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## Teachers' Perspectives On Decolonizing U.S. Curriculum For Latinx Through Ethnic Studies Programs At The Middle And High School Levels

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TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON DECOLONIZING U.S. CURRICULUM FOR LATINX  
THROUGH ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAMS AT THE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL  
LEVELS

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Doctoral Program in Teaching Learning and Culture

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2022

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THROUGH ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAMS AT THE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL  
LEVELS

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the implementation of an ethnic studies program with an emphasis on Mexican American Studies at the middle and high school level, in a district located along the Mexican/U.S. frontera. Ethnic Studies are a critical, interdisciplinary academic field of study that acknowledges that race, and racism are embedded in every U.S. system, especially our educational institution. As a critical pedagogy, ethnic studies validate and encourages the voices and viewpoints of the marginalized, while analyzing and criticizing dominant influences that promote “normalizing” of racialized inequality (de los Rios, 2013). At the center of ethnic studies, are the experiences of people of color, like our Latinx communities, who have been subjected to colonialism and imperialism. Further, these courses also address their response and involvement in defying and confronting European interventions (Valdez, 2020). This field of study, opposes “Western imperialism and Eurocentrism” by offering a “liberating educational process.” It provides a critical and cultural relevant pedagogy rooted in the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement of the 1960s. These two social struggles provided a desperately needed platform that exposed the effects of colonialism and imperialism in the political, social, and educational systems of our nation. To challenge local and state curriculum grounded in European experiences that utilizes Whites as a benchmark or the standard, I draw attention to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) to investigate the implementation of an ethnic studies program along the Mexican/U.S. frontera. By utilizing these theoretical frameworks, the goal is to advocate for a quality ethnic studies program; one that promotes social justice, critical consciousness, and a transformative, critical pedagogy. This dissertation encourages a paradigm shift to campaign for an inclusive, liberating, and relevant education by identifying, analyzing, challenging, and dismantling racism in curricula, teacher staff development, and pedagogical approach in education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### I. My Voice

As a Chicano, born and reared in the frontline of the racist struggle, I have become conscious of the social, political, and educational ways in which institutions have normalized a White Eurocentric ideology. For example, the U.S. Border Patrol was primarily made up of former Ku, Klux, Klan, and the Texas Rangers, and historically has implemented laws banning people of color like Asian and Mexican immigrants. City landmarks created by the dominant White race convey oppression, violence, and overt indifference. It is also apparent how the dominant White race has advanced a discourse, a curriculum, and education of patriotism that has caused an identity complexity and sometimes, self-hatred for many non-whites along the border, especially for Chicanas/os. Additionally, as an educator of 18 years, I have seen the White supremacist ideology extended through English only mandates, transitional bilingual classes that aim to subtract from the Chicana/o culture. Valenzuela (2005, p.28) affirmed that U.S. schooling subtracts from Chicanas/os in two ways, first by “de-Mexicanize them and second by “subtracting [their]...culture and language which [is]... consequential to their achievement and orientation to school[ing].”

### II. U.S. Demographics Attests to Dire Need of Ethnic Studies

The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau has revealed a Hispanic population increase of 1.9 million including an annual gain of 214,736 through July 2018, thus, increasing the Hispanic/Latinx population to nearly 11.4 million (Ura & Hanzhang, 2019). This shift in demographics has also led to changes in student population in public schools and communities. Therefore, the makeup of these changing communities attested to the reality that curriculum needs to be modified to serve the changing student population. At the same time, it is fundamental to implement a

different pedagogical approach, one that provides a more accurate representation of our country's origins, histories, and contributions through ethnic studies; one that develops students' critical analysis of their reality to change it (de los Rios, 2015).

Unfortunately, a white power structure and ideology continues to dictate local, state, and national curriculum while simultaneously excluding the Chicana/o experiences, their contributions, and their histories that connect to this country. U.S. Schooling historically has operated as a two-edged sword; it has indoctrinated privileged White students through an education that teaches about the disadvantage of others via racism, but not the correlation of the advantage Whites benefit from the discriminatory reality (McIntosh, 1990). McIntosh (1990) explains:

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass emergency gear, and blank checks.

Simultaneously, marginalized nonwhite children like Chicanas/os are subconsciously taught through Eurocentric curriculums to accept, practice, and maintain an inferior existence to a superior White standard. Through the implementation of a Eurocentric curriculum, White children have been educated, conditioned, and trained to think they are the true Americans, self-made, and superior. Woodson (2006, p. 5) explains this profound concept by stating the following:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.

This assessment of the U.S. educational system is also true for Chicanas/os. The same Eurocentric curriculum and educational policies drafted and ratified by the dominant White power structure, have instilled in students of color that they are foreigners, second class citizens, and inferior to the dominant White race.

Therefore, the dominant point of view that has driven U.S. policies has been a nativist idea that only people who “share the nations’ dominant ethnicity and religion are capable of constitutional devotion, while others must be excluded because of the dangers they are suspected to pose to the nation’s fundamental values.” (Goldstein, 2017, p. 491). Unfortunately, the marginalized are colonized to embrace their subjugation, and are pushed to social exclusion, which hinders their freedom (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Woodson (2006, p. 4) asserted this truth:

When you control a man’s [sic] thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.

Similarly, the Eurocentric curriculum has operated as an indoctrination machine for all students since it has served its purpose of maintaining dominance of the White race, while strategically colonizing people of color to identify, accept, and perpetuate a second-class citizenship existence. For example, some Chicanos have accepted a foreigner identity, an inferior disposition, and second-class citizenship status by adhering to what the U.S., White dominant schooling offers. The White Eurocentric curriculum has functioned in a manner that echoes the words of Paulo Freire (1970, p. 44) that asserted that when an oppressor exists, so must a dehumanized people; you can’t have one without the other. Curricula has functioned as a reminder to its citizens that this nation was founded, established, and set apart for a believed-

chosen White predominant race. It also enforces a marginalization of Black and Brown people to accept their role according to the claims made through a White Eurocentric lens.

A White supremacist ideology has maintained their superiority system by asserting that Whites and the English language are the standard of this country. Numerous of the original revolutionary founding fathers were attempting to create a nation on White supremacy but one founder provided a slight opportunity for those marginalized to seek equality, as Gordon-Reed (2000, p. 172) explains:

Of all the Revolutionary founders, Thomas Jefferson has figured the most prominently in blacks' attempts to constitute themselves as Americans. His life, in public and private, has long served as a vehicle for analyzing and critiquing the central dilemma at the heart of American democracy: the desire to create a society based on liberty and equality runs counter to the desire to maintain white supremacy.

Ironically, Jefferson, who was a slave owner and well-known for sexually assaulting slaves, provided the Declaration of Independence that expressed the need for a free and equal people. Whether his intent of "liberty and equality" was for slaves, indigenous people, or Chicana/os, or not, it still allowed these marginalized groups to challenge inequality and to ensure accountability based on democracy based on the U.S. Constitution. A democracy that encompasses ethnicity and the needs for ethnic studies.

Thus, as it was mentioned previously, the U.S. educational system has been a two-edged sword, one for colonizing people of color, but at the same time, the other edge of the sword implicated the possibility of liberating the people that have been historically oppressed. If most Whites have played out their roles provided by school standards, ethnic and Mexican American Studies may be the option for liberation of the oppressed by the status quo.

### III. Neoliberalism and U.S. Schooling

The implementation of neoliberal principles to educational reform was set in motion in the U.S. in the 1970s reacting to the economic calamities, the civil rights movement, “and the social improvement programs implemented under President Lyndon B. Johnson (Brathwaite, 2017 pg. 4). Based on a political, economic, and social capitalist predatory ideology and practice, it has controlled and exploited the poor, the working-class labor force, and people of color.

In U.S. schooling, the neoliberal agenda is apparent through the increase of corporate principles, curricular standardization, testing, the uniformity, and statistically measurable education and learning forms that have been central to the neoliberal agenda. The corporate transformation of public education into an exclusive industry, consists of “charters, vouchers, scholarship tax credits and de-unionizing teachers by transferring school administration and educators with low pay, low skill workers, and machines” (Saltman, 2016, p. 108). The privatization of education requires the relinquishing of school values to a different educational paradigm that influences the public to accept education as an exclusive consumable service. The education culture is no longer advertised and introduced as a learning process that involves the exchange of ideas, inquisitiveness, and differences of opinion. Now, the corporate message conveys the idea that education is an undisclosed expandable service, that the teacher is not regarded as a scholar, but rather as a deskilled...[transmisor]...of wisdom rather than as an intellectual (Saltman, 2016, p. 108).

At the Zapatista-sponsored *Encuentro intercontinental por la humanidad y contra el neoliberalismo* in August 1996, in Chiapas, Mexico, *Subcomandante Marcos* provided an explanation for what neoliberalism is by stating: “what the Right offers is to turn the world into one big mall where they can buy Indians here, women there... and he might have added, children,

immigrants, workers or even a whole country like Mexico” (Martinez & Garcia, 1997, pg. 1). This explanation highlights an accurate, yet exceedingly perilous reality for people of color, women, children, and the impoverished. “Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices which proposed that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade” (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). Neoliberalism exploits society encourages conversation that embodies “a ‘white/ Anglo/European standpoint ... the unmarked norm of Western rationality providing a naturalizing device for its regulation of others of all sort and kinds”” (Gyamera & Penny Jane Burke, 2018, 2 and Luke 2010, 44).

The irony behind this theory and practice is that while it claims to have the best interest of the community and education, it intentionally removes the influence, perspectives, and participation of those directly being affected. However, as the demographics of the country are drastically changing to a non-White student population, it behooves us to look for an educational reform that should be structured by those being affected the most, and not by corporate elites.

### **Overcoming oppression through Mexican American Studies/Raza Studies**

The Tucson Unified School District’s (TUSD) Institute for Transformative Education was an exemplary ethnic studies model in the K-12 curriculum that proved the quality of such a program. This Transformative curriculum allowed for K-12 educators to take part in the praxis of ethnic studies education (de los Rios, Lopez & Morrell, 2015). The Raza Studies courses which were implemented in 1998, provided the Mexican American Studies (MAS) Program, under an ethnic studies umbrella, and its goal was to maintain Mexican American students in school and engaged by providing a curriculum that emphasized Mexican American history, literature, and

art (Associated Press, 2017). The overall goal of this program was to instill a respect for humanity by providing a comprehensive quality education for all students, especially those who have historically been marginalized, and the results at TUSD were astounding (Stovall, 2014).

The MAS program in Tucson was not only successful in reversing a staggering school attendance and classroom engagement from students, but it also boasted a 98% high school graduation rate and over 70% of students who enrolled in Raza Studies, also attended a university or college (Serna, 2013). These results that the Raza Studies program was able to achieve in a short span of time, was not only impressive, but it was an accomplishment that had never been met by Latinx. Furthermore, the dropout rate for Latinx across the U.S. has fluctuated around 50%, and this program overturned that trend (Serna, 2013). These results provided data and evidence needed to demonstrate how oppressed minority groups, such as people of color and blacks, can overcome oppression, achieving awareness of their own being to transform the negative reality that has been constructed around their own existence as the other.

Unfortunately, the success of the program was not met with enthusiasm and support by conservative politicians. Republican leaders along with lawmakers, led by former superintendent of public instruction Tom Horne ratified HB2281, and later signed the bill into law by then Governor Jan Brewer, declaring the MAS program to be anti-American propaganda and out of compliance (Serna, 2013). Tom Horne argued that this type of program separates students by race. He blamed the program for teaching students that they were oppressed, and Marxist philosophy was being taught (Associated Press, 2017).

Horne further asserted through his support of HB 2281, that the MAS program promoted “the overthrow of the United States Government, resentment toward a race or class of people, were designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group and advocated ethnic solidarity

instead of treatment of pupils as individual” (Cabrera, 2013). Horne isolated his attack on only one ethnic studies program, the Raza/Mexican American Studies program by targeting the curriculum being employed. He condemned the use of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by labeling a Marxist text that taught students they were oppressed (Cabrera, 2013). Although HB2281’s claims were never supported with evidence, the program was still declared out of compliance and banned.

The social, political, and educational rights for Latinx in Arizona, were under siege in Arizona in 2010. Dr. Cintli described such assault by stating the following: “SB 1070 is an attack on our bodies ... HB 2281 is an attack on our minds... they are trying to kill our souls, but they don’t know where to look” (Serna, 2013). HB 2281 followed in the heels of the Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhood Act, also known as HB 1070, which allowed law enforcement to broaden their immigration enforcement abilities by requiring local police officers to profile, detain, and penalize people who appear to be undocumented (Nill, 2011). Therefore, by January 11, 2012, the racist attacks on the Latinx communities, and school curriculum and pedagogy took its toll. The Raza/Mexican American Studies program was eliminated regardless of student success, graduation accomplishments, and student school engagement.

In the end, the ruling that ended the program was ruled as racist and a violation of student’s constitutional rights (Depenbrock, 2017). Judge A. Wallace Tashima, declared that the state of Arizona had demonstrated discriminatory intent when it decided to eliminate the Mexican American Studies program (Depenbrock, 2017). Wallace Tashima (2017) asserted that “both enactment and enforcement were motivated by racial animus.” (Depenbrock, 2017). Yet a silver lining always exists within the traumas of racism and ignorance as the unjustly banning of



the MAS program in AZ inspired other states across the country to implement their own MAS courses.

#### **IV. Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to analyze and value the perspective and experiences of teachers that have taught Mexican American Studies and the effectiveness they consider these programs had. This research will identify and explain the implementation of Ethnic Mexican American Studies (MAS), its pedagogy and its impact on Chicano/ LatinX students.

#### **V. Research Questions**

A few broad research questions guided this study

1. What were the pedagogical experiences of teachers teaching ethnic studies
2. How was the implementation of the ethnic studies program?
3. How did teachers consider the effectiveness of the program?

#### **VI. Methods**

This research study applied a qualitative method research design. Qualitative research is a methodology that allows the researcher to access and value a significant experience of the participants and to collect detailed interpretations of participants (Creswell & Clark, 2004). To understand the perspectives of teachers that taught in the MAS program within a school district along the Mexican/U.S. border, this investigation intends to comprehend the educator's experiences and worldviews as well as their pedagogical approach they followed in the development of the MAS program in which they worked. This research study will include focus groups, a questionnaire, and personal interviews.

## **VII. Conclusion**

This chapter presented a general introduction to the research, emphasizing my own personal struggles as I developed consciousness of the social, political, and education that impact U.S. schooling. Recent U.S. demographics attest to the needs of change in curriculum and pedagogical approaches for the inclusion of LatinX and students who are underrepresented. The purpose of this research, research questions, and methods are presented.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Euro-Centric Curriculum, Pedagogies, and Perspectives: From Indoctrination to Decolonization of Latinx students**

The 1960s in the United States not only symbolized a decade of civil and political upheaval and racism, but it also represented an era of social, political, and educational progress for people of color through the Civil Rights Movement (Bixler, 1997). This decade was immersed with the desperate demands from Black and Latinx for change, equity, and eradication of social, political, and educational discrimination. Youthful Latinx throughout the southwestern U.S. staged walkouts that brought attention to racism in public education and challenged a predominantly Eurocentric curriculum that excluded the lived experiences, historical contributions, and stories of culturally diverse student populations in public schools. Youthful Latinx insisted on a more inclusive, diverse, and accurate representation of their communities, society, and U.S. history courses, through Multicultural Education and Ethnic Studies. Both, Multicultural Education and Ethnic Studies incorporated an intent to decolonize a Euro-Centric curriculum, teachers' perspectives, and students' points of views. It also challenged an educator's pedagogical approach by learning to oppose the coloniality of power within the school curriculum and its traditional pedagogies (Villanueva 2013).

In this Twenty-first century, education has centered itself on preparing students to be agents of change; however, concerning curriculum and pedagogical practices that have fostered and supported U.S. imperialism, and militaristic ideologies very little has changed. Villanueva (2013) and Grosfoguel (2005, p. 6-8) state that, "we still live in a colonial world, where metropolitan spaces are already polluted by a colonial history, a colonial imaginary, colonial knowledges, and a racial/ethnic hierarchy linked to a history of empire." Racist discourse continues along with racial underlying forces and groups that occupy the bottom most of the

pyramid. White European/Euro-American groups continue to be at the top of the racial/ethnic totem pole and this is highly displayed in school curricula, its pedagogies, and teacher's perspectives (Villanueva 2013 and Grosfoguel et al. 2005, p. 12).

In the 60s, Chicanas/os were dropping out at high rates and corporal punishment was commonly administered to Chicanas/os and students of color at a 4:1 ratio as compared to White students. Furthermore, by 1964, a youth Chicana/o movement, confronted inequities including the predominant White middle-class staff in their schools, corporeal punishment, "English-only classrooms, and Eurocentric tracking, curriculum and assessment systems for the predominantly Mexican American student body" (Cullison, 2019). As a result, Chicana/o students were susceptible to high absences, low high school completion rates, and academic failure. In this Twenty-first century, much remains the same.

It has been pointed out that the curricula in our nation have included predominantly White European/Euro-American authors who are commonly given priority over authors of color, including First Nation People. The histories, cultures, and viewpoints of people of color in this country have been overlooked and ignored, as well, and since the 1900s, the school curriculum has not changed from its Eurocentric foundation (Yang, 2000, Gutierrez, 1994 & Hu De-Hart, 1993). There is a need to decolonize curricula, pedagogies and perspectives that continue to use the Euro-Centric lens. An example is Villanueva's (2013) approach to her classroom environment. In her classroom she incorporates a sense of an optimistic struggle, where intellects are refined, concepts are cultivated, concepts develop, and certainties merge.

In contrast to the dominant White European ideologies that influence education, new approaches to critical, culturally relevant, and community-responsive pedagogy through what Augustine Romero, and Sean Arce (co-founder and director of MAS-Tucson for over a decade)

describe as the third space is needed. This pedagogical “third space” is influenced by the demand to confront epistemological and ontological understanding of the community educators are servicing (Villanueva 2013). This calls for a critical pedagogy that is relevant to the culture, language, and history of the students of color to decolonize such as Multicultural Educational Curriculum, Critical Pedagogy, and ethnic studies.

### **I. Decolonizing through a Multicultural Educational Curriculum and Critical Pedagogy**

The relationships between teachers and students are very much based on racial perceptions and attitudes attained within one’s environment. This has led colleges and universities across the country to focus their attention on a multicultural educational lens to integrate into their methods and curriculum courses. As a result, courses based on ethnicity, social status, sexual category, and language are merged, with the understanding that classrooms are a microcosm of issues facing our nation and the world. For example, negative ethnic attitudes and stereotypes commonly experienced in our country are reflected in the classroom. (Tettegah, 1996).

With negative racial attitudes and stereotypes against non-Whites throughout our nation, racism has not only permeated the country, but has profoundly impacted U.S. curricula as well. Recipients of biased attitudes and actions have led to groups like Latinx, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Asian Americans, and First Nation people to foresee and campaign for more comprehensive educational methods in curriculum, teacher expectations of learning, and home-school relations (Sleeter, 2018). According to Sleeter (2018) and Banks (1996) historically marginalized groups, including women and people with different physical and intellectual abilities, insisted that school curriculum and other aspects of educational settings be altered. These ideas and demands were

first known as multi-ethnic education, but later became known as multicultural education.

Multicultural education has advanced significantly at the theoretical level since the 1970s and 1980s, in the areas of collective and cultural rights. The earlier struggles multicultural education confronted and overcame gave rise to a newly found respect for Latinx and in the U.S. schools were making significant gains in reaching non-White students, improving their academic scores, and attaining higher graduation rates. (Sleeter 2018).

This new respect for a new way of educating non-Whites provided Multicultural Education to foster through a critical pedagogical approach with its goal to cultivate civic participation and intellectual development. De los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell (2015) assert that Latinx students have much to gain when they examine literature related to federal statutes that have a direct effect on their lives, their future, and their ability to mobilize as communities in search of social justice which is incorporated in Multicultural Education. In the last twenty years, scholars and researchers have learned that Latinx who engage in Multicultural Education and/ or ethnic studies courses benefit from them by developing strong social, emotional, and cognitive skills (de Novais and Spencer, 2019). Sleeter (2011) further states that:

A large body of research in higher education that examines the impact of various diversity experiences, particularly course-taking and interracial interaction, reports quite consistently that such courses have a positive impact on ‘democracy outcomes,’ since exposure to a systematic analysis of power and cross-racial interaction is newer to [also] White students than to students of color.

Multicultural Education through a critical pedagogical approach has allowed students, community leaders, and educators to foster critical learning through dialogue and activism. This type of learning has resulted in student interests being elevated to new heights, a significant improvement in absenteeism, and greater educational accomplishments. (Bañales 2019).

## **II. Decolonizing through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

According to Ladson-Billings, (2003), culturally relevant pedagogy is an education that enables children to academically, psychologically, and politically communicate information, abilities, and viewpoints by exercising cultural referents. Traditionally, low-income, minority, and mainstream students have lagged in comparison to White students in grade schools, colleges, and universities, and these academic disparities are enormous and overt (Gay, 2010). With inconsistencies in the social, political, and educational opportunities for disadvantaged and minority students, a shift in educational philosophy, through culturally relevant pedagogy, has challenged traditional education paradigms that adhere to European customs and ideology.

Ladson-Billings (1995) further emphasized that culturally relevant or responsive education is a pedagogy that implements a dynamic or synergetic relationship between home/community philosophy and school culture. More so, culturally relevant, or responsive pedagogy contrasts what she terms as assimilated teaching. She maintains that assimilated pedagogy acknowledges, supports, and maintains the status quo (Ladson-Billings 1992).

Similarly, Sleeter (2012) has stated that teaching and learning must be relevant to the students being serviced and this process must also acknowledge, accept, and implement students' primary language throughout the learning process (Paris, 2012).

Reza-Lopez, Huerta Charles, and Loui V. Reyes (2014), further states that the diversity of language in the U.S. borderlands has created linguistic obstacles and discord amongst ethnicities. Latinos in the borderland areas, have encountered a lack of social justice, and humanity based on their second-class citizenship ascribed status, language differences, and the deculturalization process they undergo as they assimilate into the white/European culture fostered in the United States. Educators along the U.S./Mexican border, along with policymakers

have been influenced by the increased population of Latinos, their accomplishments, and high dropout rates. The Latino population as of 2014, in the U.S. was at just about 50.5 million. For states like Texas and California, where the Latino/Chicano population is extremely high, the demand to provide them with an education that fosters respect for culture and language and social justice, has become a cause of concern. Both Texas and California have the highest Latino population growth rate of any group with the projection of being the majority ethnic group in both states by 2040 (Reza-Lopez, Huerta Charles and Loui V. Reyes, 2014 & Murdock et al., 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

With the Latino population increasing at a hasty rate in Texas, California, and the rest of the country, the greatest concern for educators, according to Reza-Lopez, Huerta Charles, and Loui V. Reyes (2014), is closing the achievement gap between Latinos and whites, and school completion for Latinos. The graduation gap between Whites and students of color showed a 20% graduation gap and the disparity in achievement and school completion is only expanding, rather than closing (Reza-Lopez, Huerta Charles, and Loui V. Reyes, 2014). In the attempt to close the achievement gap, local, state, and national governments have led and supported political agendas and policies, like the controversial federal legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ratified by George W. Bush and his administration in 2001.

NCLB was touted as a panacea for education and the achievement gap by introducing and implementing accountability methods for state instructional organizations and residential school districts. Contrary to NCLB's intent, the outcomes were devastating and damaging. NCLB, not only employed accountability procedures, but implemented a penalizing system that alarmed educators who serviced diverse populations across the U.S. NCLB's true intent was for schools



to fail, to create a crisis in education allowing for policymakers to introduce, and ratify a voucher system for charter schools, and the privatization of schools.

More so, NCLB was more strategically implemented to ensure the educational failure of English Language Learners (ELL) that include many Latinx. The fact that policies for ELLs are constructed and authorized by politicians with none or partial knowledge of diversity in the classroom, the students' realities, and the dynamics involved in schools and classrooms with these populations, affirmed NCLB's intent to be a disservice to Latinos, ELLs and to further widen the achievement gap between students of color and Whites (Reza-Lopez, Huerta Charles, and Loui V. Reyes 2014).

To further exacerbate the plight of Latinos in the U.S., especially in the state of Texas, most of the members who comprise the Texas State Board of Education, are members who are well off with businesses and community members who embody an authoritarian White, Eurocentric belief structure. For this reason, most of these board members are seldomly familiar with "diversity, marginalization, oppression, race, and/or people of color." (108) Finally, the input and the voices of educators who teach students of color, like Latinas/os or Chicanas/os, are rarely, if at all regarded or consulted by policymakers. Not only has the policy making process excluded students of color and the communities they reside in, but they have also disregarded the contributions of educators of color, and this calls for a concern for critical and conscious educators (Reza-Lopez, Huerta Charles, and Loui V. Reyes, 2014).

Culturally relevant education resulted from the social and political struggles during the tail end of Jim Crow (1877-1976). Jim Crow forced both de jure and de facto segregation of Blacks and other people of color in much of the U.S. South. The euphemism "Separate but equal," *Plessy v Furgeson*, 1896, opened the doors to inequality, and disparity in social, political,

and educational opportunities for people of color, including those of Mexican heritage. As a result, people began to demand their citizenship rights based on promises decreed by the U.S. Constitution. Latinas/os and other marginalized groups understood the importance of a quality education that was representative of their own experiences, culture, and influences. Yet, as promising as Multicultural Education and Multi-ethnic studies via a critical and culturally responsive pedagogy has proven to be, presently, few schools offer this type of education and those that do offer it are slowly dismantling it in their schools due to policies like the one in Texas Bill that questions race in the public classrooms.

### **III. Decolonizing through Ethnic Studies: Its Roots and as Community Service**

As a pedagogy, practice, and discipline, ethnic studies did not emerge until the late 1960s and prior to this time, no ethnic studies program, faculty, and almost no ethnic courses were offered at the university or college level. Ethnic studies in K-12, also does not have the lengthy history that these courses have at the college and university levels. Its origin is rooted in the Civil Rights Movement demands of African American Studies and was first implemented as a department at Berkeley High School in Northern California in early 1968 (de los Rios, Lopez, Morrell, 2015 & Obar 2004; Rojas 2007).

In 1968, the youth and student organization and movement in East Los Angeles, known as the Chicano Walkouts or Blowouts, were also very instrumental in the ethnic studies movement for the Mexican American students or Latinx. The Walkouts addressed community concerns regarding low school completion, language discrimination, a lack of culturally and community responsive pedagogy, and the disregard of the importance of student's cultural traditions and history (De Los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell, 2015, and Acuna 1996), issues that are still, at present, of concern for the Latinx community.

Additionally, ethnic studies courses for Mexican American or Latinx students are considered a pedagogy with a critical lens pertaining to race with the intent to expand educational achievement and social awareness for students of color, whose influences, and viewpoints, historically have been excluded and nonexistent in curricula. One justification for a lack of representation of students of color like Latinx, is the argument that when a curriculum focuses on the theme of race, it diminishes the progress of essential educational skills. Yet, De Los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell, (2015), refuted this assertion by affirming that teaching about race provides the capacity to make pedagogy more significant and engaging, with the potential to foster standard-based academic development across disciplines (p. 128).

At Roosevelt High School in the Eastside of Los Angeles and situated in a culturally rich Chicana/o and Latinx area, teachers have been provided the opportunity to create an ethnic studies program with a focus on students' history, culture, and humanity. The emphasis of this program is to implement an interdisciplinary method that counters much of the routine and scripted teaching pushed by high stakes testing and standardized curricula heavily relied on nationally. The ethnic studies purpose is to collaborate with local community organizations and to create coalitions with other neighborhoods with the intent to displace unreasonable and degrading hegemonic forces (de los Rios, Lopez, & Morrell 2015 and Darder 2002).

In 2013, Mr. Lopez, a history teacher from that school encouraged his 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to partake in a project focused on community and ethnic studies, called Community Cultural Treasures Project. The goal of this assignment was to address the life, ethnicity, neighboring history, and student influence by bringing educators, non-profit community arts, and literacy directors. The results of this project were successful. Students attained a wealth of knowledge by

learning to recognize community-based cultural assets and making connections with influential and respected individuals.

These prominent community leaders had a history of making positive contributions to their neighborhood and they continued to affect change within and throughout their community. The empowering knowledge students gained, allowed them to create critical textual writings by offering an alternative, yet liberating, writing assignments and discourses through counter-narratives. An anthology of biographies, poems, narratives, and interviews was created by students, and these writings confronted discriminatory opinions ascribed to their communities by dominant discourses. Students also shared their written work with community members by presenting them at a local theater (de los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell 2015).

To attain this wealth of knowledge from their people and community members, students conducted interviews with public leaders responsible for making constructive contributions to the culture and the citizenry of East Los Angeles. Students became researchers by conducting in-depth interviews with residents from the community who are supportive of an initiative to preserve Boyle Height's culture and ethnic wealth. The experiences students achieved through interactions and conferences were invaluable because they were empowered through their learned encounters. Understanding the positive impact community members have had in their neighborhood in the transformation and increasing of the cultural landscape, was crucial in their critical consciousness for both students and residents. No longer did students and community members buy into the deficit stereotype that the dominant discourse had perpetuated. The image and opinion students developed about their neighborhood were encouraging and empowering because of the fruitful interactions and positive narratives they heard about their community, culture, and those living in it (de los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell 2015).

The ethnic studies program provided a platform to strengthen the voice and influence of students and their community. This was critical because historically, residents in these neighborhoods had always settled for someone else's perspective, while their voices were being muted. Furthermore, Chicana/o-Latina/o were also relegated to foreign and prevailing voices to narrate and dictate their history, culture, and accomplishments or lack of. What students were able to achieve through their writing assignments was to challenge and dismiss many of the racist stereotypes ascribed to Chicana/o-Latina/o societies perpetuated by the authoritarian media. Within the classroom environment, students also developed academically, as they cultured their writing skills in various genres. Local non-profit organizations donated their time and skills to tutor students in Lopez's class and other English classes associated with the writing program. The support students received from community members was invaluable to student success and to the overall focus of the ethnic studies program and ethnic studies teacher's initiative to use the local community as a resource of learning and empowerment (de los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell 2015).

Tapping into the local community is crucial in the cognitive and academic development of historically marginalized students, and most importantly, when educators and students address issues concerning race and racism, the results are astounding. The consensus developed in the past 20 years asserted that students who traditionally engage in coursework dealing with race, show an increase in student's socioemotional and intellectual maturity. Ethnic studies which address race and academic learning, enables a more in-depth and complex understanding of the subject matter being studied and a greater sympathy in students towards other ethnic groups. The socioemotional well-being of students, their participation in their academic development, their

mastery of reading and writing, and overall intellectual success have been evident in research on the effects of ethnic studies (de Novias and Spencer 2019; Sleeter, 2011).

De Novias and Spencer (2019) asserted that the overall focus of ethnic studies programs created a better understanding of empathy for people of color who have been subjected to discrimination, marginalization, and second-class citizenship through structural racism. Studies conducted by sociologists noticed and revealed that people's suppositions and impressions regarding race have consequences for interracial comportment and ethnic politics. When a deficiency in sympathizing exists amongst people, attitudes and behavior are affected, and as a result, it makes it challenging for people to walk in the shoes of the ethnic other or adopt their perspective (de Novias & Spencer, 2019 and Bobo & Charles, 2009, p. 244).

Take for instance Affirmative Action (1965), a policy implemented by the Lyndon Johnson administration, with the intent of evening out the playing field for people of color and Whites in the U.S. It has been criticized and dismissed as unimportant. This is a result of Whites not recognizing racism to be a structural and a systemic problem in our country, and this perspective has been supported by Whites' lack of advocating for legislation that aims for social justice. As a result, de Novias & Spencer, (2019, p. 865), asserted that students who are learning within an ethnic studies context, learn to recognize racial inequality and resentment, better known as the understanding of structural racism. This study also concluded that females and students who identify as Black or Asian were more likely to enroll in ethnic studies courses, than students who identified as White or Hispanic/Latinx. Furthermore, students who enrolled in ethnic studies courses, took into consideration the aspect of diversity when choosing a college to attend. These students also reported being proactive in conducting volunteer work (de Novias & Spencer, 2019).

An example are the students who enrolled in the Pomona High School (PHS) in the Los Angeles district, Chicana/o Latina/o course in the Fall of 2008. They began to mobilize social justice posadas with jornaleros--farm laborers from that region that congregated at the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center (PEOC). What resulted was a great response from the community. Hundreds of youths from the surrounding area, parents, and community members partook in the annual candlelight procession as a form of resistance and a call for a path to citizenship for the millions of immigrants in the U.S. These social gatherings and discourses also addressed the pervasive growing anti-immigrant attitude in the community.

The Chicana/o Latina/o courses in ethnic studies provide a pedagogy for students, established in an educational model that encourages, facilitates, and mobilizes communities through students and laborers. Information pertaining to current and state legislation that affects students who are in the U.S. without proper documentation was presented in the Pomona Community Project, and through this learning process, students became more engaged in a teaching context grounded in service learning.

Uniting both Pomona day laborers and PHS students, two groups who have historically been marginalized, in the quest for social justice by engaging in critical dialogue, collective action, and literacies of humanity and justice through Posadas attended by families, educators, and administration is quite unique. It provides a pedagogy through a curriculum that engages students in both academia and community service.

#### **IV. Mexican American Studies (MAS)**

The Mexican American (MAS) program--also known as the Raza Studies- is the antithesis of a corporate driven curriculum. MAS epitomizes a true holistic, culturally relevant, and democratic pedagogy absent in U.S. curriculum. Conscientization, critical thinking, and

critical engagement are at the heart of its curriculum and are rooted in a democratic education that promotes equity in teaching and learning. It provides a pedagogy of love, resistance, and decolonization, by integrating subject matter that is culturally and historically relevant to students. Additionally, this curriculum challenges predominantly oppressive discourses that deemed students of color and their cultural histories as defective, dishonest, and endangered of persecution (Villanueva 2013, Lopez, and Martinez 2010). By providing a curriculum and critical pedagogy influenced by themes of race, bigotry, culture, bondage, occupation, and oppression, students and educators begin the healing process by focusing on students' knowledge attained from lived experiences, their families and communities, and their personal strengths.

It develops conscientization when disenfranchised communities and people have realized the inequalities and the injustice they have historically endured. This realization allows subjugated people to name their oppressive situation and critically strategize and act towards changing their current dilemma by becoming agents of their own learning, history, and futures (Freire, 2000).

In Arizona, the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) implemented an exemplary MAS ethnic studies model in the K-12 curriculum that proved the quality of such a program in 1998. This transformative pedagogy allowed for K-12 educators to engage in the “praxis of ethnic studies education” (de los Rios, Lopez & Morrell, 2015). The MAS program under an Ethnic Studies umbrella, produced a 98% graduation rate and 70% of students who enrolled in these classes, matriculated in a university or college. Its goal was to redirect student disinterest in school and to curb excessive dropout rates for students of Mexican heritage. The MAS program was available in Tucson, Arizona, from 1998 to 2010, and most schools offered these courses to students at the high school level, yet these courses were short-lived. The program was declared



to be out of compliance by then Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne, who introduced House Bill 2281 (Cabrera, Meza & Rodriguez, 2011). This claim was pursued regardless of the program's highly successful graduation rate, a decrease in school absences, and an increase in matriculation.

The alleged argument from Tom Horne and his supporters claimed that the MAS was out of compliance because it was unpatriotic because students were being taught to be anti-American, to despise white Americans, and to distrust their government. Opposition to the MAS program also claimed that these courses intended to influence students to overthrow the government. The irony behind these claims, was that Tom Horne, the man spearheading the verbal assault on the program and attempting to legally eradicate the courses, had never visited or attended a MAS classroom; his judgment and assessment of the classes were based on mere speculations and ignorance. Without evidence, the courses were pronounced out of compliance with TUSD standards and were removed. The irony behind this acrimonious attack on academia, was the fact that the Mexican American Studies program was the only ethnic studies courses targeted. Courses for African American studies were not targeted. Thus, it was clear that the MAS program had been isolated in its attack (Cabrera, Meza & Rodriguez, 2011).

Arizona politicians stymied a progressive and highly effective culturally relevant pedagogy program by criminalizing Mexican American Studies through false allegations, ignorance, and racist political agendas that exemplified democratic regression (Acosta, 2014). The paradox that outlined the banning of the MAS program are the astonishing results the program produced, including a significant turnaround in school attendance and a significant improvement in the number of student dropouts for the Chicana/o student population. MAS boasted a dropout rate of 2.5% from a staggering 50%. The MAS program in Tucson exposed

critical issues in quality schooling, a lack of a democratic curriculum, and the absence of equal education for students of color in this predominantly Chicana/o community. Educators from the MAS program in Tucson described the Chicano Studies curriculum as ethnically and traditionally pertinent to students whose beliefs and stories had been constructed to appear flawed, illegitimate, and at-risk for failure (Villanueva 2013, Lopez, and Martinez 2010).

During the span of five years, from 2006 to 2011, the MAS program experienced the academic success it had aimed for by inverting the achievement gap, reversing graduation rates, and increasing the percentage of Chicana/o college enrollment. College enrollment for students was also significantly higher than the national average and suspensions and expulsions were virtually eliminated. Ironically, the program's success was not met with enthusiasm or support from the TUSD superintendent, Tom Horne, and Governor Jan Brewer.

The MAS program was declared out of compliance, anti-American, and a segregated curriculum that discriminated against non-Latino students. As a result, politicians enacted policies to eliminate these courses. House Bill 2281 (HB 2281), signed by Governor Brewer in 2010, was an 'anti-ethnic studies bill that aimed to eliminate MAS in Arizona's K-12 public schools (Cammara, 2014). HB 2281 claimed that MAS taught Chicana/o students that they had been historically dominated and ill-treated by the government, therefore, Chicana/o students should hate other races and commit treason (Phippen 2015). Although the bill aimed to abolish all ethnic studies, its primary target was the TUSD Mexican American Studies Department (MASD).

Furthermore, HB 2281 also applied pressure on TUSD teachers by instructing them to remove courses from syllabus. Lawmakers ordered the ethnic studies program to be canceled and instructed for teaching to be conventional. Books that were used for the ethnic studies classes

were to be boxed, labeled as banned, and stored in storage rooms (Serna 2013). More so, HB2281 permitted the Arizona Superintendent to withhold 10 percent of the district's funding if they continued to offer courses that included information that promoted the overthrow and resentment of the government, resentment toward a race or class of people, courses intended primarily for students of a cultural group, and courses that promote ethnic unity instead of the management of learners as individuals (Cabrera, 2013).

Programs like MAS in Tucson, not only validated, embraced, and utilized student's cultural experiences to promote critical thinking and learning, but they also educated students and their communities to mobilize in defense of racist legislation like House Bill 2281 (HB2281), that attacked the MAS program and eventually shut it down (Villanueva 2013 & Lopez and Martinez 2010).

Colleges and universities have also implemented critical ethnic decolonizing pedagogies utilized at TUSD. One methodology they employed was critical personal narratives (CPN). CPN was used not only to decolonize their educational approaches, but also to transform their learning spaces by utilizing the MAS's foundational features of Tezkatlipoka. These elements included self-reflection, relationship-building, global and local (glocal) change-making, and development of critical hope. Through Tezkatlipoka students developed a mindset determined to participate in la lucha (the struggle) against racism, Eurocentric curriculums, and racist legislation. Lastly, Lam (2019) emphasized that an important reason to implement critical ethnic studies is to set in motion ideas of equity and justice in education. With attacks on MAS in Tucson, the impact of neoliberal policies, and practices encouraging "an ahistorical, apolitical, and non-materialist understanding of history, an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-

capitalist” pedagogy like ethnic studies with an emphasis on MAS is desperately needed (Lam, 2019, p. 3).

## **V. Its Potential**

Since the implementation of ethnic studies in public schools, proponents of critical pedagogy have encountered various obstacles rooted in uninformed communities, apprehensive politicians, and disapproving policies, especially in Texas. In Arizona, De los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell (2015) conducted several case studies at Pomona High School (PHS), where students conducted detailed, analytical readings of federal legislation affecting their personal lives and their futures. For example, students learned that in 2006, Latinx families, other immigrants, and their friends organized and took part in a national protest against The Border Protection Antiterrorism and the Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437). This statute intended to alter the penalty against people residing in the U.S. with no documentation from a civil violation to a federal crime. People who assisted undocumented immigrants were also targeted. The bill proposed that anyone assisting people without proper documentation could be punished financially or through imprisonment (de los Rios, Lopez & Morrell 2015 and Morris and Braine 2001).

Researchers observed that many of the students and their families, who were immigrants themselves, formed an oppositional consciousness in response to their critical reading and awareness of the nativist legislation. Furthermore, the country was experiencing an all-time high in deportations and the separation of families by border patrol and custom agencies. The critical consciousness and knowledge from these readings resulted in communities coming together to have discussions, known as charlas, over their current plight. These charlas created a vision for a high school curriculum with a focus on immigration by investigating conceptual themes ranging

from women and ethnic studies, history pertaining to labor, and English literature. Charlas were a means of investigating the experiences they had undergone as Chicanas/os-Latnix youth and how those incidents connected them to larger historical events. As a result, the Pomona Unified School District implemented the first college-preparatory ethnic studies courses through their Chicana/o-Latina/o Studies courses and programs that promoted critical consciousness of federal laws, community organization and dialogue, and action aimed at improving conditions (de los Rios, Lopez, Morrell, 2015 and Ochoa 2012) especially concerning immigration.

Cati V. de los Rios, (2016), pointed out that the teacher who started the Chicana/o Latina/o Studies course aspired to instill knowledge and skills in her students that would foster a critical consciousness about their material conditions in an environment that is openly and persistently racist and oppressive towards immigrants (de los Rios, Lopez, Morrell 2015, and Gonzales). Presently, in the U.S./Mexico frontera, the issue of immigration is of great concern and students need to be prepared on how to deal with it. The MAS program provides a platform to bring consciousness, education, and equitable social justice solutions.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Historically, ethnic studies programs have been met with hostility, fear, and misunderstanding. Politicians and critics of this program have deemed it un-American and divisive; a pedagogy that divides rather than unites. Opponents of ethnic studies argue that these courses destroy society and exasperate racial ethnic hostility, yet research conducted by scholars and practitioners have persistently accumulated evidence to the contrary. Their data asserted that ethnic studies courses enhance learning and academia by producing desired educational and social outcomes. This study repudiates the adversary debate that ethnic studies did not have positive effects on students. On the contrary, students learned to effectively challenge

discrimination in the U.S. Students also recognized racism as a system that preserves structural inequality. Finally, it is apparent that students in these courses were able to sympathize with people who have historically been marginalized in society (de Novias & Spencer, 2019). This will address such issues of systemic racism, inequality, and immigration.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **A Qualitative Analysis of Mexican American Studies**

The implementation of ethnic studies with an emphasis on Mexican American Studies (MAS), is not only crucial in achieving a quality pedagogy, but it is one way to provide all students with a liberating, healing, and critical comprehensive education that can pave the way for an authentic democratic society. The U.S. educational system did not fulfill its intended purpose to achieve, which was the formation of a citizenry prepared to put into practice true democratic participation that leads to the well-being of society (Mann, 1837). A more startling reality is the fact that, from the historical point of view, education has been a form of systematic indoctrination and miseducation of Latinx, Blacks, and people of color (Johnson, 2018).

To review the perceptions of teachers that participated in the MAS program in a Southwest border city, this research decided to utilize a qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) with the intention of respecting and valuing the voice, worldviews, and perceptions of the participant teachers. A qualitative research approach must always strive to understand the experience of the participants, confronting the current neoliberal tendency that promotes positivist approaches even into qualitative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is a methodology guided by well-structured questions with the intent of allowing the researcher to investigate a significant experience by asking participants extensive, general questions, and collecting detailed interpretations of participants in the form of words or images (Creswell & Plano, 2004). Qualitative research also applies inquiry to analyze and code data to describe it and attribute appropriate themes. This method relies on past research and

personal reflections to decode the meaning of the information to record a concluding account that contains individual predispositions and pliable construction (Creswell & Plano, 2004).

Qualitative research is guided through a methodical assemblage, structuring, and analysis of documented information (Nixon, 2018). Typically, scholars and researchers who employ qualitative research, describe, decode, and interpret human behavior by a participant's word choice and understanding of their experience, culture capital, or occupied space (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). Therefore, the benefit of utilizing a qualitative method is the rich, detailed data that will be generated from it by maintaining the participant's viewpoints on the phenomenon being investigated. It is imperative to concentrate not only on the process but also on the results and findings. The method of study should not only dictate the course of action, but it should illicitly materialize throughout the course.

### **Data gathering instruments**

This research utilized three collecting data research strategies to interact with the participants: an open reflective questionnaire, qualitative interviews, and focus groups. The questionnaire, used to elaborate on each participant's profile, explored participants' personal, cultural, and social experiences and how each one of these influencing factors shaped their values and career decisions, including making the choice to teach a highly effective, yet controversial educational discipline.

The implementation of semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to freely respond to open-ended questions. The structure and flexibility of participants' replies served as the foundation that established the semi-structured feature of the approach. This method provided a uniqueness among interview techniques because of the extent of the relevancy it offers to the subject matter while maintaining responsiveness to the participants (McIntosh & Morse, 2015;



Bartholomew, Henderson, & Marcia, 2000). Further, as an analytical method, semi-structured interviews are characterized by comparing interviewees' replies by item, since all contributing members responded to the same inquiries and in the same sequence.

In semi-structured interviews, pre-determined inquiries are prepared by the interviewer which tend to evolve in a natural approach that in turn offer participants the opportunity to investigate subjects they feel are important (Longhurst, 2003). Dilshad, Latif, and Anderson, (1990, p. 222), explained that interviews are forms of communication between participants with an intended objective related to an approved theme. Similarly, participants are selected based on their experiences associated with the research topic (Longhurst, 2003; Cameron, 2005). The objective of conducting semi-structured interviews is to acquire exploratory-relevant data from participant interviews that are focused on evidence produced for achieving the purpose of describing, predicting, or explaining the phenomenon (Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Cohen & Manion, 2007).

In qualitative research, individual interviews are considered the utmost utilized information assemblage approach to collect data (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Sandelowski, 2002; Nunkoosing, 2005). Individual interviews are regularly implemented by researchers to garner a comprehensive explanation of interviewees' opinions, approaches, beliefs, and experiences related to a given phenomenon (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Using this method presumes that participants' comprehension will accurately indicate their reality if inquiries are prepared properly (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Detailed and extensive data can be obtained from individual interviews, but there are notions that words and conversations are displays of interviewees' knowledge and therefore, may be debatable. Participants may decide to withhold specific information or exaggerate understandings to make an impression on the interviewer

(Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Fielding 1994). Therefore, to refine the data gathered from interviews and the profile questionnaires, to arrive at a more precise, insightful, and reliable understanding of these experiences, a focus group was initiated as well.

Focus groups are described as a regularly utilized and highly regarded approach to data gathering in the field of Social and Behavioral Sciences (Rodriquez et al., 2011). As a research technique, a focus group is explained as a collection of persons, chosen, and put together by the researcher to facilitate a conversation to analyze and collectively expand on personal experiences and topics being studied. This research system aims to engage a guided, collaborative dialogue as a procedure of producing rich details of complex knowledge and the reasoning behind actions, values, opinions, and attitudes. Traditionally, this data may be utilized to recognize possible spaces of investigation or to explain a theme or issue that essentially may not be obtained from other research techniques (Powell & Single, 1996).

Focus group interviews are considered a research instrument that dates to the 1920s but has consistently been increasing in use across disciplines for the past 30 plus years. It has developed into an information gathering system generally employed in the social sciences and it holds great promise for usage in educational and psychological research (Powell, Helen, & Single, 1996). The focus group is a method of research, learning, and understanding inspired by the survey, and its origins stem from the initial objective to reach beyond the statistics of large sampling polls to uncover why people act, think, and feel as they do (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub et al 1996). Focus group interviews allow for a better insight between cause and effect and the “why” certain events take place. Also, information related to unexpected outcomes can also be extracted from focus groups and so can the authentication of data analysis and interpretation. Lastly, focus group interviews may offer a different analysis of results that may

not be achievable by employing conventional quantitative methods (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinaugub, 1996).

Primarily, the implementation of focus group interviews is useful when current information pertaining to the topic is insufficient and clarification of important concerns or the initiation of new suggestions are necessary. Second, focus groups are employed when additional information is necessary because the topic being researched is complicated and further investigation is needed. Thirdly, a focus group allows for an analysis of complex subjects to be conducted in a condensed time frame to extract the most important data needed. Lastly, when other methods, such as individual interviews or quantitative surveys show that more information is needed to clarify some data collected, focus groups can illuminate misinterpretations, provide sufficient information, and present a more detailed reflexive analysis elaborated by the participants. Therefore, my qualitative investigation into a Mexican American studies program was examined utilizing these three data gathering tools.

### **Areas of interest**

This study explored the following areas of interest:

- Investigated the application of a MAS program in a US Southwest border city
- Identify teachers' perceptions regarding their participation in the implementation of a MAS program, their positionality, and the effectiveness of the program.

### **Research questions**

A few broad research questions guided this study

1. What were the pedagogical experiences of teachers teaching ethnic studies
2. How was the

implementation of the ethnic studies program?

3. How did teachers

consider the effectiveness of the program?

### **Participants**

According to Patton (2002), qualitative data can be attained through a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is considered a method extensively employed in qualitative research and choosing of information-rich cases for the most efficient use of limited resources and it involves identifying and selecting people or groups of individuals that are specifically knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). To further enhance the knowledge and experiences from the purposeful sampling of participants, having access to them and participants' cooperation and commitment to conveying their experiences and perspectives in a clear, significant, and insightful manner are vital (Bernard, 2002 & Spradley, 1979). Data was collected in the interviewees' location of choice. Interviews will be facilitated through open-ended questions and data collected from educators who are teaching or who have taught in a MAS program within schools in a school district in the Southwest, along the Mexican/U.S. border.

Between the months of January and March 2022, I recruited and interviewed seven educators from a district located along the Mexican/U.S. border. Potential participants were contacted via email or text message. They all received informed consent forms introducing my research project, explaining the purpose for the study, what the research would entail, and potential benefits resulting from the process. The consent form also explained the duration of the interview session and why each of them was chosen to partake in the research. I clarified that

they had been selected based on Patton's (2002), method of purposeful sampling to attempt to extract and record a more precise, valid, and truthful understanding of their teaching experiences.

Participants consisted of three female teachers between the ages of 25-30, four male educators, three of approximately 35 years of age to 42, and one in his mid 50s. Every participant had a postgraduate degree and most of the interviewees were former graduates of the district they were working for. Each member was born and reared in the city where the research is being conducted, and everyone was a Mexican American or naturalized U.S. citizen.

Each individual interview session was approximately one hour in duration, and I met with each participant in a disclosed location of their choice and at a scheduled time that best suited each person. I ensured that the designated time of an hour would not exceed, but I did allow for participants to elaborate on their responses when needed. Every participant was provided with a copy of the same research questions via email or hard copy. Two participants conducted the interview process via Zoom, and I provided interview questions by sharing my screen with participants.

I read each question to the participant and provided further explanation for each one of the queries when needed. Each of the questions were addressed to the best of their knowledge and based on their personal experiences and the understandings of their job description, content, and expectations. They were required to respond to 12 open-ended questions that were methodically prepared based on the body of literature on ethnic studies/MAS, based on personal experiences as an educator, and based on the recent implementation of the MAS program in the district.

## **Purposeful Sampling**

For qualitative research, a purposeful sampling data collection and analysis will be implemented in this qualitative research, in which data can be attained through a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is considered a “technique widely used in qualitative research and selecting of information-rich cases for most effective use of limited resources and it involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are specifically knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Creswell & Plano, 2011). To further enhance the knowledge and experiences from purposeful sampling of participants, having access to them and participant’s cooperation and commitment to convey their experiences and perspectives in a clear, significant, and insightful manner is vital (Bernard, 2002 & Spradley, 1979).

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected on campuses or the location of choice of the participants employing both interview and a focus group method. Individual interviews using open-ended questions will be implemented. The methods for gathering data allowed a trustworthy, amicable, and comfortable dialogue between the researcher (interviewer) and the participants (interviewees), regarding the participants’ participation in the implementation of the MAS program; it is a technique that is parallel to a conversation (Morris, 2015 & Mason, 1998).

## **Data Analysis**

The collected data was recorded and analyzed through a data analytic process. A coding process of grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspectives will be conducted (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Data were coded by dividing the text into small units including phrases, sentences, or paragraphs (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Qualitative computer software programs will also be utilized, and the research will address how open-ended question interviews answered research questions (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

A hybrid coding approach of inductive and deductive coding analysis was utilized to attain a better understanding of the data obtained from the participants. The coding of data will be systematically conducted to ensure transparency and validity and will be categorized based on information derived from both research questions and information derived from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Inductive reasoning is also required when conducting qualitative research.

Soiferman (2010) described inductive reasoning as a method of reasoning that moves from the specific to the general. An inductive researcher operates from the bottom-up while using the experiences and viewpoints of the participants to construct comprehensive themes and produce a concept connecting the themes (Soiferman, 2010). Qualitative researchers have acknowledged that along with the understanding and opinions of participants, the rapport between researcher and participant is vital in gaining awareness of the event or the studied subject. Additionally, scholars who conduct qualitative studies have recognized that a participant's values, culture, and beliefs will affect the research (Soiferman, 2010). It is imperative to note that qualitative research does rely on purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2008).

The data obtained was also analyzed using Nvivo to transcribe and code data gathered from the interviews and focus group. Data was analyzed by looking for similarities or differences throughout participants' responses and experiences. Coding or cataloguing of data will be completed using Nvivo to provide a systematic analysis of interview transcripts to enhance the understanding of this phenomenon. The process requires making sense of a vast amount of data by decreasing the amount of evidence, followed by classifying meaningful patterns, and lastly

obtaining significant data, and then constructing a consistent series of evidence (Wong, 2008).

### **Triangulation**

According to Patton (1999), triangulation implies the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study, in this study the phenomena is the perception of the teachers who teach and have taught in a MAS program. Triangulation is a qualitative research strategy that helps researchers to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. In this research, triangulation of data sources was used (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). This research focused on qualitative validity, and triangulation allowed the researcher to better understand participants' perceptions by integrating the analysis of three different data sources, as it was mentioned previously.

### **Benefits**

This study will benefit the community and district by providing a body of literature that supports the state board of education's decision to implement the MAS program in 2017. This research will assert that the MAS program is a step in the right direction in attempting to service the student population in this area. A well implemented MAS program provides a quality, interdisciplinary pedagogy that looks at the histories of different ethnic groups, especially the experiences of Mexican Americans within the context of U.S. history. This study will also help to bridge the pedagogical process of collaboration between middle school educators, high school teachers, the surrounding community, and college professors in implementing a community, cultural, and college and career readiness program for all students.



This project also relates to the district's 2020 Strategic Plan, district goals, strategic priorities, and/or initiatives by ensuring that every child who attends this district and enrolls in these high quality, interdisciplinary, critical pedagogy MAS courses will be better prepared for life, college, and future 21st Century careers. MAS programs have proven to increase student interest in school, in working toward graduation and in pursuing a college career. These programs have proven to close the academic gap and have shown to encourage students in their academic and community awareness development.

Approximately, 3-7 participants will be enrolling in this study. Willing participants will be asked to partake in an individual one-hour interview. After interviews are conducted with each participant, a focus group will be requested to further enhance the interview process. The reasoning for this range of focus group size stems from the number of MAS teachers available. Furthermore, the goal of a quality focus group should include enough participants to yield diversity in information.

### **CRT and LatCrit as a framework for the analysis**

My investigation spotlights the origins and implementation of MAS, which has its foundations in community-based education, cultural awareness, and critical decolonizing pedagogy. For this reason, this research will utilize critical race theory (CRT) and Latino Critical (LatCrit) frameworks. I am approaching this research through a CRT and LatCrit lens to illustrate how ethnic studies parallel CRT and LatCrit by identifying, analyzing, challenging, and dismantling the structured marginalization of students of color within the U.S. educational system. Therefore, the application of various theories in a study is highly recommended to increase comprehension (Janesick, 2000).

A CRT approach provides a window of opportunity to bring to light racism in the U.S. public education curriculum, its one-sided Eurocentric historical context, and the neoliberal policies applied by legislators. Although neoliberal educational reform claims to provide progression, choice, and accountability, they have displayed otherwise. These reforms have contributed to more segregation in the best performing schools in states like New York. Neoliberal policies have not only increased inequality, but such reforms have also worsened discriminating practices by reproducing current class and race disparities in the educational system (Brathwaite, 2017). More so, neoliberal reforms, where state stakeholders have no longer addressed the needs of communities and students, attention and obligation has shifted to the market, free markets and more intense scrutiny on administrator, teacher, and student performance (Apple, 2006).

CRT has its roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and traditional civil rights research. One of CLS's commitments was to be critical with intent toward activism while civil rights scholarship aimed for the emancipation of racism and racist institutions. Ultimately, the goal of CRT was to save or regain what has been lost through racism (Bell, 1995). CRT employs interdisciplinary points of view by emphasizing people of color's counter-narratives, their experiences, and comprehension to reveal the durability of race and racism in education (Sacramento, 2019).

Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1995) asserted that race is still a significant factor in determining the marginalization of people and a perpetual inequality in the U.S. and since the U.S. is based on property rights, the connection between race and property generate an investigative instrument through which we can comprehend social (and, consequently, school) inequality. Thus, CRT, is concerned with exposing, disrupting, challenging, and changing racist

policies that work to subordinate and disenfranchise certain groups of people. It is a framework that focuses on the basic perspectives that try to find, identify, analyze, and transform structural and cultural characteristics of society that maintain people of color subordinated and marginalized. (Solorzano, 1997). Solorzano (1997), further defined CRT as:

the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination.

CRT is a framework utilized to highlight discrimination that is pervasive both locally and globally. CRT confronts and opposes the effects that are associated with race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and sexual orientation and on the educational attainment and achievement of Chicanas and Chicanos (Yosso et al., 2001). CRT, particularly in education, attempts to create a theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical strategy that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education. More so, CRT works toward abolishing racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination toward gender, class, and sexual orientation (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993). In education, CRT is categorized into five themes: the intercentricity of race and racism, that challenge to dominant ideology, the commitment to social justice, the interdisciplinary perspective, and the centrality of experiential knowledge. Intercentricity of race and racism start with the hypothesis that race and racism are ordinary, pervasive, and permanent. The challenge of dominant ideology states that CRT challenges the conventional declarations from the educational system such as “objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 91). Critical race theorists dispute that these habitual claims

act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in the U.S. society (Calmore, 1992; Solórzano, 1997).

Activists and scholars have convened through CRT, to confront and challenge racism to secure social justice for all citizens. Educators are utilizing CRT to better understand inequalities and racist policies that dictate and influence school discipline, hierarchy, tracking, controversial issues over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Their concentration is focused on analyzing relationships between race, racism, and power and how to transform associations between them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Since 1990, CRT has been connected to the field of education, and this theoretical framework has continued to gain momentum.

Through a CRT lens, the subordination of people of color by Whites and White privilege is confronted (Bell, 1995). Race is stationed at the center of analysis and exploration through CRT to analyze the transformation of interactions of race, racism, and the authority people have in different socioeconomic contexts, including economics, politics, and education (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Counter-stories and narratives provide a platform and opportunity for marginalized communities, to counter the dominant narrative, discourse, and perspective (Delgado, 1989). More importantly, CRT provides an avenue to analyze and interpret the effects of race and racism through a more in-depth perspective (Parker, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

### **LatCrit**

In this study, qualitative data will be used to highlight the importance of implementing CRT, and Latino Critical (LatCrit). Both theories emphasize that racism plays a huge role in American law and policies that negatively affect students of color in public education (Solórzano, 1997). Equally, CRT and LatCrit originate from critical theory, but LatCrit is much

more alarmed with issues that are often overlooked by CRT, such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Yosso et al., 2001).

LatCrit, clarifies the multidimensional identities of Latinas/os, and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. This theory has already established a practice of providing a stout gender investigation, so that it “can address the concerns of Latinas in light of both our internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized us” (Solorzano, 2001; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997, p. 885). Chicanas/Latinas can utilize this intersectional tradition as an essential tool to provide dialogue that can potentially assist in transformational resistance. LatCrit is a theory is considered “as an antistatist and antiessentialist” development that makes an effort to connect “theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community.” (Solorzano, 2001).

Nevertheless, LatCrit is not contradictory or in opposition to CRT. It is more of a supplemental and complementary theory to CRT. LatCrit at its finest, should function as a close sibling connected to CRT “in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof.” (Solorzano, 2001). Both CRT and LatCrit theories borrow from the law, and they both confront the authoritarian discourse on race and racism as they connect to schooling by analyzing how educational systems and customs are applied to demote and disregard Chicana and Chicano students.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **A Qualitative Analysis of Teachers who taught in the Mexican American Studies (MAS)**

##### **Program**

For this qualitative study and research, a profile questionnaire, individual interviews, and a focus group were utilized to further understand how teachers that taught in the implementation of a MAS program along the Mexican/U.S. border and the teachers who volunteered to do so. The profile questionnaire explored each participant's personal, cultural, and social experiences and how each one of these influencing factors shaped their values and career decisions, including making the choice to teach a highly effective, yet controversial educational discipline. The individual interviews and focus group helped to understand the implementation of a MAS program, teacher positionality, their pedagogical practices, and the challenges they faced.

##### **Who are these Mexican American Studies Teachers?**

The first participant was born in California. His father was a migrant farmworker and mother worked at a restaurant. Shortly after he was born, his parents decided to return to a city along the border to be closer to family. By the time he was three years of age, his parents had divorced, and his mother was awarded custody. They moved in with an aunt who lived in a south-central area of the city, essentially growing up both in the U.S. and Mexico.

His fondest memories were of having the opportunity to “grow up at a time when moving between both nations was fairly easy. He was fortunate enough to attend religious events, quinceañeras, velorios, and various celebrations that were unique to our borderland.” Along with great memories of living in a border city, he also enjoyed attending school. When asked about what he aspired to be when he grew up and about his education, he stated:

It always seemed that I had an inclination to be a teacher. I enjoyed school very much because I had very nurturing teachers who encouraged me to reach my potential. My mom worked at a well-known jean manufacturing plant, so she made arrangements for me to attend a nearby children's nursery, which was adjacent to [an] Elementary. I attended [that elementary] from kindergarten to 7th grade, and then I went on to attend [a] new ... High School [in the area] for my 8th grade year.

Although his experiences were encouraging and nurturing at school, when asked about his biggest influence, without hesitation and with conviction, he responded "my mother hands down. Her devotion and love for her family, community, and work. I could go on, but I will keep it brief." It is with no surprise that when asked about what his experiences were as an educator and a MAS teacher, he responded by stating:

It's been quite rewarding, but full of turbulent patches which entail having to defend public education from forces that seek to dismantle it. I also have little tolerance for those who disregard and exploit our children. I am still forging such memories since I am in my third semester of teaching it. The relationships I've forged with scholars and community advocates who've struggled to preserve our culture and history have proven to be vital in my personal and professional growth.

This was one of the many strengths that this participant had. Not only had he forged a well solid foundation with his personal experiences and educational background, but his active involvement with his local community fostered a scholar and social activist who led by example. The final query was, what influenced you to teach a course like MAS? He responded:

I've always made an earnest effort to integrate our culture in every aspect of any curriculum I've been tasked with throughout my career, whether it be Social Studies or English courses. When I was asked to help grow the MAS program at my current school, I jumped at the chance. I've realized I know a small fraction of our history and culture as I teach the individual units. However, I have a deep appreciation and have developed more of a passion for the various aspects of concepts included in our developing curriculum.

His final response embodied an important component that is essential in teaching ethnic studies; the element of a culturally relevant pedagogy (Espiritu, 2014). He appreciates his culture and simultaneously integrates it to enhance his pedagogy. Even when teaching the traditional fields of academia, he ensured he infused his culture into his teaching. Furthermore, he did not hesitate at the opportunity to implement

the MAS program that would more freely allow him to ingrain his way of life and customs to influence his teaching.

The next MAS teacher participant was born in a border city in Southwest Texas, but she lived in the Mexican border city side for two years and then moved back to the US.

I grew up close to the [border area] ... and then moved to [the] central [area] near [a] High School when I was about six and I lived in this area my whole life. My parents were always struggling to make ends meet, but they always made us feel as though we had everything. We come from a big family and so we were always close and spent a lot of time together. Anything and everything was a reason for celebration and family gatherings.

Not surprisingly, she described her fondest memories as a child spending time with her mom and dad during Christmas time. She mentioned that it was not about what they had or received, but how special her parents made the holiday and the time they spent together. With such wonderful memories and experiences growing up, it was not out of the ordinary to learn that she wanted to be a teacher. She recollects this aspiration in the following:

When I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I was inspired by a teacher, and ever since then I always wanted to become a teacher. It wasn't until I was in high school that I knew I wanted to become a high school history teacher. History has always been an important part of people's lives and I wanted to contribute to that and help people understand history. Historically, great, quality educators are almost always inspired and nurtured by other excellent teachers, and this is evident for this teacher. She attended elementary, middle, and high school primarily in the south and central areas of the city. She continued her higher education at the local university, where she earned her bachelor's degree and then she attended the University of Texas where she earned a Master's in History. She added, "I'm proud to say I was the first in my family to obtain a graduate degree."

This personal milestone she accomplished is a testimony to her family, her family values, and the strength she received from those closest to her. When asked who her biggest influence was and why, she responded, "I think my mom, she has always pushed me to believe in myself



and more than anything to not be afraid of taking risks and doing things alone.” The love and encouragement that she received from her parents have translated to her passion and dedication as a high school teacher. She explained her experiences as a teacher by stating,

I love teaching, especially at my school because I feel I can relate to a lot of the students that attend my school. I care about them, and somehow, I feel that I make great connections with them. I believe my students feel a sense of belonging in my class, and that is important. To make them feel that they matter and that they are important.

Her love of teaching and the fact that she can connect with her students, allowed her to embrace the opportunity of teaching a Mexican American Studies (MAS) section when asked to. She did not hesitate to teach MAS, and she has made a strong and long-lasting impact on her students. She explained the following: “My fondest memory working in the MAS program was receiving letters from former students, telling me they loved my class and that they had a new appreciation for Mexican American culture.” Finally, when asked what influenced her to teach a course like the MAS program, she responded,

One of the other teachers at school told me they had approved this course to be taught in the high schools, and for me to go and get signatures so that they could give me the class. About 45 kids were interested in taking this course, and it became so popular that 2 sections were created for me to teach this course. Now we have 3 sections of this class.

It is of no surprise that these courses are growing and of interest to students in the high school where this teacher is working at. The demand for the courses and for superb teachers is in demand from students, especially when they get the opportunity to learn from the experiences, struggles, and accomplishments of people who have similar backgrounds as they do.

The third participant had a similar upbringing. During his first eight years of life, he grew up in Mexico, but once he moved to the U.S, he lived in the oldest and one of the most culturally rich neighborhoods in the city. He recalls growing up being influenced and socialized “by

everyday interactions and family expectations.” When asked what his fondest memory was, he responded by stating,

My fondest childhood memory was spending my summer vacation at the public library downtown, participating in the summer programs they offered, learning more English because our apartment did not have air conditioning and the summers in our city can be pretty hot.

It is of no surprise that this person became a teacher, considering that he spent his summers at the public library and partaking in summer programs to hone his English skills. Interestingly, when asked about what he aspired to be when he was a child growing up, he responded, “I never really gave it much thought until college, and I started more volunteer work surrounding children and that paved the way for me to become a teacher.”

Although as a child he enjoyed reading and learning a new language, his experiences would soon become unpleasant. He recalls the following when recalling his elementary, middle, and high school years:

Elementary I had a negative experience with teachers. As I was commencing my English learning journey, there would be a teacher that would have me hold a stack of dictionaries in a corner because I couldn't speak English. Middle school saw me in [In School Suspension] ISS and [in the alternative program] most of the time I had a very short fuse. High school became more mainstream for me as wrestling helped me excel in academics and popularity, it became my anchor and motivation.

This educator's experiences with teachers like his elementary one who had him carry dictionary books because he could not speak English is what many of our Mexican and Mexican American students have had to endure. Such teacher behavior and corporal punishment techniques are some of the reasons why students across the nation demanded for change, accountability, and a more equitable education in the 1960s.

When asked who was his biggest influence, and why? He responded that that honor belonged to his parents. “My parents because they have always let me be and accepted me for who I was.” Considering his upbringing, I was not taken aback that his parents had been a big inspiration in his life, and what may have seemed as a negative in his life through the lack of air conditioning in his home, turned out to pave his way to his future career. He went on to describe his current career as a teacher as “It’s all I could dream of and more.” Furthermore, he explained that his fondest memory working as a MAS educator was, “giving students a sense of validation and acceptance into mainstream that they had not found anywhere else.” Finally, when asked what influenced him to teach the MAS course, he said:

My early school experiences and graduate work eventually helped me make sense of the need for courses like MAS to be offered at schools with students that could reflect themselves in those lessons.

The last participant was born in Mexico, in a city along the Mexican/U.S. border and both of her parents are Mexican. She stated:

My father was born and raised in Monterrey, Nuevo León, and my mom was born and raised in Chihuahua. I grew up in a very Mexican traditional home where family values were very important when it came to manners and respect. On top of that, my family was very religious. I grew up in a very Christian home, so a lot of my upbringing was heavily tied with religion to the point that the music that I listened to had to be Christian.

When asked about her fondest childhood memory, she responded,

My family used to go to church 3 to 4 times a week, and I remember having a lot of friends at church and just growing up with them and playing sports and singing and learning about the Bible and being involved with the Church in general. My family also went on a lot of trips growing up; we used to go visit family in Monterey and other places for fun, like beaches in Mexico and so on.

In contrast to other MAS teachers, this participant had ambitions to become a journalist since she was in the fifth grade. Her interest to become a journalist was motivated when

her elementary school visited a local news channel to sing Christmas Carols and she recalled the following:

I remember seeing the news anchors [and] being so impressed by the way they delivered the news and the newscast really attracted me. I have wanted to do that ever since. I went to college and got my degree in multimedia journalism, and I got the opportunity to be a journalist for various publications, but then I decided to change my mind to be an educator when I started tutoring at the high school where I work now, because I just completely fell in love with it.

An important quality that all my participants had was the love and appreciation for learning, teaching, and family. This was very apparent with each one of them. She went on to explain her educational background.

I went to school in Mexico up to the fourth grade. Then, my family moved to a city along the Mexican/U.S. border, and I entered the fifth grade at an US elementary school. [After that,] I attended middle school and high school and graduated in 2014. Shortly after, I enrolled at the local community college, where I was for a year until I transferred to a university and finished my bachelor's degree in Multimedia Journalism with a minor in history in 2018.

With so many academic accomplishments, and a drastic move from Mexico to the U.S, I was curious to see who had influenced and motivated her along. Therefore, the next question addressed her inspiration for her success and unwavering resilience, and she responded by stating the following:

There have been multiple individuals who have created a great impact in my life. To start off, my mom has been an inspiration ever since I can remember. Despite not having a traditional job, my mom was a stellar mom. [She] always ensured that my brothers and I had everything to succeed in life. My mom convinced my father to move to the United States so that we could have a better shot at the American dream; she wanted us to learn English and have an American education.

In high school, I had multiple teachers who were very supportive of me and my goals in life. These teachers inspired me later on to become an educator because I wanted to give other students the opportunity that these teachers enabled me to have by just being there for me and supporting me and believing in me. The two main teachers who were a great inspiration for me were my history teacher ... who

retired a few months ago and who I had the opportunity to work beside at my school where I started teaching, and also my journalism teacher who currently is still a coworker of mine. Both of those teachers were beyond amazing, and I can only wish that I can be that teacher for my students. At last, a great inspiration I've had in my life was one of my college professors .... He was a father figure to me when I was going through college. My father did not believe I should get educated because women are supposed to just get married and have kids and tend to the household. I didn't feel the support from my father and [my professor] really encouraged me and pushed me out of my comfort zone to do greater things with my life than just being a housewife. [He] helped me through the process of getting internships within the journalism field since he was my journalism professor at the university. He was always there for me, and I will always be grateful.

The journey to become a great educator for this participant began with great choices: both her parents decided to commit to, like moving the U.S. Her parents understood that their children were deserving of a better life, but it would take patience, perseverance, and a strong will to advance academically. When asked how she would describe her current career, she responded with the following.

My last year of college, I started working at my [High School] Alma Mater ... as a history tutor. I was very passionate about teaching history since I've always loved history, but then I started to see students who were learning the English language and it reminded me of my beginnings in American schools and how I struggled to learn not only the language but also the content. I fell in love with the students, teaching, and my coworkers who at some point were my teachers. Despite being so close to achieving all of my journalism goals, as I had multiple job offers lined up before graduation, I realized I wanted to be a teacher instead. I received my Alternate Certification, and I was offered a job as a dual language history teacher at [my] High School and I have been loving my job ever since.

I feel very happy giving to my community, the community where I grew up, and the students who are in a similar situation to my own when I started school in the United States. It brings me joy knowing I can be that one teacher who they can trust and feel comfortable and happy in their native language while learning English at the same time. I also get to teach history which I am very passionate about, and I get to transmit that energy and passion to my students especially the ones who hate history. My students come to realize that history is very fun, engaging, and important and it brings me a lot of satisfaction to know that I was

able to help students who were just like me. I truly believe that I am working my dream job.

To further better her teaching experience, she had the opportunity to teach several sections of the MAS program. When asked what her fondest memory was as regarding her participation in the implementation of the MAS program, she stated:

I started teaching Mexican American studies two years ago, and my first year was during the pandemic. Although I was passionate about teaching Mexican American studies, I was not sure if my students were going to be interested or engaged since the setting was virtual. To my surprise, the students really loved the class and they learned so much and at the end of the school year they told me how thankful they were to have been placed in that class because majority of them are Hispanic and they had no idea the roots of their own history and they were able to learn theirs through the class. Perhaps one of my favorite memories about teaching Mexican American studies was last year when I took all of my students and the students of the other Mexican American teacher into the museum of history here in our city. At the time, there was an exhibit for Dolores Huerta. My students were fascinated with learning all of the history from the museum and connecting it with what they had previously learned about Dolores Huerta, Cesar Chavez, and the agricultural movement. Many of my students had never even been to the downtown area and not only did we go to the history museum we also went to the art museum and a lot of students were amazed by all the learning they were doing in their own city.

Lastly, this participant was asked what influenced her to teach a course like MAS? She replied:

I was not given the option to teach Mexican American studies. Before school ended, I was told that I was going to teach this course. When I was told, I was very excited because the other teacher ... had been telling me about this elective and the material she covered, and I was fascinated because it brought me back to courses, I took in college such as Chicano film, Chicano studies, Chicano legal

history, and those were perhaps one of my favorite classes in college. As I was learning all this history in college, I always felt sad and to some extent disappointed that I had never learned about these issues when I was in high school. And now that I was given the platform and the opportunity to teach what I have learned in college to these high school students, I was beyond thrilled and excited, and I took my duty very seriously to make sure that the students were as prepared as possible to learn their own history, their own roots.

### **Interviewees' Positionality**

A solid, well implemented ethnic studies with a focus on Mexican Americans or Chicanos Studies, begins with an educator who understands their own identity and positionality to be that of a Chicana/o. According to Ruben Salazar (1970), a “Chicano is a Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of himself.” A Chicana/o does not accept the erroneous history that acknowledged that the Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus allegedly discovered the Americas, when hundreds of sophisticated and complex civilizations like the Toltec, Maya, and Aztec, were in the Americas centuries before Spain financed Columbus’ exploration and colonization. Chicanos also do not accept the misleading discourse that Spanish is a deficient language or inferior to English. Chicanas/os are conscious of the fact that they are not culturally deprived, they understand that the indigeneity of the Chicana/o culture predates that of both the Spanish and the Pilgrims.

Chicanas/os are also aware that Spanish was spoken in the Americas approximately 100 years before the British colonizers set foot in New England (Salazar, 1970).

The fact that many Mexican American or Latinx educators are not aware of the histories, struggles, and victories Chicanas/os have had since colonialism and the U.S. land grab of over

50% of Mexico's northern land, has perpetuated acceptance to colonialism. The indoctrination of White, European history has been strategically forged in U.S. curriculums, as it was in Germany during Hitler's reign of terror. For that reason, Chicanas/os have learned from a curriculum that asserted a status of illegal outsiders, the enemy, and the inferior race.

Historically, they have been treated as second-rate people who are at the mercy of the White power structure and standards. Most educators, in this school district and neighboring ones, are products of the same districts they are serving now. Therefore, they have endured a propagandized White colonial, Eurocentric curriculum, and one-sided pedagogy for 13 plus years. According to Dr. Bixler-Marques (2018), for generations, schools in this area along the Mexico/US border have assisted in assimilating students. It can be said that the educational institutions' responsibility is to "Americanize" minority students and treating Mexicans and other minority groups' language and culture as "excess baggage."

For this reason, one of the questions that drove my inquiry during my investigation and one of the codes I utilized to analyze my data, was pertaining to teachers' positionality and self-identity while they are teaching in the Mexican American Studies program. It is imperative to acknowledge that the last place the colonizer leaves is the mind of the colonized, and in the U.S. the colonizer has been ingrained psychologically, physically, and philosophically. Therefore, people of color have continued being colonized their whole existence while learning and navigating through a White supremacist society and Eurocentric school curriculum.

So, this investigation explored the following inquiries: how did educators identify themselves? What was their attitude regarding race and racism? How was their pedagogical approach influenced by their positionality and view on marginalization? How was their administration supporting their growth as Mexican American or Chicana/o educators? What



challenges did they face from the district, campus, and curriculum? What professional development have they received? How did standardized testing affect their pedagogical approach and teaching? Finally, how were the local Community College programs and universities assisting the program’s development, facilitation, and growth?

**Interview Questions**

1. What specific training or educational background do you have that qualifies you to teach in the Mexican American Studies (MAS)?
2. How many years have you taught MAS and which curriculum is being implemented? Did you receive any training?
3. What is your experience in implementing the Mexican American Studies program thus far?
4. How does your teaching perspective align with the MAS program’s purpose of decolonizing a Eurocentric curriculum, confronting racism, and challenging discrimination?
5. What are your experiences with students, the community you are working in, the culture, and language predominantly used by your students?
6. What are the structural and professional challenges you have faced while establishing this curriculum?
7. How does standardized testing and the standardized testing culture affect the success of your teaching?
8. How is your teaching philosophy, pedagogical approach, and curriculum working in conjunction to advancing the needs of your students and community?
9. Considering your training, understanding of curriculum, and your knowledge of content, how confident are you that you are meeting the expectation of the MAS program and those of your students?
10. How supportive is your administration in implementing this program?
11. How often have you had professional development since you started teaching MAS? How does professional development support your teaching?
12. What relationship do you have with both the local college/university Chicana/o Studies Programs in reference to teacher support and professional development?

**Codes and Participants’ Responses**

Codes	Participant responses
Educator’s positionality and self-identification	“I studied Critical Race Theory, which led to a real consciousness of the Mexican American condition.”

Educator's positionality and self-identification	"Being involved with ... advocacy in [the barrio], fighting the local oligarchs against gentrification, so I am directly involved with those community efforts, and I use community as a resource"
Educator's positionality and self-identification	"The way that I teach is that I start from the Aztecs, you know, move on to the Texas Rangers, and the Mexican Revolution"
Educator's positionality and self-identification	"Ethnic studies course allows us to talk about those issues, unlike a regular S.S. course; the classroom environment has provided a safe haven to talk about race, racism, and confronting it."
Educator's Positionality and self-identification	"This is one of the focal points (decolonizing curriculum and confronting racism) of presenting such information. We present information and students have the option of formulating their own opinions about why things happen as they did."
Educational background	"Master's in Bilingual Education"
Educational background	"Philosophy, gender studies, Chicano Studies Courses as electives, cross-sectionalism."
Educational background	"Multicultural Studies, secondary education with an emphasis on social justice."
Educational background	"Imperial studies and postcolonial studies"

Pedagogical Approach	“I research for resources to provide lessons aimed at confronting racism and to open up a more profound dialogue.”
Pedagogical Approach	“With the MAS, I have a license”
Pedagogical Approach	“Teach the truth about history; don’t sugar coat it. I teach about nativism, sexism, and empowering students to learn about their history.”
Pedagogical Approach	“We hosted an online lecture provided by Georgina Perez, partook in luminarias, and participated in a blanket drive for the homeless shelter.”
Pedagogical Approach	“Utilizing certain district programs that allow MAS to merge with emotional learning to deepen student consciousness to their own identity and who they were. Students are allowed to reflect on who they are within their community and within the classroom with intent to challenge racism.”
Pedagogical Approach	“Provide field trips to Chicano Park and provide a walking tour of Chicano murals; while teaching this class, “I don’t have to worry about Critical Race Theory.”
Pedagogical Approach	“Incorporate current events connected to the disproportionate gentrification movements, displacement, environmental racism, and Segundo Barrio disparity of resources.”

Pedagogical Approach	“Decolonizing the Eurocentric curriculum is one of the focal points of presenting such information. “We present information and students have the option of formulating their own opinions about why things happen as they did.”
Pedagogical Approach	“I steer away from the curriculum, we created a club, the Mexican American Studies Association (MASA), and “we talk about issues pertaining to decolonizing, unlike a regular Social Studies class.”
MAS training/professional development	“None”
MAS training/professional development	“No training”
MAS training/professional development	“No training for Mexican American Studies”
MAS training/professional development	“No training; learn as you go, initially a lot of people were against the program.”

MAS training/professional development	“No training, not in Chicano Studies but in History with a focus on race relations, imperialism.”
MAS training/professional development	“I do not have any specific training or educational background on MAS. It is more of a passion of mine to explore and teach the younger generation.”
MAS training/professional development (Heredia)	“No professional development; I haven’t seen any professional development.”
Administration Support	“Very positive, administration had ‘open door policy’ and current administrator self-identifies as a Mexican American person who requires to be called Francisco rather than ‘frank.’”
Administration Support	“Very supportive”
Administration Support	“Administration is 100% behind the courses.”
Administration Support	“Supportive; get the numbers and we’ll make it happen.”
Administration Support	“I have met admin that is only concerned with tests scores and others with students finding their identity and something they are passionate about.”

Challenges	“Administration does not take MAS courses (which are electives) seriously; more affluent neighborhoods have more of these courses and are very supportive; students are placed in these courses.”
Challenges	“Other teachers are not on board; pocket of teachers who invalidate students; teachers are critics of the MAS program and they demand we teach to the standard curriculum; if it is not something that comes out of the textbook, it’s not validated; data is everything; you pass STAAR and that equals great teaching, but it does not define who I am; standardized testing like STAAR put our students at a disadvantage”
Challenges	“Resources are scarce; we must search and vet sources for objectivity; because MAS courses are electives, administration don’t take them seriously; first thing to go are the electives.”
Challenges	“Biggest challenges are not having resources; lack of resources.”
Challenges	“Resistance to converting MAS to a dual credit course; primary person teaching at a higher-level institute is Caucasian; students are dumped in courses”
Challenges	“No resources.”

Challenges	<p>“We started from scratch to tie in standards to the content. Resources are scarce.” “Most students are unaware of a MAS program and have not learned about what it entails.”</p>
Challenges	<p>“The limitations I have right now is COVID has restricted us from freely moving around and getting the kids involved.”</p>
Challenges	<p>“There is no leadership within the program, so we’re following the lead of one of our own. “The resistance from administration or from conservative parents.”</p> <p>“They are trying to, you know, accuse everything that is challenging as far as being a Critical Race Theory.”</p>
Standardized testing & pedagogical approach	<p>“Scores can and will influence the future of MAS electives.”</p>
Standardized testing & pedagogical approach	<p>“We have to teach to the TEKS because we are accountable to that and teaching to the test is not working because standards are low.”</p>
Standardized testing & pedagogical approach	<p>“Standardized testing sucks; we have to teach to the test, but at the same time, we are not restricted by a timetable/frame to start and finish at a certain time without the demands of the test; you can go in depth when teaching certain topics.”</p>

<p>Standardized testing &amp; pedagogical approach</p>	<p>“STAAR test does not impede with the quality of Mexican American Course because it does not demand a time frame to introduce, teach, and learn lessons; provides more inspiration and motivation to take these courses.”</p>
<p>Standardized testing &amp; pedagogical approach</p>	<p>“Standardized testing most of the time is directed for a certain demographic and usually the unsuccessful students are the minorities. So many kids do not see any MAS in standardized testing.”</p>
<p>Local university/college collaboration</p>	<p>“No collaboration with, but would help”</p>
<p>Local university/college collaboration</p>	<p>“No, no collaboration with local university”</p>
<p>Local university/college collaboration</p>	<p>“No connections with university or college”</p>
<p>Local university/college collaboration</p>	<p>“I have one University connection with A.A, professor with the Chicano Studies at the local university; used to take students for a field trip to sit in a Chicano class; and I worked with another professor too.”</p>
<p>Local university/college collaboration</p>	<p>“It would be nice to have training or have UTEP Chicano professors should provide courses but no support from UTEP or EPCC yet.</p>



Local university/college collaboration	Went to San Antonio Summer Institute and one
Local university/college collaboration	None, but UTEP needs to be involved to bring about legitimate change

**Findings**

Based on the data gathered from each individual interview, transcribing the responses, and analyzing everyone’s response, I employed an inductive research method (Soiferman, 2010). Since I implemented each participant’s response, based on their experiences, views, or observations, I incorporated the second half of my research approach to build on broader themes or codes. In addressing the first coded inquiry about positionality and how MAS educators classified themselves, they all identified themselves in one form or another with the ideals and philosophies of what a Chicana/o is.

The first interviewee has a master’s degree in Bilingual Education, and what qualified this MAS teacher to teach this pilot program was the course work he had attained as a graduate student. While earning a master’s degree he received courses that provided him with a thorough understanding of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Utilizing a theoretical framework like CRT, led to an awareness and consciousness of the Mexican American conditions within the educational system which intrigued him to further develop a research-based self-development curriculum that was later implemented in teaching in the field of MAS.

Also, while in the master’s program, this educator was introduced to a professor who encouraged him and instilled in him a curiosity in the complexities of the educational systems and how the system disregarded the contributions, narratives, and perspective of minorities and

how these groups are affected by state mandated curriculum, state tests, and by traditional classroom pedagogy practices. This professor tapped into his curiosity and helped him develop a critical consciousness of the plight Mexican American students and other minorities are facing.

This new developed interest and awareness encouraged him to further his investigation into the educational experiences of minorities. He explored the works of Richard Delgado and Delgado's legal scholarship in CRT and the scholarship and educational philosophies like those of Paulo Freire emphasized in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Currently, this educator is not teaching the MAS course, but he did teach it for four years under a supplemental curriculum and course aimed at academically advanced students. While teaching this course, he and another teacher collaborated to develop a curriculum based on his personal research and on his experiences and knowledge attained while finishing a Bilingual Education coursework. While piloting this program, there was no MAS curriculum to follow and much of what was taught was based on continuous and ongoing research. This pilot program was an initiative by a specific department offered by the district and although a curriculum was not provided, department personnel made several visits a month to assess how the program was operating and provide feedback on daily lessons. Therefore, lessons, worksheet development, and community outreach was conducted by both teachers while facilitating the program; "it was all grassroots." From his understanding, a curriculum was never provided till this past year when MAS was introduced at the high school level.

Regardless that this course was facilitated without a curriculum, teaching MAS was very much enjoyable; "I loved teaching it because it really connected to the students, it really reflected for them what hadn't been, something that they had seen in school before. It reflected who students were basically, uh, you know the framework, I don't know if you are familiar with it,

but there are a lot of learning outcomes within this framework that instills the development of social emotional learning.” “The social emotional learning and Mexican American Studies components really ‘complimented each other.’ Students truly developed a profound realization of their identity, who they were, and their place in the educational system and their community.” As a result, students began to advocate for their learning, growth, and personal development by taking the initiative to engage in community outreach and service.

Equally important was the fact that this educator had developed a critical awareness regarding the marginalization of minority groups, especially exclusion of the Mexican American communities. His mindfulness allowed him to recognize that traditionally, “we’ve been fed a Eurocentric curriculum without ever questioning it.” This led to self-reflection and realization that as a student, he was also taught through a Eurocentric curriculum. This prompted him to conduct his personal research to provide a curriculum and instruction more reflective of his students and his pedagogical philosophy. Lastly, he mentioned that there was no collaboration with higher learning institutions, but was hopeful that someday, a collaborative initiative could be implemented to provide guidance, resources for the continuity of the program.

My second participant has been an educator for six years and he graduated with a Philosophy and Gender Studies Degree. While taking courses to graduate, he registered for Chicano Studies classes as an elective at the local university, which has provided a solid background for teaching Mexican American Studies (MAS) at the high school level. Of those six years as an educator, he has taught the MAS program for two years. Growing up in the central area of the city, being the president of his neighborhood association, and chair of the South-Central Coalition, has also provided a wealth of knowledge and experiences that he incorporates in teaching the MAS courses.

He has never received any form of professional development. “Did I get any training for that? No training, no professional development or anything like that though.” Further, there are no resources to guide in teaching the MAS course. Normally, teachers are provided with professional training for other subjects, such as social studies and language arts. Therefore, when preparing and lesson planning for his MAS course, he goes off the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) provided by the curriculum and then conducts research to provide resources. As far as aligning his pedagogical philosophy and approach to that of an ethnic studies program, which requires confronting racism and challenging it, he felt he has an advantage because of the reputation the high school he teaches has been given.

This high school is predominantly of Mexican/Mexican American heritage or Latinx, and he prefaces the fact that “we’re at a certain school, in a certain location in the city that normally gets that bad reputation in every social aspect, including education.” Interestingly, most of his students, who are transnational students, who travel back and forth from Mexico to the U.S., do not understand the Mexican American or Chicano experience with marginalization, racism, and struggle to overcome. To them, they consider themselves as Mexican and their experiences are in Mexico. Their primary language is Spanish, and not Spanglish as it is more common with the Chicano communities in the U.S., along the border. Therefore, one of the many challenges this educator faced was attempting to connect the Juarez or Mexico experience with that of the Mexican American or Chicana/o experience in the U.S.

This reality influenced this participant’s pedagogy to focus more on Mexican history and Mexican history in context to the border and the U.S. For example, when this teacher provided a lesson about the lynching of Tejanos after the Mexican American War, by Texas Rangers, many of his Chicano or Mexican America students were surprised to learn this dark history. Students

were under the impression that slaves and Blacks were the only group in the U.S. subjected to such treatment. On the other hand, transnational students reacted indifferently to this history. So, one of the topics that is touched up on is ``nepantlera,” the space in the middle, the space between two worlds, realities, and countries. Students who consider themselves Mexican are here on “business” for school rather than attempting to understand the Mexican American experience.

The third participant was asked to teach the MAS class halfway through the first semester when students were released from or did not make it to a specific athletic program on campus. So, the administration asked for volunteers to begin a course (MAS) to provide as an elective class for those students who would no longer be playing sports. “I received no training whatsoever under Mexican American Studies.” He has a master’s degree in Curriculum Instruction in Secondary Education with a Multicultural emphasis from the University of Washington, but he did not take any Mexican American Studies courses while at Washington. He mentioned that he is learning about MAS as he goes along and has only taught the course for two semesters.

Although no training was ever provided for this educator, he was able to “follow the lead of one of his fellow colleagues who has taught MAS before and who also has connections with the Chicano Studies folks over at [local university].” Therefore, this MAS instructor has begun writing and creating his own curriculum, “with the help of folks I do know from the university, local historians, and some other folks that I do community activism and advocacy here in the city. So, I have a little more of an insightful perspective from those folks. The nice thing about me, is that I have been involved with the south-central advocacy, against the local oligarchs and we are also fighting the folks who are trying to gentrify el barrio. So, I was directly involved

with those efforts, you know, going to city council, and going to community meetings, and organizing, so that is a pretty cool insight that I was able to get; use the community as a resource, right?”

As far as pedagogical approach and his positionality as an educator in reference to ethnic studies and its tenets, he has always implemented critical awareness, critical learning, and action within his teaching. While teaching English or Social Studies, he would incorporate many of the themes within an ethnic studies course, but he did experience resistance from administration and conservative parents. With this new MAS elective program “I have a license to just go for it but giving the political developments in the state of Texas and how they are trying to accuse everything that is challenging, as being Critical Race Theory, but fortunately, I have some really good students and parents, and the majority of my students are Latinos, and so they have a good connection there, and there hasn’t been any pushback there.”

This MAS teacher felt that it was crucial to be involved with the community and the issues that students, parents, and residents face like the land grab by the local “oligarchs,” who are relocating people in the name of profit. Along with the displacement of people, the issues of environment racism are also at stake according to this educator. He understood the essence of ethnic studies and promoted critical consciousness of social, political, educational, and environmental racism that affects students, their families, and learning. The knowledge he has gathered from his personal social and political activism within and throughout the community, has allowed him to recognize, understand, and confront every form of discrimination in his pedagogical approach, lesson planning, and classroom activities.

The fourth participant has been teaching MAS for three years and similarly, did not have any specific training to teach the course. Just like other participants, she was asked to volunteer

to teach these courses and she accepted. Fortunately, she had a colleague who had taught the course before, and she was able to access information and guidance from this person. From this source, this teacher was able to access an online curriculum that other teachers had developed to teach MAS. Within this curriculum, they do have TEKS aligned to the curriculum.

Challenges that she faced was having to learn as she went along with teaching MAS because there was no guidance from administration. Everything she learned along the way was hearsay, and through any information she came across as she taught the course. Therefore, with no resources to employ in teaching MAS, this educator felt that to some extent, the program was set up for failure. The first time teaching it is scary because you have to research all the information. To further exacerbate her experience in teaching MAS, there was constant talk about canceling MAS even though they had just been implemented. Furthermore, “initially, lot people were against the MAS program, they did not allow it in high schools, it was only taught in colleges, because they, kinda, what is happening right now, the Critical Race Theory, and all of that, a lot of people did not want teachers to indoctrinate their students.”

“The course is considered an elective and not a core requirement, which says a lot, but electives are important but not a priority unlike core classes. There is no importance placed on MAS classes, until administration wants something out of you, like placing students when there is nowhere else to place.” Yet when it comes to teaching and positionality, she emphasized; “I’m kind of a rebel when it comes to teaching because sometimes, I teach something that we’re probably not supposed to teach, like for high school students, but to me it’s important for me it’s important for them to learn the truth of like history, you know, so I don’t sugarcoat anything; I tell it like it is. You know, like this is what happened, and these people were off basically, you know? Which in doing that, I guess I am serving the purpose a little bit, right? As far as

confronting racism and discrimination, I don't think I am doing anything special, but hopefully, with the knowledge the students get, especially kids who are not from this border city, that are not Mexican, hopefully with this knowledge, they can see people a little different and hopefully not be racist.”

The fifth participant expressed that he, just like the other educators, had no previous training, and he had only taught it for one year as a pilot program at the middle school level. Similarly, as preceding participants, he started from scratch and resources were very scarce. He further state, “I do not have any specific training or educational background on MAS. It is more of a passion of mine to explore and teach the younger generations.” As far as his perspective in teaching this course and his pedagogical approach and positionality, he expressed that these courses must be taught with the essential foundation found in ethnic studies, that racism is common and pervasive.

Furthermore, he expressed the following: “We presented information and students had the option of formulating their own opinions about why things happened as they did, and this is crucial because my experience was with a Title 1 school that is predominantly Hispanic that is Spanish-speaking. Most students are unaware of a MAS program and have not learned about what it entails.” So, a crucial challenge that has confronted educators who teach MAS, is the lack of knowledge about the courses. Communities, parents, and students are oblivious to the historical context of MAS courses and of the positive effects they have on students and the community.

Although these educators did not have a specific degree to teach ethnic studies with an emphasis in MAS, they all had master's degrees in courses that relate to and overlap with foundational ethnic studies requirements. They are well qualified, well knowledgeable, and most



importantly, they are motivated to address the problems in their district, the Eurocentric curriculum, the dominant White narrative, and all forms of discrimination found in the educational system and beyond.

The sixth participant (Heredia) has been teaching MAS for two years and has a certification in Social Studies. “In order to teach Social Studies, you must pass the content exam, which has a focus in all of the different courses in high school, which has from Geography, history, U.S. history, economics, and government. This exam does have questions on electives, Psychology, Sociology, and so on.” “I was also not sent to any particular trainings for Mexican American Studies, but thankfully when I was in college, I took a lot of Chicano courses because I was interested in. Since I needed history classes, I would just use different courses. Like I took Chicano Film, I took Chicano Legal History, so everything that had to do with legislation that affected Mexican Americans and other Chicano courses that I cannot recall at this moment. But all these courses, I think that more than anything helped me to be prepared to teach Mexican American Studies, but as far as my district sending me to a special training for that, no.”

“The Chicana/o Legal History class was amazing and so impactful because I had never heard of that, especially, with certain districts within our communities that had once been found guilty of racism and discrimination of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, even though they claimed that drawing district boundaries for these specific schools to separate Mexicans from Whites was unintentional. I was like, ‘wow!’ This is so important, and we need to learn. I was even inspired, and say, ‘hey, who knows, maybe I can go to law school and defend the rights of my people.’ So, it was an amazing class. I mean it is so important, I mean here in the borderland. I learned so much from those classes, that I was like why, I had no idea, like graduating from high school, and I know it was not my teacher’s fault and especially we didn’t have Mexican

American studies classes. It barely came in 2014, and it barely passed legislation here in Texas and even then, there is still a lot of opposition. So um, of course with Critical Race Theory, especially, with all the hatred it has with various people, so I think more than ever, it is very important.”

“We don’t know. I was shocked a few weeks ago. I took a trip to Chicago to destress for a moment, and so I left and, on the plane, there, a lady sits next to me, and she has nothing. It was cold and she had this very light sweater, and she did not speak any English. So, she was not too sure what was going on and it turns out that she was from Nicaragua. I was so inspired by her story, I was like ‘oh my God,’ there is so much that we don’t know what is going on out there. She was telling me that right now there is a civil war going on in Nicaragua. There is a person who has been raised to power, like a dictator.

So, this dictator is going after the universities and people in general, so she was flying away, I mean obviously looking for the ‘American dream,’ to have a better life and she was detained, so her and her husband were detained by border patrol agents. They decided to turn themselves in, and she has not heard anything from her husband. She was very devastated because she was not sure what was going to happen with him and with her, so they were flying her to Kentucky, I think, which she had relatives where she was going to go work. But I was like ‘wow,’ this is so heartbreaking. I can’t imagine being separated like that from my husband. Leaving my kids behind, and it broke my heart, and I’m like this is happening right now and every time that we listen, or we watch in the news, especially all the hatred towards Mexicans and Mexican Americans, you know, it’s horrible and I think this is why classes like this are so important, not just for Mexican Americans but for everyone.”

As far as a curriculum is involved, this participant was simply going off the TEKS that had been provided for her by the district and here in Texas. However, she did not receive anything other than that. She had not been provided with books, or anything and there was nothing specifically she was following to teach the MAS course. One of her colleagues, who was one of the first educators to teach these courses at her campus, did share a lot of resources with her and she also shared a website with her, which has everything online including an online book. Based on the online book, they also have lesson plans, and that is what she has used as her foundation to teach the course.

Her pedagogy begins with the question: “what is a Mexican American?” and she moves on to identity by introducing terms and teaching students to use them correctly, such as Mexican, Mexican American, Latin, Latinx. Then she transitions to civilization and the first people who came to the Americas, the Aztecs, the Mayas, and how advanced their civilizations were when the Spaniards came and conquered, and she ties it with the mission system and basically up to modern times. “It’s nice that it’s a yearlong course because if it was only a semester, I don’t think there is much history, so much to cover for one semester and in a year, the students seem to really enjoy this class. They are literally shocked by all the things they are learning, especially since we learn and teach history from a very Eurocentric point of view.”

“Therefore, we don’t really champion our ancestors like the Aztecs because of how they are portrayed in media, in movies, how they are savages and ripped people’s hearts, when in reality, they were really advanced in astrology, very advance in mathematics, and one of the things that I teach them, is even the Aztecs had a very sophisticated city built on quadratics, everything was even in lines, they built on top of water, and they actually had aqueducts running strait into the city. I’m like we praise the Romans for the aqueducts, when here the Aztecs are

doing the same thing, but no one really knows about them because the only thing they are known for is ripping hearts apart and sacrifices and all that.”

Accordingly, when they learn these things, like about Moctezuma’s Castle that he had essentially a zoo in his house with different kinds of birds and animals, they are like ‘what?’ They are so surprised, and they really like it and they also realize how unfair the justice system has been to Mexican Americans. And not just Mexican Americans because I actually have them analyze other ethnic groups, like African Americans, like the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese camps, all these different things that were legal, right, because there was legislation making it legal but just because it’s legal, ‘is it right?’ Then I have them analyze that and they are so blown away; they can’t believe it.”

She continued by stating that, “students are so into the courses that when they get their schedules changed, they go to the counselors to fight to be moved back to MAS. That’s how interested the students are and I think it has to do with the fact that this is the first time they are learning their own history, and I think it is a very beautiful thing to experience and see that they care.” Considering the positive reception from students taking MAS at this campus, this educator supported the idea of making MAS a graduate requirement like some school districts in California and not just merely an elective as it currently is in this district.

Presently, the MAS elective class is only considered and offered as elective courses and primarily available for junior and senior level students, but some sophomores and freshmen are also enrolled in the class. Therefore, she is completely in accord with the course being exclusively available to juniors and seniors because students do need a comprehensive background of U.S. history. For example, understanding the origins and actions taken during

Manifest Destiny, the Mexican/American War, and World War II are important to understand, according to this MAS educator.

Her teaching perspective is very much aligned with that of the ethnic studies or MAS purpose. She believes this course is very important considering the current issues Chicana/o and Latinx students are currently facing in society and the educational system. Students themselves have been able to experience some of the concerns the course confronts, especially when students have traveled away from the borderland. Also, this participant remembered her experience as a student learning about the Greeks and the Romans, but not about the Incas, the Aztecs, or the Chavín, the Zapotecs, or other civilizations in the Americas. She felt that the current curriculum is very Eurocentric and therefore only praised and justified what the Europeans and England did and accomplished. When she started teaching World History, she wanted to instill in her students the historical contributions and genius of their ancestors, because the campus where she teaches is predominantly Hispanic.

Therefore, teaching students about the Aztecs, the Chavín in South America, and the Incas, would hopefully enlighten, encourage a critical consciousness, and constructive action toward decolonization of the current Eurocentric curriculum. As far as confronting racism, all students must do is turn on the news. This educator communicated that students are aware of the racist problems in the country because it goes viral on social media. For example, when people call the authorities on people for speaking Spanish and such discrimination gets coverage in the media and social media, students are informed. “So, when students take courses like MAS and they encounter discrimination in the streets, in the classroom with their teachers, or they are confronted with English only rhetoric and ideology, students can defend themselves and others with historical facts.”

In teaching the MAS course, some of the challenges she faced were a lack of resources and no books to implement in her teaching. She also expressed that providing teacher training are essential for MAS, yet training was not available. She felt that if other subjects have staff development training, so should MAS. Another one of her suggestions and concerns was that UTEP professors, Chicano Studies professors should be involved with the implementation, progress, and success of the program. Training provided by Chicano Studies professors would be instrumental and essential in teaching courses at the high school level. Although many challenges exist with the MAS program, one area that is not lacking so much is in administrative support.

Administration at this campus expanded the program from the first years that it was implemented. When the course was introduced, there was only one teacher teaching it, but when interest and enrollment began to increase, they hired her to help with the increase of MAS registered students. She feels that administration understands the importance of the student population and community teachers are servicing. Although administration supported the MAS program and this educator, professional development aimed specifically to train her and her colleague to facilitate this course is non-existent. The only training she has received in the past three years, was for dual language education, but as far as content, she has not received any instruction.

Finally, the other challenge that this MAS educator has faced is the lack of collaboration, guidance, or training from the Chicano Studies programs at the local university. Her current colleague who is teaching a section of the MAS at her campus began her career at the local community colleges and she is the only connection she has with the college. She also keeps in touch with a professor from the local university who provides her with resources, but she feels

that the next step in this process must be to get Chicano professors from the local university and college to guide, promote, and grow this very important course for the future. She hopes that MAS can be a requirement like it is in most of California's school districts, but not only MAS, but other ethnic studies courses, like African American Studies, and Asian Studies should be available. She felt that there is a lot we do not know because we (Mexican Americans and other minority groups) are marginally mentioned in our current history books.

The seventh and last participant, similarly, did not have a background in Chicano or MAS, nor did she receive any training directly from the district she teaches at. Yet from her own research, she became aware of training through the UT San Antonio Chicano Studies Summer Teacher Institute, and she attended. She mentioned she was the only educator from her district who attended, but she had the opportunity to converse with other Chicano or MAS teachers from neighboring districts who attended the conference. She further communicated that some of those MAS teachers that she communicated with, were generous enough to share resources and lesson plans.

Her educational background is in History, and that includes her undergrad and graduate degree, but she did take college courses with a focus on race relations, women's studies, Brown and Black relations, and realism. Most history courses she registered for in college were based on American History, post-colonial studies, and imperialism. She has taught MAS for two years only.

Although her schooling is not in Mexican American or Chicano Studies, she felt strongly qualified and knowledgeable to teach this course. She understood the importance of the class, so much that she started a petition asking for MAS to become a dual credit course. She mentioned that students were "on board" to make this course a dual credit; the fact that the MAS course

would give students college credit, would serve as an incentive for students to enroll in the class, but just last year, MAS was temporarily removed from the schedule. To supplement the course and to maintain the momentum previously established, she created a club called the Mexican American Student Association (MASA), and through this club she was able to keep students engaged until they brought the course back this year.

While the MAS course was removed, the MASA club maintained the interest and progress of the class online because of COVID, but students were very much active in their learning and community service. Students paired up with elementary schools and would read ethnic and culturally relevant books to elementary school students. They also hosted an online lecture with a member of the State Board of Education, who lectured and interacted with over 90 students about the importance of MAS. Through the club, they also held a winter festival with luminarias, and they had a blanket drive for people staying in the immigrant shelter. By partaking in community service, students were allowed to graduate in their zerapes.

With the MAS course being brought back, she continued where she had left off. She organized a school field trip to a neighboring community to attend a Charreada that one of her students had organized. She also expressed that she wanted to plan field trips to Pachuco Park, where students could take a walking tour of the murals, a visit to the downtown museums, and a walking tour of the downtown murals too. This pedagogical approach aligns with the ethnic studies' educational philosophy because many of the murals and the art depicted on the city walls, convey a history of discrimination, struggle, and resistance.

Her pedagogical approach for all her classes is founded on the issues, concerns, and discrimination Chicanas/os and other marginalized groups encounter. Since she is teaching a MAS section, it is more of a "safe space" to talk about racism or forms of discrimination. She



has autonomy to help students identify, address, confront issues without being apprehensive regarding the current Critical Race Theory hysteria that has overwhelmed the country. So, the fact that she is teaching an ethnic studies class, grants her the privilege and even a protective shield to teach about racism, and the systems that reproduce it, unlike when she taught issues of discrimination in her history class, and parents complained at the local school board meetings.

Therefore, teaching racism and marginalization in her regular history class was very difficult and she sensed she had to self-sensor herself and her pedagogical method out of fear of pushback from certain people. Furthermore, she felt that her educational background which included learning about race relations and post-colonial studies were foundational in her positionality and pedagogical approach.

Students on the other hand, certainly enjoyed learning about topics dealing with racism, LGBT issues, and the Chicano community. She emphasized to them to be critical about current local, state, national, and global issues, and to construct their own thoughts, emotions, and ideas about what they are learning. By analyzing concerns and issues pertaining to their community, students began to find a clearer picture of who they were. Students began to construct their own identity and how they fit within that context.

Teaching the MAS course was successful for this educator but one common issue she shared with other MAS teachers was the absence of resources and staff development to hone pedagogical skills. Also, students were frequently dumped into the course to fulfill scheduling demands. Therefore, she was left with a classroom of students who were eager to engage and the other half of students who were forced to be there to fulfill scheduling demands. More so, since MAS is an elective and not a core subject, the class was perceived as a “fun class” rather than a

course to learn about an important missing piece of history of marginalized people, and their contributions to the world, pre- and post-colonial.

Overall, administration was extremely supportive of the program by allowing her to facilitate the MAS course according to her pedagogical perspective. They gave her full autonomy in teaching the class. Moreover, she certainly had a great experience attending the UT San Antonio Chicano Studies Summer Teacher Institute. Professors who attended the Summer Institute and organizers of the program were exceptionally supportive, they provided quality information, and they were exceedingly well organized. The only drawback to this training was the travel expenses accrued from having to attend a training outside the city. Also, more local MAS educators could have taken advantage of such a well needed staff development course if offered regionally. Lastly, another issue hindering the implementation of the MAS program is absence of collaboration and support from local colleges or universities and their Chicano Studies programs. In addition, a partnership with these institutions would benefit and enhance the program immensely. She would like to see a similar system like UT Austin's on Ramps, a dual enrollment program where UT professors teach high school students and students earn dual credit.

### **Focus Group**

The focus group was conducted on May 23, 2022, and all seven participants were invited to partake in this group assemblage to further discuss and elaborate on the data I had gathered, analyzed, and interpreted from the individual interviews. The focus group session lasted a little under an hour and I employed a timer to ensure I would not exceed the time frame I had projected the focus group to last. I began the focus group by welcoming each participant and providing an overview of the intent of the session, and reason for it. I allowed each participant to

introduce themselves, and to mention their current teaching assignment and campus location. Once formalities were completed, I shared my screen with the group, and presented the five focus group questions they would be addressing. I read each question individually, and I allowed participants to voluntarily respond to inquiry or comments being made. Each question, response, and discussion lasted approximately seven to eight minutes. All participants contributed to the questions and provided additional feedback based on participant responses, and here are results.

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. Because the district did not provide training to teach the Mexican American Studies (MAS) course, how can you as educators ensure that future training will exist for you all and for future MAS teachers?
2. Several scholars and researchers have stated that to implement “an effective” ethnic studies like MAS or Raza Studies, “K-12 educators, university faculty, community organizations, students, and families have to come together to fight for an education that could potentially address gaps in education achievement, opportunity, equity, and justice.”
  1. Therefore, how can such a collaboration come to fruition in this district, in your campus, and your communities?
3. All of you have a vast amount of knowledge and are well equipped to teach these courses. Considering a successful district, like the San Francisco Unified School District, that unanimously adopted a resolution to support ethnic studies and develop a MAS curriculum in their schools, what steps can you all take to create a committee of teachers solely charged with developing a curriculum for high school?

4. In our interview sessions, it was mentioned that advocating for MAS to become a dual credit course would help with more funding, an increase of student registration, and would open the opportunity for the program to gain respect, legitimacy, and interest.
  1. What steps can be taken to achieve this goal and expand awareness of the program, the value of teaching it, and to increase funding for it?
5. What steps can be taken to begin a dialogue and collaboration with EPCC and UTEP?

### **Focus Group Findings**

1. *Q1: Because the district did not provide training to teach the Mexican American Studies (MAS) course, how can you as educators ensure that future training will exist for you all and for future MAS teachers?*

The first volunteer to respond to the first question explained the following: “In my case, what we did here on my campus because I started teaching Mexican American Studies and then another teacher started teaching it. We didn’t really have any training, but what I did was just pass the baton to the teacher and passed on all my resources to the teacher, my curriculum, and we met up and we created our own training. This is everything that is going to be covered, this is the curriculum, these are the resources; I’m here if you need any help. Unfortunately, because we did not have an expert to give us training, we took it upon ourselves to ensure that the other teacher the adequate resources and all of that.”

This was followed by another participant who expounded that his graduate degree is in curriculum and instruction with a multicultural education component in secondary schools, so he was able to write and compose his own curriculum, which he described as “pretty extensive curriculum with quite a few resources.” Furthermore, he reached out to Sean Arce, former Tucson Unified School District Mexican American director and co-founder who supports and

promotes *El Libro Traficante*; a program that ushers a caravan of controversial books into Arizona that were banned by public school officials after canceling the MAS program in Tucson. He also reached out to a Texas State Board of Education representative, and other individuals, including a professor from a local university who provided him with their university syllabus to supplement his curriculum resources. He modified the university syllabus to suit his classroom the information he attained, he also passed it on to two other MAS educators who needed resources because none of the MAS teachers who were selected to teach the course, were not provided with resources. Additionally, these educators were “thrown into the mix because there were quite a few kids who did not make the major sports teams, the varsity or jv squad, and so they put them in our classes.”

Another participant contributed to the conversation by stating that a lot of the training in our district kind of has to be self-sustaining, but it’s tough, if you don’t have that graduate degree or that network to reach out for assistance. When I was at the middle school campus with a MAS colleague, and we were doing the Mexican American curriculum, it was pretty much on our own and we relied on our background knowledge of it. I also had to reach out to former professors for assistance.” This participant felt that there is a strong need to create a network of professional educators in the field of MAS to provide public educators with resources and training.

Another participant added by stating that “training starts at the top, at the district level, they need to advocate for these programs; we are dictated what we need to teach. What teachers can do is get parents involved by educating them on these programs, spreading the word. He was adamant that parents and community leaders need to be aware and have knowledge of the great possibilities that a MAS program provides for students, their communities, and the improvement

of education. Additionally, one participant mentioned that the district does allow teachers to go to training but there is no training available for the MAS program.

Therefore, it is to the discretion of the MAS educator to seek training outside of the city or state or to reach out to local historians. Discussions have commenced between these MAS teachers, local historians, college students, university professors, and social activists to begin creating a curriculum. “Other than that, we are going to be relegated to going up to Tucson or San Antonio or somewhere far away to get the training.”

*Q2: Several scholars and researchers have stated that to implement “an effective” ethnic studies like MAS or Raza Studies, “K-12 educators, university faculty, community organizations, students, and families have to come together to fight for an education that could potentially address gaps in education achievement, opportunity, equity, and justice.”*

- 1. Therefore, how can such a collaboration come to fruition in this district, in your campus, and your communities?*

The first to respond to this query mentioned that professionals need to come together to analyze the need for a critical pedagogy like MAS program, yet he was a bit discouraged because he felt these issues were not being mentioned or addressed. He emphasized that our district is more concerned about standardized testing rather than providing a culturally, critical, and community-based education. He was discouraged about the progress the MAS program can have because he understood that meeting state standards will continue to stymie and undo MAS. He strongly felt that the concern over teaching MAS and providing a good, quality, critical pedagogy must be put front and center, but if administrators do not take the lead in this fight, and push for a MAS curriculum, then the fight to maintain these courses will not be sustained.

Yet, another argument that was brought up was the concern over the Critical Race Theory (CRT) discourse that is being perpetuated by GOP politicians and their supporters on the right. This educator believed that this scare tactic over CRT would exacerbate the problems they currently have with implementing a MAS course with a standard curriculum. Considering that the state of Texas is republican, and perpetuating a scare tactic discourse on CRT, he was under the impression that the MAS courses would eventually be eliminated.

In one campus, elimination of the MAS courses had begun. One educator mentioned that they were already doing away with some of the courses at her campus and that she would not be teaching her section next year. Her campus will only have one MAS teacher starting next year. She believed that one of the factors playing into the elimination of the program was lack of awareness from parents regarding school issues, let alone, they do not get involved in the educational system. Parents from this community do not attend educational board meetings and they just do not participate because they come from a working-class background, and they are constantly working. So as far as support from the community, it is very scarce and nonexistent.

*Q3: All of you have a vast amount of knowledge and are well equipped to teach these courses. Considering a successful district, like the San Francisco Unified School District, that unanimously adopted a resolution to support ethnic studies and develop a MAS curriculum in their schools, what steps can you all take to create a committee of teachers solely charged with developing a curriculum for high school?*

The first participant to respond to this inquiry expressed that they need to tap into the community as a resource for information. He mentioned an organization that has been attempting to implement a curriculum for some time now. This group has attempted to bring the artistic component to education. He suggested that they need to tap into a valuable resource like G.G.

who has facilitated and encouraged the murals in Chicano Park. This participant was adamant about employing the community to create a curriculum.

His view was supported by another participant who stressed that it should not only be teachers partaking in the creation of a MAS curriculum. She further elaborated that this process should include not only the community, but professors from the surrounding universities, and local activists too. She emphasized that this effort should not only be facilitated by educators, but from the community too.

Every educator was in accord with the idea that curriculum writing is going to take more than just educators, professors, and the educated. They need the entire community to partake in the educational process because the gaps in education are not being addressed in low-income campuses. They all are communicating the concept that it takes a village to properly educate our students and to properly meet the needs of our students they need a community that unifies for the betterment of the future generations. The composition of this committee must include people from all levels of life. For instance, one of the participants was assisted in learning about the community he worked in, the culture of the people, and the history of that barrio by the school's custodian worker.

This custodian worker grew up in that community, understood the people, and was directly involved in bettering his surroundings, and he was the president of his neighborhood association. Yet, since this MAS educator made the transition from middle to high school, he lost that connection with the custodian who provided him with valuable information. Now that he is teaching English at the high school level, he attempted to implement those MAS elements he attained teaching at the middle school level, but he feels that it is difficult to sustain the efforts because there is no collaboration.



This idea of bringing everyone together to create a MAS curriculum, to develop resources for lessons, and to maintain the program operating. “There lies the problem because we have a bunch of folks fighting different battles, but the same issue, right? But the common denominator is patriarchy, White, dominance, right? Whether it is at the local level, the national or the global; we all have the common opponent that we struggle against, and they got us all divided. It’s all good in concept, but to get everyone to come in and to sustain it? That is a different story, and I speak from experience, from the various community advocacy efforts we’ve done.”

*Q4: In our interview sessions, it was mentioned that advocating for MAS to become a dual credit course would help with more funding, an increase of student registration, and would open the opportunity for the program to gain respect, legitimacy, and interest.*

2. *What steps can be taken to achieve this goal and expand awareness of the program, the value of teaching it, and to increase funding for it?*

When this conversation opened, one of the participants suggested that making the MAS program a dual credit would force educators to attain a master’s degree in MAS to qualify to teach the course, but this idea was disputed by another participant. “If you have a master’s degree in history or English or curriculum and instructions, like I have, I think you are qualified to teach these courses, but if you exclusively start thinking that it is only the Mexican American Studies Master’s, I think you’re going to lose a lot of folks who are teachers because they need the pedagogical foundation, first of all. You just can’t go in there and teach the content without knowing how child development and child psychology and all that works, right?” He emphasized that the strong teachers should be the ones taking the lead in teaching MAS to attract and encourage students to partake in the courses.

An additional participant stated that making the MAS program a dual credit course would be a big incentive for students. “As educators we understand that many of our colleagues became

English teachers because they had a great English teacher in middle or high school. Many people became great welders because they themselves had great instructors, and many students can become great Mexican American Studies teachers because of their experiences too.”

Furthermore, it was expressed that the curriculum needs to include the contributions of Chicanas and feminist. The feminist component needs to be integrated into the curriculum as well because most of the research that this participant recalls doing, was based on men; “it was male dominated.” By adding the Chicana and feminist contributions to the Chicana/o history, struggle, and survival, it would be an act of respect that is extremely needed, and it would broaden the curriculum as well.

The last participant to add to the conversation stated that the process of making a dual credit course would be a positive move, but the first step would be to communicate and create a relationship with the local university because the university has a solid program, and it has a lot to offer. “The district has a lot to offer the university too.” Overall, if MAS can be converted to a dual credit course, students would gain from both ends because students would receive a quality education from professors, and the MAS or Chicano Studies at the college level would also grow in return.

*Q5. What steps can be taken to begin a dialogue and collaboration with your local college/university?*

The first to participant stated that professors could “be our trainers, I first got exposed to Critical Race Theory and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; all that literature, was based off my graduate studies with my professors, logistically for us, there would be no better local or regional trainees than our current professors.” Another participant was in accord with this statement. She stated the following: since they have been teaching it a little bit longer and are exposed to more

people, and resources, they can be a point of reference and they could be our trainers, teach us and pass down the knowledge.”

Yet, another participant was critical of these two responses, although he did agree that they need to tap into the knowledge the professors have to offer, he would prefer the social activists that have locally been involved in our community and advocating. “For example, when Cesar Chavez was going to be removed from the local university, or the displacement of a local barrio, or the community environment issues; those guys (professors) don’t come out. I mean we got to go beyond the classroom and be out there advocating in the community, right?” He expressed that students need to be more involved in community activities and outreach, and one of the ways he provides a different learning perspective for his high school students is by taking them on field trips to the local college and university. He knows a professor that allows these high school students to visit his Chicano class for a 90-minute university course, and the experience and knowledge students are exposed to is invaluable.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, and CONCLUSION

This chapter will recap the outcome of my study. I will summarize participants' interpretations and provide recommendations for future teachers of Ethnic MAS programs. Finally, I will conclude with a summation of important issues that impacted this study.

#### **Interpretations of Interviews**

In this study all participants were very cooperative and eager to participate. I will emphasize that all these MAS educators faced the same challenges regarding the teaching of this course: A lack of resources, a lack of professional development, and a lack of a more ethnic-based curriculum and pedagogy. To begin, they all had to conduct their own personal research, assess their sources, create lessons, and present their information in a manner that created interest in their students and provided relevance to their lessons. Some educators had to personally recruit students to get the numbers to make these courses available, yet other teachers had to face the issue of getting students dumped in their classrooms to fulfill scheduling requirements. Considering that MAS courses are elective classes, it was a challenge to create interest amongst students, let alone respect for the course. Administrators also failed to provide the essential tools and resources for these courses to be implemented effectively because under a standardized testing culture, data and scores outweigh critical thinking, critical awareness, and critical action, in the form of community service and improvement, which is highly encouraged in MAS programs. Although administrators verbally championed the MAS program and promoted the process, their support never really materialized into resources, MAS staff development training, or school advocacy.

More so, there was no professional development provided for any of these MAS educators. Only one participant attended the Summer Teacher Institute Inservice in San Antonio, which provided training for MAS teachers. While attending this in-service, she met another MAS educator from the city she teaches but from a different district. Fortunately for this participant, she was able to attain resources from the other teacher who attended the training. She also learned that other school districts along the Texas/Mexico border, were offering MAS programs that offered dual credit to encourage student's future pursuit of a college education.

Lastly, the challenges these educators faced in attempting to implement the MAS program were similar and quite extensive. Teachers were attempting to provide a quality pedagogy without resources, with no support from administration because courses are relegated to elective status. Administrators commonly used these classes to dump students who needed a class to fulfill scheduling requirements or when they needed a classroom to place students. Some participants faced backlash from their own colleagues who questioned the implementation of the class, the information being presented, and the legitimacy of the course.

Most of these MAS educators did have a professional relationship with professors at the college or university level. Others did not have the luxury of tapping into the community or other local resources that could serve as foundational pieces to teach MAS. Therefore, there was no mentoring or guidance in implementing, sustaining, and promoting the course.

### **Interpretations of Focus Group**

Implementation of a MAS program and course for these amazing educators has been a pleasant but challenging task. Historically marred with a hostile representation, a false narrative of the program, and a misrepresentation of it they were grateful for the opportunity to be given voice and agency. Their educational background comprised of courses that challenged the status

quo, confronted forms of discrimination, and challenged them to critical action through their critical pedagogy. Through their teaching experiences, they recognized the inequalities and marginalization they personally had experienced as pupils in the same district.

Through their personal experiences, their self-consciousness of the Chicano struggle, resistance, and survival, they developed critical awareness of the corrupt policies that dictate curriculum, implement standardized testing, and accountability. Regardless, their school district did not provide any form of staff development or training to prepare these teachers to effectively facilitate and execute this ethnic studies program, nevertheless, they still managed to provide a quality and critical education.

Although each educator had a diverse educational background, each was passionate in going the extra mile to ensure they could provide a quality ethnic study that highlighted the experience, challenges, and resiliency of Mexican Americans. Teachers welcomed the opportunity to conduct research, to develop engaging critical lessons, to ensure they could provide a quality and productive pedagogy. These educators conducted their own investigation of the Chicana/o or Latinx experience, they collaborated with other MAS teachers, and some had the luxury of obtaining information from local historians and community organizations like *Familias de La Frontera*. \* Others had the opportunity to tap into professors from the local universities, but unfortunately, this luxury was not available to every educator.

The actions taken by these seven instructors displayed the resiliency demonstrated during the height of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s which led to the origins and implementation of ethnic studies with a concentration on MAS. Since its inception in 2017 at the local level, the program has faced obstacle after obstacle and considering the anti-immigrant sentiment historically plaguing this nation, the racist issues that our country has refused to acknowledge

and address, and the White supremacy that is perpetuated, this program will continue to face resistance.

As stated earlier the only curriculum teachers had to employ was the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), but with no resources to supplement their unique lessons. Many students were placed because they failed to meet athletic requirements, or they needed an elective, or because scheduling demanded it. This posed a challenge for MAS teachers because they were conscious of the fact that when funding ran low, or when core subjects needed further attention, it would be MAS electives to be cut from the master schedule.

To avoid this from happening, teachers understood they need to educate and inform parents, communities, and seek the support of professors at the college and university level. One participant felt that this was not enough though. He felt that seeking the support, aid, and training from higher institutions was not sufficient. He suggested that leaders from the community who are involved in local struggles against the city's "oligarchs," is what is needed to create an ethnic curriculum with resources connected to it to guide the process of facilitating a solid ethnic studies program like MAS. He implied that it is more that intellect, theory, and a sharing of thoughts that needs to occur to effectively develop a MAS curriculum, implement it, and legitimately establish it as a foundational core subject.

Theory and intellect must be placed in motion; a collective praxis must occur with different and diverse stakeholders who understand the importance of employing a critical pedagogy founded in community and cultural knowledge. Other educators felt that it was imperative to make this course a dual credit course, not only to create interest in the course, but to increase enrollment. More importantly, MAS programs are lacking validity at the University

level, especially in Teacher Education, and this needs to be addressed for the future of a diverse population that is seen in Texas' public- school classes.

### **Recommendations**

The Mexican American Studies program in this district was confronted with various challenges even before the implementation of the courses. These participants explicitly described the issues they encountered; no curriculum, scarce resources or nonexistent, the course is an elective, and there is no collaboration with college or university professors.

Considering that one of the participants in this research has a background in curriculum writing and instruction, a committee of community leaders, local historians, Chicana/o or Latinx educators and university professors should begin collaboration with these MAS educators on a full and comprehensive MAS curriculum. The city where this investigation was conducted is rich in history and saturated with local historians and community members who have a wealth of information to build on a solid curriculum foundation based on local Mexican and Mexican American history. Thus, a collaborative networking of local educators teaching the MAS program, historians from the local community, and university professors from the community is my first recommendation for the future of MAS programs at the local level.

Second, Professional staff development must be implemented, promoted, and funded by the district and campus. District leaders must ensure that professional training is available locally for educators who cannot travel to other cities for quality MAS training. Online Professional Development can be an option when resources are limited, as well as online conferences. Zooming can also be used to create a network of state and nationally known educators of local, state and national Ethnic MAS programs.



Third, a strong mentoring network between district MAS educators, local civil right activists, and professors should be established to create a database of resources that MAS educators can tap into and have readily available. Local university professors should be providing resources, books, and education tools to enhance, promote, and sustain MAS at the district level. There should be courses, training, and seminars provided by Chicano professors. MAS district educators should have funds to take MAS students on a field trip to the local university or college to attend a Chicana/o or MAS college lecture.

Establishing this coalition of district educators with professors will pave the way for MAS studies to attain a dual credit status and the respect that it is currently lacking by being an elective. There are Texas and California dual credit models that are currently working well, and instead of reinventing the wheel, we need to follow their lead.

Fourth and the final one, is a Community Service Project-Based where students become agents of change, but not only learning about civic engagement but being part of it--living and writing their own history (Friere, 1970). As mentioned in chapter 2 of these, the Civil Rights Movement provided many such projects for Mexican American students. An example would be working in the Immigration Shelters, Community Centers and/ or local community projects that help the marginalized, underrepresented population.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed issues of concern and struggles that the seven brave participants who accepted participation for this study experience during the time of the research. It provides remarks from the personal and focus group interviews. The chapter also provides four recommendations for future teachers of MAS programs and finally a concern for the future of

MAS programs at the local level that seems to be at present in peril through HB 4545 and the misinterpretations of Critical Race Theory.

These MAS educators understood their role as an ethnic studies instructor. They recognized that Chicanas/os or Latinx are still being colonized through the U.S. educational system, and their role as educators was to provide an objective pedagogy that unmasked the lies that permeated in education, history, and media. With no available district professional development courses to hone their critical and cultural pedagogy, they have taken the initiative to conduct their own research. They take pride in their Chicana/o identity, their city, and the history they are imparting with their students.

This study along with the teaching experiences and perspectives of these seven MAS educators has already made a positive impact. They have all decided to build a professional relationship to help one another in teaching this course. They have decided to work on a curriculum that provides much needed resources, and they have also determined to become more conscious, and proactive in the issues of their communities. The limitations reflected the novelty of the program as the MAS program was launched no more than five years ago, and to this day, teachers, administrators, and students continue to develop the program with hope of justice and equity for its students.

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## VITA

A doctoral student at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) with an interest on ethnic studies with a focus on Chicano/a Studies. Research interests include ethnic studies, Mexican American Studies (MAS), Latinx Studies, Chican@ Studies, decolonization, Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical (LatCrit), education policy, counter narratives, and civic engagement. Co-taught a Ph.D. course with Associate Professor at UTEP titled Economics of U.S. Schooling in the summer of 2018.

Has presented in three Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conferences and in the Ethnography Conference, at Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ). Has taught English and reading for 18 years at El Paso Independent School District (EPISD). Facilitated a week of community awareness and service with students at Guillen Middle School in El Paso, TX. Students participated in a week-long community awareness, activism, and service to commemorate Cesar Chavez and local farmworkers. Educators and students collected nonperishable food to donate to local farm workers, partook in a march alongside field laborers, planted trees on the Guillen Middle School campus, and listened to a lecture led by Associate Professor at UTEP.