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A Systematic Compilation of the Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Education (DESJE) Program

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A SYSTEMATIC COMPLATION OF THE DIVERSIY, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN
EDUCATION (DESJE) PROGRAM

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Master's Program in Education

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Dedication

*To all the students I had the privilege in serving and to all of those
who come from a broken home and a low-income family:*

You are not alone

y

SI SE PUEDE!

In memory of my loving granddad, the greatest man I've ever met,

Alfredo Medina, mi Lolo.

(March 12, 1950- December 11th, 2021)

And

*To the most loving, kind, strong, and courageous woman
who raised me, my grandmom.*

Margarita Medina

(October 11, 1952-living)

A SYSTEMATIC COMPLATION OF THE DIVERSIY, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN
EDUCATION (DESJE) PROGRAM

by

CYNTHIA OCHOA, M.A.

THESIS

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The University of Texas at El Paso

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DESJE Introduction

What is Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Education? For me it's means to be able to create an education that is yet to exist (Love, 2019). I grew up in El Paso, Texas and was raised by my grandparents. At a very young age, I knew I wanted to work with children and be able to make an impact in their overall education and lives. Before being raised by my grandparents, I lived in a very abusive home under the care of both my parents who suffered from substance use. Education was never a priority to my parents and the neglect during my early years of school affected me throughout my school years. For example, being fully present during class instruction was difficult because I had sleep deprivation due to the fights my parents constantly had. Other things tormented my mind, like the thought of being hit by my abusive father. And I was also malnourished and was unable to focus on school. The list of problematic issues I faced were endless, and they led me to have a lessened ability to retain information, which meant I fell behind in my learning. Children like me who suffer from trauma, neglect, and violence suffer from memory issues, and it creates a barrier to comprehending and learning like the rest of the students. I was also a Mexican/Latina student who spoke Spanish and English with an accent. Unfortunately, there weren't so many resources for diverse students like me, it made me feel like I was part of a problem and there needed to be fixed in me, because I wasn't part of the "normal" group of students.

When I came across the Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Education (DESJE) program, I wanted to be able to support and serve children who might be experiencing obstacles that interfere with their learning. Such as, a language barrier, children with adversities, or underprivileged children. How can we ensure equity for diverse students and students with ACEs? Children who have sleepless nights, children who are not being fed, children who are

being categorized as “at risk” due to their home lives, and children who are being segregated from the mainstream and made feel shame for who they are.

Through my studies in the DESJE program, I have been able better understand the issues that face our nation’s schools, including racism, oppression, microaggressions, and injustices toward people of color. This includes anyone who dares to be different in their language or identity. Growing up Mexican/Latina and being fluent in Spanish and English, I knew I was different. This program was a place in which I thought my voice could be validated. This program has shown me a range of injustices that learners face and offered many resources for educating students and bringing awareness to these issues. In this reflection, I discuss what I have learned in my DESJE coursework between Fall 2021 and Fall 2022. I begin this essay by focusing on two of the most influential courses I took in the DESJE program.

TED 5303 Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist Education

One of my very first courses in the DESJE program was Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist Education in which I took in the fall of 2021 with Dr. Ullman. This course addressed different ideas that provided us with the tools necessary to reshape education by applying anti-oppressive and anti-racist education in a variety of educational settings. As we engaged with and looked at various approaches, we learned to examine issues with detail and to question, analyze, and ultimately, transform educational inequities.

For example, people of color have been subjects of violence, police brutality, and overall injustices. Not only have people of color have been seen as less intelligent, but they have also been criticized in our society to be harmful because of the way they look. Such beliefs have caused oppression and misrepresentation that has become a problem, and must be addressed through policy and practice.

I remember falling in love with the assigned reading “*We Want to do More Than Survive*” (Love, 2019). This book highlights stories of survival and how even through difficult circumstances, people of color are overcoming constant obstacles. Systematic forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, and linguicism make schooling so much more difficult for many of us, because it is about privilege. We live in a country where people of color are minoritized. Therefore, race, background, language, economic status, and identity are obstacles that are seen as problems for our society, not assets. Everything is domesticated, and there is no room for differences or change. Abolitionist teaching, as Dr. Bettina Love describes it, is breaking old ways and traditions, as well as becoming fighters for what is just. It means becoming visionaries to imagine a world that is yet to exist (Love, 2019).

Along with this amazing book, in this course I was exposed to people like Dr. Melissa Crum (TED Talk, 2015). She shared a story about how assumptions were made about her, because of her skin color. This was done throughout her childhood education, and she noted that one teacher even said that she was smart, for a Black girl. The assumption of the teacher was wrong, but common, as she was surrounded by the belief that people of color were not smart. Ignorance is the cause of many of our problems today. When taking the time to educate ourselves, we gain power, and with power comes the ability to create change.

I was also impacted by Dr. Kevin Kumashiro (2018), who helped us understand why people have certain perspectives of others, based on someone’s religion, culture, education, and race. Dr. Kumashiro introduced five lenses of Anti-Oppressive Education, based on how we grow up, our cultures, and our education. They are: 1) Contesting authoritative discourses; 2) Unearthing hidden curricula; 3) Learning to read critically; 4) Addressing resistance; and

5) Complicating race and racism. This class really allowed me to understand the way some people undertake a variety of situations.

For example, I grew up in a Mexican/Latino household where assumptions like “you’re a woman, you should know how to cook, clean, and attend to your spouse”. Although my culture and beliefs were brought upon me, I also knew that I was more than a housewife and that marriage should be a balance. I am proud to say that I can make some delicious traditional Mexican meals, and my husband is there to help me wash the dishes when I’m done. He helps me clean the house while I put my daughter to bed. Assumptions like the one I’ve described have placed a heavy load on people. The way we do things, how we dress, our beliefs and how we go about our daily lives shouldn’t be a crime or a target. This course also built awareness about others and allowed me to want to seek for productive ways in changing and evolving our world into a better one. In the following section, I will be discussing another course that I thought was most influential for me in the DESJE program.

TED 5313 Diversity in Education Settings

During the same fall semester of 2021, I took Diversity in Education Settings with Dr. Rossatto. This class was about the diversity in schools and how what we can do as educators to make students feel included. It focused on being classroom facilitators and agents of social change with a focus on multiculturalism. We also identified and deconstruct problematic hegemonic social structures, so that we can recreate possibilities and rethink schooling. In this class I was able to read a book called “*Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” (Tatum, 2021). This book explores decades of research on the psychology of racism, and it helps readers understand the previous racism from decades ago to the modern racism and the results it has on individuals today. I found this book to interesting, because growing up as a

Latina and being raised by my elderly Spanish speaking grandparents, this was something I was subjected to. I remember feeling different and being shamed about my accent and overall, for who I was. In this course, we also discussed books like *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2020) and the importance of children being able to see themselves in their own learning. How can we expect children to be engaged in something they cannot relate to or a subject that excludes or lies about them? As an educator I find it crucial for children to feel heard and validated. It is important to embrace, accept, and normalize their languages, races, cultures, and identities. For example, teachers can use books, films, and projects that demonstrate inclusivity. They can also have scholars make their classroom their own by including ideas that represent them. In my current Kindergarten classroom, I have a few scholars whose first language is Spanish. During class assignments, I love to play music and usually my students have many suggestions. Recently, one of my students suggested a song called “No Se Va” by Grupo Frontera. To my surprise when I played this song for them, almost all my class stood up and danced and had huge smiles on their faces. Building this understanding and connection with students helps them feel valued and seen. In the next paragraphs I will discuss each of the remaining courses I took in my DESJE program.

TED 5301 Learning Contexts and Curriculum

When taking Learning Contexts & Curriculum with Dr. Rossatto in spring 2021, this course challenged my own perceptions and views about life and schooling. It focused on personal and social transformation by introducing me to theories that confirm the voices of teachers and of subordinated groups. We talked a lot about the hidden curriculum in schools and how students do not necessary receive the same equal education across different contexts. We also discussed how people follow certain expectations and rules. For example, growing up in the

lower valley in El Paso Texas many of the parents didn't really question education. Perhaps because before teachers were the most educated people in small villages in Mexico. I remember my grandparents always telling me that "the teacher is right" or "if the school is requiring it must be necessary". However, this ideology is less likely to be the case in some of the wealthier parts of El Paso.

Self-advocacy is something that is very much practiced in wealthier areas, due to the amount of privilege and upper status they uphold. When you are surrounded by privilege, and all the beautiful things in life with almost zero to no obstacles, it is easy to have a voice. However, for people like me, I had to learn as an adult how to advocate for myself. I had to learn to find my voice and be able to question everything around me. Dr. Rossatto introduced us to one of my favorite books called *The Four Agreements* (Ruiz, 2021). We focused on the first chapter, in where he talks about Domestication and the Dream of the Planet. This chapter helped us understand the focus and one-sided mentality many people have and the norms they teach us at a very young age. This has caused ongoing oppression and has made people feel as if something is wrong with them.

TED 5304 Scholarly Writing for Educators

In fall 2021 I also took Scholarly Writing for educators with Dr. Aguilar. And although Dr. Aguilar did everything in her power to make the class flow smoothly, I did find this course to be a difficult one. This course helped us build and refine scholarly writing through the use of archival research, documented sources, and library databases. We were allowed to pick a topic we were passionate about and throughout the process we worked with our classmates and our professor to provide constructive feedback on our writing that would allow us to produce publication-quality papers. I recall reading the book "*They say I say*" (Graff and Birkenstein,

2021) and being amazed by how someone can read a statement and easily challenge it, based on how it was expressed in writing. When completing essays in this class, I remember how it really challenged me to not let my personal experiences define my writing. Not repeating myself or being overly sympathetic toward the subject was something I struggled with. I worked hard on that throughout the entire semester. This course allowed me to see the other perspectives and not to be so one sided in my writing. When trying to convince an audience of something you believe to be right, you have to think about an audience with different opinions on the given subject.

SCFE 5307 Language, Race, and Culture in Education

During the summer of 2021, I took Language, Race, and Culture in education with Dr. Ullman. This class focused on raciolinguistics, and how we stereotype people based on their language, race, and culture. During this short semester I was able to read *Looking Like a Language, Sounding Like a Race* (Rosa, 2019). In this book, Rosa (2019) uses young people's culture, habits, mutual differences as well as language, and social behavior to analyze the racialization of language as a central form of modern governance. I enjoyed how this class was able to expand my way of thinking about what is ideal/acceptable and what isn't in terms of language and assumptions about people. Rosa (2019) also talked about a young scholar named Yesi, who was shamed because she said the wrong word for truck. It focused on standard Spanish vs. more colloquial Spanish, and brought me back to when I was growing up. I remember being called "the no sabo kid" which translates to "the I don't know kid". The term "no sabo kid" is used for someone who isn't fluent in Spanish and mainly used for light teasing. And that's because it's "No se", not "No sabo", but sabo follows the general verb rules in Spanish, so the speaker is overgeneralizing that form, not knowing that saber is an irregular verb.

Being able to use your primary language to learn another language is something powerful, because it allows you to make connections between both ways of speaking and being.

Translanguaging is being able to use more than one language within a classroom lesson, allowing bilinguals to use their linguistic dexterities by mobilizing and embracing their entire linguistic repertoires. This class was also one of the most inspirational and useful courses I took during my DESJE, program because it builds a foundational awareness of what people of color live and experience every day.

SCFE 5313 Transnational and Postcolonial Feminisms

In the semester of fall 2022, I took Transnational and postcolonial feminisms with Dr. Convertino. In this class, we discussed the beliefs, traditions, education, and cultures of women around the world. Topics like female genital mutilation (FGM), the hijab, religion, and power were the topics we discussed. In this class, we saw a film called “*#femalepleasure*” (Miller, 2018). This was a powerful and informational video of different women around the world who live a constant battle for simply being women and demanding rights. This made me think about how the norm is sometimes justified by things like the Bible or government expectations. In the film, there were five courageous women who talked about their archaic-patriarchal societies and religious communities, and made their voices and stories heard. These women have experienced public shaming, death threats, and have been excommunicated from their own society, as they sought a better life for themselves and future generations. Overall, the film also brought into focus the ways in which the female body is subjected to being an object of lust, meant for procreation, without any female sexual pleasure. This course brought awareness to me, regarding how women who face these challenges become their own warriors and create activist movements or programs to help women like themselves. Just because something is set to be the norm does

not mean is something people should follow or accept. Throughout my entire DESJE program we have been shown of people who took risks, stood their ground, and fought for their rights, beliefs, and more.

SCFE 5315 Queer Theory and Pedagogy

In the spring of 2021, I took Queer Theory and Pedagogy with Dr. Convertino. This course focused on gender and sexuality, along with the problematic events that have happened in schools such as bullying, and hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people. I was also introduced to terms such as non-binary, which refers to people who identify as neither male nor female, and queer, which can be used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ people, and to refer to queer theory, which is a lens to examine gender- and sex-based binaries. We also discussed the expectations society has about individuals and gender. For example, women are expected to be domesticated and to become housewives, while men are expected to be the providers and heads of the households.

During this class I was able to see a TED Talk presentation by Jo Michael Rezes, in which he does a theatrical performance on *gender rehearsativity* in where he describes it as acting or playing a gender in our everyday lives (TED Talk, 2020). Gender performativity is taking on a role, where an act is performed, and where individuals rehearse their gender, as if it was a guided script. During his play performance he asks if the world is good enough for you. This left me thinking about how acceptance is something that many people struggle with. The way the norm has been established and seen for centuries has caused change to become difficult. Therefore, when people see someone who stands out and is different from what they are used to, there is often judgement, or even violence. Things like gender, race, and pronouns do not really become important until any of those things pertain to you or someone you love. This brings me

back to the TED Talk by Jo Michael Rezes, and this question: Is our behavior what creates our gender?

Throughout this course I was introduced to concepts like hegemony. This concept is best defined as the political dominance of one state over other states, or the control by a social group within a society. Hegemonic gender is something that has been rehearsed over and over and its maintenance is part of the dominance of patriarchy. This can be seen in gender reveal parties, where blue is for boys and pink is for girls. Parents are already rehearsing and choosing a role to be practiced and performed for their children. When you rehearse a gender you wear specific clothing, choose specific colors, and even pick particular vocal ranges. Traditional gender roles are examples of hegemonic gender, because when you choose a behavior or a quality you create gender. In this course, we also talked about queering education, a place where we challenge the cisgender and normative structures, practices, and curricula that have marginalized or oppressed non-heterosexual and all students. Queering education would make room for acceptance and acknowledgement for queer students. By promoting social and legal changes for LGBTQ+ folks, we limit the violence and harassment they encounter in their daily lives. I remember learning about a student named Gavin Grimm, who wanted a non-binary restroom in school, because of the harassment and torture they received from peers at school. This transgender boy decided to sue the school board over being forced to use the girl's restroom, which was part of the school board's policy. After a few years, the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Virginia ruled in favor of Gavin on all his claims. Because of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment, we have many who now deal with mental health issues, and some have even taken their own lives (The Trevor Project, 2022). This class brought a lot of awareness to me.

SCFE 5319 Comparative and Transnational Education

In the summer semester of 2022, I took Comparative and Transnational education with Dr. Cashman. This course focused education rights, social inequalities, and urban-rural education, we also discussed teaching and assessment methods, the effects of gender, race and social class. This class consisted of many readings and presentations. I recall talking about the need for cross-border understanding, and inclusivity in education. Border-pedagogies is a multicultural educational approach in where to help students understand their histories, identities, and cultures. There are children who are being historically and culturally excluded and are unable to see themselves in their own learning and are being oppressed by this. For years, we celebrated Christopher Columbus Day, until finally it was officially changed to Indigenous Peoples' Day.

During this course Dr. Cashman assigned us a documentary called "*On the Way to School*" (Plisson, 2013). In this film we saw different students from around the world who walk miles and face many dangers to attend school. Although their journey to obtain an education is difficult and different, these students go to school every day with excitement in hopes to live what many call "The American Dream" a better lifestyle with more opportunities. Border-pedagogies and cross-border understanding allows room for inclusive approaches in educational settings. For example, language is an area in which students need to build connections, to make sense of their learning. For example, a student might pronounce an English word in Spanish to make sense of what that word means. Language is everchanging, and when there is a need of communication being able to connect their linguistic repertoire and make up words is how students can comprehend.

TED 5398 Thesis 1: Critical Discourse Analysis

In the spring semester of 2022, I took Thesis 1 with Dr. Ullman, taught by Jair Muñoz, in where it's focus was to develop knowledge of the research of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this course we used the book, *How to do Critical Discourse Analysis*" (Machin and Mayr, 2012). This book was difficult for me to read, and it also carried a lot of information regarding how language, power and ideology are played in media, texts, and any form of social platform. However, we watched films and YouTube clips every week that helped me better understand and relate to what I was reading.

For example, during our first week I recall watching the film, *Latinos Beyond Reel-Challenging a Media Stereotype*" (Picker and Sun, 2013). This was an interesting film, because it brought light to things that perhaps we overlook when consuming mainstream media. For instance, in this film we saw a variety of fictional figures and historic heroes like Pancho Villa being played in Brownface, by White actors. This sends the wrong message to the audience, because it makes it seem that white people can play any character and perform any racial or ethnic background role, which people of other races cannot. I also recall a variety of short TV commercials we analyzed, that helped me understand the manipulation used in this medium. This course brought awareness to me, and provided me with a different mindset to analyze what I consume. Overall, this course allowed me to comprehend the meaning that is created behind context, and it exposed me to ways to analyze that power and how it is used in a variety of contexts.

Conclusion

In this reflection, I have summarized and discussed each course I took during my DESJE program, and I have highlighted an assignment that was helpful or meaningful to me. During my DESJE program, all the classes were intertwined with one another and worked to build on my previous knowledge. Every class showed me the importance of acceptance and understanding,

and the challenges it takes to make a difference. This program has also exposed me to the suffering of those who have been marginalized and subjected to hateful acts because of who they are, and this has led me not to jump to conclusions. It has also developed the need for awareness and being able to educate myself on topics that affect people's everyday lives. Overall, this reflection is a way for me to more deeply consider the main topics that were presented and learned in each course. Writing this was a wonderful experience and it was one that has changed me, and inspired me to do more for the children teach.

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When The Odds are Against You: A Critical Literature Review of the Pedagogical Implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences

Exceling in formal education is one way to improve a person's social mobility and life chances (McMahaon & Oketch, 2013). However, there is a long line of educational inequity in the United States from the founding of the nation to the present. People of color and minorities have fought long and hard for educational equity, with the most effective approaches being grassroots mobilization and court battles (Lopez & Burciaga, 2014). This includes examples such as California schools denying entrance to Chinese American children to enter schools based on their ancestry in the 1800s; the arrest of Margaret Douglass for teaching literacy to enslaved people in 1854, along with the horrors of enslavement and its extension, through Jim Crow laws, as well as Juan Crow (Madrigal-Garcoa & Acevedo-Gil, 2016). *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) established that segregating Spanish-Speaking Mexican children was unconstitutional, laying the groundwork for the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision (Noltemeyer, et al, 2012). Legal advances go hand-in hand with grass-roots activism, as the Little Rock Nine (1957) fought to integrate schools after *Brown*, and the struggles persist. Activists continue to fight for the educational rights of people with disabilities after the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well. Similarly, Spaulding and Pratt (2015) show us that the treatment of people with disabilities follows societal and cultural trends, changing conceptions of disability as a qualitative or quantitative phenomenon, shifting emphases on nature versus nurture, and the new not necessarily being better than the old.

This is the case when it comes to gender equity as well. Domestic education for girls, especially girls of color, was the norm for many years, and the first institution to offer women bachelor's degrees was the Georgia Female College in 1836 (Noltemeyer, et al, 2012). While there has been improvement in these areas, there is still a lack of educational equity both

systemically and in the classroom. Unfortunately, although school segregation is illegal, it continues to exist in the United States, and there is still significant racism, sexism, and homophobia being experienced in schools (Rothstein, R., 2019). The United States has shown gender inequalities in schools. For example, the belief that male students are naturally better in STEM fields while often having a discriminatory view on female students is prejudice (Riegle-Crumb, 2019). The history behind Indigenous Education is something that has also been a battle for hundreds of years. The United States has had countless of racist policies and practices that have jeopardize Indian learners. For example, on December 2nd, 2011, President Barack Obama expanded educational opportunities and improve overall outcomes for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians by passing a bill that allowed them to learn in their Native languages and still receive educators who prepare them for college and careers (McKinley et al, 2015). In the following section I will be discussing adverse childhood experiences.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

According to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) (2022), which is a national measure of economic, social, and health factors that allows educators to understand income disparities. People who have experienced ACEs have higher rates of dropping out and teenage pregnancy, even when it is disaggregated by race. This emphasizes just how intertwined poverty is with other forms of social exclusion and personal pathways that lead to social disadvantage (Harding, 2003). Akom et al (2008) note that based on a child's birthplace, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, those who are minoritized have fewer opportunities than those in the majority. They make clear that not all scholars are given the same chances. Therefore, we can conclude that K-12 scholars who are faced with challenging obstacles like race, racism, violence, and poverty are likely to have experienced ACEs.

How prevalent are ACEs among school-aged children? Sacks and Murphey (2018) note that there is growing interest in understanding the prevalence of ACEs in the United States. Their research used data from the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) to describe the prevalence of one or more ACEs among children from birth through the age of seventeen. They also considered race/ethnicity and nine geographic divisions used in the U.S Census. They found that economic hardship and divorce/separation were the most common ACEs reported. In the United States, 45 percent of children have experienced at least one ACE and in states with significant amounts of child poverty, such as Arizona, Arkansas, Montana, New Mexico, and Ohio, as many as one in seven children has had three or more ACEs (National Survey of Children's Health, 2022). Sacks and Murphey (2018) note that 61 percent of Black non-Hispanic children and 51 percent of Hispanic (i.e., the term used in this work) children have experienced at least one ACE. On the other hand, white non-Hispanics experienced 23 percent. The prevalence of ACEs is lower among white non-Hispanics, and Asian non-Hispanics, leaving Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic children with the highest percentage of ACEs (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Also, ACEs vary depending on gender, which means that certain outcomes and strengths are sustained differently (Leban & Gibson, 2020).

Cprek, et al (2019) conducted a study indicating that ACEs have been important contributors to poor health outcomes throughout a person's lifespan. The study was evenly distributed between males and females and found that 30 percent of boys and 23.8 percent of girls had a risk of a delay. Among the racial group study, white children recorded the lowest risk of delay with a 25.3 percent versus a 30.5 percent of Black children and 30.0 percent of children who identified as other.

Cavanaugh, et al (2015) conducted a study of 34,652 adults involved in the (National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related conditions NESARC, (2022) in which they considered ACEs in relation to mental and substance use disorders (MSUDs). When comparing low ACEs and MSUDs, adults who had the most ACEs had 3.71-89.75 times greater of a chance in also having MSUDs. This study identified the following mental health disorders: major depressive episodes, dysthymic episodes, manic or hypomanic episodes, PTSD, panic disorders, social phobias, specific phobias, generalized anxiety disorders, as well as alcohol use and drug use. They found that 10 percent of females and 8 percent of males had experienced parental substance use, and 13 percent of females and 14 percent of males had experienced childhood physical abuse.

Merrick et al (2019) show that from 2015–2017, ACEs have led to health concerns and unfortunate educational and life outcomes for both children and adults. ACEs can affect health, brain connectivity and its function, and proper immune response and even organ functioning. Children and adults who experience ACEs have an increased risk for alcohol and substance use disorders, along with suicide, mental health conditions, heart disease, and chronic illnesses. They are likely to have less educational attainment, employment, and income. Such things can clearly affect the health and well-being of those who have experienced ACEs. In fact, at least five of the ten leading causes of death have been associated with exposure to adverse childhood experiences (Merrick, et al, 2019). 60.9 percent of adults in Merrick, et al’s (2019) study experienced at least one ACE and 15.6 percent had four or more ACEs. Also, the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences was higher among people between the ages of 18-24 and 25-34.

The argument here is that there have been and continue to be struggles for educational equity in the United States around race, language, ethnicity, gender, and ability. The focus of this

paper is to point out that there is an opportunity gap, as opposed to an achievement gap, (Akom et al, 2008), and that learners who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been overlooked, as a group.

The academic opportunity gap can be seen in the educational outcomes of students who have experienced oppressive practices based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and sexuality, and I argue that this is the case for learners who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as well. Students who have experienced ACEs need trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning. In the body of this paper, I explore some studies that explore trauma-informed pedagogy, and I review the literature that has to do with ACEs and schooling by providing an understanding of how, at a school-wide level, ACEs, and absences, and dropping out are intertwined. I also discuss the literature on teachers and caregivers who have also had ACEs. Lastly, in the appendix I discuss my own experiences with ACEs and the motive of this research.

What Are Trauma-Informed Pedagogies?

Trauma-informed pedagogies refer to understanding that children might be going through traumatic experiences that can affect their overall learning in a negative way. It also refers to specific practices for educators and counselors that allows them to better support K-12 students (Portell, M. 2019). Circumstances such as not having a stable place to live, being abused, not having a healthy living environment, not being able to complete their homework due to violence in the home – all these realities can create a stall in the education of learners with ACEs. Moreover, unresolved childhood traumas will follow these children into adulthood and affect their educational and life experiences. Golden (2020) explains that trauma-informed pedagogies have recently begun to be studied in education, and that it is crucial to understand

that there is a range of approaches that teachers can use. He suggests that by using a trauma-informed pedagogical lens with a critical eye, educators can offer necessary support and change students' academic and social outcomes.

To use pedagogies that support students who have experienced ACEs, we must also take into consideration racial, gendered, and class differences among these children. Trauma-informed pedagogies are not necessarily categorizing children as being “bad kids.” Rather, trauma-informed pedagogy can help students learn to develop trust, when they are being guided with the proper tools. Building a deeper understanding among teachers of how surroundings and environment lead to traumatic experiences is essential.

Cramer (2018) mentions that many students are facing educational limitations because of the effects of poverty, discrimination, and ACEs, and that, teachers must be provided with trainings in trauma-informed pedagogy to teach more effectively. Awareness provides helpful tools that allow teachers to better support students with ACEs.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2012) is a non-profit whose mission is to end homelessness. It informs teachers of the children impacted by homelessness of the many challenges they might encounter because of this. As such, this brings awareness about the effects of poverty and homelessness, and prepares teachers to develop stronger emotional connections, develop a trusting and safe environment for learners, and build academic confidence and critical/creative thinking skills among their students. It is also about teachers learning to recognize how to properly address students who are being challenged with chronic stress from poverty, and to avoid inappropriate school labels, such as *at-risk*. When students are experiencing poverty and homelessness, a lack of engagement with school is common. Cramer (2018) suggests that teachers can use the arts as a covert action strategy that can eventually lead

students to develop their problem-solving skills, working memory skills, and any limitations they might be encountering, including vocabulary development. Once teachers can identify the child's needs according to their behavior, they can build on the child's strengths.

The Framework for 21st Century Learning was developed as a school/community that utilizes skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation (Cramer, 2018). Art can often demonstrate life experiences, and it provides an open discussion for understanding an individual. For example, a piece of art can allow students to express what they notice, think, feel, and wonder. Visual art also supports communication, as words might not be easy for many students. However, through art, they may be able to express what they are feeling. It also allows students to collaborate in their artistic projects and to become more engaged in their own learning. These approaches also encourage creativity and innovation by guiding students to express themselves in a positive manner, regardless of their experiences. Everything that is being understood and seen is through personal experiences, and art acts as an outlet of expression to make sense of the world.

Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE) (Brunzell, et al, 2022) was designed to promote trauma-informed education and positive education. This approach brings awareness to teachers so that they understand children with traumatic experiences, and can better meet their needs for wellbeing both within and outside the classroom. TIPE consist of three domains, the first domain is repairing regulatory abilities. This helps teachers guide students in managing their stress-responses with effective strategies such as de-escalating self-talk out loud activities. This kind of technique can move students from emotional episodes such as trying to leave the classroom to becoming able handle the classroom environment with a positive outcome. This can mean giving students time to calm down, helping them become aware of their feelings, and

having them redirect their thoughts. Brunzell et al (2022) explains how one teacher created a set of emoji cards to teach emotional intelligence this produced a positive emotion shift in students when dealing with their emotional stress-response. Then, students can understand the effects of the stress that is happening in their own brain and body and effectively de-escalate their stress responses.

The second domain is increasing relational capacities. The focus on this is to equip teachers to help students form and maintain classroom relationships. Trauma can cause students to have difficulty forming relational attachments. Unfortunately, for those who experience childhood trauma, adults within the family who are meant to nurture these children are often the sources of the trauma or neglect (Brunzell, et al 2019). Heretofore, equipping students with ACEs to build strong relationships can allow them to have a support system that is helpful in times of distress.

The last domain is increasing psychological resources for student wellbeing. Often, children with traumatic experiences find that the classroom setting is the most stable and consistent environment they know. To successfully have positive psychology interventions with students, there needs to be a consistent development in character, resilience, strong relationships, healing, and overall growth. These domains help teachers better meet students' needs, so that they can become fully engaged in schooling and increase their own wellbeing. These resources can help educate teachers use trauma-informed pedagogies that allow them to be successful in their teaching methods, and also to help and better serve children with ACEs.

Teachers and Caregivers with ACEs

Narayan, et al (2021) argues that comprehensive approach to prevent ACEs in early childhood must be understood broadly. They focus on the fact that Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) is understudied in education. They determined that there is a higher probability of ACEs in children if their parents have experienced ACEs, as well. For example, adults with PTSD may be a consequence of parental ACEs or their family background history. ACEs traits serve as a mediator, linking ACEs with future generations. Therefore, when adults with PTSD become parents, there is a probability that ACEs history on children is relatable.

A study performed in a southern state by Hubel (2020) states that of 349 early care educators, 73 percent had at least one ACEs score, and 22 percent had 4 or more ACEs. They mentioned that one of their most important roles in education is promoting a healthy social and emotional classroom climate for the scholar, especially for those with ACEs. Some researchers have questioned how teachers with their own ACEs might not be the best qualified to provide a healthy and good environment for students. However, when examining ACEs among teachers who have had a similar background to their students, some scholars have suggested that they can create an environment of wanting to protect and nurture their scholars. Connections are often built on relatable and shared experiences, and children with ACEs may be more likely to trust individuals who can relate to their own personal traumas.

Based on the findings on trauma-informed teaching in early childhood education, Hubel (2020) found that many of those working in education have experienced ACEs themselves and for that reason, teachers can build connections with scholars who are dealing with their own traumas to better serve them as their experiences allow them to familiarize with their circumstances.

Trauma-Informed Teaching with Elementary Learners

Dombo & Sabatino (2019) argue that children who have experienced traumatic events can be triggered during class by environmental factors such as smells, sounds, images, touch, or

arguments. For example, a child might be triggered by loud sounds because maybe their abuser constantly used a loud voice or disturbing loud sounds. The teacher might not necessarily be aware of this information and therefore, it may create a setback for the scholar. Places and people that are supposed to be a child's safe place are often the ones that neglect and abuse the child. Dombo & Sabatino, (2019) discuss three primary pillars of trauma-informed education: the importance of establishing safety; emotional connection; and emotional and behavioral regulation. Classrooms that feel safe to children must include classroom routines, an established classroom management, and have clear expectations. This allows the classroom environment to become a safe place for children. Also, when teachers can establish trust with the child, they are able to slowly learn about their unique triggers, which may affect their learning and environment.

Von Dohlen, et al (2019) states that implementation of trauma-informed practices validates students and promotes healthier relationships. This study was conducted in a laboratory middle school (LMS) located in a rural county with a population of 43,000. During the time of this research, the enrollment at LMS was 56 students. They were 22 females and 34 males. 76.8 percent of students identified as white, non-Hispanic; 14.3 percent identified as multiracial; 5.4 percent were native American; 3.5 percent were Hispanic, and there were none who identified as African American. There were also 21.4 percent of students in special education, 4 percent had 504 plans, and 48 percent received free or reduced lunch. This study focuses on three students who had experienced a traumatic event in their life. It was also indicated that trauma-informed pedagogy is good for *all* students, as everyone has their own unique experiences.

For example, Damien lives with his grandmother, and has a difficult time in the context of a traditional classroom, where he gets frustrated and acts out violently. He is aggressive and has had multiple verbal outbursts. He also has frequent absences, and this has led him to feel lost

in class, despite his best efforts. Julie is an eighth-grader who has had multiple surgeries to help her walk. Like Damien, Julie is being cared for by her grandmother, as her biological mother doesn't have the financial means to support her. She is currently physically challenged in most activities, and exhibits attention-seeking behaviors. She also struggles socially, and comes across as mean and hurtful towards her peers. Because she has experienced bullying so often, her only coping mechanism is to bully others. Lastly, we have Nate. He comes from a large family with both parents present, three siblings, grandparents, and many women that he refers to as stepmoms. He comes from a background where the family struggles financially and he currently struggles with impulsive outbursts. He is also animated and very energetic, however these characteristics have caused him to have disciplinary issues.

Von Dohlen, et al (2019) discuss children like Damien, Julie, and Nate in relation to a program called *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* (AMLE., 2022). This program provides trauma-informed practices that are focused on meeting students' academic needs as well as their socioemotional needs. For example, students at LMS are regularly involved in decision-making regarding their own classroom learning environments. One way of involving students in decision-making is allowing them to create classroom rules and student expectations, and determining teacher expectations, as well. It also mentions the importance of teachers becoming more aware of how to read students' body language and non-verbal cues to determine their emotions, as sometimes these things can be easily missed. They also concluded that schools and teachers can not only provide a safe environment for these scholars, but also bring awareness to teachers about triggers that can be traumatizing for the scholar.

School Absences

Stempel, et al (2017) conducted an analysis to examine chronic school absenteeism and adverse childhood experiences. The research was conducted with 58,767 school-age children between ages of 6 and 17. They found that among the students with absenteeism, their parents had experienced at least one ACE. Their study showed that children in elementary school showed the highest percentage of missing class for 15 days or more (39.3 percent); middle school was next (32.7 percent); and high school was the lowest (28 percent). In this research, it was determined that while having multiple ACEs does increase the risk of chronic absenteeism, certain ACEs have a greater impact than others. Some of the most impactful ACEs included neighborhood violence, family substance abuse, having special health care needs, and living in poverty. Middle school children with high exposure to violence have shown a high prevalence of absenteeism.

Rankine, et al (2022) found that out of over eight million United States scholars, 16 percent of the population are chronically absent from school. In these findings, they concluded that 45.5 percent of students were missing two or more days within 30 days, with 9.8 percent missing four to five days, and 9.4 percent missing six or more days. This is alarming. The unequal distribution of chronic absenteeism can start in early childhood education and can easily progress throughout a child's schooling. Constant absences can affect scholars' future educational and career opportunities, socioeconomic outcomes, and health. By the time children have reached middle school, chronic absenteeism has caused an enormous impact on their schooling, and often, by this point, they are at risk of failing to graduate. Low academic achievement is often connected with behaviors such as substance use, early sexual encounters, low physical activity, and a poor diet. In a study of 587 scholars, an outcome variable of absenteeism was 15 percent. This was among students between the ages of 11-15. They also took

into consideration absenteeism in relation to race, and 33.9 percent of chronic absentees identified as black/non-Hispanic; 29.2 percent as white/non-Hispanic; 7.8 percent as Hispanic; and 24.6 percent as multiracial/other. This also divided the findings from 49.5 percent who identified as female, 42.5 percent as male and 4.0 percent as transgender, another identity, or unsure. This type of research has proven that children who are exposed to violence have a high prevalence of being absent and of encountering obstacles throughout their childhoods and into adulthood.

Crosby, et al (2018) mention how it is believed that to thrive, children need good attendance records, resourced schools, and engagement in schooling. However, it is not surprising that children who have experienced trauma face different barriers throughout their lives. Rather than having these children with ACEs feel shame for their circumstances, teaching social justice education through trauma-informed teaching allows educators to gain awareness and knowledge to identify trauma-exposed students who have been disempowered by their adversities. In conclusion, Crosby, et al (2018) determined that trauma-informed teaching gives teachers opportunities to help students to get the services they need, and to maintain a healthy mental state, without being discouraged in their schooling.

Stempel, et al (2017) conducted an analysis to examine chronic school absenteeism and ACEs. This was done by conducting research of 58,767 school age children between ages of 6 and 17. They found that their parents had experienced at least one ACE themselves, and that elementary scholars showed the highest absenteeism. Rankine, et al (2022) did a similar study that found more than eight million United States scholars, 16 percent of the population, are chronically absent from school. This is impactful, as this has is a factor in scholars' future education, careers, socioeconomic outcomes, and health. Von Dohlen, et al (2019) and Crosby,

et al (2018) found that resources like *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* (AMLE., 2022) can make a big difference among children who are experiencing trauma and that is also equips teachers with the tools to better help these scholars. When teachers become more aware of students' trauma, they can better identify students' triggers. They also concluded that such resources help teachers overcome any stressors they might be experiencing themselves.

Struggling and Dropping Out

Hinojosa et al (2019) conducted a survey with 525 undergraduate students about ACEs and their barriers to school success. The participants reported barriers with different types of ACEs, which were identified as: being judged unfairly because of race; experiencing verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse; witnessing domestic violence; witnessing serious mental illness in the home; witnessing substance use in the home; and experiencing extreme economic hardship. 56.5 percent of those with five or more ACEs said they experienced difficulty in managing their time as a barrier to college success, compared with 37.7 percent of those reporting no ACEs. Therefore, we understand that ACEs play a big part in academic outcomes and other health-related issues that come with their experiences.

Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) write that children who experience ACEs are not necessarily or formally diagnosed or referred to services for numerous reasons. Some behaviors may be undetectable or overlooked. It is also important for teachers to identify children's triggers and to be able to determine what really constitutes bad behavior among children with ACEs. ACEs are a barrier for children's academic success and overall accomplishments in life. However, research has also shown that people with ACEs can overcome them. Scribner (2014) says that almost half of American children have experienced an adverse situation in their childhood.

In the research done by Iachini, et al (2016) they explored the extent to which thirteen students who had repeated ninth grade experienced eight different types of traumas. This study showed that children with ACEs are more likely to drop out of school compared with individuals without ACEs. They also looked at their ethnicity and economic status. Their study showed that parental separation/divorce and incarceration had a significant impact on learners. This work provides us with the need for “identification and availability of early intervention services to support students who have experienced trauma” (Iachini, et al, 2016, p.225). Given the importance of these students’ educational future, it is important for educators to be well equipped with strategies to reduce the number of dropouts.

In this category, Rumberger (2012) states the high prevalence in dropouts and the reasons behind it. His book states that in the United States, 607,789 students dropped out in 2008-2009 and that there were higher numbers indicating students not graduating. In 2010 there were almost 28 million dropouts at the age of eighteen. Rumberger (2012) also states that these children are more likely to be involved in criminal activities, suffer from health conditions, and to live in poverty. This is crucial, as all these factors stem from ACEs. Hinojosa, et al (2019) conducted a study that showed children with ACEs are less likely to finish school. Their findings showed that 56.5 percent of those with five or more ACEs had difficulty managing their time to finish their schooling. Iachini, et al (2016) conducted a study in which thirteen students repeated the ninth grade, and concluded that children with ACEs are more likely to drop out from school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to understand the meaning behind ACEs and the prolonged effects they have over the life course. Perhaps most importantly, I have reviewed approaches, services, and techniques that teachers can use to work with children affected by ACEs. Throughout this paper I provided an explanation of what ACEs are, I discussed the literature on

absences, dropouts, and teachers and caregivers who have ACEs. I also discussed some examples of trauma- informed pedagogy. A significant number of people who work with children are likely to have experienced one or more ACEs themselves, which provides them with shared experience, insight, dedication, and the heart to comprehend, advocate, and support these children. Students with ACEs need guidance and services, and of love and care. “ACEs need culturally relevant therapy that teaches age-appropriate stress-reduction practices” and there is a powerful need “for mentors who understand what being a critical mentor means” (Love, 2020, p. 74). The need to prepare our teachers to support our scholars to obtain success is a critical need. Teachers play an important role, not only academically, in the success of children with ACEs, but also in becoming their support system and safe place. By providing awareness about ACEs and the methods discussed in this paper, teachers can be better prepared to help children receive the guidance needed and for them to develop towards a better future.

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Appendix

In the childhood stories I grew up reading, heroes are often perceived as someone strong, courageous, and overall, a positive role model. These characters often inspire us to do better and make us feel that we can achieve more than what we can imagine. In my story, my hero was not close to any of those figures. She was rather more of an antagonist. She was my mother.

My mother was someone that solidified within me to know exactly what I did not want to become. Growing up, she taught me that on any given day, you could lose it all and fall into a pit of loneliness, sadness, rage, and hopelessness. The traumas discussed in this paper are events that one can learn to overcome with an antagonist like my mother because it is then that an individual can have an exact image of what is not wanted in life. These traumatic experiences can shape a person to be stronger and even lucky in ways that are hard to comprehend as one grows up. Even though I was a child, I was lucky to grow up knowing exactly what I wanted for myself and what I wanted to become. I wanted to be the opposite of my mother. I wanted to be someone who didn't cause so much pain to those around me. I wanted to have a loving family, stability, a career, wealth, and health.

I grew up in El Paso, Texas, a warm city where the sun always shines, and the air is always hot. It was there that my mother gave birth to me in 1991. During her educational experience, she once had access to a full Art scholarship to the University of Arizona while attending Ysleta High School, but my grandma rejected the offer because my mother was only sixteen and too young to live alone in an unknown city with no family. I believe that her life would've been different if she had gotten the opportunity to accept the scholarship. Her circumstances would've been so different had she not been surrounded by the wrong kind of people. Moreover, she was also an excellent artist with beautiful penmanship and liked to paint as a hobby. Perhaps the world would've smiled upon her if her natural talent had been nurtured.

When my mother met my father, she managed two Allstate insurance companies and appeared to have a bright future ahead of her. However, soon after my mother married my father, their relationship became unhealthy and abusive. While with my father, my mother was constantly beaten, cheated on and worst of all, became addicted to an excessive amount of drugs. My father dealt drugs for income and abused them himself. Sadly, it was not only my mother my father targeted. My father got creative in ways to punish me. For instance, he would make me kneel facing the wall and placed bricks on my hands or whatever might be heavy enough to cause me great pain and discomfort. Growing up with an abusive father and under drug dependent parents was very difficult. Fear was the biggest problem of all as I was a child and was unable to let my teachers know I was hungry, terrified, or tired from the sleepless nights due to my parent's constant fighting. Their multi-layered neglect led to hatred. I was angry for not feeling loved or cared for, for being different from the rest of my classmates, for feeling lost and confused in a world I barely knew, and for a very long time, I was angry at myself because I thought I was the problem. Because of these traumatic experiences, I developed the tendency of wetting the bed and it became something I couldn't control. I remember trying so hard not to and would fight my sleep not to have an accident, as I knew my father would scream and hit me the very next day for doing so. Eventually, after nine years of nonstop abuse, my parents divorced. My mother and I then moved in with my grandparents, who since that day, became my parental figures. They took upon themselves a responsibility that was not theirs to own, and treated me as if I WAS theirs.

Unfortunately, for my mother, her situation did not improve. She lost her job, her friends, and her passion towards art. Alcohol and drugs became her one and only focus. As for me, I was still trying not to wet the bed at the age of nine, out of the tremendous amount of fear that I still

held in my being. My mother also became verbally abusive towards me and everyone around her. While the other children in my school were busy participating in sports, playing outside, or simply having a “normal” childhood, I remained worried about my unconscious mother and wondered if she would overdose.

The first time my mother collapsed in front of me, I remember feeling terrified. Her face was pale as she was having a seizure and her body was shaking at a rapid speed outside our backyard door. She gurgled white foam, vomited, and her eyes rolled back. Although I was a child and didn't know the actual definition of an overdose, I knew she was suffering because of all of the drugs she was consuming. Even so, my grandparents tried their best to be the best parents they could be and filled me with much love, a roof over my head, the bare necessities, and guided me towards having a relationship with God.

My Grandparents

My grandparents, Alfredo Medina and Margarita Martinez De Medina (Mague), were both born in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua from where they migrated to the United States in search of a better future. My grandmother migrated in May 1968 and my grandfather migrated in January 1969 and six months later on June 23rd 1969, they got married. My grandfather always worked a minimum wage job. My grandmother was a housewife who took care of all my cousins and myself and made sure that sopita was always on the stove warming up their home and our tummies. My grandparents also lived paycheck to paycheck, and I never realized how much of a struggle it was for them to even have things like a home or a stocked refrigerator. However, growing up my grandparents always tried to give me the best they could. Just like any child, I was mesmerized by the cool gadgets, technology, nice clothing, and shoes everyone possessed. Thinking back, the times my grandparents treated me to fast food, we never dined in. Places like

Peter Piper Pizza were off limits. They always got the pizza to go because my grandparents didn't have the money for the coins to play games or the dessert ice cream at the end. Moreover, going to Whataburger meant sharing a meal with my grandmother, because there wasn't enough for each of us to get a full meal. I fondly remember how my grandmother would always cut the burger in half and give me the bigger slice with the most fries along with her Coke while she drank her cafecito.

Of course, all these things were never once discussed with me and it wasn't until I was older that I realized how much financial distress we were in as a family. This made me admire my grandparents even more because they never made me feel less than. Part of my success has always been because they believed I could, and this is something that has always helped me achieve my goals. Many of the times, you only need one person who truly believes you can accomplish greatness. My grandparents taught me to view the world with equality and often reminded me that everyone must be treated the same. There was no money, color, gender, or language that mattered more than another. Alfredo and Mague lifted, nurtured, and clothed me with all the kindness and love any little nine-year-old could ever wish for and they did this throughout my entire life, and still from heaven above.

They also taught me that forgiveness and kindness is necessary to move forward even if it does not always come easily. Despite my mother's hurtful actions, they continued to protect and care for her. My mother's insults, stormy emotional outbursts, jailed offenses, embarrassing encounters, stolen valuable objects that went missing at home and numerous of other offenses did not matter to my grandparents. My hatred for my mother however grew fuller and made me question the meaning of love on many occasions, as nothing really made sense on my end. To try to make me understand, my grandmother would say "es una enfermedad, no sabe lo que hace" in

Spanish which translates to, “She’s sick; she doesn’t know what she’s doing”. But my mother cried and begged for forgiveness the very next day after her outburst, which clearly showed that she knew exactly what she was doing wrong. With all the focus on my mother, it was hard to have a “normal” childhood even after we left the physical abuse. Things such as extra curriculars, sports, graduating, or going to college were never a subject I heard at home. Because of the life I was living and all the pain I was going through, I knew deep down inside that I needed to do something to set myself free from that type of life. It was very difficult to excel in school as it was challenging to do homework or even get sleep while my mother threw up or gave a marvelous performance of her sickness. This was compounded by the fact that I was a child being raised by Spanish caretakers in where English did not always come easy for me. My motivation to become someone with more was my upbringing but I also know that for some individuals who may experience the same ACEs, striving for “more” might not always be so easy as the “world” may assume that you will be just like your parents and consumed by the same vicious cycle of addiction and abuse. When I started this journey, my Granddad Alfredo Medina was still living, and he was so proud of me for being the first in my family to even think and try to attempt something so big. Remembering his tears as I handed him my Bachelor’s graduation cap is one of my most profound memories. I can only wish to tell him now, “Si se pudo”, as I accomplish what I never thought I would, which is obtaining my master’s degree.

Curriculum Vita

My name is Cynthia Ochoa, I was raised and born in El Paso, TX on June 14. I obtained a B.A., in Multidisciplinary Studies, 2020 from The University of Texas at El Paso. I then later then proceeded with a M.A., in Diversity, Equity and Social Justice in Education, 2023 also from The University of Texas at El Paso. I conducted a Thesis/Capstone project called: “When The Odds are Against You: A Critical Literature Review of the Pedagogical Implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences”. I started my education journey in 2017 with New Horizons Home School Academy as a K-5th teacher and drama instructor. In 2020 I then transitioned to IDEA Rio Vista in where I am currently a Kindergarten teacher.