005-2006 school year the “Mexican American Studies” program expanded to four schools and now offered language arts classes, which also counted as a core requirement (Cabrera, 2014). By 2011, TUSD was the only school district in the United States to have a “full-fledged ethnic studies program” (Sleeter, 2011, p. 40). This is the year the systematic dismantling of Arizona’s ethnic studies program began. The occurrences in Arizona spurred a national movement demanding MAS class which is the subject of the next section.

A National Movement Arises

In 2017, after seven years of court battles, Federal Judge A. Wallace Tashima, ruled that HB2281 was unconstitutional and based on racial animus (Gonzalez, 2020). Tashima wrote, “students First amendment rights were violated because they were denied the right to receive information and ideas, and their Fourteenth amendment rights were violated because the decision discriminated against Latinos” (Strauss, 2017, p. 5). As previously mentioned TUSD was the first to implement Mexican American Studies at a district wide level to show empirical data to support the claims that dropout rates for Latino/as decreased, MAS students improved academically, passing rates for state tests increased, and more MAS students enrolled in college (Strauss, 2017). A gap that has become apparent in the aftermath of Arizona’s ban on Mexican American studies is the fact that most states do not have district wide MAS programs, if there are schools that have the curriculum there are not enough teachers qualified to teach MAS, and /or there is no support or training for teachers who want to teach MAS (Hengesteg & Doran, 2019).

Anita Fernandez the director of XITO, Xicano Institute of Teaching and Organizing is an urban education consulting collective who fills this need by instructing teachers and school staff on how to develop ethnic studies curriculum (Gonzalez, 2020). As of 2020, XITO hosts workshops and gives professional development training using culturally responsive pedagogy. In 2016, Oregon instituted ethnic studies curriculum in K-12 schools. The following year Albuquerque, NM launched an ethnic studies program for 13 of its high schools (Valenzuela, 2019). The Texas State Board of Education soon followed suit; I will discuss the case of Texas MAS policy in the following section.

Creating Mexican American Studies in Texas

As the ban of Mexican American studies in Arizona gained national attention in Texas, scholars and activists reflected on the fact that Texas did not have district wide Mexican American Studies curriculum to speak of in 2012 (Valenzuela, 2019). This section will focus on the development of Mexican American Studies in Texas. In Angela Valenzuela's article titled, "The Struggle to Decolonize Official Knowledge in Texas' State Curriculum: Side Stepping the Colonial Matrix of Power she and her colleagues document their committee work in the Tejas Foco, which is a Texas affiliate of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS), to change state curriculum and implement Ethnic Studies in Texas between 2014 and 2018, before the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). November 21, 2014 was the first time the Tejas Foco PreK-12 Committee demanded a MAS course, which was denied. What did come of this demand was an opportunity for MAS advocates to come forward with a text that could be considered for state adoption. Valenzuela situated the Tejas Foco struggle for MAS in Arizona's battle against HB2281, banning ethnic studies, which spurred a nationwide movement for ethnic studies in public schools. Valenzuela described these efforts to decolonize official knowledge in Texas state curricula, "The focus is how a statewide, college- and university based, advocacy community utilized, as Lorde (2003) famously expressed, the master's tools to both confront and sidestep what may be described as the colonial matrix of power" (Valenzuela, 2019, p. 209). For Valenzuela and MAS advocates the "colonial matrix of power" not only consists of social, economic, and political legacies of colonialism but also of the "SBOE, the Texas State Legislature, and large corporate interests in education, that find expression vexed in Anglo Mexican relations and a predominant form of subtractive culturally eviscerating assimilation embodied in Texas Eurocentric social studies curriculum" (Valenzuela, 2019, p. 199).

In 2016 a legislative battle with the SBOE regarding a racist error ridden textbook was fought and won. At the SBOE meeting on April 13, 2018, the board voted to approve Mexican American studies, but the issue became the name of the course, “Ethnic Studies: An Overview of Americans of Mexican Descent” which led to statewide protests and press coverage (Valenzuela, 2019). Finally, on June 15, 2018, the SBOE under community pressure changed the name to “Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies” and this is the birthdate of MAS for Texas public schools. The final vote for approval came on September 14, 2018 (Valenzuela, 2019). A major focus of Tejas Foco committee was centered on reclaiming and imbedding Indigenous Knowledge and histories in the curriculum as reflected in two (TEKS) history standards (TEA, 2019):

(2.) History. The student understands the causes and impact of interaction between early Amerindian societies and Europeans from 1248 to 1800. The student is expected to: 1.) Explain the significance of selected years and events as turning points relevant to Mexican American history, such as 1248, Aztecs arrive in Mexico’s central valley; 1428, Aztec Empire solidified; 1519, Hernán Cortéz’s first encounter with the Aztecs; 1521, Spanish conquer the Aztecs; 1542, New Laws; and 1767, Jesuits expelled from the New World; and 2.) Identify the contributions of selected individuals such as Moctezuma, Hernán Cortéz, - La Malinche, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Valenzuela centers this on using Critical Indigenous Studies and MAS to dismantle Eurocentric regimes of truth and disrupt hegemonic constructions of self and nation, that reinscribe empire (Byrd & Rothberg, 2011). By advocating for a separate course Tejas Foco committee, side

stepped the Texas social studies curriculum, leaving it intact. This is important as it would have been nearly impossible to “take on” the Eurocentric social studies curriculum at the State level and MAS may not have been written into policy if this approach was not taken.

This is evident in the many times the SBOE reared its racist head as detailed in the social studies standards revision which took place from 2007 to 2010. One example is the fight to keep labor leader and civil rights activist icon Dolores Huerta in the state’s third grade curriculum, which failed. Omitting Huerta was done based on David Bradley’s protests, a right wing SBOE member, saying she was a communist and not a good example of “good citizenship” (Valenzuela, 2019, p. 202). In 2010, in the State of Arizona, Tony Diaz a PreK-12 committee member to organized *Librotraficante* (book trafficking) caravan to take banned books on a 1,062-mile trek to Tucson teachers (Acosta, 2012). The significance is MAS curriculum and Mexican American or Chicana/o authored books were banned simultaneously. Valenzuela points to the fact that MAS advocates and the committee worked within the system, “in order to lay a foundation though state-approved curriculum whereby future generations of educators and youth can exercise their own disobedience toward a truly liberatory praxis where intersectional, as well as “oppositional, place-based existences” can thrive (Alfred & Cortassel, 2005, p. 597, as cited in Valenzuela, 2019). Finally, as the Arizona and Texas battles for MAS converge Mignolo (2007) argued, since the state of Texas,

Is incapable of thinking outside of its own frame when its very existence depends on reproducing extant relations of power...the decision of the PreK-12 Committee to sidestep the social studies official curriculum, play by the rules of the game, and enunciate throughout the legitimacy of MAS as a field of study- validated by the legal

victory in Arizona-were decisive to... rob the SBOE of Arizona-like arguments against MAS.” (Valenzuela, 2019, p. 199)

The battle for Ethnic Studies in Texas continues as new courses in Mexican American Studies and African American studies were approved on April 17, 2020 (TEA, 2020). African American Studies is its second statewide Ethnic Studies approved curriculum (TEA, 20220). The question remains how will Ethnic Studies be implemented in Texas high schools? The following section will discuss Culturally Responsive Teaching and Social Justice Issues for the purpose of training pre-service teachers to examine their biases to be socially conscious and civil rights oriented in teaching diverse students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Social Justice: Investigating Teacher Identity

“A culturally responsive teacher understands a quality education is a fundamental civil right- becoming more culturally responsive involves a process of critical self -reflection about their pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Scherff, 2011). Frye (2010) argues the right to learn is the most fundamental civil right and freedom. She is a teacher educator and director of a teacher education program who wants to adjust the program so pre-service teachers understand the educational disparities that exist for African American and other disenfranchised groups. She focuses on underrepresentation of African American students in Gifted and advanced programs, the reasons for inequity, and possible solutions through teacher preparation in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Frye, 2010). Similarly, Barnes studies teacher education programs to discuss how teacher education programs can create an environment to support students from diverse culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. One of the ways this is implemented is through field experience (Barnes, 2006). To better prepare pre-service teachers to teach culturally

and linguistically diverse students a program was designed to observe 24 preservice teachers under the supervision of a professor and a graduate assistant in a private Christian midwestern University. Data were collected from the preservice teachers' class and field experiences in the areas of (a) autobiographical poem and cultural artifact, (b) cultural diversity awareness inventory, (c) book discussion groups, (d) inquiry project, and (e) structured field experience (Barnes, 2006, p. 1). These methods were employed to address cultural discontinuity to debunk the notion that different is inferior (Barnes, 2006).

In a study comparing two cohorts of elementary pre-service teachers Castro compares teachers who teach citizenship education. One group was trained around the needs of urban school children and the others were not (Castro, 2012). This study elucidated the awareness needed for Culturally Responsive teaching to be effective. Curtis uses her own personal narrative to encourage students to critically analyze race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in hopes of informing preservice teachers' curricula in the future (Curtis, 2006).

Huerta examines barriers to multicultural education specifically preservice secondary teachers who fail to investigate privilege when trying to implement multicultural education. Another barrier is resistance to multicultural education and how it stems from resistance to diversity in the 1960's and 1970's (Huerta, 1999). Irizarry uses the Cultural Connectedness framework for participating in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that acknowledges hybrid culture and identities of Latino students in an urban multiethnic context (Irizarry, 2007). There were few articles about teaching on the U.S. Mexico border specifically, in which case citizenship also informs privilege.

On the U.S. Mexico border cultural identity is complicated and bleeds into how a student may be taught, depending on geographic location of birth, language, and class. This will matter more than race, as Mexicans and Mexican Americans are historically and culturally linked but also very separate and not equal (Irizarry, 2007). In this vein, LeCompte (2022) investigates how white teacher education candidates embrace racial identity as a cultural component of teacher preparation. This is a qualitative study that examines three themes: guilt/anger, self-identity, and individuality (LeCompte, 2002). LeCompte (2022) asserts that the themes drive pedagogical practices in the classroom.

Most of the literature is about white teachers in urban neighborhood schools, which focus on African American students. There are very few articles about Latinx, Asian-American, or American Indian students regarding CRP/CRC. A common thread throughout the existing literature suggests it is essential for an educator to examine their own privilege as an individual, to implement effective Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Curriculum (DePitt, 1996; Freire, 1998). Essentially, multicultural education cannot move forward without a self-examination, to include privilege, i.e., white privilege, race, class, gender, status, and access to education. Chu (2011) argues that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds and factors related to CLD diverse outcomes by looking at three factors: racial gap, social class, and cultural-ecological factors associated with involuntary minority status. This is to address why CLD students underachieve. Chu (2011) asserts Culturally Relevant Teaching is central to facilitating those students' learning.

Along with privilege the issue of racism and especially the issue of internalized racism as held by Mexican American teachers and students and other minority groups will be investigated. Kohli explores cultural biases in the classroom and the process by which the dominant culture

dictates how African Americans see themselves. It also considers the impact that cultural bias in schools can have on students of color. This is a qualitative study that interviews nine undergraduate preservice teachers, women of color, in an education program in Southern California, to reveal how their experiences can help break the cycle of racism in classrooms (Kohli, 2008). Banks describes the five dimensions of multicultural education. He argues the transformative scholars create oppositional knowledge and liberatory curricula to challenge the status quo, sanction action and reform (Banks, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Teaching is socially conscious and civil rights oriented. It requires a critical self-reflection process to critically analyze one's pedagogy while critically analyzing our own privilege and identity. A Culturally Responsive Teacher understands history and why educational disparities exist for students of color, low-income students, and English Language Learners. A Culturally Responsive Teacher is aware of cultural and linguistic differences and doesn't disparage those differences but highlights them so students can relate and see themselves in the curriculum. The literature suggests the most optimum time to receive CRT training is as a preservice teacher and through field experience. During field experience, Culturally Responsive Teachers should address issues of racism in the classroom to challenge the status quo and the dominant culture. Addressing issues of resistance to multicultural education historical is essential to understand and analyze. Resistance to diversity in general can be a barrier but not as threatening to CRT as racism and internalized racism, including cultural biases (Banks, 1995). Teachers trained in these essential elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching have a goal to break the cycle of racism in the classroom by challenging the status quo and the dominant culture in various ways. Reflection is essential in Culturally Responsive Teaching, similarly the next section

examines how narratives and self-reflexivity are used in Culturally Relevant Curriculum (Kohli, 2008).

Narratives and Self-Reflexivity as an Approach to CRC

Various pieces of work on the topic express that CRC is a curriculum that allows students and teachers alike to relate their personal narratives and experiences to course assignments thereby engaging in the practice of self-reflexivity. Cheryl Curtis (1998), in her experience as a faculty member in the College of Education in a major university in Connecticut, relates that she employs the narrative in her pre-service teacher education courses.

Her frustration is evident as she expresses that her essay grew out of increasing aggravation with “student unwillingness to critically consider issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in the educational relationships that they hoped to establish in their future roles as teachers and human service workers.” (Curtis, 1998, p. 136) She writes that as a Black professor in a predominantly White university, her narratives are used as a filter for students to consider the “cultural impact of experiences” in her life and encourages students to find themselves as “potential theorists and embark on self-reflections that include a critique of racist, classist, and heterosexist assumptions.” Moreover, she writes that narratives can be used to establish “positionality” within the social order/hierarchies and “scrutinize privilege.” Curtis (1998) argues that by modeling a CRC in her university classroom she will teach her pre-service teachers to do the same when they develop curricula for their students. Her work concludes with a powerful message: “Race matters in the creation of curriculum,” and alluding to the fact that we must know ourselves before we learn to see and read others (Curtis, 1998, p. 139).

Howard studied African American elementary students' interpretations of Culturally Relevant Teaching within an urban context are interrogated using qualitative data. It revealed three findings that students preferred in their learning environments: teachers who display caring bonds and attitudes toward them, teachers who establish community and a family type of classrooms, and those who make learning fun (Howard, 2003). Similarly, Ladson-Billings describes the theoretical grounding from which Culturally Relevant Teaching derives. Her investigation into schooling and culture of successful African American teachers investigates why good teaching strategies aren't being implemented in classrooms populated by African American students.

Similarly, Baker, Digiovanni and Woodham (2005) by discussing their own use of narratives in the classroom, claim that narratives help students to “achieve greater understandings of the curriculum” (p. 55) and help link their cultural/personal experiences to previous and new knowledge. Menchaca (2001) also puts forth those personal experiences are rich sources of knowledge when they are used to relate to examples and create connections to content. She also maintains that the experiences of teachers and students alike can be incorporated into lessons thereby validating the cultural experiences of students. Ladson Billings suggests, to reconstruct schooling educators must, “value the fact that students-no matter their background or experience – bring knowledge to teaching & learning through just being themselves and living their lives inside and outside the classroom” which requires a personal and professional investment (Ladson Billings, 1995).

The works that I have reviewed offer an in-depth look at what the meaning of CRC is in the K-12 classroom or the university pre-service teacher classroom; unfortunately, this is also their limitation (Fenwick, 2011). Most seem to put forth that CRC is a curriculum that promotes critical consciousness, social justice, and participatory democracy and/or validates the rich cultural

experiences of both student and teacher. In addition, the works wither directly mention or at least allude to the use of narratives and self-reflexivity in the enactment of CRC. One study conducted in Australia (Fenwick, 2011) settled on a similar meaning but maintained that in the case of the secondary students that were studied, CRC undermined learning and curriculum/assessment design.

The literature that is focused on K-12 classrooms suggests that more studies need to be conducted at the high school level, where curriculum is still an issue and oftentimes a focus of debate, as in the case of Arizona. With a revived threat to ethnic studies at the K-12 and University levels it is more important than ever to study the meaning and outcomes of CRC, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, etc. The lack of studies of CRC in the K-12 education classroom are crucial to the defense of such criticisms as we witness in states of Texas, Arizona, Mississippi, among others delegitimizing the Ethnic Studies such as Mexican American, African American and Indigenous Studies. The legislation for these curricula has been passed in Texas but the question of implementation remains: how & when will these classes be taught, and by whom? Furthermore, the perspectives of teachers in the field of Ethnic Studies are rarely studied at the high school level as most public-school teachers are not Ethnic Studies teachers per say. With these new elective classes being offered the lack of data and meaning further validates my study of CRC in a K-12 context, specifically at the high school level. The following section explains the notion of Conocimiento or knowledge. In this study I used Conocimiento to comprehend how MAS teachers understand, utilize, and implement MAS curriculum. The next section focuses on Conocimiento definition and uses in this study.

Conocimiento

In this study, *Conocimiento* which translates to knowledge, is used to describe a familiarity or awareness of facts that contribute to understanding. *Conocimiento* is best explained in Spanish, “Es un proceso mental y emocional a través del cual un individuo capta e interpreta la realidad, a partir de diversos tipos de experiencias, razonamientos y aprendizajes” (Concepto, 2021). Translated, “It is a mental and emotional process through which an individual captures and interprets reality, from various types of experiences, reasoning and learning.” This notion is the basis of the entire MAS class. It grounds students and teachers in their own identity investigation to begin to discuss historical, social, political, and cultural aspects of MAS curriculum. It serves to decolonize the curriculum by situating students and teachers within the course content. This practice is highlighting and centering Mexican Americans in the study of U.S. history as well as placing the student within the framework of the curriculum.

According to Gloria Anzaldua (1987) the concept of *conocimiento* is a spiritual journey seeking one’s life purpose and path to healing generational trauma. “Tu camino de *conocimiento* requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you’ve programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your culture) to avoid (*deconocer*), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your *facultades* (Anzaldua, p. 504).” Anzaldua attributes an epistemological shift to the feminization of knowledge, which aims to deconstruct binaries and question conventional colonial knowledge and categories to reach a reflective consciousness, an awareness. Anzaldua (2002) describes the decolonial journey of the seven stages of *conocimiento* as:

El arrebato...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning; 2. *nepantla*...torn between ways; 3. the Coatlicue state... *desconocimiento* and the cost of knowing; 4. the call...el *compromiso*...the crossing and conversation; 5. putting *Cyolxauhqui* together...new

personal and collective “stories”; 6. the blow up...a clash of realities; 7. shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism.. p. 35

The first stage is an awakening, coming to the realization that your perceptions must change. “Este arretrato, the earthquake, jerks you from the familiar and safe terrain and catapults you into nepantla, the second stage” (Anzaldua, 2002). The second stage is “Nepantla the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it” (Anzaldua, 2002). The third stage calls for decolonization by re-indigenizing epistemology, returning to ancestral knowledge to heal the trauma of colonization (Anzaldua, 2002). The fourth stage is a reconnection of mind, body, and spirit. “Consequently, the fifth stage involves a desire for order and meaning, a new script that realigns the inner self with discoveries from the shadows and the reconnections” (Ohmer, 2010). “After dismantling the body/self you re-compose it-the fifth stage of the journey, though reconstruction takes place in all stages. When creating a personal narrative, you also co-create the group/cultural story” (Anzaldua, 2020). This epitomizes the work of the *conocimiento* project students and teachers used at the beginning of the MAS course.

The sixth stage consists of dealing with a clash of realities between the imagined and constructed to facing the differences and reconciling both. “La nepantlera leads us in celebrating la comunidad soñada, reminding us that spirit connects the irreconcilable warring parts para que todo el mundo se haga un país, so that the whole world may become un pueblo” (Anzaldua, 2002). The strategy acquired in the seventh stage solves the clash of realities to

establish a common ground. A blend of ethics and compassion, along with a shift of realities, engages spiritual activism. Spiritual activism depends on integrating the knowledge/experience acquired from the shamanic exercise into our lifestyle (Ohmer, 2010). “When the self is part of the vision a strong sense of personal meaning helps in identity and culture construction. By developing and maintaining spiritual beliefs and values la nepantlera gives the group hope, purpose, identity” (Anzaldua, 2002). The notion of doing this *conocimiento* work before being able to engage with others is the crux of the *conocimiento* project. This is the lens by which the entire course will be viewed through, a decolonial, reflective, and transformative epistemology. The last stage is praxis which is ultimately what a MAS class should strive to.

Chapter Summary

This review of literature details a historiography of Arizona’s ban of Ethnic Studies between 2010-2020 and the Texas State Board of Education signing into law Ethnic Studies curricula in 2019. I presented the history of Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory in education, a brief history of M.E.C.H.A., and the struggle for a Culturally Responsive Curriculum during the Civil Rights Movement. Then I discussed the battle for Mexican American Studies in Arizona, at the state and local levels and how it led to a nationwide movement, influencing, and informing the MAS program in Texas. Finally, I presented elements of Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Curriculum, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and LatCrit, which served as my conceptual framework to analyze teachers’ experiences implementing Mexican American Studies. Finally, I discussed the theory of *Conocimiento* as Gloria Anzaldua (1986) formulated. In the following chapter I will discuss my research design and methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Design & Methodology

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, on September 1, 2021 “The Critical Race Theory” bill (Senate Bill 3) took effect in Texas banning the teaching of race in K-12 classrooms by limiting or banning discussion of race, racism, and current events (Texas Legislature Online, 2021). This came as several campuses around Texas were beginning to implement Social Studies elective courses in Ethnic Studies (Perez, 2021). SB 3 is aimed at the heart of effective ethnic studies implementation since racial inquiry and analysis is at the crux of Mexican American and other ethnic studies classes. As Valenzuela (2022) argued, an attack on CRT is an attack on Ethnic Studies. The 2021 school year was the first time many schools taught Mexican American Studies courses in high school since Mexican American Studies was approved by the State Board of Education in Texas in 2019 (Perez, 2021). Considering the anti-CRT movement, and its’ clear connection to Ethnic Studies, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies high school teachers in Southwest Texas implementing Mexican American Studies during the 2021-2022 school year. In this chapter, I discuss the purpose of the study, research questions, definition of terms, research design, methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis. Furthermore, I discuss my participants, the setting, trustworthiness, and my positionality.

Purpose & Research Questions

As stated above the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies high school teachers in Southwest Texas implementing Mexican

American Studies during the 2021-2022 school year. The research questions guiding this study were:

- 1) What are the experiences of first-time MAS high school teachers in Southwest Texas in 2021-2022?
- 2) How do first-time MAS high school teachers describe the implementation of MAS curriculum?
- 3) How does implementing MAS curriculum for the first-time shape teacher consciousness?

In the following section, I discuss the terminology used for this study.

Definition of Terms

In this study, important terms that were used are Ethnic Studies, Mexican- American, Testimonios, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory in this study is used in education as a line of academic inquiry which seeks to uncover how superficially race-neutral social policies can and do recreate systemic racial oppression.

Originally developed to analyze cases in legal studies, CRT challenges the objectivity of social science research while concurrently highlighting the value of experiential knowledge from communities of color (Bell, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ethnic Studies in this paper used the following criteria or five consistent themes offered by Sleeter (2011) to further understand why and how ethnic studies came about:

1. Explicit identification of the point of view from which knowledge emanates, and the relationship between social location and perspective.

2. Examination of U.S. colonialism historically, as well as how relations of colonialism continue to play out.
3. Examination of historical construction of race and institutional racism, how people navigate racism, and struggle for liberation.
4. Probing meanings of collective or communal identities that people hold; and Studying one's community's creative and intellectual products, historic and contemporary (p.3).

“Ethnic studies as a discipline, is anti-racist, decolonial project that seeks to rehumanize education for students of color, center subjugated knowledge narratives and ancestral knowledge, and build solidarity across racial and ethnic differences for the purpose of working toward social justice” (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 20). Ethnic studies were created to center the histories of the marginalized in schools. Teachers experiencing teaching MAS for the first time and beyond will impact the courses life, i.e., whether the course will live in the master schedule of high schools from now on, when and how it will be taught, by whom it will be taught, and the potential impact it can have on students and teachers lives. The passing of this curriculum challenged the notion that minority students should take MAS because they can't make it in a “real class” or in an advanced class. The implementation of the MAS course in the 2021-2022 school year affects its legitimacy and longevity.

The term Mexican American is used in this study as that is the name of the class. The curriculum explores Mexican history and culture as well as the issues of immigration including the U.S. Mexico War of 1848 which led to the use of the term, Mexican American. Referring to a person of Mexican descent who resides in the United States (Census.gov, 2021). The saying *we (Mexicans) didn't cross the border, the border crossed us*, speaks to the notion that after the U.S.

Mexico War and Mexican Session national boundaries changed and Mexicans effectively became Americans (loc.gov 2021). Much of the American Southwest was once Mexican territory. Many families in that area date their residency in the United States from the mid-19th century or before (Bixler-Marquez et.al., 2011). Texas, formerly part of Mexico, declared its independence in the mid-1830s and ultimately joined the United States in 1845. Border skirmishes and a variety of political considerations eventually led to the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48), which ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In this treaty, the United States acquired more than 500,000 square miles of Mexican territory—all or part of the current states of Arizona, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas. The United States purchased another 30,000 square miles of what is now Arizona and New Mexico in 1854, in what today is known as the Gadsden Purchase (Bixler-Marquez et.al., 2011). This is important to understand as it is the foundation of the term and of the struggle for equality socially and politically.

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings,1994). Some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are positive perspectives on parents and families, communication of high expectations, learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and teacher as facilitator (Ladson Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant education is a conceptual framework that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences in all aspects of teaching and learning within the classroom and across the school (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009; Milner, 2017). Culturally responsive teaching is not a formulaic

pedagogy defined by and limited to specific scaffolds. These approaches leverage cultural resources and uses them as assets instead of deficits.

As discuss further below, I used testimonios in this study as methodology and method due to its collaboration with the researcher and centering teachers' lived experiences as the basis of this study. Testimonios allow for participants to work in collaboration with the researcher, honoring their lived experiences and knowledge (Huber, 2009). Teachers' experiences provided insight as to how the implementation of MAS occurred, in a particular historical socio-cultural moment. Testimonio was used in this study to explore the implementation of Mexican American Studies to inquire how teachers implemented and experienced the new MAS course. Including, investigating systematic analysis of racism, systems of oppression such as power relations included in critiques of Eurocentric curriculum, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy, as well as the implementation of critical pedagogies, intersectionality relations of power and privilege (Sacramento, 2019). Roots of testimonios are part of the struggle for people of color for educational rights and for the recovery of knowledge production including the intention of affirmation and empowerment (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). The themes can be viewed as written interpretations of "lived experience" (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1292). Furthermore, "testimonio is rooted in liberationists pedagogy exemplified by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire" (Reyes and Rodriguez, 2012, p.527). Next, I will reiterate the significance of this study which is to center teachers' lived experiences implementing MAS for the first time.

Significance of the Study

For Students of Color the opportunity to take culturally relevant courses taught by culturally responsive teachers trained in Ethnic Studies can be revolutionary as the activists of

the civil rights movement imagined (Cabrera, 2019). This study provides insights into the experiences of first-time MAS high school teachers in Southwest Texas, including challenges, opportunities, and practical uses for MAS curriculum, such as professional development, curriculum guides, and culturally responsive teaching. Exploring the experiences of MAS teachers has elucidated how the class will continue to exist or not, and how it is used as a Social Studies elective course. The way MAS is scheduled will determine how it is used, when and how it will be taught and how the credit will be used in Texas. This study adds to the discussion on the challenges teachers face when establishing and implementing MAS courses as it is not well known, as it is relatively new (Parker, 2019). Yet, “We know Ethnic Studies courses have the potential to improve educational experiences and outcomes for historically disenfranchised students” (Sacramento, 2019, p. 167). This study is unique in that it explored teachers’ experiences teaching a MAS course, as opposed to students taking the course. There is a lack of research on the teachers' experiences in the classroom teaching MAS for the first time and this is a contribution to the field for implementation of MAS curriculum.

Educational research affirms that Ethnic Studies helps foster cross cultural understanding amongst all students, aids in valuing students own cultural identity, and helps students appreciate differences around them (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). “These studies also confirm that students who participate in ethnic studies are more academically engaged, develop a stronger sense self-efficacy and personal empowerment, perform better academically and graduate at higher rates” (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 3). Using the existing literature on ethnic studies I examined how new MAS teachers experienced the same types of engagement and development of critical inquiry of MAS TEKS implementation. By infusing knowledge that is culturally relevant to students, teachers who take a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning connect students’

knowledge with new and unfamiliar academic knowledge (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). This study elucidates nuances that may go unnoticed like a teachers' familiarity with the MAS TEKS, professional development related to MAS, and their level of background knowledge related to the class. Fewer studies have observed effective practices in preparing teachers to teach Ethnic Studies in high school classrooms (Curammeng & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2017; Daus-Magbual, 2010; Dos Passos Coggin, 2014; in Sacramento, 2019). Importantly, teachers who are already in the field of education are hardly studied the way pre-service teachers are. Ethnic Studies teacher professional development models center on critical inquiry and dialogue. "Critical approaches urge Ethnic Studies practitioners to view their role with a critical lens and reconsider the purpose of their praxis as it relates to place, social transformation, and decolonization" (Sacramento, 2019, p. 169). This study gives insight into how, when, and if teachers are trained to teach MAS. Sacramento (2019) argues access to critical professional development can connect teachers to transformative experiences and methods, but support for this exists primary at the grassroots level.

Within Culturally Relevant Curriculum assets-based pedagogies are used to investigate academic impact. "The teacher related factors include academic expectations, critical awareness (knowledge of historical and sociocultural oppression and how schools perpetuate racial power imbalances), cultural knowledge (knowledge of students' household funds of knowledge), cultural content integration (ability to integrate culturally relevant content into the curriculum), and beliefs about/use of Spanish language in instruction. Together, these dimensions constitute asset-based pedagogy" (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 11). This study investigates teachers' experiences to determine how assets-based pedagogy is utilized in MAS classes, if at all.

Culturally responsive teaching is not a formulaic pedagogy defined by and limited to specific scaffolds. Culturally responsive teaching leverages cultural resources and uses them as assets instead of deficits. “Ethnic Studies is anti-racist, decolonial project that seeks to rehumanize education for students of color, center subjugated knowledge narratives and ancestral knowledge, and build solidarity across racial and ethnic differences for the purpose of working toward social justice” (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 20). Ethnic Studies were created to center the histories of the marginalized into schools. Teachers experiencing teaching MAS for the first time and beyond will impact the courses life, i.e., whether the course will live in the master schedule of high schools from now on, when and how it will be taught, by whom it will be taught, and the potential impact it can have on students and teachers lives. The passing of this curriculum challenged the notion that minority students should take MAS because they can’t make it in a “real class” or in an advanced class. The implementation of the MAS course in the 2021-2022 school year affects its legitimacy and longevity in whether schools will continue to offer these newly passed courses. The way the class is utilized can determine if the course is populated with students throughout the school year, during one or both semesters, what periods it is offered, and to whom. The next section focuses on testimonio, which I utilized as methodology and method to explore teachers’ lived experiences and because it is situated in Paulo Freire’s liberationist pedagogy (Delgado-Bernal, 2009; Freire, 2000).

Testimonio as Methodology and Method

To explore the experiences of first-time MAS teachers, I used testimonios as both methodology and method (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2009). I begin this section by discussing my critical raced-gendered epistemology and then elaborate on testimonio.

For this study, I used critical raced-gendered epistemology grounded in CRT and LatCrit. Delgado-Bernal (1998) asserts there are four sources of cultural intuition Chicana researchers draw upon to conduct academic research – personal, academic, professional, and the analytical process itself. “A critical raced-gendered epistemology enables educators to consider creative admissions, curricular, and pedagogical policies that acknowledge, respect, and nurture the ways of knowing and understanding in communities of color” (Delgado, Bernal, 2002, p. 118). A critical raced gendered epistemology sees all stories as subjective, and the production of knowledge as situated. One acknowledges and respects other ways of knowing and understanding. Particularly, the stories and narratives of those who have experienced and responded to different forms of oppression (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). CRT and LatCrit are a means to resist epistemological racism. Delgado-Bernal (2002) argues as U.S. Third World Feminism, LatCrit, and Critical Race Theory combine, we have a critical raced-gendered epistemology allowing educational researchers to “bring together understandings of epistemologies and pedagogies to imagine how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality are braided within cultural knowledge, practices, spirituality, formal education, and the law” (p. 643). CRT and LatCrit give credence to rethinking the traditional notions of what counts as knowledge in the hopes of affecting policy and educational practice (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Taken together a Chicana feminist epistemological standpoint brings testimonio to life and changes the process of testimonio from method to methodology. Testimonio can make important contributions to critical race research as a methodological tool, which I elaborate on next.

Testimonios

The testimonio has the unique characteristic of being political and *conscientized* reflection that is often spoken, which does not remain in its oral state but instead is interviewed,

recorded, and transcribed (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). The objective of the *testimonios* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action. The testimonio is different from the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, oral history narration, prose, or spoken word (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). As discussed by Huber (2009):

Testimonio allows for participants to work in collaboration with the researcher, honoring their lived experiences and knowledge. As a result, participants play a crucial role in deciding how knowledge about their experiences is produced in the research process. Second, testimonio recognizes the power in telling one's story that is rooted in traditions of storytelling in Latina/o, African America, and Native American communities (Booker, 2002; Yosso, 2006). Third, locating testimonio within a Chicana feminist epistemology provides explicit method of data analysis, and guides the research strategies used throughout the research process. (p. 650)

The *testimonio* is intentional and political (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). Again, in this study I used *testimonio* as methodology and method to theorize and as means of conscientization.

Testimonios help explain the way the teachers experienced teaching Mexican American Studies for the first time. Roots of testimonio are part of the struggle for people of color for educational rights and for the recovery of knowledge production including the intention of affirmation and empowerment (Reyes and Rodriguez, 2012). "Testimonio is situated in the liberationist pedagogy exemplified by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire" (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 527).

Testimonio allows the narrator to show an experience that is not only liberating in the process of telling but also political in its production of awareness to listeners and readers alike to name oppression and other types of institutionalized marginalization (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012).

Furthermore, testimonio allows for marginalized groups to use their lived experiences as

legitimate data to inform improvements for further consideration. Similar to Reyes's and Rodriguez's (2012) work,

The most important reason testimonio is applicable in this study is the notion that the participants' memories, testimonios, are used to challenge pervasive theories, policies, and explanations about educational failure as a problem, not of individuals but of systemic institutionalized practices of oppression. (p. 528)

The ability to understand the nuances of the teachers' experiences is crucial to this study, speaking to the complexities of teaching including social, political, and cultural processes that influence how MAS is implemented. "Testimonio in this study is used to shape a methodology which departs from a traditional Eurocentric educational research approach to privilege an antiracist and social anti-hierarchical agenda" (Huber, 2009, p.644). This method and methodology are used to further the decolonial agenda of MAS courses in high schools. The ability to understand the nuances of the teachers' experiences is crucial to this study, speaking to the complexities of teaching including social, political, and cultural processes that influence how MAS is implemented. The cultural groups the participants belong to are various ethnic groups, of the same generation, academic and athletic coaches, and various gender identities.

The benefits of using testimonio in this study are (1) testimonio allows researchers to document the stories of their participants while validating their experiential knowledge, a central tenant of LatCrit; (2) testimonio allows the participant to identify the forms of oppression that have affected their experiences, rather than the researcher defining those experiences for them; (3) the witness or participant becomes an agent of collective memory and identity to reveal exploitative oppressive conditions; (4) testimonio is a direct challenge to dominant epistemology.

5). Because testimonio is concerned with revealing oppression, challenging dominant ideology, and moving toward social justice is useful tool in CRT research (Huber, 2008).

Testimonio suggests participant and researcher collaborate on the method as an act of solidarity. Furthermore, testimonio acknowledges the broader social context of oppression, that impact and shape life experiences. Finally, testimonio serves to transcend individual experiences and creates an empowering collective experience by speaking our truths and letting our stories be heard (Huber, 2008). This was done through the lens of first time Ethnic Studies teachers who are implementing MAS curricula for the first time in various Southwest Texas.

Testimonio Interviews

I conducted six *testimonio* interviews. Teacher interviews (testimonios) were the primary source of data. Testimonios are conducive to the purpose of this study as they attempt to help us understand the first time MAS experiences of these teachers. One may call this “a way of knowing.” The ways of knowing for teachers are constructed in that, “pedagogical knowledge is situated-informed by setting, experience, and theoretical framework- what surfaces is a different kind of transferable knowledge: the understanding that knowledge about teaching is shaped and refined by interactions with people and ideas, therefore flexible and socially constructed” (Klehr, 2012, p. 3). Reflectivity was very important in this study as it is the first time teaching this class, “reflection on action in action” (Schon, 1991 in Klehr, 2012, p. 5).

I adopted a semi-structured approach, which is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Bernard, 1998). Semi-structured is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview because of what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview

has a framework of themes to be explored. According to Bernard (1988), this type of interview is appropriate when the researcher may not have more than one chance to interview a participant. Furthermore, “including open-ended questions allows for the researcher to explore topics that are relevant but stray from the guiding questions, providing the opportunity to see and understand the topic from a different perspective” (Cohen, 2008, p.1).

The interview instrument questions were developed with the following guiding questions in mind. They were built into the interview instrument but not asked explicitly. In implementing MAS for the first time, the guiding questions were: 1). How do teachers successfully implement MAS curriculum for the first time? 2). Do teachers undergo the same transformation as the research shows students do from taking Ethnic Studies courses? 3). Do teachers undergo the same self-reflexive process to consider what Ethnic Studies means as a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a social movement? 4). Do these notions carry over from an intentional social justice curriculum to other Social_Studies courses? 5). How is success measured regarding teaching MAS? 6). How much professional development or effort is put into teaching Culturally Relevant Curriculum? Some technical observations I made in the teacher interviews include how the teachers implemented the TEKS as curriculum at their various campuses. For example, I asked about textbooks, assignments, students' responses to their assignments, professional development, prior knowledge, and years of teaching experience

I conducted five in-person face-to-face interviews and one zoom interview. The interviews took place in a location of the teachers' preference such as coffee shops, a park, an individual's home, in a classroom, a restaurant, and one over Zoom. I did not follow up with participants after the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and participants. Participants were asked 10 open-ended questions for discussion. At times the questions led to

probing and merited deeper discussion or follow through. The questions focused on the perceptions and intentions of teachers. They also focused on implementing the MAS course for the first time in the 2021-2022 school year. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour in length. Please see Appendix A for the interview protocol. Next, I will focus on the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Once transcribed in their entirety, I manually coded and recoded the interview data. Similarly, I categorized and recategorized the data approximately seven times (Saldaña, 2021). According to Saldaña (2021), the definition of categories are codes that look alike and feel alike, which embody and label the pattern explicitly. I used index cards to diagram models to help develop the categories. The index cards were color-coded and sorted to synthesize the main themes. My First Cycle coding included inductive coding, InVivo coding, and deductive coding (Saldaña, 2021), which I explain below.

Inductive or open coding was used to deconstruct the data and then later analyze it. Inductive coding entails conducting heuristic or exploratory research and building codes, themes, and subthemes from scratch based on data (Saldaña, 2019). InVivo coding meaning “in that which is alive,” refers to a code or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, or a term used by participants themselves (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). This type of coding was used to honor the participant’s voices, include their quotes and statements in the study to honor their lived experience. Each participants thoughts, feelings, and stories were captured through testimonio to show the reality of their first-time teaching MAS class. In addition, I used deductive coding or preexisting codes to analyze my data. For example, I used identity and

conocimiento as categories of analysis. In addition, I used Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Culturally Responsive Curriculum to harmonize with my study's conceptual framework and research goals. In my analysis, I considered how time, space, physical, and interpersonal interactions emerged in the testimonios to develop the predominant themes.

My Second Cycle coding involved Pattern Coding. Pattern Coding entails organizing and assembling a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs from the First Cycle (Saldana, 2021). The second round of coding revealed the following patterns and themes: "building the plane as we fly it," identity/conocimiento, dumping ground, and "taking the wind out of our sails - damper on the momentum" "Building the Plane While We Fly It," "Dumping Ground," and "Taking the Wind Out of Our Sails - Damper on the Momentum" was derived from InVivo Coding. These were the exact words used by my participants.

Teacher Participants

This study analyzed first-time MAS teachers' experiences with implementing the MAS TEKS curriculum. Six teachers participated in this study. To participate in this study teachers had to meet the following inclusion criteria: a) they had to be high school teachers and b) had to be teaching MAS for the first time in the 2021-2022 school year. Teachers were purposefully recruited via snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects (Saldana, 2016). The snowball sampling method is extensively used where a population is unknown and rare and it is tough to choose subjects to assemble them as samples for research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In the following subsections, I present brief bio sketches

for each teacher participant, which I was able to recruit by speaking to acquaintances in the same field of Social Studies and by reaching out to some fellow participants from a MAS online teacher academy. I reached out to my own personal networks, I already had their contact information. I asked if I could email them, and they agreed.

Participant Bio Sketches

To protect participants, all names used in the study are pseudonyms. Participants were given the opportunity to select their pseudonyms. Four teachers discovered they would be teaching the course prior to July of 2021; Alex Rouse, Ximena Villa, Mauricio Gomez, and Jose Lopez. The other two teachers, Shannon Tyler and Andrea Gonzalez found out about the addition of this class to their course load between a few days to one week before the class began. This is significant as it is a new curriculum for all teachers and there are no state or district resources readily available. It was necessary to create the curriculum from scratch.

Andrea Gonzalez

Andrea Gonzalez is a native born west Texan dedicated to coaching high school sports and teaching Social Studies. As a special education teacher, she has taught many different social studies courses over the past 15 years. Growing up in the outskirts of town, Ms. Gonzalez had the opportunity to travel and lived in different parts of Texas. She is a mother of one daughter and a new grandmother. She holds many city championships in volleyball and soccer at various high schools in Texas. Currently, she is teaching World History/Dual Language World History, Mexican American Studies, and U.S. History. In addition, she coaches girls' soccer at a large high school in Southwest Texas. She recently received her master's degree in History from an online program. She has had a change in political affiliation in the past few years.

Alex Rouse

Alex Rouse, holds a Ph.D. in History. He is in his mid-thirties and earned his master's degree in history as well. He is originally from the southern United States but has lived in the borderlands for the past 15 years. He has taught Spanish in the eastern U.S., English in Korea, and in Mexico. He left a job in administration to pursue public education, especially activism and advocacy for public school teachers and students. Currently, Alex Rouse is teaching AP World History, regular World History and Mexican American Studies. He is faculty sponsor for the Queer Student Organization. He has experience teaching high school in Tennessee, Korea, and Mexico before teaching at a university for five years in the years prior to joining a West Texas ISD and teaching social studies curriculum to include MAS.

Ximena Villa

Ximena Villa is a native Texan has been a teacher for 5 years. She has taught mostly in charter schools, middle and high school Social Studies classes. Her educational background is in History, more specifically Chicano/a history. Recently, she left her position as a classroom teacher to pursue a career in the library sciences. She is a first-generation college student and an activist. She has familiarity with MAS from her undergraduate course work in Chicano History and her own activist and political affiliations.

Shannon Tyler

Shannon Tyler is a new teacher in Southwest Texas. She is originally from the Rocky Mountain region. She studied English and Social Studies as an undergraduate. She had only taught for one school year before arriving in Texas two years ago. This is her third-year teaching

and her first-year teaching only Social Studies and not English. She enjoys Texas and the students in her classes. She is teaching at a Southwest Texas high school with over 3,000 students. This is her first-year teaching in this school to include the MAS class for the first time. She considers herself “Anglo-American” and has enjoyed being culturally immersed in her new hometown situated on the U.S. Mexico border.

Jose Lopez

Jose Lopez is a veteran teacher of over 35 years. He has taught in many parts of Texas and California. He has taught elementary, middle, and high school over the years to include a tribal school on a reservation and migrant students in California. He has taught at several large high schools in Southwest Texas. He is an environmental and community activist. For several years in his career, he taught in an alternative education setting, which is assigned to a student as part of disciplinary action against the student. Usually, it is still on campus but in a isolated classroom where the students are not allowed to interact with other students for a set amount of time.

Mauricio Gomez

Mauricio Gomez is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for 15 years at the same West Texas ISD high school. He earned a bachelor’s degree in History with a minor in Education. Mauricio has taught every social studies class in the high school curriculum. He identifies as Chicano and wanted to become a teacher to combat racist and oppressive curriculum.

The following table shows the teacher participants' demographic information. In addition, drawing from their narratives, I identified participants as activist or non-activist educators based on Niesz's (2021) work. According to Niesz (2021), an activist educator is a teacher who is concerned with social justice issues in education and in their community. When activist educators in their communities participate in collective work and dialogue, they engage with existing social movement knowledge, produce new local knowledge to guide their work and circulate their knowledge (Niesz, 2021, p.8). In this study activist educators are in a teacher federation, involved in social justice and environmental groups in their communities. A non-activist educator is the opposite of an activist educator, i.e., not involved in their educational or social community related to social justice.

Table 3.1*Teacher Bio Sketches*

TEACHER	BACKGROUND	YEARS OF SERVICE	RACE ETHNICITY	ACTIVIST EDUCATOR
ALEX ROUSE	Ph.D. History	15	WHITE	YES
ANDREA GONZALEZ	M.A. in History	15	HISPANIC	NO
XIMENA VILLA	M.A. in Library Science	5	XICANA	YES
SHANNON TYLER	B.A. EDUCATION	5	WHITE	NO
JOSE LOPEZ	M.ED CURRICULUM	35	CHICANO	YES
MAURICIO GOMEZ	B.A. HISTORY		CHICANO	YES

Setting

Southwest Texas is affected by anti-CRT legislation due to the majority Hispanic demographic in the region's schools. To give some context to the demographic information of the site the following should be considered. The Southwest Texas region is 90% Hispanic, 2% African American, and 5 % White (TEA, 2020). Out of all Hispanics in the region, only 70% of them approach grade level standards (TEA, 2020). The teachers in this study were from all parts of the region's charter and public schools. In 2020, the average annual pay per job in this Southwest Texas region was \$44,000 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

At the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic school year Social Studies teachers that participated in the MAS Teaching Academy questioned how implementing MAS would affect the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) for the school year due to the anti- Critical Race Theory legislation that had just passed. I participated in that conference and was part of those conversations during department meetings on my campus. On July 12,2021 due to the items on the Texas capital agenda as well as voter suppression bills, Texas Democrats fled the state to block the bill from being voted on so as to not meet quorum. The result was that the bills were eventually voted on and passed because of Gov. Greg Abbott’s threats to arrest Texas State Democrats. The block was unsuccessful as the bills that were voted on included:

- [House Bill 3979](#) by Rep. Steve Roth (R-The Woodlands) signed by the Governor. Limits what social studies teachers are allowed to talk about when it comes to the history of the United States and the treatment of people of color.
- [Senate Bill 3](#) by Sen. Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola) reported engrossed. Removes requirements to teach that white supremacy is morally wrong and removes the teaching of people of color, and women.
- [House Bill 2497](#) authored by multiple Republican legislators, signed by the Governor. Establishes the 1836 project, which promotes “patriotic education.”
- [Senate Bill 2202](#) by Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), referred to House Public Education Committee. Bans the teaching that “one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex; (2) an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.” (Silva-Fernandez, 2021)

As noted by experts and laymen, the term “Critical Race Theory” does not appear in HB 3979 and the bill misuses the term CRT. As previously noted, Critical Race Theory is language that is utilized in this bill as a catch phrase for race and racism. Critical Race Theory is rooted in legal studies and entered the academic scene in the analysis of *Brown v Board of Education (1958)* (Silva-Fernandez, 2021). This political tension is like what has happened in Arizona and

California historically. Texas Senate HB 3979 passed and went into effect on September 1, 2021 (Texas Legislature Online, 2021).

Ethical Concerns and Trustworthiness

I protected participants by assigning pseudonyms and disguising the schools and districts for which they work. Protecting the privacy of teacher participants was of the utmost importance. Some ethical principles I adopted, as suggested by Zeni (2001) were: responsibility-keeping central the researcher's responsibility to her teaching/research community; reputation-portraying colleagues and students respectfully; and accountability-sharing data and analysis with participants and engaging their perspective. Schwandt (1994) states that connoisseurs in a research context have a heightened awareness or education perception- a particular kind of attention to nuance and details, to multiple dimensions or aspects-that come from intimate familiarity with the phenomenon. This relates to the use of testimonios to center the teachers' lived experiences and expertise in the field of education.

To ensure trustworthiness I used multiple strategies including triangulation (Miles et al., 2014), a critical friend (Gordon, 2006), thick description, and an audit trail (Glesne, 2016). For the data to be sufficiently triangulated I considered the extent to which multiple perspectives about a situation or practice were sought and analyzed (Klehr, 2012) in this case the implementation of MAS curriculum by six different teachers. My critical friend was my dissertation chair. In addition to pointing out blind spots in my analysis, they helped me monitor my biases and subjectivities. They raised questions to ensure my analysis reflected my participants' stories. This process was key since I was also a first time Ethnic Studies K-12 teacher of Mexican American studies during the first half of the 2021-2022 school year. Further,

as highlighted in the section below, I was clear about my positionality and prior knowledge, experiences, and biases in efforts to monitor them throughout the entire research process (Peshkin, 1989).

Jesse Arrieta - Positionality

I have been a public educator for 20 years from the middle school to college level. I taught for the Chicano Studies department at UTEP for 5 years before becoming a high school teacher for the last the past 12 years. As a Chicano Studies undergraduate from UTEP this informs my research interest in MAS for high schools. My area of expertise is Mexican American History. I taught Chicano/a Studies course at UTEP for 5 years after receiving my master's degree in History at U.C. Irvine in 2004. My undergraduate degree is in Chicano Studies from UTEP. I have taught at every level of middle and high school Social Studies courses, but much of my teaching is in U.S. History. I am a first-generation college student and was born and raised in Southwest Texas. I come from a working-class family, two parent household, with two older sisters. I have been married for 13 years and have four children, two girls and two boys.

I identify as a queer Chicana educator in a Texas. I have taught all middle and high school Social Studies courses to include U.S. History and other social studies topics. I currently work at an ISD as an Instructional Coach specializing in secondary social studies curriculum. I have only been employed in the ISD for one full (pandemic) school year. I have taught U.S. History, World Geography and Mexican American Studies at a school prior to conducting this research. I am mostly unfamiliar with the processes and procedure for curriculum implementation in ISDs, at the district and campus levels. I consider myself a first time Ethnic

Studies K-12 teacher of Mexican American studies in the 2021-2022 school year. I also taught Mexican American Studies in a Southwest Texas public high school for the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. I taught the course for the first time from August 2021 to the beginning of February 2022, due to accepting another position at different campus. Anti-CRT legislation was discussed in faculty meetings on my campus regarding how Social Studies teachers would eliminate discussion of race in their classrooms since race, segregation, and racism are part of the curriculum. Other discussions that came up were how the bill affected classes like Ethnic Studies, Dual Credit, and AP courses since those classes also discuss the same topics but are less regulated than traditional and elective courses.

Initially, I attended a summer MAS teaching academy by UT San Antonio which was online in which we learned about an initial foundational project called the Conocimiento project. The lesson plan is in appendix B. In this lesson teachers are to conduct a survey about their background and personal family history to investigate their personal biases and positionality in the classroom before giving the lesson to students. This is reflexive praxis. The Conocimiento project lasted several weeks and serves as the foundational grounding piece for the rest of the course. It is something that is referred to continuously throughout the course. I collaborated with other teachers who were teaching MAS for the first time and provided this lesson as well as other to those teachers who in turn shared the resources. This practice snowballed and led to more sharing of this lesson and other lessons. The following chapter will discuss my findings after conducting the interviews and subsequent theme coding.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies (MAS) teachers during the 2021-2022 school year in Southwest Texas. The U.S./Mexico border is a unique, culturally rich region, that is diverse, binational, bilingual, and rooted in indigenous history predating national boundaries. According to the 2020 census 11 million people live along the U.S. Mexico border (census.gov, 2020). The borderlands are made up of people of color with 50% Latinx. According to the Texas Department of Health and Human Service, the majority, 89% of the Southwest Texas, U.S./Mexico border residents identify as Hispanic /Latino compared to 40% of all Texans (Texas Health and Human Services, 2022).

The fight for Mexican American Studies in Texas schools began in 2013 when the MAS Tejas Foco, a part of the National Association of Chicana/o Studies (NACCS) began petitioning the Texas State Board of Education for a high school MAS curriculum to be adopted. The final approval for an Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies History course came in 2018.

In June of 2021, Texas Governor Greg Abbot passed HB 3979 which aimed at abolishing Critical Race Theory being taught in Texas public schools. To be clear, Critical Race Theory is not taught in schools and is not part of Social Studies curriculum (Zou and Kao, 2021). In the Texas Legislature of December 2021, SB 3 was passed to enforce the previous anti-CRT bill. SB 3 is more restrictive and broader than HB 3979, stating that the TEA has the authority to enforce how Social Studies will be taught in schools including race and racism, as well as a long list of prohibited concepts pertaining to social studies in K through 12 (texastribune.org, 2021). On August 17, 2021, a group of higher education professors signed a petition called “Declaration

Against Censorship from Texas University Faculty Involved in Teacher and Administrator Preparation in Response to HB 3979 (texasequity.blogspot.com, 2021).” This declaration speaks against hiding the truth and states HB3979 is a direct assault on academic freedom going against the purpose of education to help students understand and participate in an informed & empowered manner (Texas Equity, 2021). The research questions guiding this study were:

- 1) What are the experiences of first-time MAS teachers in Southwest Texas in 2021-2022?
- 2) How do first time MAS teachers describe the implementation of MAS curriculum?
- 3) How does implementing MAS curriculum for the first-time shape teacher consciousness?

Teachers’ overall experience teaching Mexican American Studies for the first time revealed many similarities in patterns and strongly interrelated themes despite interviewing teachers from various backgrounds, years of teaching experience, on different campuses in different districts, including public and charter schools. As I examined the experiences of first time MAS high school teachers, I identified three interrelated themes: 1) Building the plane as we fly it; 2) Dumping Ground; 3) Identity and *Conocimiento*; and 4) Taking the Wind out of Our Sails- Damper on the Momentum. Dumping ground relates to how the class was devalued and used as a filler for students who needed an elective during an athletic period usually last period of the day. Regarding Identity and *Conocimiento*, fostering *conocimiento* about one’s own identity is essential in preparation for teaching MAS class. At times this happened simultaneously as the student's analysis of their own identity. I will elaborate on each interrelated theme and related subthemes below.

“Building the Plane as We Fly It”

The first theme, “Building the plane as we fly it,” speaks to the many challenges related to implementing MAS curriculum for the first time, including lack of resources, lack of support, and overall neglect for the class. “Building the plane as we fly it,” which derived from manual coding, embodies the way teachers felt about their first-time teaching MAS during the 2021-2022 school year. The subthemes are a) Short notice /no notice, b) Background knowledge or lack thereof, c) Recruitment: fight for your right to MAS, d) Who should teach MAS: who decides, e) Lack of resources, Professional development, Lack of support/materials, and f) Sharing resources: throwing out a lifeline. These subthemes are the major challenges teachers reported causing anxiety and instability for first time MAS teachers.

Challenge 1: Short Notice, No Notice

The first challenge teachers identified is the fact that they did not know they would be teaching Mexican American Studies class until right before school started. One teacher found during the first week of school and others as little as one week before school started. This class was a new content for all the teachers interviewed which led to challenges in implementation of the course.

Two out of the six teachers I interviewed had no awareness or knowledge of MAS curriculum or that such a class had been approved for the Texas High School curriculum. Andrea noted, “I didn’t even know the class existed at first, but I feel comfortable with it now. I feel I understand it.” Shannon said, I had never taken any Mexican American or even Latin American course. For the most part, it was minimal experience that I had in any of it.” Shannon Tyler, who is originally from the Rocky Mountain region, reflected upon her positionality teaching MAS in a predominantly Mexican and Mexican American community calling it an

immersive teaching experience. She discussed how she felt teaching a majority Latino student population at her school, namely as “really eye opening.” She stated:

I say all the time (to the students) that they’re my teachers, that I’m learning from them because it’s something that they live and breathe and something that I have minimal exposure to. And I’ve spent a lot of time trying to learn the curriculum, immerse myself in it. But being with them, like I said, it’s what they live constantly, a lot of them, or most of them has taught me a lot.

Shannon noted that the course curriculum is relevant to the students. She did not mention that it was relevant to her besides being immersed in it. She mentioned that learning alongside the students allowed for a more collaborative type of class where students can discuss and share experiences. She noted that the class was unpredictable and fun: “It’s different every day. I don’t always know what is going to happen.” These two teachers’ experiences speak to the lack of preparation but also to the newness of the course. They are learning on the job which leads to the discussion on forethought, preparation, and planning for teachers. For this reason, it is important to have background knowledge and professional development related to the content area and TEKS. For the MAS teacher one out of the six teachers interviewed knew the curriculum.

Andrea Gonzalez and Shannon Tyler were notified at the last minute that they would be teaching MAS for the first time in the 2021-2022 school year. Andrea found out the day before school started and Shannon was told the first day of school as she had been scheduled to teach English courses. Her administrator told her, “Hey, something opened today, last minute, do you want to switch to social studies to fill this spot?” and she said, ‘sure’.” Andrea echoed the fact that she was also assigned to fill a spot and said that:

I don't think it was that anybody on our campus was selected (to teach MAS) because we had the background. We were just selected because we needed to fill classes. I think for me it was different just because I had a sports class, so they had to fill gaps.

Jose Lopez noted that in the second week of the semester, the class was thrust upon him. Jose's reaction was, "What? We didn't have time to prepare. I said, okay, and I called the people that I know." This is important if the class is thrust upon a teacher to have some background knowledge so the teacher has a foundation to build from, if the scheduling is going to be last minute, teacher training is essential for preparedness.

Challenge 2: Background Knowledge or Lack Thereof

The importance of having background knowledge is essential for any teacher especially teaching a new class for the first time. Typically, a teacher must have content knowledge of some kind in order to teach the course. Four teachers in this study had some type of background knowledge to help them in implementing the MAS course and two teachers had no background knowledge which made the implementation of MAS class a challenge.

To help them navigate the new MAS class, teachers drew from previous course work in undergraduate or graduate school, to help them navigate the first-year teaching MAS. They gravitated toward what and who they knew to survive the school year. They noted that they found resources from Houston, San Antonio and Tucson but would have appreciated a focus on local history to contextualize the class and make it more relevant to the cultural and regional space they were teaching in. To address the lack of resources and training due to lack of background knowledge teachers utilized previous training, teaching strategies, lessons, or related Social Studies TEKS. All the MAS teachers felt the class proved to be more difficult to teach

than just utilizing traditional methods along with one's transferable skills. Alex Rouse discussed how teaching Religious Studies and Women's & Gender Studies (W & G) courses at the college level helped him navigate a MAS class.

It's been interesting because I've gotten to familiarize myself with some content and teaching strategies, of which I really hadn't used much since I taught W & G Studies. In some ways it was kind of like polishing off tools that I hadn't used in a while. In other ways it's been new content.

Jose Lopez echoed the notion of using his previous university teaching experience to inform how he approached and implemented the MAS class. He said,

I taught a multicultural class in Colorado and that gave me perspective. Then I taught a senior level multicultural class at university for a secondary teacher preparation program. That experience gave me the foundation for how I approach MAS and continue to approach MAS.

Similarly, Andrea Gonzalez said she used her high school social studies and special education training to help her in the MAS class. She mentioned that:

Some of the TEKS require you to look at the vocabulary, so some of the TEKS are similar. Structure, contextualizing, cause and effect, a lot of the same skills are required for MAS as other Social Studies classes. So, I use those skills and instructional strategies for MAS that I would use in my other classes.

These three teachers of various backgrounds, education, and teaching experience drew from what was already in their teacher toolbox to learn how to implement MAS course content.

The MAS course curriculum is the antithesis of perpetuating racist and oppressive history from the existing TEKS by decolonizing official knowledge in the state curricula. Angela Valenzuela (2019) argued that MAS advocates for the destruction of the colonial matrix of power which consists of social, economic, and political legacies of colonialism and the “SBOE, the Texas State Legislature, and large corporate interests in education, that find expression vexed in Anglo Mexican relations and a predominant form of subtractive culturally eviscerating assimilation embodied in Texas Eurocentric social studies curriculum” (Valenzuela, 2019, p. 199). When teachers are gravitating towards what they already know and have been trained in, they may be doing exactly the opposite of what the MAS class was designed to do, by perpetuating the grand Eurocentric narrative that teachers have been trained to do.

Although four of the six teachers had a foundational background or some familiarity with Mexican American history, they described the challenges they faced as they got deeper into the TEKS as the school year progressed. For instance, Jose Lopez had followed the progress of the *Librotraficantes* in Tucson, Arizona, the passing of the MAS course by the Texas State Board of Education. He followed Gina Perez, the Texas State Board Representative, at the time, but he wasn't very familiar with the MAS curriculum. “Like I said, I'm learning right along with them. Another teacher upstairs in the STEM program is also teaching it and she's never taught it either. So, we collaborate with each other. We share resources.” Jose relied on his previous experience with all other high school social studies curriculum to aid him throughout the year. Similarly, Shannon Tyler discussed a project she did with her students in the first semester.

We did, like, a newspaper research project on the Battle of the Alamo and my students really loved that. So, it's a weird balance where I wish there was something like a textbook, but I also like the freedom of it. Mostly, I'm really grateful for the teachers that have helped provide me with the resources and at least the timeline of what I should be looking at, especially as someone who is coming into it not knowing a lot of the big points or issues that should be talked about in the class.

Participants noted that there is no supervision of the course from the departments, assistant principals, district, or at the state level. The level of freedom in the teaching of the course would be unprecedented by all standards, according to teacher participants who describe the lack of supervision, guidance, and support for this course. Mauricio said he was told the following by his administrator: "Well, that's an elective, you do whatever you think you're supposed to do. So, what I implemented was what had been shared." This speaks to the importance of knowing the content and having background knowledge in the area as teachers are navigating uncharted waters alone.

Shannon Tyler, Ximena Villa, and Mauricio Gomez discussed their frustrations with not having the background knowledge of MAS curriculum to create the activities necessary to teach the class. Shannon stated:

Sometimes I feel like it can get a little mundane. I struggle to come up with something that's really creative and engaging because I'm like, 'I'll give you this article and I'm not sure what else to do with this piece of information.' As a teacher, that's not...If I'm getting bored with it then they are definitely bored with it.

This elective class was not meant to be boring but instead to use the “master’s tools” to dismantle and decolonize knowledge and incorporate other epistemologies as valid and important (Valenzuela, 2019). By master’s tools, Audre Lorde argued that “the narrowest parameters of change are possible and allowable” (Lorde, 1984, p.1) The above example is precisely why professional development is crucial for MAS teachers. “Invoking Lorde, the “master's tools” is a metaphor for conventional theoretical and methodological approaches and “dismantle the master's house” as a metaphor for intersectional structures and systems of oppression that created and sustain health inequity in U.S. Black communities (Bowleg, 2021, p.3).” The metaphor for the master’s tools will never dismantle the masters house speaks to the need for intersectionality to address systems of oppression that perpetuate inequity in education and elsewhere. Training to teach ethnic studies courses requires specialized training. Cabrera argues, ethnic studies teachers are not born, they are made (Cabrera, 2019, p. 5).” Ximena Villa studied Mexican American History as an undergraduate. Even so, she said she was not very familiar with the curriculum:

As far as the curriculum goes, I had to almost outsource my knowledge of that. So, I looked at the TEKS, a sample syllabus that I pulled from some school in Houston. And then I attended the MAS Teacher's Academy out of San Antonio, Texas so I could really see what other people were doing, see how other people did it and try to find a community around it.

It is important to note that Ximena applied for a scholarship to attend the online MAS Teacher's Academy during the summer. Teachers said that they are expected to pay for this type of professional development out of their own pocket if they want to attend. Mauricio Gomez, who is the outlier, stated that he was very familiar with the MAS TEKS. “Before it was approved by

the state board, and finally by the state, the curriculum had been passed around for review, editing, and suggestions. I would get the emails and PDF's, so I was familiar with it by the time it was implemented," he shared. Mauricio added that resources were shared amongst colleagues and *conocidos* noting that there was no guidance on how to implement the course. ... "I had been in touch with the Mexican American studies program out of Tucson, Arizona, we just happened to be friends. I shared that with other people who were also teaching MAS." Most participants had taught several different topics in the Texas high school social studies courses, but it was evident that their repertoire did not necessarily translate to being able to implement MAS curriculum. Another challenge to implementing MAS for the first time was recruitment of students and teachers.

Challenge 3: Recruitment Fight for Your Right to MAS

There were two simultaneous occurrences happening with recruitment. According to participants, teachers who wanted to teach the MAS class must actively ask for the class from administration to be added to the master schedule and must recruit those students to prove there is an interest for the class to make. Furthermore, there were requirements placed on the teacher to create the course such as a minimum number of students, which is ten. Mauricio noted that at his campus there were different requirements teachers of elected classes had to meet in order to get the class. His administrator told him, "No, no, no, no, you got to have at least 20 students to make the class, we're sorry." Mauricio noted that other classes were taught with 8 to 10 students enrolled. Furthermore, he said, "Some of those teachers who had those small classes handpicked their students, and hand rejected other students, making it easier for them to have their preferred group." He noted that this wasn't just for elective classes but classes like AP, advanced placement, and social studies classes.

Four teacher participants were willing and even sought the class out conducting recruitment efforts in the form of fliers etc. to be able to teach the class. They petitioned their principals, wrote a proposal to teach MAS, and recruited students. On the other hand, there were three teachers who did not elect to teach it but were told with very little notice that they would be teaching MAS. The teachers who were told they will be teaching the course and who may or may not want to do so were Andrea, Shannon, and Jose.

The transitional stage of being online, due to Covid-19, and face to face simultaneously proved to be another challenge for MAS in its initial implementation. To justify the creation of the course at the campus level the onus was placed on teachers to send out an interest survey to prove there was a need and want for the MAS course. Alex Rouse sent out an interest survey to students in the spring of 2021, when many students were still 100% online. At this point, some students were face to face doing on campus instruction, but many had not stepped foot on the campus ever. Interestingly, Alex noted that only, “a handful of the students who were interested in taking the course actually got the elective.” Some teacher participants were told there had to be a minimum number of students to make the class, while other social studies classes were operational without meeting the same requirements. Mauricio Gomez discussed his word-of-mouth advertising on his campus:

Students spread the word. And specifically, during registration, kids show up at school, on campus, and they're in line, and I was just handing out fliers. And by that time, some of the kids knew me, so they said, 'Oh, I want to take that class with Gomez. I don't know what it is, but I want to take it.' And that's how it started.

Besides having to recruit the students for the class themselves, all teachers also had to contend with the lack of resources and the constant content creating throughout the year since resources like lessons and activities are not readily available.

Ximena had advocated for the MAS class for three years at her charter school, pre pandemic. She also sent out an interest survey to recruit students which was required of her by her principal in order to offer the class. She noted:

The first principal that I asked flat out told me, ‘Well, no, there’s no demand for it. No student wants to learn it.’ And so, the next year I requested it again and I heard nothing. The following year, I asked my principal again and he was like, ‘Okay, well, we’re going to send out a survey to students. And if we have the students saying they want to take this class, then we’ll add it.’ And they did and so I was able to create the class.

The issue with these teachers' efforts is that the students who they recruited would later be moved to a different class after one semester, in January 2022, without notice. This will be discussed in the “Dumping Ground” section. The willingness to teach MAS class and actively seeking it out are two very different things. Below teachers discuss why they think they were selected to teach MAS. Some teachers actively sought out MAS by asking administrators for the course and recruiting students and others were told they would be teaching MAS with very short notice which is related to how the teacher would be able to implement the course or not, based on their background knowledge and willingness to invest the time and effort required for a special class like MAS.

Challenge 4: Who Should Teach MAS and Who Decides?

This subtheme is strongly related to another major theme Identity / Conocimiento. When asking teachers why they think they were selected to teach the class the responses were either they needed a class to fill, or they actively sought it out. Alex Rouse noted, “I think it was a willingness; I think I’m friendly to the curriculum. I believe in teaching as a praxis, and so to me, it is...how do I say this politely? Fucking insane that we wouldn’t have MAS class taught in school on the border, and we wouldn’t be doing an amazing job with it.” He went on to say, “So it wasn’t that I sought out that role. For the record, I’m a white dude from [said state] so I don’t necessarily know that, based on my identities, I would be the ideal person to teach it, but it seems like the circumstances and my academic training and my general disposition, I guess, led me to it.” For the activist educators, who have a good rapport with their students, this is how they recruited students for their classes. The teacher identified as activist educators are Ximena, Alex, Mauricio, and Jose. The students knew the teacher and wanted to take a class with them. Word of mouth is the main way that activist educators were able to get the course. These four teachers are considered activist educators due to their involvement in their communities regarding educational policies and voting campaigns. These four teachers are striving to make education more equitable, especially for students of color. Ximena Villa had to plea to get the course on the master schedule before recruiting. She argued:

I wouldn’t say I was selected to teach MAS rather I forced my way into teaching MAS. For three years I asked to teach it. I sent my principal, every single year, a copy of a sample syllabus, the TEKS for the MAS education. And every year I requested to teach it. So, I really asked very heavily to bring this class to my campus and to really just like start it at my school.

As participants noted, this type of work is time-consuming and not required by teachers for any other social studies course. If it is a special topics class for instance, often counselors would help in the work of advertising the class and educating students about what electives are available and which would best suit their needs and interests. Andrea noted, “we can’t just go to the district website and click a lesson plan or activity for each unit. I rely on the materials provided for our curriculum, with three preps to teach.” Teachers mentioned, this class is unique in that most other social studies classes are equipped with content like activities, tests, projects, apps, etc. in databases that are easily accessible to both teachers and students through the TEKS resource system, textbooks associated with the curriculum, and through materials provided from the districts, to name a few. This is not the case with MAS, teacher participants who spent time conducting their own research for lessons and creating these materials for their class on their own which is also extremely time consuming and requires content knowledge. Andrea noted, “it’s hard to find good stuff. I look at the websites that were recommended to me, but it take time to look for something good for my class.” This sentiment leads to a discussion on lack of resources for MAS class implementation.

Challenge 5: Lack of Resources

The next subtheme is lack of resources, which is important to consider when implementing a new program or curriculum. It is essential to consider what is available to teachers and students regarding a new implementation of a curriculum like MAS which requires specialized resources like books and support like professional development, in its first year. When teaching any course, the number and access to resources can make or break the class (Maffea, 2020, p 2). The lack of resources in general was a common theme all participants discussed regardless of district and school. It is important to note that all the teachers interviewed

had other Social Studies courses to teach. All participants had one section of MAS and discussed the frustration in the lack of resources, professional development, lessons, activities, texts books, or support from their campus or district. Participants discussed how time-consuming gathering resources, planning and collaborating during the summer as they are preparing for the next school year. Alex Rouse noted:

We didn't really have the materials that we had requested, for that reason and other reasons, I've been frustrated in teaching the course. I basically found out that the course materials that had been requested by my colleague; I think the end of the previous year. We went more than halfway through the fall semester before getting these books that we had hoped to have for the course. It has been a lot of building the plane as we fly it.

This sentiment was echoed by all the teachers I interviewed. Some found it doable because, as noted previously, they had some background knowledge, content and curriculum familiarity, and or undergraduate or graduate course work to reference in helping them navigate the course for the first time. For most participants the notion of "building the plane as we fly" was a major cause of frustration and led to a steep learning curve as they taught the course. This was a weekly reoccurrence since the entire course was new to all and required the teacher to create the content, materials, activities, projects, and assessments on their own without the ability to collaborate with anyone else on their campus as they were the only teacher teaching it.

Challenge 6: Professional Development

Professional development for any teacher in any content area is essential to implementing the state curriculum, lesson planning, collecting resources and materials for the year and collaborating with colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 1). It is important that there is

sufficient time to learn, become comfortable and familiar with the content and process the information to effectively plan lessons, activities, exams, and projects before a teacher goes into the classroom on the first day of school. Shannon Tyler stated:

I haven't had a lot of social studies PD since I've been in this district. And a lot of it I've felt is geared toward general, U.S. History, Gov, and World History classes. And with the elective side, with Mexican American Studies, I haven't felt like there's a ton geared toward that.

The focus on the STAAR test has caused a tunnel vision which detracts resources like training, books, and funds and attention from non-tested subjects especially electives that are not in the core curriculum of science, social studies, math, and English. Alex Rouse noted,

I think the big problem in education is that the standards movement has created this environment where students know how to do school well, they learn how to memorize and regurgitate. They're not guided to becoming discursive beings... MAS class done well would challenge the concrete regurgitation model.

Teachers may not receive professional development or support for classes which are not STAAR tested. Also, the training that is provided for STAAR tested subjects is not necessarily geared toward what Alex Rouse calls becoming discursive beings. Analytical skills like writing with a purpose, cross curricular connections, and current event connections are minimally emphasized. When asked about professional development Jose Lopez said there was none. "None, I went straight from whatever's available that was forwarded to me by the folks I mentioned and the research that I've done. But I'm hoping that I continue teaching it next year and I plan on taking some PD this summer." The professional development he was referring to is the UT San

Antonio MAS Teacher Academy which has been referred to in this study. This is a PD he will pay for out of his own pocket.

It is important to note that many times teachers pay for their own professional development (Schwartz, 2020, p. 5). In the case of Ximena Villa, the one participant in this study who attended the MAS Teaching Academy online, she had to apply for a scholarship to attend. In other words, the training was not paid for by her campus or district. Ximena Villa noted, “Everything I created from the ground up for the entirety of the year really. I incorporated some of the activities that I had learned in the Teacher's Academy give through UTSA but even then, that only goes so far.” Creating activities, finding readings, and constructing curriculum is extremely time-consuming and may or may not be effective. The current MAS Teacher Academy for the summer of 2022 costs \$100 and is online. Andrea Gonzalez elaborated on this issue:

It's very limited what we can find for free because teachers put a lot of money into buying things for their classroom, including lessons sometimes. So, what you're saying is that the TEA is gonna create these classes. We're gonna teach classes in these high schools then we need to have free resources and free PD.

This type of training which is an investment in the teacher and the course is very economical compared to other trainings teachers are required to attend and compared to the amount of money invested in STAAR tested subjects to buy digital and online resources, like workbooks, online programs and teacher training. Not to mention the thousands of dollars that are spent on consultants to come to the districts to train teachers on STAAR 2.0, like Lead4Ward.

The structure and function of the MAS course was not clear, participants had all the autonomy in this course to do as they saw fit. In addition, if the MAS course is mishandled or

disregarded by the teacher like it is by the state, district, and campuses it could become problematic. Alex Rouse elaborated on the issue of importance regarding MAS:

I was reflecting on how the MAS course would be different if it were taught not as an elective, certainly not as an elective that was so disregarded and disrespected like it has been on my campus this year. If it were taught as your social studies credit, I think that it requires the course to be treated in a certain way. I acknowledge, I have not treated it like a heavy.

He noted he hasn't treated it like it's a required social studies course and how this fact could indeed be problematic but notes it is the reality of his experience at his school. The disregard of the MAS class is not only from the triple neglect of the state, districts, and campuses but also by the students if the teacher does not place an emphasis on the importance of the class, even though it is not treated the same as other social studies classes.

Challenge 7: Lack of Support and Materials

Mauricio Gomez, who is very familiar with MAS curriculum noted that he used his own materials from his undergraduate studies and emphasized the importance of networking with other teachers around the country to share resources. He said, "professional development was zero, they just figured, 'Oh, you know what you are doing...There's the class, you do it. Okay, bye.'" He noted there was no textbook and, "No, no support, no support at all." Similarly, Ximena Villa described her level of support for the MAS course as nonexistent, "What support? After the creation of the class, I didn't receive any support from administrators, from my department chair, from really anywhere." She added that this fact was "fairly sad" because no one checked on her or asked her, how or what she was doing in the class. She said, "it was like, 'oh, she wanted to do this. She can figure it out.'" Shannon Tyler echoed this sentiment by

saying, “From an admin level they’re basically, ‘Just do whatever.’ It’s not that they are not supportive. I just think that it’s not an emergency.” When asked about professional development Jose Lopez said there was none. “None, I went straight from whatever’s available that was forwarded to me by the folks I mentioned and the research that I’ve done. But I’m hoping that I continue teaching it next year and I plan on taking some PD this summer.” Professional development related to MAS was not existent in all teachers’ experience. Mauricio Gomez said he got nothing; no professional development related to MAS. He referred to his professional development masquerading as a celebration:

There was some kind of kickoff event at central office, and there was this popular Chicano/a author, and all these teachers showed up, and people in suits said, ‘Well, it’s a class now, we’re going to teach it here at the district now, and this how we celebrate this accomplishment.’ But it was more of a celebration than training, even though it was titled professional development. Beyond that, no support.

This is not the common sentiment as most of the other teachers interviewed had no idea about the MAS course and if they did there was no attention to the course offering. Andrea Gonzalez, said she had no professional development for MAS class, “none, whatsoever.” She said she went online and got resources from Houston ISD. “San Antonio had a whole bunch of resources too, but nothing locally. So definitely no PD, I’ve had to look for myself.” Since Andrea is an athletic coach of varsity sports, she had less time to seek out these essential resources and lessons for the MAS class. She referred to what she already knew.

All the teachers talked about how the focus is on STAAR tested subjects which are of course the priority on any high school campus because that is how the campus, and the teachers

will be judged. The feeling of the MAS classes not being a priority was echoed by all teachers. They said it was, “not an emergency, and not even considered as a class of importance.” Almost as an afterthought, a filler of space on a teacher or a student's schedule as opposed to something that is valued and important. Something deserving time, attention, consideration, money, professional development, collaboration, and at least the same treatment as other courses.

To keep their heads above water teacher did what they had to in order to survive, no teacher discussed thriving but instead surviving until the end of the year as they scrounged to find resources to help them get through the year any way they could. The main way this was accomplished was by sharing resources, which speaks to the essence of ethnic studies, creating community and resisting the status quo to challenge and survive against all odds, despite the challenges that are thrown at them.

Challenge 8: Sharing Resources to Survive: Throwing Out a Lifeline

As noted above, lack of resources refers to lack of materials like textbooks and or specific explicit lessons or examples of how to deliver the curriculum. Resources also include professional development, professional learning communities, support and guidance for the class, and time to plan, as well as collaborating with colleagues that also teach the course whether they are on or off campus. Shannon Tyler discussed her lack of access to resources as scattered:

So, when I first began, I got some resources from the teacher that previously held my position. But not much at all. She gave me some websites, some PBS type stuff, but that was basically it. I personally would have loved a textbook just to have something to guide me a little more. I'm pretty type A, and the state

standards are pretty broad...Getting stuff from other teachers has been the most helpful to me in terms of resources.

Resource sharing and collaboration amongst MAS teachers is so important because if this sharing wouldn't or hadn't happened the fate of the class could have been jeopardized. How would teachers have gotten through not only deliver the curriculum but also to accomplish the goal and purpose of the MAS course. Jose Lopez discussed that as practitioners in education we must support each other through collaborative practices like professional learning communities. He explained that the emphasis is on the tested subjects and accountability scales. He noted:

So Mexican American Studies is not a priority. I can understand that. But if we kind of embrace it and see the value of it and how much it's going to be able to retain these kids and spark something in them academically, not just culturally, that's the aspiration, of course. But the value of it is not seen yet and I see it in Tucson.

The excitement and the realization that the MAS class would finally be implemented in Texas public high schools was exciting to many, especially the activist educators I interviewed, but the realization of what the class would actually be is the opposite of what they hoped.

When asked about the challenges he faced implementing MAS for the first time Alex Rouse talked about his frustrations with lack of resources like textbooks, the less than thoughtful scheduling, and the changing of the student's schedules mid-year. He said:

I have come to realize that there's not a great regard for content mastery because I think it's not just with the MAS though. I think in general, we're doing a crappy job considering content mastery of who we assign to do what, because I think I've been able to do an okay job with MAS because my prior experience being

transferable in a way. I can imagine if somebody hasn't had that training, it would be maybe not great.

It is the administration's job to know what teachers' strengths and areas of expertise are. They can do this by reviewing faculty's curriculum vitae or merely asking them what their areas of concentration and study have been, to assign teachers to classes accordingly. As participants noted, many times, their area of expertise or topic interest are not considered when scheduling classes for students. Andrea Gonzalez agreed with the other teachers in saying that the sharing of resources is what helped her as a teacher going into the course at the last minute. She said:

I have a friend who used to be a MAS teacher and she helped me out so much, if it wasn't for her and her resources, I really would have been just based off how Houston had their scope and sequence. I would have probably been trying to piece together something using that, but using her resources totally helped me.

Andrea was able to tweak the materials that were shared with her and then in turn share those out to teachers she knew were teaching MAS for the first time. She continued, "if it wasn't for her resources, I would've been lost completely." She considered the help she received a lifeline, and we must consider the alternative, if the resources were not shared it could have had an adverse effect for students who mostly did not wish to be in the class to begin with.

This sentiment speaks to the issue of the MAS course being a "dumping ground." It is not known if this was the intention from the inception or if the lack of attention to the class was not taken into consideration, as well as the implications. The impact of that lack of consideration seem to echo and perpetuate educational violence inflicted upon Mexican American students historically (Bernal, 1998; Bixler-Marquez, 2010). The notion of the "dumping ground" class is

synonymous with the vocational tracking of students of color historically (Bernal, 1998, p. 127). Not offering culturally relevant curriculum and funneling students of color into technical courses instead of college tracking (Gonzalez, 2013, p. 87). Based on participants' narratives, MAS became a class that no one cared about. The way teachers talked about it was that although they deemed it important it became a low priority due to time commitment in finding the resources themselves, lack of planning time and collaboration during (PLC) Professional Learning Communities and lack of professional development and resources. MAS class exists but it has no value. Many times the students enrolled in such courses are of color, who have not been afforded quality education, especially culturally relevant classes designed to decolonize the curriculum and empower (Cabrera et al., 2013, p. 20).

Dumping Ground

This section discusses how the MAS class was treated and devalued. First the class is an elective, and as relayed by participants many students weren't given the choice to take the class but rather placed into it. The class was scheduled as a filler course to coincide with designated athletic times for students who don't play sports. Students were switched out after the first semester of the class, in January, without prior notice to teachers or students. The subthemes for this section are a) Filler Class and b) Scheduling Nightmares. These subthemes relate to how the course was treated in the master schedule of the high schools as a semester course instead of a yearlong course causing students to leave at mid-year and not benefit from the entire curriculum. Furthermore, this section discusses the high rate of student placements in MAS as opposed to choosing the elective course.

Filler Class

Like all the other teachers, Shannon taught the class 8th period when students are scheduled for athletic classes. She noted, “that maybe they add, drop, whatever. So, it’s a filler in a way for some students, some students stay, because there’s a lot of interest there or they want the elective.” Like all other teachers noted most of the students took MAS to fill a spot in their schedule. Shannon said some of her students stated, “it’s like, I’m just going to take this because I need something to fill this class period.” The class was available and there was a need to fill seats from the counselors and administrators' perspective. A common sentiment to counter that notion is that these border cities where MAS is offered there should be an interest in taking a course like MAS (Cabrera, 2013; Cammarota & Romero, 2014). Students should be on a wait list to sign up for the class in 85% majority Mexican American communities and schools but that is not the reality in any of the schools where the teacher participants work.

Mauricio described his disillusionment with the treatment of the course, which is also attributed to the students’ responses to the course. When he found out his class was made and he had 18 students he thought, “Oh, hell yeah, this is great. As the kids say, ‘This is going to be lit.’ But it had the opposite effect, everybody was quiet, it was awkward. And I would dare say that of the 18 or so kids who were thrown in there, were put there without asking.” He noted that he was excited to be able to teach MAS but then he found out the students didn’t want to be in that class but instead were forced. He said, “When that happens you take that choice away from them and they’re just going to rebel and stay quiet. ‘Screw you, I’m not doing anything.’ Okay, so that is what took the wind out of my sails, so to speak.” He noted that many students would be silently waiting for the class to end, day after day. The implication is that an elective is essentially selected by the student from a list, they get to choose what courses will fulfill their

diploma requirements. Some students chose it as a default because they didn't like the other options like Art or ROTC.

It is evident that most students did not choose to take MAS class but instead were placed in the course, again as a filler. Mauricio Gomez noted,

It was more a matter of scheduling in terms of ... Not in terms of what kids wanted to take or what they chose, but in terms of where they were being placed. So, they'd request a certain class, but they wouldn't get it because they'd be placed in something else.

Participants felt the way the course was scheduled is not a coincidence but instead purposeful and intentional. Andrea Gonzalez asked her students how they came to be in her class. She stated:

They all got placed in the class. So, no one like went and requested the class because they had no idea, they were even going to make a Mexican American Studies class. Mexican American Studies is taught first and eighth period because that's when we have our sports class. So, the kids who aren't in sports need an elective.

Students are required to take an elective which implies that the students choose the classes based on a well-informed decision about the course content and availability.

Jose Lopez discussed the scheduling issue and how it is related to coming back to face-to-face classes after covid. He discussed the fact that students had not been in a face-to-face classroom for a year and a half to two years and how that affected athletics which is usually scheduled the last class of the day, in this case 4th period or 8th period due to block scheduling for his high school to accommodate practices and games.

A lot of these kids signed up for the sports and they didn't have the necessary skills or background foundations to complete on the same level as some of these other kids that have been competing in organized sports. So, these poor kids had to find a place for them during 8th period or 4th period. So, they had just an abundance of kids that didn't make the teams, so they had to create the class for them.

MAS class served as a filler class to complete a teacher or a student's schedule, done without regard to implications such as the lack of enthusiasm / awareness from teachers and students.

Scheduling Nightmares

TEA Guidelines state the class should be yearlong for one elective credit (TEA, 2016, p. 1), which implies the same students should be in the course for the entirety of the school year. Instead, according to participants, MAS is on the master schedule for the whole year and students were switched out during the semester. In that case it would be a semester course given twice a year. The issue is that teacher participants were not given the professional courtesy to know the class was treated as a semester instead of yearlong course and the majority of the class would be new students with a few of the same students mixed in. Teachers noted, another issue is with the many TEKS for MAS class, it would be difficult if not impossible to get through the material in one semester, especially without prior notice. Participants indicated it's like having the rug pulled out from under you as teachers are trying their best to keep their heads above water with all the other responsibilities they have and classes they teach. Teachers expressed that it is counterproductive and counterintuitive to try to squeeze the prescribed content of a

yearlong course in one semester without notice, without training, without support, and without resources.

Furthermore, each school's master schedule is created by administrators but usually one assistant principal is the lead in this endeavor. This person will determine the teachers' schedules and student schedules. All teachers who participated stated the MAS class was scheduled for the last period of the day regardless of campus or district. In addition, counselors are responsible for scheduling students into the classes. Jose gave interesting reasoning as to how the scheduling nightmare occurred on his campus due to the number of students on his campus, approximately 3000, in which there were several sections of MAS courses taught by two other social studies teachers, for a total of 5 sections.

Throughout the school year teachers detail a lack of communication regarding how this MAS class was scheduled, I.e., semester course vs. yearlong course and how this would affect them and the students. Shannon Tyler echoed the sentiment,

It's supposed to be a yearlong course. And when the semester changed about at least 60, maybe 75% of my students left the class and I for a new of, two thirds or three quarters of the class was new, but then there was still 25% or so that had been in the class all year long. And that from what I've been told is most attributed to the fact that it is an elective course.

The TEA recommends the MAS course is one credit, the number of TEK are extensive, and the recommended grades would be 9-12 graders, a certified Social Studies teacher from 7-12 grades is required. This is an area of confusion as all public-school campuses scheduled the course as a semester long course, where students switched at the beginning of the spring semester. Some students remained in the class, but new students joined in and there were several schedule

changes throughout the year. Alex Rouse reflected on his frustration with the scheduling of the MAS course,

I had a small, but I guess, well formulated class at the beginning of the fall semester, and then they basically removed most of my students, including several who said that they didn't want to move because the scheduling didn't take into consideration a required course. I think it was professional communication. So basically, I think it's because of poor admin or incompetence, they treated the course like a one semester course with scheduling instead of as a full year course.

Teaching a one semester course and a yearlong course requires different types of planning and preparation, not to mention noticing that this is what the expectation is at the beginning of the school year. It is unprecedented to ignore this schedule and unreasonable to expect a teacher to adapt to it from one day to the next. This point is notable since many students won't get the rest of the curriculum delineated by the TEA due to being removed from the course at the end of the first semester. The literature, poetry, culture, and art discussions come at the end of the course once the study of Mexican American history has been established.

The only campus to have a year-long designation for the class was the charter school. The students who remained after a semester were few. Another issue that was discovered as the year went on is that teachers were not aware their students would be shifting and leaving the MAS course at semester and new students would join the course. Also, the class seemed to be a dumping ground which had a revolving door throughout the semester. The teachers identified many reasons why.

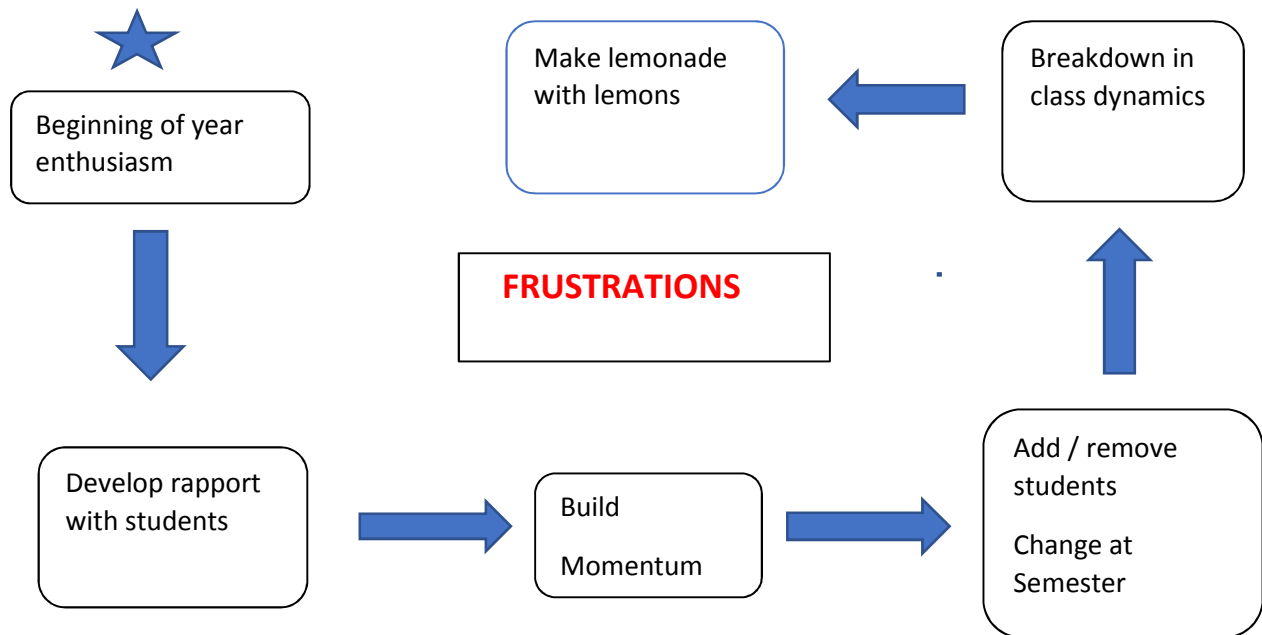
The planning for a yearlong course and a one semester course is like night and day. Considering all the TEKS in the MAS curriculum it would not be possible to cover all the

content in one semester or even due the curriculum justice without forethought and planning. The study of resistance in all its forms is done toward the end of class after the Chicano Movement has been discussed in the spring semester. Alex Rouse continued, “I think the course could be taught in a one semester format, obviously not necessarily covering all the stuff that we would want, right? Or doing the depth that we would want, but not having the pre-planning has made it really challenging.” When teachers refer to the challenging nature of the course due to lack of resources and the revolving door it translates to daily preparation for the course. Often daily since the resources don’t exist therefore or not allowing for the preparation and pre-planning and collaboration that would usually exist with another course.

Teachers mostly discussed the covid learning loss in relation to a loss in socialization not academically. This solidifies the need for culturally relevant curriculum to engage students who are coming back to the status quo or standardized high stakes testing. Mauricio notes, “They were worried about test scores, they were worried about enrollment. I was talking about their social collapse, a lot of disciplinary issues. So, they weren’t too worried about the Mexican American Studies class. ‘It’s like it’s fine, just leave it alone.’” The following figure shows common themes all teachers discussed in the experience as first time MAS teachers. This contributed to the overall frustrations of teaching the class and created challenges on many levels affecting the way the class was taught. The next section discusses how the scheduling of MAS combined with all of the challenges teachers faced including short notice, lack of resources, lack of professional development, and lack of support caused them to feel they lost momentum which they had invested time and effort to create.

Figure 4.2

Overall Frustrations



Taking the Wind out of Our Sails- Damper on the Momentum

It is important to note that all teachers interviewed has at least two other subjects that they taught in addition to Mexican American Studies, if not more. More than two preps can be common for a public-school teacher. According to participants, the focus is on STAAR tested subjects, then classes needed for graduation, and then electives like MAS. Teachers expressed their willingness and or desire to teach the course and the challenges of losing momentum can be detrimental to the teacher and the students. The subthemes in this section are a) Teaching Mixed Classes Last period of the Day: Recipe for Disaster and b) Class Dynamics Deteriorated.

Teachers described the challenges of the unexpected schedule changes and having to rebuild rapport with students as being a hinderance to them as well as students who were still in the class for the second semester. Building rapport is one of the most important pieces of any class but

especially a class that students haven't chosen to be in and that teachers didn't necessarily want to teach or know how to teach.

Shannon Tyler felt the damper on her momentum in the class affected how she taught the course due to losing most of her class who had another scheduled course. She lamented:

I had done a lot of work at the beginning on identity, and how do you identify? And weeks and weeks of that foundational piece, about identity and then all the new students had never heard about that before. So, it was like, do I go back? Do I just move forward? They're not going to understand what I'm talking about because I wasn't aware that they were going to switch the students out, until it happened in January. I didn't know that so some of them went to sports and basketball or whatever. And that was fine. I expected that like always, but not the majority of the class, I didn't expect that! So that put a damper on momentum that I had tried so hard to build, it went down after that.

Participants understood that class dynamics was an integral part of how the course would be perceived and how the curriculum would be implemented. Teachers felt once the vibe was lost, it was almost impossible to get it back and that affected the way the class turned out. Teachers were blindsided by the change in students at semester. As participants explained, if they had known, they could have done some planning and preparation to combat the obvious issues with changing students. Not to mention reluctant students who may not have chosen to be in the class and may not have an interest in or inability to see the benefits and value of ethnic studies courses.

The change in student's schedules and no communication with teachers that this would happen mid-year created a breakdown in class dynamics as teachers had invested the last 5 months building rapport and momentum with their students. Teachers began the year with enthusiasm and energy which was sabotaged once again as the wind was taken out of their sails at semester. Shannon Tyler noted:

That was really hard for me because I had this section of the kids that I felt we've built a lot of background that really is important for what's supposed to be the second half of the year. And I found myself referring to stuff we'd already talked about. And then, half my class was like, 'Wait, what's that?' And so, it's like, Do I go back? But I can't but I feel like I should because they don't have the background but then this other section of my class doesn't need it.

Shannon noted that it was extremely frustrating as she found herself trying to straddle that line constantly. The breakdown in momentum and enthusiasm not only affects the class dynamics but undermines the integrity of the course in its value and purpose.

All teacher participants discussed being enthusiastic about teaching the course whether they chose it and sought it out or not but soon concluded that it wasn't going to be an easy task to take on without the resources, guidance and support other classes provide. Ximena Villa said:

So, in the beginning I think I was very ambitious. I wanted to show my students everything I could possibly find that I didn't learn until I was in college. And slowly but surely when I realized that I had to be the one creating all this content and creating all the materials, that slowly faded away and it became more focused. So, it went from being very broad and I'm just going to give you

everything I can, so we're going to focus on this for two weeks and we're going to really understand it, and we're going to deep dive into different parts.

The deep dive into the specific and important details is what made Ximena more conscious of the fact the students didn't necessarily know that they were part of a larger narrative. And the sensitivity in realizing that she teachers at a school that's predominantly Mexican and Mexican American. The task of creating materials like activities, lectures, assignments, and projects for an entire year's work of course work is a daunting and time-consuming task. Even with the best intentions and motivation to teach the class to the best of their ability, teachers found it difficult and sometimes impossible.

The enthusiasm for teaching is at times hard to come by in a high school where teachers are being taxed daily amid a global pandemic, which at times called for teachers to simultaneously zoom with students while teaching a live class, for instance (Belsha, 2020, p.1). Finding and harvesting the necessary *animo* and *ganas* for a class like MAS should not be overlooked or underestimated. To learn that the wind was taken out of teachers sails intentionally and purposely speaks to the educational violence that MAS is supposed to confront and combat (Valenzuela, 2019). Jose Lopez also felt overwhelmed by the number of TEKS and was unsure about the depth that he thought he needed to discuss each of them. He felt a need to try and conquer the TEKS and he says,

I started off like gangbusters. I incorporated Black Lives Matter and current oppressive developments in our society and how it impacts the kids' generation. I tied in historically to what's happening. But then there's always the common element transcends history, and it's that oppression of folks. It's difficult to make

them see their station in life, perhaps what benefits and privileges they've been afforded, and they now perpetuate to contributing to the oppression of other folks.

Jose, like most participants in this study, expressed the quandary of how to teach the course regarding depth and level of detail. The issue was teachers and students were not familiar with or aware of the curriculum which was then compounded by all the other challenges placed upon MAS teachers. The most common theme amongst most teachers was that the students were placed in the class, which some students knew nothing about. Compounded by teachers who were creating the course content by themselves took a toll on them due to its time-consuming nature and difficulty finding quality curriculum to adapt for high school. Teachers were interpreting the vague TEKS and creating lesson plans, activities, assessments, projects, as well as rubrics for grading all this new content while teaching several other Social Studies classes.

When asked how Andrea's class was affected by losing half of her twenty students at semester, she talked about how she kept spiraling back to the identity piece from the beginning of the year. I asked how this affected class dynamics. She said:

I wish they would've had that part. Because we did a cute little activity where they created their own Funko Pop and they talked about their individual identity and that's something that we refer back to and I think the kids enjoy that. So, I haven't had the time to go back, even though we spiral back all the time, this idea of identity.

Andrea also talked about how the adding and removing of students affected her ability to teach a cohesive course, so all students benefit. She continued:

And then, oh, here's another new student, and now there's another new student. So now I'm back to 20 and we keep spiraling back to identity because it's important. I just wish it was like, they would respect that it's a full year long course.

This speaks to the lack of communication between administrators and counselors and lack of awareness about the purpose of course. Andrea discussed how she felt frustrated by having to spiral back to identity for new students continuously which was hindering moving forward through the rest of the curriculum. To compound the issue of giving identity its important emphasis in class, the way MAS was scheduled caused another challenge.

Teaching Mixed MAS Class, the Last Period of the Day: Recipe for Disaster

In addition to being the last class of the day, for all the teachers interviewed, their classes were made up of 9-12 graders. Teaching mixed classes can be a challenge as we consider student's maturity levels and exposure to various content in Social Studies (Song, Spradlin, & Plucker, 2009). Song et al. (2009), argued that teacher buy in, and preparedness are important considerations in multiage classrooms in K-12. The issue found in their research was that many teachers reported having almost no preparation for teaching students of different ages in one class at the same time. "Yet, some schools choose to implement multiage classrooms as a "dumping ground" (Song et al., 2009, p. 4). Other concerns that arose are from parents who think the quality of instruction will compromise as older students not learning on their level while younger students may be challenged too intensely (Song, Spradlin, Plucker, 2009). As teachers discussed how to approach the class curriculum many TEKS have to do with topics that an underclassman may not fully understand, especially if they have not taken other social studies classes previously. For instance, a freshman in high school would take a World Geography class

where they may touch on a few topics related to MAS, like genocide or culture but much of the class is physical geography. Shannon Tyler, said:

It's nine through twelve and it's, I would say a little heavier on upperclassmen, but really, it's across the board and that's been something that's fun, but also challenging. Like with a lot of resources and curriculum, if you for and look for it, you can find college-based stuff and give the same material to a freshman, a freshman who's also dealing with COVID for two years and it's their first time in high school.

Importantly, freshman students in the 2021-2022 school year had not been in a face to face on campus class since seventh grade due to the COVID 19 global pandemic. Similarly, seniors would not have been in the classroom since they were sophomores. The issue of learning loss was addressed by the teachers but not regarding academics but the social emotional maturity and factors that were disrupted during lockdown. Freshman students may not get the full benefit of the course or be able to appreciate the purpose of the class due to lack of exposure to the content area, lack of maturity, and the nature of being in a class with upperclassmen which could strain the dynamics of the class. Mauricio Gomez taught the class second to last period on a 45-minute schedule. He stated, "It's weird, the only thing I could think of is that because there are 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders all mixed up in there. They don't want to embarrass themselves or each other." This is especially true if a freshman student were to enter the MAS class in the second semester without the foundational identity piece many teachers talked about.

Andrea Gonzalez discussed the lack of connection for some students, to include those who are not Mexican American. But again, connections can be made for all oppressed and or marginalized groups, which MAS students and teachers came upon simultaneously during the

year. Andrea felt the students had a hard time connecting due to not knowing what to expect and then she invested the time to build the rapport only to have the students taken out of the course, “I lost a lot of kids the first semester and now I have a bunch of new kids second semester. Some of them are the same. And then I have a girl who was taken out, who said, ‘I wanna get back into your class.’” The student who wanted to return to the class could not because she was in a sports class, therefore her schedule didn’t allow for the MAS elective due to how and when MAS was scheduled. Andrea noted some other students initially despised being in the class but then had a change of heart. “He hates it. He doesn’t like it; he doesn’t understand why he’s in there. He’s not Mexican American. He doesn’t care to know about it because he’s not even from here. But now he loves it, because he thinks it’s interesting.” This change of heart came from learning MAS content and seeing how it relates to everyone. This revelation wouldn’t have come about without the scheduling errors which elucidated the initial issues students felt being placed in a class they didn’t choose but then realizing the value of the MAS class.

Regarding how the class was scheduled on Andrea’s campus, she looked over the scope and sequence and decided it was 12 units which she thought should be a yearlong continuous course. She noted her assistant principal scheduled it as two independent semester courses, I.e., semester 1 and semester. Her response was:

No, I think it needs to be a whole year. So, once we started looking at all the information I kept pushing for, no, this needs to be a whole year. But a lot of the other teachers who are teaching it are saying, no, let’s just have it just one semester so we can go through everything quickly. But I think there’s so much content that it shouldn’t be just a semester.

This shows the effects of not placing importance on the course and how this sentiment can snowball into a non-course or a study hall class.

Class Dynamics Deteriorated

Since the course is treated as a one semester class for most but a yearlong course for a few other students. Teachers felt this was a disaster when considering the logistics of teaching the class and how it affects the classroom dynamics in a detrimental way. The lack of consideration for a yearlong course with the same students and adding new students to an established course caused problems for new MAS teachers. Alex Rouse noted how the schedule change affected his classroom dynamics. He stated:

On top of taking out all these students that I had developed rapport with and had finally gotten some momentum with the course, they threw in two students who had no desire to take the course for the second half of the class. And so, it felt a little bit like the red headed stepchild from a scheduling perspective and that I'm trying to make some lemonade with lemons, right? But it hasn't been implemented in the most ideal fashion.

As explained by participants, starting over in January without prior notice posed problems. The students who had been in the class for the first part of the year lost time and energy due to spiraling back for the benefit of the new students in the class.

Furthermore, the new students missed out on the important work of investigating their own identity construction like the students did who were in the course year long. It was a recipe for failure of a teacher, students didn't get the benefit of learning that vast and detailed material as they should due to inconsistent and haphazard scheduling. It was

evident that the well-being of the students and teachers was not considered whatsoever. These examples speak to the triple neglect from the campus level to the district and state levels which is closely related to a lack of resources from a macro to micro levels.

Triple neglect refers to the total disregard and neglect from the state of Texas to provide resources, materials and support, neglect from the district by not providing guidance, books, professional development, and the campuses not scheduling the classes appropriately, not allowing planning time, plc, etc. to ensure success in the class for teachers and students. The lack of support from all three levels shows how Mexican American Studies is devalued and negatively affects class dynamics by not giving teachers and students all available resources to make the class successful and effective. Andrea Gonzalez makes a point which encompasses the idea of triple neglect,

I just think if it's something that was created by the TEA, because it was important enough to be created, then they should have resources and not just leave it up to the districts. I mean they're creating the TEKS, okay, so why not put effort and allocate money into getting people to create something good that can be used throughout the state? At least like a skeleton, you know, because again, like from one night to the next, being told you're gonna do this and there's nothing. Yeah.

Nothing.

All the teachers I interviewed did the best they could with what they had to work with. They all placed value and importance to the extent that they could. No one I spoke to have a total disregard for the class. On the contrary they were facing many challenges and struggles at all levels to teach the course. The next section discusses the importance of investigating identity

and engaging with the *conocimiento* process as outlined by Anzaldua (1987, 2002) in order to learn MAS from a decolonial perspective.

Identity and Conocimiento – Reflexive Praxis in CRC

In this study, *Conocimiento* which translates to knowledge, is used to describe a familiarity or awareness of facts that contribute to understanding. In this study it refers to the MAS epistemology (i.e., What we know, how we come to know it, and what it means to know). It is best explained in Spanish, “Es un proceso mental y emocional a través del cual un individuo capta e interpreta la realidad, a partir de diversos tipos de experiencias, razonamientos y aprendizajes” (Concepto de conocimiento, 2021). Translated, “It is a mental and emotional process through which an individual captures and interprets reality, from various types of experiences, reasoning and learning.” This notion is the basis of the entire MAS class, it grounds students and teachers in their own identity investigation to begin to discuss historical, social, political, and cultural aspects of MAS curriculum. It serves to decolonize the curriculum by situating students and teachers within the course content. This practice is highlighting and centering Mexican Americans in the study of U.S. history as well as placing the student within the framework of the curriculum.

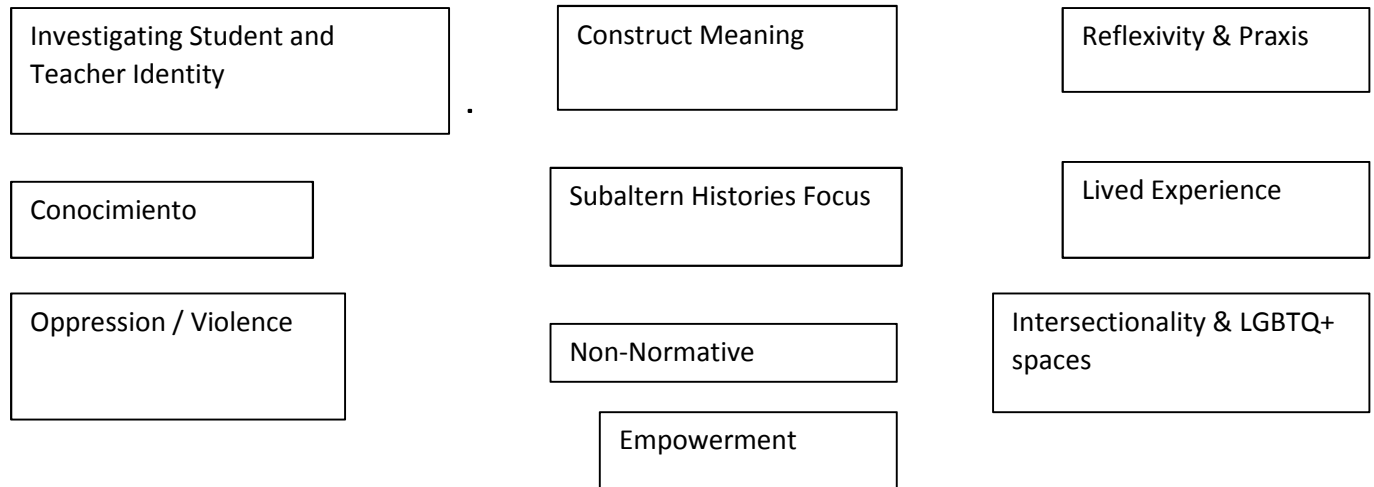
According to Gloria Anzaldua (1987) the concept of *conocimiento* is a spiritual journey seeking one’s life purpose and path to healing generational trauma. “Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you’ve programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your culture) to avoid (deconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 504). Anzaldua attributes an epistemological shift to the feminization of knowledge,

which aims to deconstruct binaries and question conventional colonial knowledge and categories to reach a reflective consciousness, an awareness. Identity is of the upmost importance when teaching a class like MAS so a teacher does the work of questioning their roots and privilege before entering into these personal and thought provoking conversations with students. Investigation of identity is an ongoing and fluid process that happens simultaneously throughout the course and in one's life. The subthemes are a) Activist Educators vs. Non-Activist Educators; b) Student/Teacher Despertada (Awakening); c) Intersectionality: LGBTQ+ Visibility in MAS class, d) Investigating Race, Class, and Gender; and e) Self-Discovery/Rediscovery (Anzaldua, 1987).

The following figure shows the topics that teachers discussed regarding identity and conocimiento. This section includes teacher and student identity reflections. The following figure shows some of the topics and realization teachers discussed regarding their identity which they in turn discussed with students. The identity work was being done simultaneously by teachers and students in the process of teaching MAS class.

Figure 4.2

Identity Factors



Activist Educators vs Non-Activist Educators

The difference between activist educators and non-activist educators may be when the teacher participant was exposed to ethnic studies and particularly MAS (Niesz, 2021). In the following examples activist educators were trained and exposed to Chicano/a studies as undergraduates or before in their homes. Teachers who had no prior experience or knowledge regarding MAS are not considered activist educators. This subtheme is related to *conocimiento* but in a different vein because that previous exposure had an impact on how the teacher would implement the MAS curriculum for the first time. Four out of the six teachers interviewed I consider activist educators and two are not activist educators. Activist educators engage politically, socially and educationally in social justice and equity issues (Niesz, 2021). This translates to their pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies. Activist educators sought

out the MAS class, felt it was important to teach, had some knowledge & background to be able to teach it and actively recruited for the class. Four out of the six have an educational background in history, I.e., master's and doctorates in History. The other two teachers who are not activist educators are Andrea Gonzalez, who identifies as Hispanic and Shannon Tyler who identifies as Anglo American. They both had no awareness, no course work, nor any background experience with Ethnic Studies. Although Andrea Gonzalez recently got her master's degree in history from an online program she went through a social and political transformation in the last few years regarding her political affiliation. Andrea Gonzalez discussed the issues she had with the fact that MAS has no set curriculum. She's been a Social Studies teacher and athletic coach for over 15 years. She emphasized that she had to push herself to seek out good material for her classes which allowed her to learn the material simultaneously with her students in addition to being forced to be more organized. She noted,

There's a lot of things that I didn't know that have been brought to my attention, especially within my own community, that I had no idea happened. So, I feel like it's opened my eyes to a lot of things that made me want to be more responsible within my community to get those stories told.

This is an important notion to note considering the purpose and value of the MAS course. The notion of making ethnic studies courses speaks to the transformation teachers experienced during the first-year teaching MAS. Alex Rouse said, "It's heavy, and given the political climate, I can see how you're walking into a mine field in a certain way. I for one I'm not going to be afraid to tackle that stuff...I'm just going to jump in there and do the best I can. But it's a struggle for me as a white dude approaching these topics that are not my lived experience." Teachers appreciate autonomy in their profession.

A teacher's expertise and background knowledge are what allowed MAS class to move forward and what will sustain the course in the future despite the challenges placed on teachers by the 'triple neglect.' The two radical activist educators Alex and Ximena I compare with Shannon who is Anglo American does not consider herself an activist and had no familiarity with MAS curriculum. In addition, the question of who should teach MAS besides the issue of who the class is for will be discussed.

Ximena Villa identifies as Xicana and Fronteriza and is an activist in her border community. As discussed above, she actively sought out the MAS class at her charter school and considered teaching MAS class an honor and privilege. She discussed her identity informed the way she taught MAS. During the interview Ximena noted that her identity is always front and center which is evident in her large hoop earrings and winged eyeliner, which she considers her aesthetic. She said her world view informed who she is and how she teaches, with an emphasis on subaltern histories.

I want my students to get a history and a perspective that is hidden, but still there. It's a history that has been so far removed from popular memory that it's no longer front and center. I really try to bring it out into the light for my students. I do that in everything I do, and I would say that's how I taught the class.

Ximena gave the example of teaching the Mexican Revolution from the perspective of women and peasants in the revolution. Learning the curriculum with students simultaneously and trying to find resources appropriate for the topic without proper training or background knowledge can be a daunting and may affect the delivery of lessons as well as the content presented.

Learning the curriculum along with the students had an impact on this teacher who had to struggle to seek out resources and who had to conduct her own research and investigate her own

biases without realizing that is the work of Ethnic Studies courses which she was teaching and learning throughout the year. As a non-activist educator, Andrea Gonzalez discusses the evolution or process she went through while teaching MAS as a series of realizations she hadn't previously considered. She goes on to say that,

I think teaching this class and really seeing, you know, the cultural side of it and then mix the political side of it and seeing like the great things that Mexican Americans have done, I think that's really helped to push me to be prouder of my background.

This eye-opening process in which she recognizes she wasn't ashamed of being Mexican American but just more disconnected from her heritage, and not something that she thought about often. This type of realization or self-discovery is the crux of the course and what allows the invisible history to be highlighted. Although more training is needed for a novice MAS teacher to ensure stereotypes aren't being perpetuated but instead thoughtful analytic questioning is being taught to investigate Mexican American culture, history, politics, and economically are studied. Andrea mentioned she showed two films in her class, "The Book Of Life" and Disney's "Coco." This could be problematic if not properly analyzed and investigated for bias and stereotypes. Cabrera (2019) argues ethnic studies teachers are not born; they are made. Andrea's experience shows that she had a willingness to meet the objectives of the MAS course but did not have the proper training to do so.

Reflexivity and praxis inform how a teacher will place value on the course as more than just curriculum to be espoused for a test. This idea spills over into investigating student identity and the relationship between teacher and student in a Mexican American Studies class which is situated on the U.S. Mexico border. Jose Lopez, a veteran teacher of more than 30 years, who I

consider an activist educator, reflects on how teaching MAS forced him to consider his role in the classroom by reflecting on how we came to be in a place and the fact that many people are several generations removed from their Mexican roots. Jose says,

I didn't realize how ignorant I was. The whole thing about accommodation or assimilation, right? I thought I had some pretty in-depth knowledge about the Chicano Movement, but, boy, did I learn...But I think as teachers, we'll look at ourselves and see how complicit we are in a system that's continuously eroding even the democratic values. So no, I think it's one of the classes that everyone should take.

Even though Jose had some familiarity with Mexican American history he discovered he was ignorant to many details and specific things about the Chicano Movement, namely, but said his opportunity teaching the class to learn in depth information about it and preserve democratic values in the process. Many teachers are considering the question of their role in the classroom as we are seeing a mass exodus of teachers from the field of education in this country amidst the global pandemic.

When asked about the implementation of the class there was a stark difference in a teacher's ability to come up with the necessary resources to teach the class back on educational and background knowledge. Ximena Villa acknowledged her privilege of being able to use her expertise and undergraduate and graduate education to help her navigate the class for the first time.

Now, I recognize that's a privilege to do so, to be able to say like, 'Oh, I'm just going to pull out this book that I read in grad school and find it.' And I know a lot

of teachers don't have that. So, I had to really do my own research and do my own lesson planning, do my own activity creation, Power Points, workshops.

The examples of educators who are not familiar at all with the curriculum and those who are is an important factor to consider as there was no professional development or guidance for the first-time implementation of this class. Activist educators took on a more proactive approach to meeting the challenges of teaching MAS as they understood the purpose and importance of the class. Teachers continue to have to seek out their own professional development for this class and as I noted some teachers are given no notice or very short notice that they are teaching MAS before the new school year begins. Ximena still had to invest a considerable amount of time into the MAS class despite having a solid background and foundation in the content, maybe not the TEKS per say, but she was able to pull something together to fulfill the purpose of the class that she sought out.

Ximena Villa discusses her own identity crisis as an activist educator as well and how we experienced this with her students. Her experience and background knowledge stem from learning Mexican American history as an undergraduate and her community work. She talked about why she initially wanted to teach MAS for herself but seeing and experiencing her students' reactions to the class she describes a shift in her thinking, "And in the end, it came to be, I wanted to teach this because they don't know this. I want to teach this because I see the reactions when they learn it. I see how it changes their perspectives about who they are as a people and as a community." The issue of identity and the identity crisis that so many describe as part and parcel of an Ethnic Studies course is also evident in the high school version of the course. Ximena noted:

I had quite a few (students) struggle with the identity crisis, at least at some point in my class, which is what I was really hoping for, to get them to think critically about who they are and where they belong in society and what they look like.

That was a big goal for me, because I had an identity crisis when I was in college, and I wish someone would have kind of opened my eyes a little bit sooner.” So, I had a student tell me, ‘Ms. My parents are Mexican, but I’m born here, but I don’t feel American, what am I?’ And so, like that constant, ‘who am I?’, that identity crisis that needs to happen, happened. I had a few students that do identify and belong to the LGBTQ+ community.

Considering Ximena’s identity crisis and transformation happened years before she ever taught MAS which informed and provided the purpose and the structure for the class. She had already experienced the struggle her students were feeling. She was able to guide them and ask the types of questions that would bring them to be able to situate themselves in a particular social, political, and historical moment.

This same type of instructional impact was not seen in Shannon Tyler’s experience as a first time MAS teacher. Mauricio Gomez discussed a common sentiment as to his reaction and opinion on who should teach MAS. He said,

I think it makes a huge difference on the teacher’s own background, how they implement a Mexican American Studies class. I remember taking a Chicana/o studies class in college taught by a white guy. And I’m like, ‘No, dude, no!’ He was a nice guy, and he was great, and he was intelligent, and everything is just that there are some things that are not conveyed. So, a person’s background has a lot to do with how effectively they can teach Mexican American Studies, because

even the lingo has a lot to do with it. And if you don't speak the lingo that kids do, they're just going to look at you as, 'Oh, there's another one,' and I think kids are looking for somebody to relate to in that sense as a mentor/teacher and not just another employee bossing them around.

This is an important notion to consider which not only speaks to relatability factor but also the importance of lived experience. How can you know what it feels like to walk in someone's shoes when you haven't done it? How can you know what it feels like to be oppressed and discriminated against when you have white privilege? The above quote was Mauricio's final comment to conclude the interview which speaks to how important he felt this point was made based on his lived experience and now as a first time Mexican American Studies teacher. That is not to say that someone who is not Mexican American cannot teach Mexican American studies or any other ethnic studies course but in a certain context and with a certain background it could take on a different meaning.

Student & Teacher *Despertada*

Whether teachers were activist educators or not, all teacher participants expressed that they learned new things while teaching MAS for the first time. Student teacher *despertada* means that as students and teachers are navigating the course together for the first time they are coming to important realizations about their own histories and identities. They are finding the similarities between marginalized people and are realizing many things about education itself in the way that the MAS class was treated as unimportant compared to other classes.

Andrea Gonzalez, who previously identified as a Republican discussed how teaching MAS affected her personal and political outlook. She situated her recent reflection on her own

personal identity shifts which continued while she was teaching the MAS course for the first time and of course are always in flux. She discussed the social and political climate in Texas for the most recent school year. Social studies came under fire before the school year began within an anti-CRT climate which she felt caused her to be more cautious in class, limiting what she could and could not say in class. She noted that she was not interested in pushing any political agenda but instead just states facts, but she noted there is a point that cannot be crossed. She said:

So that's been tough because of course the compassionate person in me wants to say, 'Hey, like these kids are still in cages. Why? What's being done? What did the last administration do? And what are we doing now? So as far as my worldview, I would think I've always been compassionate about other people, but I think I'm more compassionate to my own kind of people now.

The reason this example is important is due to Andrea's *despertada*. She experienced a personal and professional transformation as a first year MAS teacher. Expressing their concern for sharing current events was a topic of discussion and some teachers felt it was a risk worth taking. This is important to note because at the beginning of the school year teacher participants were afraid of coming under fire for discussing anything related to race, gender, violence, and oppression related to blaming a particular group historically. Teacher participants were told to avoid controversial or potentially controversial topics of discussion in the TEKS or in current events. Opening the floor in their class for this type of discourse had profound effects on teachers, as teacher participants noted. These two elements are the basis of the social studies, especially the U.S. History course in the 8th grade and 11th grade which are STAAR tested subjects. These are accountability courses with high stakes testing based on students' knowledge and ability to analyze 'difficult' topics like slavery, racism, lynching of people of color, systemic

racism, and systematic discrimination and genocide. In order to comply with the anti-CRT bill would be to change the established and current TEKS, in the end teachers mostly ignored the rhetoric and taught their courses as they had been doing.

Intersectionality Emerges in MAS Class

In this section participants gave examples of how intersectionality became apparent and part of the discussion on identity/conocimiento in their classes by noting a) LGBTQ+ visibility b) investigating race, class, and gender and the notion of c) self-discovery or rediscovery.

LGBTQ+ Visibility

According to participants, the MAS class forum allowed for multiple identities to co-exist and emerge, especially for students who do not identify as Mexican American. LGBTQ+ students also had a space to thrive and engage with a nontraditional curriculum in this space. Students were able to conduct a mini oral history project and find out about their families and how they fit into the history they were learning about in a particular time and space, in this Frontera region. Almost all six teachers discussed how MAS coincides with LGBTQ+ students in their class who found not only a safe space but a place to discuss their gender identity in addition to their racial ethnic reflections and investigations. Jose Lopez created a space where students can feel comfortable discussing intersectionality. He said, “I have these kids that are women, strong women in my class that bring the whole feminist and transgender LGBTQ perspective too. And it’s like it’s this common struggle. It’s the same struggle and so I’m looking forward to it next year.” The rewarding moments lead to the animus needed to push forward, to continue the work of this course for its longevity in Texas high school curriculum or not.

All the teachers discussed the visibility and participation of LGBTQ+ students in the MAS class. Discussion on identity opened a forum and safe space to discuss oppression and resistance of LGBTQ+ communities and specifically youth. Jose Lopez noted

I got a LGBTQ peace flag hanging prominently in my classroom. I've got violence against women, I got immigrants, I for all these movement placards and posters and flyers in my classroom I think it always keeps me grounded as to how I teach a history and become aware of it. I thought I was woke. It's a constant struggle to become aware. I was ignorant and oppressive at the same time. I always ask for gender preference pronouns in my class.

He was referring specifically to anti CRT legislation and anti queer legislation to include banning gender affirming surgeries in Texas and Governor Greg Abbot's passing of bills which would criminalize abortion as well as potentially jail parents of transgender children for seeking medical care for them. Jose added "I am so fearful at this moment because we are in transition. All this legislation that's going on especially in the state of Texas." This statement is regarding purposed anti- LGBTQ+ bills in Texas, namely those related to affirming healthcare for transgender youth and bans on youth participation in sports aligned with gender identity, which did not pass the house floor (equalitytexas.org, 2022).

Investigating Race, Class, Gender

In my interviews a common theme that emerged was the notion that the class was an open forum not only to learn Mexican American history but to examine where everyone in the classroom fits into that history. Andrea Gonzalez discussed focusing on feminist perspectives and female empowerment, especially for male students to understand. Andrea says,

I don't want to, I guess, lose the boys in the class because it's not a female empowerment class, it's a Mexican American studies class. But I think right now we do need to make our girls feel like they're important and like they matter, their histories matter. Just as much as Mexican American studies matters. So especially, with my nonbinary student, when we do talk about gender... I really try to be sensitive to that student's needs and making sure I use a correct pronoun.

Teachers discussed having more nonbinary/queer students who are out at school and may go by another name or pronoun as compared to how many students who were out pre-pandemic. Many teachers talked about their lived experience whether it aligned with their students or didn't they focused on subaltern histories and allowed for difficult conversations to happen. Ximena Villa shared an example of how students opened up and made personal connections with the curriculum she was teaching.

I had my students write a poem and it was a poem about who they are, how they identify, and their background. I had one student who is a cis male, but he wrote about his brother who is queer and the trauma and the insult and the problems they experienced with his family. He wrote about his grandpa and how he loved his grandpa so much, but he'd make fun of his brother. Just bringing in those stories and saying, like, 'This is a place for you to share your identity so that we can all be in this together.' So, we can all understand these various roles.

This speaks to Freire's practice of teaching as a two-way street. Getting to a place of investigating intersectionality in a MAS course is considered a great success. For students to be able to understand multiple identities and historical oppressions simultaneously is a win,

considering they are high school students and may have never been challenged to think in this way before MAS class. This is important as many campuses have a hostile relationship or non-existent space with LGBTQ+ students on campus. Teachers describe how their background and world view inform the MAS class.

All the teacher participants discussed the importance of the class whether they identified as Mexican American or not. Teachers comfort level and familiarity with the MAS TEKS content varies greatly. Considering culturally relevant curriculum and how it relates to MAS Shannon Tyler emphasized how important she thought it was to be able to take a class like MAS. She would tell her students over and over how important and what a unique experience it was to be able to take a course like MAS. She said:

You guys, don't realize, what a unique experience it is first of all to take this class at all and the fact that this is offered at your school, it's a state offered course.'

And then to experience it in this town where so much of our culture, as a city that I have gotten to dive into is so unique and such a blend of cultures. I think honestly, it's different here than other parts of the state because of this city culturally and other border cities.

Shannon and other teachers noted that the value and purpose of the course became very evident to them once they started teaching the course. Shannon did not have any familiarity with MAS at the beginning of the school year. Highlighting and comparing two teachers who are not born and raised in a border region but have come to live and work on the U.S. Mexico border and teach predominately Mexican and Mexican American students daily emphasized how important they thought the MAS class was to their students and themselves.

Two of the six teachers identify as Anglo American, Alex Rouse and Shannon Tyler. Alex Rouse is considered an activist educator and Shannon Tyler is completely new to the region and to ethnic studies. They had an interesting perspective as Anglo-American teaching MAS for the first time in a predominantly Mexican American cultural space. They both believed that MAS should be taught in this U.S. Mexico border region and should be supported. Alex Rouse noted:

I guess I have better appreciation of being a white person but being a minority in this region in a weird way. I think I have a better understanding of the challenges that our schools face. For example, intellectually I was a supporter of MAS. We should provide curriculum that is relevant to them or value their dominant culture to make academics relevant. If I thought, it was absurd that we weren't doing MAS at these campuses before. I now think it's absurd that we're not thoughtfully purposefully doing MAS on these campuses....

Alex Rouse argued that if the rigor and the structure of the MAS class was there like it is in AP or a core STAAR tested subject the purpose and value of the MAS class would be fully realized. Although, that may not have been the intention behind the creation of the course or how the class was imagined to be implemented. Cabrera (2013) argues that Ethnic Studies courses require specialized training, as noted in Chapter 2. Shannon Tyler, who expressed a willingness to teach the class, discussed her lack of content knowledge and lack of access to resources, says she came into the school year with an open mind to student's experiences:

I personally don't identify as Latinx or Mexican American, nothing that I had experienced. So, I knew going into that I had to be very open to what they (students) had to say. And that's been beneficial because it's made them open

their mouths more, because I was honestly quite nervous to teach it. I thought, I don't speak Spanish hardly at all, I'm trying to learn Spanish.

According to Shannon Tyler, her perceptions of the class are like those of students and teachers who are unfamiliar with the course (Cabrera, 2013). One misconception is that the class is a Spanish language class. This and other misconceptions combined with many other challenges related to teaching the course leads to many foreseeable and unforeseeable problems. The example above is attributed to lack of knowledge and amplified by misconceptions by those who are unfamiliar with MAS class. In this case an Anglo-American teacher who is not from the border region and has possibly no relation to and cannot identify with Mexican culture is expressing and stressing the importance of MAS class to a majority Mexican American student body but highlights a common misconception held by students and teachers, that MAS class is a Spanish language class. Not only are the misconceptions dangerous but defeat the purpose of the class. Speaking Spanish is not required to teach Mexican American Studies. The course is not perceived as part of U.S. History for Social Studies teachers.

Self-Discovery - Rediscovery

All the teacher participants had mostly Mexican American students but the initial foundational discussion on identity and *conocimiento*, as an epistemological approach to the MAS class. It is interesting to note that self-discovery, reflection, and reinvention of identities for both teachers and students is happening simultaneously. This speaks to Freire's theory in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. It also solidifies the notion that ethnic studies course is not like traditional course and the purpose of MAS was to decolonize the U.S. History TEKS and grand narratives of American exceptionalism. Five out of the six teachers assigned a *conocimiento*

project at the beginning of the school year. This foundational unit took on average three weeks to complete due to the multitude of investigations on one's own identity and family history including reflexive assignments, videos, writing reflections, and an oral history project. This lesson was the crux of the MAS course and served as an introduction to Ethnic Studies (MAS) curriculum. It also situated students and teachers in a particular historical space to begin investigating one's biases and power structures in the classroom.

Alex Rouse discussed an example of how the *conocimiento* identity project played out in his class. He shared an anecdote which occurred amid the *conocimiento* project. about a male upperclassman male student who called himself Joe:

We had a series of conversations that asked the students to reflect on the ways that they define themselves. At the end of that, the student who called himself Joe, decided that he wanted to be called Jose afterwards. Right? And so, it was just this stuff where the students in that case realized, gosh, I've got a name...I realize, wait a second, my family's all Mexican. I'm like first generation or second generation in this country.

Moreover, Alex Rouse talked about how students came to realize that they have this cultural experience that they haven't tapped into, which he thought was cool. He said,

I don't think it's my place to tell people how they should frame themselves, but I thought it was cool seeing the students, maybe for the first time, think critically about where they find themselves culturally and socioeconomically.

These types of interactions and investigations are so important in a MAS class which is an example of what a student who comes in second semester would miss out on if they were not present from the beginning of the course until the end of the class. It is a foundational piece that

the entire rest of the class is built upon. Without it the class lacks the deeper meaning and praxis it should have. Alex Rouse noted, “I’ve seen a lot of these sparks of introspection from the students, and of course, as an educator, that’s pretty delicious, right?” Feeling a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction to meet learning goals or this case the goals of ethnic studies courses like MAS is underestimated. This could make the difference for a teacher between wanting to continue teaching the course or electing not to in the future, despite its challenges.

This is part of a larger discussion on the importance of culturally relevant curriculum and the required necessary training for future MAS classes. In other words, experiencing what you will be teaching the students to experience beforehand. Asking students to question, reflect, and discuss difficult topics should not be done simultaneously. The difficult work of reflecting on one’s own self, history, and identity requires specialized training in order to be transferred to high school students who will engage with that challenging process.

Importance of CRC and MAS

The issue of teaching as praxis was discussed by all the teachers as well as the importance of teaching to show students how to think, not what to think. Mauricio Gomez wanted students to understand the shared history of oppression but also to make the connection from MAS content to current events. Mauricio argues that in the U.S. History textbooks a small paragraph is dedicated to Mexican American History and or Native American Histories. He consciously tries to combat the grand narrative by connecting the content of the class to current events. He said:

So, what I do, I try to get them to realize that the issues that we face, the issues that I bring up in class are issues that we have as people it’s like, ‘this isn’t just a

class, you all, it's something we're experiencing.' Ans so I try to get them to also realize that those issues also are experienced by other minorities or ethnicities.

Without proper training or any professional development at all, almost all teachers came to this conclusion and made it a point in teaching their first MAS class. It is imperative to understand the purpose and value of MAS classes before the class is attempted. But as we can see, even when it is not all teachers concluded that the class is important to have as part of the Social Studies high school curriculum.

The purpose and value of this course was never explicitly communicated to the teachers. It was something they came upon on their own without training or guidance. Alex Rouse discussed the lack of cultural awareness of students and how that affected the class dynamics.

The students don't necessarily appreciate that they are located in a specific community. I think what is interesting about this place is that I don't think that the students realize that if they were to step outside this town or this region, people's perception of their identities, or people's reading of them could be different than how they imagine themselves. I don't think that the students often are like, oh yeah, I'm from a group that has been historically oppressed. I don't think that they think about it that way.

When discussing how the course should be taught as teachers have complete autonomy to teach the TEKS how they see fit, Alex Rouse struggled with whether to teach the class as a history of oppression or something else. "I'm often torn because I don't ... I've also had moments when I'm teaching the course where I'm like, I don't want this course to just be, 'and then they took their land and then the rangers beat those guys up, and then the kids were beaten for speaking

Spanish.” He noted that it would be easy to teach the history of colonization and oppression, but he wishes for something more than that when students leave the course. He does note that students must learn the history of oppression as the course was designed to do.

Mauricio described his experiences professionally and personally teaching MAS for the first time as challenging due to an obvious disconnect between the purpose of the class and MAS curriculum and what students get from the course, who considers himself comfortable with the curriculum and is an activist educator, says, “It’s almost like they don’t relate with any of it, it’s just like, ‘great, another lecture, another assignment’ and it’s just another class to them. So, on a personal and professional level it’s been disheartening, I’ll be revved up and ready to show them something, and they’re like ugh.” Regarding the return to face to face after covid lockdown Mauricio continued, “I don’t know what happened during this gap, and I don’t think it has to do anything politics or identity or anything like that, I think a lot of it is literally just them being disconnected from school in general.” This sentiment is only amplified and exacerbated by the lack of support on all levels of the existence of this class, the triple neglect carries over to the teachers and the students. If the initial foundational piece of investigating identity does not occur, it is difficult to assume that the students will appreciate the purpose and value of the course. Alex Rouse argues, “It is also not really, I think, being treated as a real class. The last thing we want to do is reify the Mexican American experience by way of the curriculum.” Without Conocimiento, it could be just another class and if a teacher is not prepared to lead those difficult discussions the class could be dreadful as it is not treated as a real class, leading to a devaluing of the course by all involved either forcefully or by choice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of first-time Mexican American Studies (MAS) teachers during the 2021-2022 school year in Southwest Texas. After analyzing interview data, I identified four interrelated themes: 1) Building the plane as we fly it; 2) Dumping Ground / Scheduling Nightmare; 3) Identity and *Conocimiento*; and 4) Taking the Wind out of Our Sails- Damper on the Momentum. Teachers expressed frustrations and obstacles related to these themes. Building the plane as we fly it, is related to teachers' frustrations and challenges regarding short notice or no notice about being scheduled to teach MAS class. Also, the lack of preparation teachers had before teaching MAS. For example, issues with background knowledge or lack thereof, lack of resources, no professional development, and lack of support/materials leading teachers to share resources. Dumping ground referred to the devaluing of MAS class by counselors and administrators, treating it like a filler course of little significance. Teachers said their students were placed in the class even though they did not elect to take the course. The class was scheduled as a one semester class instead of a yearlong course leading to other issues, like a revolving door of students and an unstable classroom environment which is related to taking the wind out of our sails theme. Teachers described it as losing momentum and making lemonade with lemons.

I found that teachers had a little to no notice before having to teach the course, along with a lack of resources, professional development, and support. This proved to be challenging in implementing an unfamiliar curriculum. They survived and navigated their first year by sharing resources and helping each other to the best of their abilities. Finally, identity and *conocimiento* were at the crux of the first year MAS teachers' experiences as students and teachers experienced an awakening, or *despertada*. The theme of identity/*conocimiento* was most important as it set

the groundwork for the entire class. Knowledge, whether it was prior knowledge, acquired knowledge, ancestral knowledge or traditional Eurocentric knowledge were all important in that all aspects allowed for exploring notions of decolonizing Eurocentric and traditional Chicano curriculum. The awakening and journey teachers and students embarked on in the MAS class spoke to the praxis of culturally relevant curriculum (CRC).

By praxis of CRC, I mean doing the analytical, historical, interdisciplinary, and community work that is implied in Mexican American Studies courses. Some teachers and students discovered parts of their identity previously hidden from them and other (such as LGBTQ+) students felt safe to be themselves in the MAS class. This revelation came about through teacher participants testimonios, as I did not interview students. The revelations and realizations that came about are important as we are in an anti-CRT and anti-LGBTQ+ political arena, especially in Texas as oppressive policies in Texas continue to grow (Lopez, 2022; Zou & Kao, 2021; Texas Equity, 2021).

Interpretation of the Findings

Chicano Studies in its' inception was meant to be a philosophy and praxis (El Plan De Santa Barbara, 1969). Chicano Studies is Mexican American Studies. The reason the high school course was not called Chicano Studies is due to the political climate and the politicization of the term Chicano (Chavez, 2002; Sanchez, 1993). De-centering Eurocentric K-12 curriculum is the vehicle for Mexican American Studies to address issues of social justice and culturally relevant curriculum by including marginalized groups. This is done through the multidisciplinary lens of the subjects of MAS class (Mexican Americans) and as the participants, in creating and revising racist curriculum. It is a class where one acts out the prescribed curriculum by studying its dances, songs, crafts, histories, poems, murals, food, and languages

amongst other things, through action curriculum. Schults (2008) argued social action curriculum projects (SACP) allows teachers and students to engage in public spaces as they identify problems and issues that relate to their lives and experiences, while simultaneously crafting solutions. This means that the community and the institutions where Chicano Studies and Mexican American Studies is taught, should be equal partners, collaborators, and have co-participation, working and studying together to solve problems. This stems from Paolo Freire's notion of critical literacy where one engages in critical reflection and then acts. The implementation of Chicano Studies curriculum in the late 1960's through El Plan de Santa Barbara was a radical approach to change traditional notions of epistemology by incorporating indigenous and ancestral knowledge as part of a multidisciplinary curriculum for K-12 and post-secondary students (El Plan de Santa Barbara, 1969).

Currently, the activist movement with the implementation of MAS curriculum for Texas high schools is to decolonize Chicano Studies curriculum by re-indigenizing our understanding of ourselves and the purpose of Chicano Studies (Tellez, 2020). It is logical to try and close the knowledge gap between generations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans by treating MAS as part of legitimate U.S. History courses. Participants noted, their MAS students used primary sources to challenge the status quo of Eurocentric racist narratives by addressing omissions and/or errors in the prescribed traditional Social Studies curriculum. This practice was the only way to circumvent anti-CRT legislation while still protecting their jobs and any backlash from parents, other teachers, or administrators. Teachers were able to defend themselves against accusations of politicizing history by using primary sources to support the TEK. MAS also helps students understand the present day social, political, and cultural world they live in (Cabrera, 2014; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Valenzuela, 2019). Students can use what they learn in MAS to

answer the historical question, why is it the way it is today? Historically the treatment of anything outside of the grand narrative is treated with disdain, disrespect, and disregard and can be anti-subaltern and conservative. Studies from Stanford and the San Francisco Unified School District, show after taking ethnic studies courses, to include Mexican American Studies, students are more engaged, have higher attendance rates, higher graduation rates, and higher test scores (Saharsh & Ananya, 2022). If MAS is not implemented correctly, it is just optics and illusory progress. Based on my findings MAS continues to be marginalized and devalued like we have seen historically as noted by Bell (1980) in the *Brown v Board of Education* decision and like in the inception of Chicano Studies in the 1970's. Lack of funding for implementation led to lip service and policy rhetoric but no actual social change.

This has been the challenge since the 1970's, to allow the course to be legitimized and implemented to meet the purpose, which is to help students find themselves in history and to empower, according to El Plan de Santa Barbara. Just because the class is now allowed in high schools doesn't mean it is being utilized and implemented effectively as I found in my study. Unless as a discipline there is the decolonization of the curriculum it's not serving the purpose of Mexican American Studies by teaching the curriculum to the students it is supposed to serve. From its inception MAS original purpose to learn about the contributions of Mexicana and Mexican Americans from a historical, cultural, social and political lens through an interdisciplinary approach. It was to see themselves in the curriculum, to reflect the growing number of students of color in education, and to not only include but legitimize subaltern histories. Rudy Acuña (2012) argues, the purpose of Chicano studies in its inception, was to liberate through literacy. For over 50 years this has been the objective but by treating MAS and Chicano Studies as a dumping ground, study hall, and filler course the goals are not being

accomplished on a large scale as they should be. This is evident in the participants responses to how the implementation of MAS was not only disregarded, scheduled incorrectly, but also neglected. The issue of triple neglect by the state, districts, and campuses was felt by first time MAS teachers through the obstacles and challenges placed on them. Teachers saw the value of MAS class once they began teaching it. They appreciated the relevance and impact the class had on themselves and their students, whether they were familiar with the curriculum prior to teaching MAS or not. According to teachers the purpose of MAS class was not given a chance to develop, to prove it can be liberating, or not due to triple neglect, marginalization, and lack of support. Teachers never had the proper support, funding, or time to prepare the course to see its fruits. Based on teachers' experiences much more could have been accomplished to meet the goal and purpose of MAS class, but it was never intended to be implemented effectively due to the perpetuation of Eurocentric racist curriculum. I agree with Tellez argument,

That the early insistence on the notion of a (Southwestern) land-based heteropatriarchal Aztlán (Anaya 1989) posits a surface-level understanding of the Aztec peoples as the dominant culture, and in so doing has led to forms of soul loss or *susto* in the field of Chicana studies and in Xicana communities outside of academic institutions. This, along with “de-indigenization” and the imposed racial hierarchy of *mestizaje* that aims to erase or dilute specific Indigenous and African lineages, reinforces the logics of whiteness and colonial nation-state borders.

Together these structures have created an intentional distance from knowing and working with spiritual lineages and complex historical narratives that open pathways toward healing from colonial forms of harm (Tellez, 2020, p.1).

Revisionist historians, poets, artists, professors, and students are taking on the work of questioning racist, Eurocentric, patriarchal epistemology, after over 50 years of learning Chicano Studies curriculum a certain way. Its aim is to address the traditional sexism, colorism, and homophobia that existed in the Chicano movement and the colonial interpretations of indigenous knowledge (Tellez, 2020). As it evolves, the Chicano Studies movement has outgrown patriarchal exclusionary mode of resistance. Chicano Studies was supposed to correct errors and false narratives, historically and otherwise, to combat the Americanization process that attempted to separate students of color from their cultures and impose the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture on them (Valenzuela, 2019). The issue of banning books and MAS curriculum in schools harkens back to the violent cultural contact of colonization between Europeans and indigenous groups in Anahuac, historical and geographic region in Mexico, modern-day Mexico City (Tylor, 2004). Anahuac is a Nahuatl word meaning Atl (water) and nahuac (close to), i.e., close to water (Carochi, 2001, p. 506). This is an example how *conocimiento* of ancestral knowledge can shift the paradigm to decolonize the curriculum.

Teacher participants went from not knowing the curriculum to feeling like they should advocate for the class and for more teachers to teach it like Shannon Tyler and Jose Lopez. Similarly, Ale Rouse lamented about how poor of a job was being done with the class and how much better he thought it could be implemented. Andrea Gonzalez had the same sentiment to the point that she felt she needed to be more politically conscious in her classroom and in her community. Although teachers did not experience banning of books mostly due to the neglect they faced in their first year implementation of MAS the teachers did experience what Tellez (2021) argues is the distance from knowing. Teacher participants gave examples of how this unfolded in their classrooms and reflected on their own histories and experiences forced

them to face the reality of how devalued MAS class was, on many levels. Teacher participants went from not knowing the curriculum to feeling like they should advocate for the class and for more teachers to teach it like Shannon Tyler and Jose Lopez. Similarly, Ale Rouse lamented about how poor of a job was being done with the class and how much better he thought it could be implemented. Andrea Gonzalez had the same sentiment to the point that she felt she needed to be more politically conscious in her classroom and in her community.

Similarly, Anzaldua's *conocimiento* is recentered to include queer, Afro-Latino, and indigenous knowledge as our ways of knowing, collectively. Decolonizing the curriculum and ourselves relies on these practices of remembering. Teacher participants shared examples of how intersectionality became important by providing the space to discuss LGBTQ+ issues and a space where queer students felt comfortable and seen. Teachers discussed immigration status and how patriarchal Mexican culture oppressed queer family members. They discussed visibility in pop culture, history, media, and in politics. The *conocimiento* / identity project was the crux of the class, the foundation for every subsequent topic. MAS was a non-traditional class, and it incorporated the histories of the students taking the course. Most of the time the teacher's ethnic background reflected those of the students in the class. Four out of the six teachers identified as either Hispanic or Xicana/o, and two teachers identified as white. MAS teachers had the forethought to ensure all students felt included and comfortable by hanging rainbow flags in their classrooms.

The notion of *mestizaje* was another oppressive master narrative constructed to de-indigenize people (Gonzalez, 2012; Tellez, 2020). Part of this means incorporating the testimonios and lived histories of teachers and students into the MAS curriculum to prioritize that knowledge and make real world connections in the classroom. So then, the community is

reflected in the classroom through the study of this curriculum. The stories of elders are just as important as anything in a textbook, especially considering that MAS is being taught on the US-Mexico border, which in the early 1900s didn't have national boundaries or militarized borders. This is related to the themes of *conocimiento* in the sense of knowing yourself and the curriculum which is linked to the theme of building the plane as we fly it. For example, Mauricio Gomez has a background in danza and indigenous knowledges from his upbringing which he incorporated into his teaching of MAS. Similarly, Ximena discussed her aesthetic and her training in history which led to her conscious raising which occurred in college when she took Chicano Studies courses. She expressed how important it was for Xicanx students to experience the awakening and revelations about their own histories sooner, in high school, rather than waiting until college, because not everyone will attend college or university. The two teachers who identified as white also expressed the need for and importance of the MAS class for their students. They both stressed how they wish students and administrators took it more seriously and valued it more to at least the level of any other social studies class due to its importance as an area of study for their students.

Regarding the themes of *Dumping Ground*, Andrea Gonzalez, the teacher that knew the least about MAS curriculum was adamant that the course should be given more attention and funding for it to remain vital, which she discussed with her administrators at her campus. She went on to say that her understanding of politics and her experience with discrimination of the MAS class, helped her see how important the curriculum was for her to learn and apply in a real-world setting. At the beginning of the school year, she said she'd never heard of Mexican American studies before. She hadn't really thought about what being Mexican American meant before but teaching MAS made her more aware and led to more advocacy for the class on her

part. All teacher participants expressed a need for more advocacy for the course and more support to meet the purpose of the course. They were encouraged to look forward and try to make improvements in the course if they are scheduled to teach it again. Teachers expressed wanting to seek out professional development and networking to improve the course especially due to the nature of the TEKS.

According to participants, the MAS TEKS are vague, they say what to teach, but not how to teach it. With the proper training, which includes professional development, strategies, and resources, MAS teachers can accomplish the goals of the curriculum through a decolonial framework by seeking out professional development like the UTSA MAS Teacher's Academy, reaching out to faculty at universities and colleagues in other states, and scouring the internet for lessons and activities. MAS teachers networking became a powerful tool to circumvent the many challenges and obstacles first time MAS teachers faced. MAS class allows for open conversations where teachers and students are co-learners, thereby making space for difference in classrooms and elsewhere.

The implications found in this research are that the MAS class was disregarded, scheduled incorrectly, and set up to fail. It was never meant to be implemented by districts and schools in a meaningful way to fulfill the purpose of the course, like we have seen historically at the University level due to lack of funding, devaluing, and marginalization. Where Mexican American studies is needed are the most economically marginalized group of students and where there is also a lack of funding and resources (Aleman, 2006). Furthermore, implementing low priority courses like MAS becomes more far-fetched ideal due to the lack of funding and resources, even for the classes that are required. Since the class was requested by some teachers on campuses, they were met with a "you asked for it, now figure it out" attitude. Much like

Fukumori (2014) puts forth about the establishment of Ethnic Studies as a concession to quell activism the TSBOE seems to have done the same. There are no economic provisions or resource recommendations to properly implement the course across the state. Aleman (2006) argues the Texas state finance system aggravates inequities in schools by mal distributing money and reinforcing racial inequalities. This relates to how this study shows the process by which educational racial discrimination, marginalization, and lip service was paid to MAS classes in Southwest Texas like we have seen happen historically for decades in higher education to Ethnic Studies courses.

Another question that arises is did the students who left the course in the middle of the school year receive 1 credit or 1/2 credit? Teacher autonomy and trust usually have a positive connotation when discussing public school. In this case, the lack of support and guidance, could contribute to ineffective implementation of the curriculum, which is a disservice to students. Many times, teachers are micromanaged or even encouraged to use scripts to teach but in this case teacher autonomy and trust to teach MAS for the first time indicates a disregard for the class as many of the participants have noted. This also speaks to how a teacher sees themselves in the classroom leading to a discussion on identity and *conocimiento*. The reflexive work of investigating and asking questions (you may not have done before) of yourself is crucial to understand your personal history, your biases, and your positionality in the classroom. Not training teachers properly, giving them no notice, and taking their student away at semester implies the sabotage of the course. After several months of dealing with obstacles and challenges teachers began to realize the MAS class and by default the MAS teachers were experiencing discrimination and oppression they were teaching about in the MAS TEKS, especially regarding educational discrimination like segregation. They heard and felt first-hand

the stereotypes and notion that the class was not important enough to be treated like other Social Studies courses. They received no training, no help, and no support but were expected to teach a class they were unfamiliar with to a revolving door of students who mostly didn't want to be there. In the middle of the school year teachers realized this discrimination was systematic and not just a coincidence or lack of planning on an administrator's part. The marginalization was at all levels and it was a rude awakening for teachers who thought the class was important to teach and important for student to take. The seventh stage in *conocimiento* is *praxis* but one cannot reach that point without the proper training and process of reflectivity, healing and resistance required to transform themselves and the class (Fernandez & Gamero, 2018). This is usually studied from the student perspective, but we need to study teachers experiences with this process, especially those already in the field.

My study gives perspective on how to train Mexican American Studies teachers and how important professional development is when becoming an ethnic studies teacher (Cabrera, 2019). If teachers were trained properly MAS and other ethnic studies courses like MAS would be a threat to the status quo. We would see improved students' test scores, more social emotional learning across disciplines, more collaboration amongst students, teachers, and the community, higher graduation and attendance rates, and more critical thinking leading to more civic engagement and voting (Cabrera, 2014; Valenzuela, 2019). This is not occurring because the opportunities for social change through MAS would require funding, training, and support as opposed to what the reality is which entails neglect, marginalization, and devaluing of the class. MAS class is not supported in the most basic ways like other classes are, but instead used as a filler class which happens to align with new state curricula. This reality depicts a perceived option for an elective (MAS) that should be of interest to a high percentage of brown students in

Texas. Sadly, the implementation falls short of being effective or meeting the purpose of liberation and literacy.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation is the effects of COVID and online teaching, social learning loss, academic learning loss, and the fact that the global pandemic is not over. For the teacher participants being a first time Mexican American Studies teacher coincided with a global pandemic which created challenges in education which were unprecedented. Mauricio Gomez and Jose Lopez noted that Covid had impacted their teaching especially for a class like MAS due to a loss in socialization and relating to social issues like gun violence, the Black Lives Matter movement, and trauma students faced through the global pandemic. Shannon Tyler also noted the difference in her students noting that they haven't been in person at school for two years, which for her student population means, since they were middle schoolers. Participants' notes, this led to a lack of socialization and maturity to be able to understand heavy concepts dealing with violence, racism, and oppression in MAS class. This class was taught in person, not online. Due to the age of the students, mixed classes, and their prior social studies knowledge combined with social learning loss due to covid social emotional learning was slowed. The next section focuses on my recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

Recommendations for Policy

The main and most important recommendation is for funding to train teachers by experts in the fields of study that make up MAS curriculum which are history, literature, art, music, film, etc. MAS should be an option for a high school social studies credit which could substitute

World History or U.S. History requirement. Counselors and instructional coaches, assistant principals, and principals need to be trained in what the course is and how to effectively offer the class on their campuses instead of using it as a filler or a dumping ground. MAS should be offered in K-12, not only in high schools. MAS curriculum should be taught as the counter narrative to accomplish the goals of teaching critical thinking skills and civic engagement. Perhaps regional districts can also collaborate with local colleges and universities in conjunction with the TEA and SBOE to create a digital repository of resources and contact information to help influence policy and implementation at all levels.

MAS should be a vehicle to reclaim cultural identities by focusing on intersectionality and multiplicity to complicate the narrative and be more inclusive (Tellez, 2020). There should be community engagement and social action as culturally responsive pedagogy is supposed to be. Districts should have a group of experts provide professional development to teachers scheduled to teach MAS, perhaps in collaboration with a university who has a department of Mexican American or Chicano studies to facilitate the teaching of the curriculum, so teachers have the foundational background to teach MAS. The model campuses doing this work are UT San Antonio and UC Los Angeles (utsa.edu; ucla.edu). Schools should have a collaboration and/or partnership with their regional or local universities and colleges to provide the information and implementation to create a continuum from K-12 to higher education and into the communities. This can be done through service-learning projects and by providing mandatory training or coursework for secondary education teachers in the social studies.

The only existing MAS teacher training program is through the University of Texas at San Antonio, MAS Teachers Academy, which is put on every summer for teachers and community members to participate. I have attended for the past two years in a row and the

programming is meeting the needs of teachers and the purpose of MAS curriculum to teach in a decolonial way for the student's maximum benefit. The week-long conference is geared at providing resources, materials, and networking for teachers who are teaching MAS. School districts or individual campuses should pay for teacher conferences and trainings. Teachers should not have to pay for their own trainings but instead should be funded by their campuses or districts and it should count for professional development credits.

The presenters / participants are college professors who present their research in the fields of history, literature, music, art, etc., teacher scholars who give practical lessons that can be implemented in classrooms the next day, and community/student participants who discuss how to incorporate project-based learning and praxis in the MAS class. The breakout sessions are led by teacher scholars who give pedagogical strategies and decolonial lessons for students and teachers. I would recommend Texas universities implement programs like this one to help facilitate the teaching and learning of MAS from kindergarten through university levels and beyond. Another facet of the San Antonio MAS Teachers Academy is in person and online networking functions called "Cafecito y MAS" as well as one day symposiums held in the fall and spring. A mentorship program involving former and current Chicano and Mexican American Studies student consultants would also be beneficial to schools and districts. Student organizations for Mexican American Studies could be implemented on campuses which could link and collaborate with similar university organizations.

Learning the curriculum simultaneously with the students is not as effective as having the background knowledge and familiarity with the history and trajectory of how the MAS class is taught especially, taking into consideration the way MAS was scheduled and the disregard for the course. The data shows a difference in how a teacher implements the MAS course based on

their cultural and educational background especially if the teacher is of the same ethnic racial background as the students. Shannon Tyler discussed her lack of background knowledge of MAS TEKS but also the lack of familiarity of the racial, ethnic, and cultural knowledge of Southwest Texas where she teaches majority Mexican American students. She expressed her discomfort and lack of confidence because she, “never lived it, like her students do.” Teachers expressed the challenges of having to draw from your own background prior knowledge for MAS class without experiencing it themselves, namely Alex Rouse and Shannon Tyler.

Mauricio Gomez expressed that he didn't think that non-Chicanos should be teaching the course due to his experience taking Chicano Studies courses at the university level from white professors. Mauricio, Ximena, Jose, and Alex discussed how the training as historians and especially studying history at the graduate level prepared them with analysis and information to be able to implement MAS more effectively than the other two teachers who had no such training, Andrea and Shannon.

In fall of 2015 the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) teacher education department began a pilot program, as a response to the growing need to prepare ethnic studies teachers. The UCLA Teacher Education Program (TEP) launched an Ethnic Studies pilot program that prepares secondary Social Science and English/Language Arts pre-service teachers to teach Ethnic Studies classes in Los Angeles schools (University of California Los Angeles, 2022). Texas universities could implement the same type of program modeled after UCLA to meet the need for training of Ethnic Studies teachers.

Perhaps the regions and districts could house resources for teachers on their websites the way that other content curriculum is. There are lesson suggestions, scope and sequence, activities, and projects listed in the TEKS Resource System most Texas teachers can access

through their districts. In many places, MAS curriculum is tailored to reflect local Mexican and Mexican American history. I would recommend this practice continue and be bolstered by local experts and historians to further Culturally Relevant Curriculum locally. Another recommendation for teacher training would be to attend the Xito Institute (Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Learning). The XITO's mission is XITO strives to support the Xicanx/Latinx community through teacher preparation, social justice pedagogy, and community organizing. XITO's practices are steeped in Xicanx Indigenous epistemology which drives the intentions, structures, and practices of the institute (xicanxinstitute.org, 2022). XITO's vision is aligned with the purpose of this paper to address the needs in order to advance MAS education in policy implementation and in practice.

There is a lack of opportunities for teachers to improve their practices in meeting the needs of students of color through culturally responsive, authentic and research-based methodology. The Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing (XITO) is an urban educational institute that will fill a gap in Xicanx/Latinx schooling for students and practitioners with the goal of impacting future education policy (xicanxinstitute.org). Both the UTSA MAS Teachers Academy and the XITO conferences have been held virtually due to the global pandemic and to accommodate more participants through an online format. Next recommendations for practice are discussed to inform how teachers can effectively implement MAS courses.

Recommendations for Practice

MAS class should be scheduled as a yearlong course by administrators and counselors, allowing the same students to remain in the course for the entire school year, as the TEA

suggested. Students should not shift to another half year course in January. When teachers and students were surprised by a shift in their schedules at the end of the first semester of the MAS course, there was a negative shift in classroom dynamics teachers called, taking the wind out of their sails and losing momentum. Students received half the course content and were cheated out of contemporary history related to civil rights, important supreme court cases, poetry, etc. Seasoned teacher participants argued based on their experiences, students respond better to familiar topics than those which they have no prior knowledge. The second semester for any history class is more well received, more interesting, and more interactive than the first semester due to the comfort level of teacher and student with the curriculum because students have seen in remnants of it in other social studies courses. The second half of the class focuses on contemporary history, politics, economics, etc. Many teacher participants were looking forward to getting to that part of the class, hoping students would engage more with the content and teachers would feel more confident teaching something they had some experience with. This speaks to the data from two themes: building the plane as we fly it and taking the wind out of our sails: damper on the momentum. I recommend the course be scheduled and treated as a yearlong course for the benefit of teachers and students, to have time to explore the MAS TEKS by giving the class the time and attention it deserves. Furthermore, for the high school class, students should be 11th or 12th graders to take the course, so they are fully able to grasp the MAS TEKS as they coincide with U.S. History TEKS. Students have the benefit of studying pre-Columbian civilizations in World History, and the elements of culture in World Geography which would give them foundational knowledge necessary to delve into the MAS TEKS.

The disregard for this important knowledge could be seen as intentional or just an oversight but nevertheless denying students the course they registered for is educational

violence. Denying them the opportunity for the *despertada* could be intentional as more and more students take the course and may be affected the way college students are, in a transformational way, into action. Some districts in Texas, such as Donna ISD, offers the class as a dual credit course which is beneficial to the students so they can earn college credit while taking the course in high school. In most districts the class is offered as an elective which some teachers would argue is a tactic to not have it at all or for students to not take it. As seen in the data most of the students were placed into the class and did not elect MAS as a course. The way it was scheduled was as a filler for students that didn't want to be or couldn't be in a sports class.

Since MAS teachers are not given or offered any kind of professional development at all, I argue that MAS teachers must be trained in decolonial framework, otherwise they are just enforcing the same colonial narrative that has transcended generations. It is an opportunity to practice our agency and decolonize pedagogical practices. It is an opportunity to empower students and foster civic engagement. It is an opportunity to bring in community partners and create a strong sense of identity. For a MAS teacher to teach in this way they must have a strong sense of their own identity first which can be accomplished through specific training and professional development. Teaching MAS requires that we dig deep into who we are, and examine our roots, in order to explore our positionality before we present students the opportunities to learn about the past and present simultaneously. This is an ongoing process as was seen in the data. Some teachers were only beginning to connect with their heritage and identities while others were firmly rooted in decolonial pedagogical practices. The finding suggests and reinforces the notion that MAS is on the same trajectory as it has been historically. The existing literature shows, MAS is undervalued, neglected, and treated like a dumping ground but now it is in high schools instead of exclusively in institutions of higher education. For this

implication to be remedied and steered in a more positive direction more research needs to be conducted on this topic.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is an opportunity to interview more teachers in the future as more people begin to teach this course, especially teachers in other parts of Texas who may have a different experience. Future research could include a cross analysis of similar data from Tucson and California compared to Texas to see if there are similarities in the way teachers experience implementation challenges and to find solutions to those problems as well as share best practices. Perhaps looking at how other states implement their ethnic studies curriculum by analyzing resources should be examined to have a more efficient ethnic studies curriculum that supports teachers in the process and meets the goal of ethnic studies in Texas, like activist and scholars have suggested for decades. The focus of this study was not how different districts implemented the curriculum, in the future, it would be beneficial to try to add this aspect to my research to get a macro and micro perspective on implementation of the policy. The issue is the difficult to gain permission to acquire this type of research. Analyzing other states' implementation and curriculum development and data would benefit the creation of professional development and implementation strategies for Texas schools.

It would be beneficial to interview the teachers who attend the UTSA MAS teacher's academy to see if their experiences are different than the teachers I interviewed. An analysis of those who did attend the MAS Teacher's Academy delivery of the class as opposed to those who didn't attend. This would be beneficial to analyze teacher preparedness, networking and support structures, and troubleshooting which were major concerns for first time MAS teachers based on

my data. Because MAS is supposed to be interdisciplinary and consider different approaches to knowledge creation. It was not intended to be just a history class; we must revisit how this can be done through more training for social studies teachers who more than likely have a background in History. As well as collaboration with other disciplines and content areas like the fine arts, literature, science, and math. An analysis of the student experience can be added as another facet to this research to contribute to the existing literature about the benefits of Mexican American Studies.

Conclusion

This study was an analysis of first time MAS teachers' experiences implementing curriculum at 5 high schools in Southwest Texas. By elucidating the many challenges and obstacles first time MAS teachers experienced we can see there may be pitfalls and discouragement for teaching the class and possibly from offering the class. My research can help remedy that situation by providing a basis for future research to avoid these challenges and instead create a model for a more expansive network of MAS teachers. There has not been research done from the teacher's perspective, only from the point of view of students. It is established that taking Ethnic Studies courses increases attendance, graduation rates, passing rate of state mandated tests. Furthermore, MAS increases awareness of race, class, and gender analyses but it is hard to find research on teachers who are already in the field of education and are asked to teach MAS. There is substantial research on pre-service teachers and the benefits of mandating multicultural studies for example, but my research is specific to a particular region, in a particular historical, cultural, political moment. This study adds to our understanding of the

significance of implementing new MAS curriculum for the first time and how to implement it more effectively.

My study found there are many challenges teachers face implementing MAS for the first time like lack of professional development, scheduling conflicts, lack of resources, learning as they go, difficulty finding support from districts, campuses, and at the state level. The class is treated like a dumping ground with a revolving door of students who are placed in the class. There is more work to be done in the area of policy implementation and teacher training. It must be more than just optics, semantics, and/ or lip service but should be serving the population that needs ethnic studies because it could cause more harm than good to have it done incorrectly or incompletely.

To summarize, the experiences of first time MAS teachers in Southwest Texas were more similar than different. The teacher participants struggled professionally and personally to teach the class while simultaneously learning the curriculum. In the end they created an informal network of MAS teachers who supported each other over email to navigate the course for the first time without a guide but with good intentions to do the class justice. Teachers used whatever tools they had and tried to do their best to meet the goals of the MAS course. Despite all the challenges associated with implementing MAS for the first-time teacher expressed hope for the future of MAS classes at their schools. Jose Lopez said, “I think next year I’m going to have a more willing and different type of demographic. I think I’m going to have kids that are going to want to be in there.” Teachers don’t have any control over who is scheduled for their class, what class they will be scheduled to teach. Teachers did express that a return to normalcy was welcomed as schools are returning to pre-covid procedures and protocols. They hoped that

they would have more support now that school is slowly returning to what they were used to before Covid.

Based on teacher participants experiences, students are not allowed to elect the MAS elective course across various districts and campuses which is disheartening. Jose Lopez did not elaborate on how or if it is even possible for students to choose to be in the class, but he still has hope. In these last comments many teachers describe the hope they feel for improvements in the implementation of the course from a personal, district, and state perspective and the hope to teach the course in the future. Andrea Gonzalez noted she looks forward to teaching MAS the next school year and advertising the class to her student athletes like the strategy activist educators used to recruit students into their class and get the course scheduled. According to participants, the future of MAS in Texas high schools is bright despite the challenges from the state, districts, and campuses. The class will grow and the number of teachers teaching MAS will become more abundant causing a ripple effect of positive social action curriculum in Mexican American Studies classes nationwide.

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Vita

Jesse Soledad Arrieta is a public-school educator and curriculum leader of 15 years. She has taught from the middle school level to the community college and university levels. She earned her undergraduate degree in Chicana/o Studies from The University of Texas at El Paso, an M.A. in U.S. History from UC Irvine, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration from UT El Paso. Her research interests include implementing ethnic studies curriculum, critical race theory in education, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, and gender issues in education. Jesse is a mother of four school-aged children, who attend schools in the U.S. Mexico Border region of Texas. Her experiences on the U.S. Mexico Border drive her research and pedagogical practices.