

Guerra, M. J., López, M. M., & Benavidez, A., *Funds of Identity and education: The journey of a Latina educator from linguistic erasure to linguistic empowerment*

Funds of Identity and Education: The Journey of a Latina Educator from Linguistic Erasure to Linguistic Empowerment

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Abstract

This study had three aims: to present a case study and explain the *funds of identity* of a Latina educator; to use this as an opportunity to connect heritage language to ideological clarity and humanizing pedagogies in educator preparation programs; and to illustrate how pedagogy and language education can include transformational and healing elements when educators are engaged in culturally and linguistically affirming professional development. By understanding ourselves as teachers in relation to the communities in which we teach, we are able to develop ideological clarity and reject deficit perspectives that serve to erase non-English languages spoken at home in order to effectively serve and advocate for our multilingual, emerging bilingual and heritage language students. This case study of one Latina's journey to linguistic empowerment may serve as an example of how future teachers can transform their own experiences of language loss into empowerment and reclaim their own culture, language, and values not only for themselves but for their students as well.

Keywords: heritage language, humanizing pedagogy, teacher education, ideological clarity, case study

Introduction

Spanish language communities in the United States have had their languages taken away from them in various forms throughout colonization. Unfortunately, this practice persists today despite policies which provide legal provisions for bilingual education. In Texas, where this study takes place, bilingual education has been required by law since the early 1970s in elementary schools where there are large numbers of non-English proficient students (Blanton, 2004; San Miguel, 1988). However, this does not pertain to Spanish heritage students who may be proficient in English. In addition, the vast majority of Spanish proficient immigrant children do not have access to bilingual education and thus do not maintain their home language. By the time they reach postsecondary schooling, they are shamed and distressed by this erasure and the ensuing lack of linguistic connection to their families and communities (Fillmore, 1991; Rumbaut, Massey & Bean, 2006; Zentella, 1997). This study explores the funds of identity of a Latina educator and the critical moments that allowed her to reclaim and embrace her bilingualism more fully and in turn practice linguistic healing and empowerment.

This study has three aims: to present a case study and explain the “funds of identity” (Esteban-Guitart, & Moll, 2014, p.35) of a Latina educator; to use this as an opportunity to connect heritage language to ideological clarity and humanizing pedagogies in educator preparation programs; and to illustrate how pedagogy and language education can include transformational and healing elements when educators are engaged in culturally and linguistically affirming professional development. By understanding ourselves as teachers in relation to the communities in which we teach, we are able to develop ideological clarity (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001) and reject deficit perspectives (Valencia, 1997) that serve to erase non-English languages spoken at home (Calderon-Berumen, 2019) in order to effectively serve and advocate for our multilingual, emerging bilingual and heritage language students. This case study of one Latina’s journey to linguistic empowerment may serve as an example of how future teachers can transform their own experiences of language loss into empowerment and reclaim their own culture, language, and values not only for themselves but for their students as well.

Heritage Language

Language maintenance and shift within the US Latinx community is complex and dynamic (Valdés, 2015). Heritage Language (HL) is an evolving and related field, which parallels the rapidly growing demographics of immigrants and people speaking languages other than English at home. According to Census data from 2017, in the United States, 22 million children are considered heritage language learners, yet few institutions have the resources to offer meaningful training to educators to meet their needs (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Hence, due to the large number of HL students in schools, educators must differentiate between the differing needs of educating HL students and English Learners, also called Emerging Bilinguals (Potowski & Lynch, 2014). Wiley (2001) views HL where a student acquired the language at home or the community, and these students have a natural resource that should be built upon in school. Valdés (2001) concurs and expands the definition where a HL student is one who has command of the English language and is raised in a home where a language other than English is spoken, whether the student can speak or understand the additional language or not.

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Recently, Valdés (2015) argued for the learning of a heritage language in a natural or more organic way. She posits that there is a ‘curricularization’ of the teaching of language in schools, which constrains language learning. She states:

When language is curricularized, it is treated not as a species-unique communicative system acquired naturally in the process of primary socialization but as a curricular subject or skill the elements of which can be ordered and sequenced, practiced and studied, learned and tested in artificial contexts within which learners of the target language outnumber proficient speakers. (p. 262)

This curricularizing of language instruction creates categorization, identification, and naming of language learners and is constrained by institutionalized policies and practices. Furthermore, in such instances, language instruction is not designed to develop or maintain the linguistic resources of Latinx students, leaving many students without access to a language that is an integral part of their family, culture, and identities (Valdés, 2015). Indeed, Pascual y Cabo and Prada (2018) argue there is a need for new curricular and pedagogical approaches that depart from post-colonial ideologies that consider Spanish as a foreign language. Instead, Spanish must be considered a language which is present in vibrant and diverse communities across the United States, not merely a language used primarily by immigrants and foreigners. They advocate for the transformation in the curriculum to prominently include the experiences of HL students.

Humanizing Values and Advocacy in Educator Preparation

How can educators build on and affirm the linguistic repertoire of all of their students, especially those who are Latinx and whose heritage language is Spanish so they may be empowered? It is necessary to center this discussion on the notion of ‘ideological clarity’ proposed first by Bartolomé and Balderrama (2001) and expanded on by Alfaro and Bartolomé (2017). The authors call for a move beyond strategies and methods towards the examination of the ideological and political dimensions of education, particularly in regard to Latinxs and other subjugated groups.

To engage in ideological clarity is for educators to evaluate their own deficit views regarding students of low socio-economic status and students who speak a non-standard variety or language in addition to English. Bartolomé and Balderrama (2001) “argue that the combination of assimilationist belief system and a deficit ideology proves to be an especially deadly one [view of Latinx students]” (p. 52). Both studies, one in a high school (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001), the other in a Dual Language elementary school setting (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017), underscore the need for educators to develop ideological clarity in order to be effective teachers of students of color. To develop ideological clarity, educators recognize that teaching is not neutral and work to deconstruct and question their own biases. Other studies have confirmed that in order to become humanizing educators, teachers deconstruct and question their own biases regarding language teaching, teaching practices, and historically subjugated communities (Ek, Sánchez, & Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008; Valenzuela, 2016). Moreover, educators who question meritocracy and consciously reject white supremacy along with assimilationist and deficit views of Latinxs (including actively promote Spanish language instruction and the use of all a students’ linguistic repertoire) are able to become

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border crossers and engage in effective humanizing pedagogies (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008).

Humanizing pedagogies were first explained by Freire (1979) as education where students are no longer manipulated by the system or by educators but are able to express themselves fully. Moreover, humanizing pedagogies value students' background knowledge, language, culture, and experiences (Macedo & Barolomé, 1999). The values of humanizing education are explained as an approach in education to:

embrace the notion that love of self, family, and community promotes a healthy sense of pride and dignity upon which a solid foundation for a strong and meaningful life can rest. At its best, *la buena educación* inspires a high sense of purpose and a transcendent view of personhood and basic human dignity (Valenzuela, 2016, p. 7).

Humanizing pedagogies are even more important in contexts where Latinxs have been robbed of their language and their abilities to fully develop their language(s) and culture in school. In thousands of schools across the United States, Latinxs students are seen from deficit perspectives, are forced to assimilate, and lose the language of their families and loved ones. In order to change these practices, it is imperative for teacher educators to implement, humanizing, sustaining, and dynamic pedagogies suitable for greater acceptance of an everyday evolving diverse student body.

Funds of Identity

Funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) was articulated as a means to overcome various limitations in *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), including the centrality of families for the individual as well as an overreliance on students' homes. Funds of identity seeks to expand into various social networks and lived experiences of participants including technology and other formal and informal learning environments across their lifespan (Subero, Vujasinović & Esteban-Guitart, 2016). These additional experiences and technologies form relationships and identities in individuals that may differ from that of their family of origin. In other words, participants may embrace, reject or cobble together their own lives and identities with funds of knowledge derived from their families and cultural histories but they also add their own interests, activities, and experiences. In short, funds of identity "is based on the simple premise that people have and accumulate not only their household's funds of knowledge but also life experiences that ultimately help to them to define themselves" (Subero, Vujasinović & Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 5).

Funds of identity (Fol) are characterized as a "box of tools people use to define themselves" (Esteban-Guitart, & Moll, 2014, p. 74) that are both internal and external. Moreover, Fol are temporal, a process of becoming, created at various times in our lives through a vast range life experiences, including our funds of knowledge, our lived experiences, and other historically created, accumulated, disseminated, and situated resources. Funds of identity can be made visible in artifacts, in chosen activities and academic pursuits, and in a repertoire of behaviors.

Funds of identity can be a method for teachers to overcome their own deficit thinking of themselves and their students. In a study of his high school students' funds of identity using three identity texts including digital wordclouds and avatars, Poole (2017) found that his two week project on cultural and individual identity helped transform his own thinking about both his students and himself as an educator. He claims that he shed some deficit views and held

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more inclusive perceptions and practices that embraced the fullness of his students' identities, both in school and out of school. As we learn more about our students and communities, we are able to honor what they bring to school and to build upon the strengths and assets of their world (Yosso, 2005).

The scholarship on Fol is still in its infancy, but two other studies were found related to preservice teachers, one in the United States (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018) and the other in Australia (Charteris et al., 2018). In both of these studies, preservice teachers were asked to respond to a set of questions, co-constructing artifacts together. In the United States, the study focused on three immigrant preservice teachers from China, Korea, and India, who were new to the United States (within one year) and studying to work in early childhood education with infants. They explored their Fol through journals, reflections, and assignments during their practicum and there were tensions when the preservice teachers' knowledge and experiences did not fit with what they were seeing and learning in the practicum course. Through a supportive and safe space, these preservice teachers were able to broaden their perspectives and the Fol approach allowed them to see the process of learning to teach as a dynamic and evolving process.

Charteris, Thomas, and Masters (2018), used a case study approach to understand the Fol of four preservice teachers across Australia. The four women completed reflective assignments online designed to elicit their Fol and although brief excerpts, they integrated their life experiences into assignments and units of study, combining the personal and professional to forge new identities and understandings. The authors posit that the participants used both positive and negative experiences or "dark Funds of Identity" (p. 14) which consist of difficult experiences in schooling, to inform and shape their pedagogical values. They call on teacher educators to incorporate Fol so that preservice teachers will develop deeper understandings of themselves and their students to enrich learning.

Data and Method

For this case study, we use qualitative methods described as a multi-method autobiographical approach designed to uncover funds of identity at different times in the participant's life to understand her funds of identity and how she developed as a Latina educator. The participant or case, is the second author. This order was deliberate to honor the work, effort and perspectives she shared. The other two authors engaged in analyzing the data and writing the results. Angelika was a student in Author 3's study abroad program to the Dominican Republic in 2018 where they met and worked together. At that time, they had many discussions about language, identity, and heritage language, language loss, and the context of language in Texas. Angelika identifies as Hispanic and Mexican American. She has graduated and become a teacher back in her hometown where she grew up. She enthusiastically participated in this research and was very interested in reflecting on her own life and identity formation through the *funds of identity* approach.

The methods used include graphic representations, for example self-identity drawings (could you draw who you are right now? And add people, things, activities, languages that are important to you), the "significant circle" technique where the participant draws concentric circles to represent significant factors that contributed to her identities as a Latina in Texas. We also collected photographs (over a dozen) and journal entries (about thirty pages) to capture her thoughts, routines, as well as ways language use, ideologies, and practices. We

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interviewed her several times and asked her about the cultural artefacts in her home, which were more or less important than others and these techniques enabled us to collect “testimonies of identities” at different times in her life (Gifre, Monreal, & Esteban, 2011). We asked for clarification as we analyzed the examined the artifacts and made sense of the drawings, photos, texts, journal entries, and notes we collected. We analyzed these products of identities in order to document the funds of knowledge and identity that she expressed during her life and link them to her learning and educational pedagogies with the aim of providing a rich description not only of her own Fol but of the processes she used to understand herself, her language(s), and the intersectionalities of these identities with her work as an educator.

The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, an analytical approach for identifying and reporting patterns within data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We arranged data in chronological order and specifically looked for themes related to Fol and language in the data, starting with open coding (e.g., “language loss” and “Mexican American” “schooling”, “dyslexia”, etc). After these initial themes, we coded again and each category was reexamined, redefined, and combined with other similar categories. For example, initial codes were based on multiple or repeated occurrences of words or phrases with similar meanings (e.g. “Latina” and “Hispanic” and “Mexican American” came together as “Latina”) and were grouped together to create themes. From our analysis we chose representative artifacts and texts that exemplified her Fol and dynamic understandings as a teacher. The result of her own increased understanding is a move to humanizing pedagogies (Salazar-Jerez, & Fránquiz, 2008) for her students built on linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) and translanguaging approaches (García, 2009) to language education.

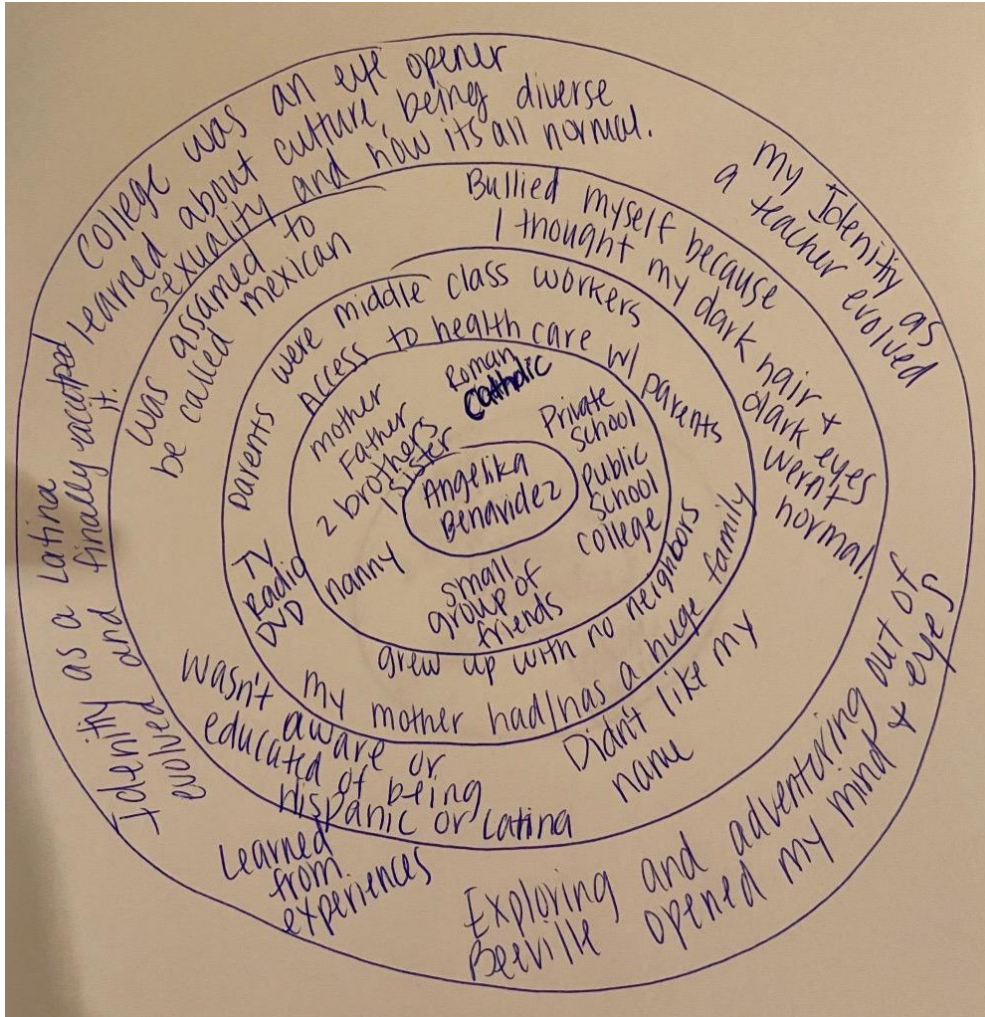
Findings and Discussion

To understand how Angelika developed her funds of identity over time, we present the findings here in chronological order from childhood through to her life as a young adult and teacher. Angelika produced several texts, drawings, and photographs that she felt best represented her experiences throughout various times in her life. We have analyzed them and compiled them here.

The first text in understanding Angelika’s funds of identity is the significant circle technique. In the significant circle, she identified pivotal moments, experiences, people, and factors of her life from childhood until now. Her significant circle is Figure 1. Notice how she includes her Roman Catholic faith, a Spanish speaking nanny when she was a baby, and her family and friends in the first circle. Moving to the second circle, she grew up in a rural community with no neighbors but with a large, close-knit family. She also indicates she had access to health care and her parents were middle class. Media influenced her, and primarily media in English. The third circle shows how deficit perspectives (Valencia, 1997) towards Latinx community in the United States impacted her identities. She was ashamed to be called Mexican, didn’t like her Spanish sounding name (Angelika is pronounced the Spanish way), bullied herself because of her dark hair and eyes, and wasn’t aware of her Latinidad and Mexican American heritage. The final circle shows that leaving her hometown and exploring outside of it was liberating. In addition, college was affirming for her and her multiple identities; reinforcing that her cultural and ethnic background as well as her sexuality was not deviant. She states “identity as a Latina evolved and finally accepted it”.

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Figure 1: Angelika's Significant Circle



Childhood

Angelika's story reflects views of language maintenance and language shifts experiences that mirror other Latinx children's linguistic experiences while growing up in the borderlands. Guadalupe Valdés (2015), points the decisions made about "the continued use of bilingual repertoires over time and the abandonment of such use as a dynamic process" thus, are influenced by multiple factors, "including group size, concentration, existing or changing ideologies, political circumstances, economic opportunities, and educational experiences." (Valdés, 2015, p. 256). The area where she grew up is a few hours from the Mexico-US border and approximately 70% Latinx. Moreover, 36% of the population are proficient in Spanish. Despite these demographics, she did not feel a strong connection to her Latinidad (Ricourt & Danta, 2003) and her Mexican heritage. She lacked even the imagined community of alliances based on shared culture, language, and identity that many Latinxs have.

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When asked what artifact she would choose from her home to represent her childhood, Angelika responded that there are not many artifacts from that time in her life. She said that she has a few blankets her grandmother made her but that is the extent of the cultural artifacts in her possession. It makes her very sad that she has so little from her family and ancestors but that most of the artifacts were lost in Mexico. As is true for many immigrants, the memories and stories she has of family and the few photographs that remain are the only tangible artifacts they have. The photo she chose to represent her childhood is a photo of her and a cousin as babies, wrapped in love with the blankets crocheted by her grandmother in Mexico. To her, this represents a significant aspect of her identity as a child and present day --her ties to her family and her Mexican heritage.

Figure 2: Angelika as a Baby



While she missed out on some critical aspects of being the daughter of Mexican immigrants such as learning Spanish, she did take part in many important traditions such as Ballet Folklórico. Reflecting on her identity as a child, she wrote,

As a child I was always afraid of “being too Mexican”, I grew up in a family of immigrants and Spanish speakers. I was never, not once, not proud of my heritage and being Hispanic. However, In the town I grew up in it wasn’t embraced as other towns in Texas were. Growing up in a small town in South Texas you would think that being Hispanic and Latina was common. But growing up in the early 2000s in the small town I grew up in, it wasn’t as commonly known or at least discussed. As a child I didn’t think much of it, I knew I was Mexican but that really was the extent to my background knowledge. My mother who is from Mexico would speak very little Spanish to us and teach us a few

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phrases. Speaking Spanish wasn't expected for my siblings and I to speak it. My mother always said she didn't want us to be made fun of if we spoke another language other than English. I look back at this comment she has said several times in my life and think about the advantage and opportunities I missed out on as a Latina not knowing Spanish. The only connection I had towards my heritage growing up was dancing Ballet Folklorico.

One of the artifacts she chose to represent her life and identity as a child is a photograph of her dancing Ballet Folklorico, Figure 2.

Figure 3: Angelika as a Young Girl Dancing Ballet Folklorico



Although Angelika participated in Ballet Folklorico and learned about her culture and identity through dance, she was not raised speaking Spanish. As a heritage learner, she was robbed of the opportunity to learn the language of her own mother, her mother tongue, because of fear of being “othered” or even punished for speaking Spanish as has been documented throughout Texas history to present day. Many Mexican Americans were forced to assimilate and punished for speaking Spanish in schools and in public throughout much of the twentieth century resulting in rapid language loss (Blanton, 2004; San Miguel, 1988). Although studies have documented mothers choosing to enroll their children in programs in school to learn Spanish in Texas, such as Two-Way Immersion programs (López, 2013), this was not the case for Angelika. Instead of learning Spanish at home from her mother and other family members or at school in a formal program, Angelika joined the millions of other heritage language learners

who are denied their linguistic birthright as children. Angelika expressed regret and that she missed out on opportunities as a child because of it.

Schooling and Adolescence

As part of the funds of identity data collection, we asked Angelika to draw or share photos of herself at different ages, to go through journals or reflect on her identities at various times, and to think about the places, people, and experiences that shaped her funds of identity. Angelika wrote this reflection about her experiences as a student:

A friend once told me that “We spend the majority of our life identifying ourself as a student”. When she said these words to me, I was in shock. In shock to believe that she was absolutely correct. It is so hard to detach our self from the “label” of student, from kindergarten to college and beyond. Being a student is an automatic characteristic of oneself. As a Latina, being a student is difficult. We have so many challenges and obstacles that we face within education just because of our culture and race. As a Latina, we are automatically identified as a problem student. For me, I was labeled as a student with disabilities. I was diagnosed with dyslexia, ADD and a few other things that gave me a label within the school system. So, growing up I always thought there was something wrong with me. I felt as if something was wrong with me because I wasn’t treated the same as other students, and not in a good way.

The overidentification of Latinx and students of color as disabled or qualifying for special education has been well documented (Artiles, Harry, Reschly & Chin, 2002) and is one result of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). The pathologizing of communities of color can have long term detrimental effects to communities, families, and individuals. As Angelika reflects, “I thought there was something wrong with me. I felt as if something was wrong with me because I wasn’t treated the same as other students”. This is alarming and unjust. It points to the pervasive deficit thinking that exists in society and schools today towards communities of color. Deficit thinking places the blame on marginalized students and their families for poor academic performance (Valencia, 1997) while at the same time fails to acknowledge and build on the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by communities of color (Yosso, 2005), inhibiting teachers’ ability to see their students fully. Deficit thinking is in opposition to ideological clarity and empowerment.

On another occasion, Angelika wrote about her schooling and how it made her feel stupid. She took on an identity as less than others because of her ethnicity and cultural background. She stated,

I wasn’t given the same opportunity and I felt that I was just given up on. When I think of Latinx students across the country and even the world, we are not given the same experiences as students of primary white culture. We are identified as the “problem” in education therefore we are not being given the education that we so rightfully deserve just as much as anyone else. I was a child and I thought that there was a problem with me, that I was stupid and not going to amount up to anything because I was Mexican.

This exemplifies what Delgado Bernal (1998) urged us to keep in mind with educational research, that Latinas experience schooling differently from other students, due to their skin color, gender, class, and language proficiency. It also echoes the words and experiences of another Latina teacher we worked with in regards to language and funds of identity, Summer (a pseudonym). We wrote about Summer, her linguistic and ethnic struggles, and how deficit

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views and a sense of shame of being Latina early on in her childhood remained with her into adulthood, even keeping her from excelling in postsecondary education (López & Saunders, 2020). Summer did graduate from college and become a teacher, and eventually earned her graduate degree in education to become a literacy leader and reading specialist. But like Angelika, Summer had to work to undo a lot of damage that teachers and society had caused her through their deficit thinking and their labels of her as stupid and unworthy.

College

Like many other Latinx youth who are marginalized in school and do not get the support they need to attend college immediately after high school, Angelika enrolled in the community college in her hometown. She doesn't have much to say about that time, it was a continuation of what she had experienced there growing up. The same kinds of attitudes and beliefs about who can be successful. But when she finished her two years, she decided she wanted to be the mentor she didn't have – to inspire youth to grow and prosper, to develop into their full potential. This is when she decided to transfer to a large, public university a few hours away. This decision was a pivotal moment in her growth as a young Latina and her identity. She describes the experience:

When I first moved, I was honestly culture shocked. I had never experienced anything really outside of the small South Texas town. My first semester I became acquainted with so many people from different walks of life and it really got me thinking “Well who am I?” So, I started exploring my identity. Up until college I had everything mapped out for me or I truly wasn't able to express myself because I was afraid of judgement. Here I am a sophomore in college and completely having an identity crisis, who would've thought that is what you would go to college for? However, I think it all worked out now looking back at it. I surrounded myself with activities, people and things that I enjoyed. All played a huge roll in my identity then and now as an adult.

She began exploring her identity in college and was able to do this because she was away from the constraints of her small town and the deficit mindsets there. She participated in many student organizations and went on a short-term study abroad to the Dominican Republic. During the study abroad, she had some pivotal moments regarding her cultural and linguistic identities. She wrote in her journal from the first day of the trip:

After settling into our hotel in Santiago, Dominican Republic, our group decided to adventure out and grab a bite to eat. I didn't realize how much Spanish I could say or even understand. I was able to translate for our group for the most part during dinner. At this moment I realized and knew that I needed to learn the language and become fluent. Not just for me but for my future students.

And she did exactly that. Angelika excelled in the service-learning project with a local nonprofit to the extent that they asked her to stay on longer and work as an intern in their summer school program. She stayed for four more weeks and developed her Spanish as well as taught students in the arts and language. What motivated her to stay was her desire to learn and grow as a Latina and as a teacher of Latinx students. Being in the Dominican Republic was the first experience she had to interact with a culture different from her own, outside of Texas, and it helped her re-evaluate her own life and priorities. It was also a context where English was not the dominant language, and she was able to recuperate the Spanish she had lost through

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immersion in it. She said she came away from the experience more determined than ever to serve as a resource and advocate for Latinx children in the United States and around the world.

Angelika's experiences in the Dominican Republic reinforced her own culture and values and provided her with a deeper love and respect for Spanish. Her identity evolved into not only a Latina, but a Latina proficient in both English and Spanish. She became empowered culturally and linguistically. She wrote:

I didn't realize how amazing and rich my Mexican culture was until I was an adult and in college. It took me 20 years to embrace the Latina in me. I became educated and learned about diversity within our society and how we --the minority-- make up more than half of the population. I started to learn the language that I wasn't taught and tried my best to learn the basics to get by. The language was beautiful, I have never been so in love with a language until now. I believe that our language as humans is the strongest weapon we own. Whether it is English or any other language, the ability to express yourself is something so magnificent; it shouldn't be hidden or taken away. I took the challenge head on and learned to speak Spanish, I wanted to be able to express myself as a Latina and embrace it to the fullest."

It took her a long time to overcome the trauma she experienced as a child, trauma that many Mexican Americans experience in the United States related to bilingualism and education as their language and culture is denigrated (Castillo, 1995; Delgado-Bernal, 1998, Valenzuela, 1999). Although she does not describe it as trauma, the denigration of her language and culture had traumatic effects. As she engaged in the process of cultural recovery (Campano, 2007), she took on the challenge and learned more about her culture and the language that was taken from her, Angelika engaged in healing and was determined to also work for change in her community. She decided to become an educator and to give back, to serve as the positive, affirming role model that she didn't have but needed growing up.

Educator

In addition to serving as a role model, what motivated Angelika to become an educator? If she had so many hurtful, negative, and traumatic experiences in school, what made her want to come back voluntarily? She describes her decision to become an educator as connected to something she heard her father say often and to her desire to change schooling into something positive for others like her. She recounts the story here:

My father would say "I don't know, I'm Mexican." when he didn't know something. This has always stuck with me, and I thought it, too for a while until one day, when I realized I didn't want that for myself. I was tired of belittling myself because society and others thought of Hispanics as uneducated and worthless individuals to say the least. So, I became an educator. I like to use the word educator instead of teacher because that's how I like to identify. I don't just teach the next generations, I educate them. I made a promise to myself that I was going to be that advocate and that voice that I so lacked growing up. I personally feel that the only thing I missed growing up was someone to educate me on the matters of the world.

The day she decided she did not want to belittle herself and think of herself as a "stupid Mexican" was a pivotal moment in her process of reclaiming her own language and identity. In addition, Angelika's choice of the word "educator" and that she doesn't just teach, she

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educates, is also evident of her culture and language as a Mexican American Latina. *Educación* (Valenzuela, 1999) is a value inherent in Mexican culture based on caring relationships along with respect and responsibility. She begins with that respect and responsibility to herself and extends it out into her community, a connection of her *funds of identity* to the wider community. Now, Angelika's funds of identity embody that of advocate and champion extended beyond herself and for others. She is a dedicated teacher, in her first year during a stressful time in the midst of a pandemic. Angelika continues to work hard and show up for her students because of her commitment and her funds of identity. When asked about what artifact she would choose to represent who she now is she responded, "my teacher's desk". Her teacher's desk represents achievement. She has made it to her goal of educator. It is also a place where she displays many of her identities, including that of a first-generation college graduate, an ally and advocate for LGBTQ+ students, and photos of her family and friends. She displays college paraphernalia, pride flags and rainbows to demonstrate inclusivity and create a welcoming atmosphere.

Figure 4: Angelika at Her Teacher's Desk



Angelika describes her classroom as a place where she has created "a vibe of diversity and inclusion for all of my students no matter their race, gender, social economic status." She

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wants her students to experience all that the world has to offer. She wrote about a conversation she had with a colleague about her colleague's daughter. Her daughter wants to venture out and explore the world, open her horizons, and learn from new experiences. But her colleague said "I grew up in a very Hispanic home for it was uncommon for us to leave the house or the town we grew up in", which according to Angelika is very representative of most of the Latinx community, where they stay close to home, within their known boundaries. This is a struggle for her colleague – how to stay true to her roots and also allow her daughter to grow and stretch her wings as she experiences the world. This was a struggle for Angelika, too and in some ways may continue, as she returned home to live and teach in her hometown, even though she longs to travel more extensively. Angelika wrote,

I want to educate my students and be an example that you can be Hispanic or of any race and explore the world and experience new things. I want my students to be the change for themselves and for the world. As a Hispanic Educator I want to break that cycle of identifying Hispanics as less than. We are not less than what society forms our identity to me be, we are more than it, and with new experiences and opportunities we break those gates and fill our world with endless opportunities of change.

Mestiza Consciousness and Humanizing Pedagogies

Angelika's desire for change and to engage in linguistic and cultural recovery (Campano, 2007) to break the cycle of trauma in her own life and in the Latinx community exemplifies empowerment and mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa (1999) explains that a mestiza consciousness emerges from a "synthesis," or the reconciliatory coming together of separate identities, understandings, and physical spaces Chicanas inhabit (p. 102). By embracing the identities and experiences that she has had as a Latina growing up in a small town in Texas, robbed of her language as a child, and reclaiming it as an adult, Angelika has come into her own mestiza consciousness, which is part of her ideological clarity as an educator. Angelika no longer feels like the inept, negatively-labeled young person who was seen as less than others, but now has become empowered and determined to advocate for future generations. As we trace her funds of identity over time, we can see how as a child she held a negative view of herself and her language, but as she grew and experienced more and came to understand who she is as a Latina, she embraced her ethnic and linguistic heritage, immersing herself in Spanish. These experiences created a determination in her to adopt humanizing pedagogies that would contribute to her students' liberation – so they would not have to work to overcome the linguistic imperialism and erasure she herself experienced as a child of immigrants from Mexico.

When examining her own journey and looking to the future, Angelika sees how the deficit perspectives and limitations put on her as a child and adolescent were detrimental to her overall growth but they did not keep her from excelling and achieving her dreams. Through pivotal moments and experiences, and determination, Angelika reclaimed both her cultural and linguistic identities and she knows she will continue to evolve. She wrote:

I was so limited to my experiences growing up in a small town and even growing up as Mexican-American that I couldn't develop my own identity. Once I was able to spread my wings and explore what the world had to offer, I was able to shape and mold my identify and who I surrounded myself with. It boggles my mind to think, what if I stayed and stuck to what I knew before what I know now. I wouldn't be the same person and I think that I would've been a sad and miserable individual. I didn't know who I was as a

person until college and well I think I am still trying to figure out my identity even as an adult. I don't think a person ever stops changing, we are like the Earth, we are constantly evolving.

Conclusion

Language is just one aspect of culture and identity, but an important one. We must stop the trauma and violence inflicted on Mexican Americans and the Latinx community in the United States embodied in deficit thinking and practiced through cultural and linguistic erasure. In order to empower new generations of students, our teachers need to experience linguistic empowerment. Angelika represents a new generation of teachers that we need in our schools, teachers of color who have overcome trauma and language erasure, participated in healing, and recaptured their linguistic and cultural identities. The transformational process Angelika experienced was supported through a rich educational experience. She was able to deconstruct some deficit thinking engrained in her since childhood. This is evident with the change of her own perspective as a bilingual individual, which changed from feelings of shame about her home language, to fully embracing her bilingualism potential. Strikingly, Angelika achieved her ideological clarity (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001) regarding her bilingualism while translating and translanguaging to her peers in a different country, but not in her own community full of Spanish speakers. Reclaiming her heritage language was essential to her healing and there are other Mexican American students who are not provided the same opportunities as she was given, through study abroad and immersion in a positive Spanish language environment. Her linguistic healing, aided by her strong sense of Funds of Identities (Esteban-Guitart, & Moll, 2014) allowed her to reencounter herself and value her lived experiences and to accept Spanish as part of her identity. As a result, of this transformational process, where she questioned her own biases about language and ethnicity, (Ek, Sánchez, & Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008; Valenzuela, 2016), she was able to make peace and embrace all her identities-- as a Mexican American daughter of immigrant parents, student, educator, activist, dancer, bilingual, and educator.

Limitations

This study was conducted on one person's experiences and while we can learn from Angelika's experiences and deep reflection, it is limited to one case. In addition, the study took place over two years and we would have benefitted from data collected over a longer period of time to fully understand the ways Angelika formed her funds of identity. Moreover, the data collection for this study was conducted in part by a professor of her student. The data included assignments and personal reflections (journal entries from study abroad). The power differential between professor and student can be a factor in the content, as data collected as part of a course can sometimes be skewed to fit the professor's viewpoints. If data was collected by an outside researcher who did not have a role in the course (i.e., is not the professor of record) may be less biased. However, it was beneficial to have a second researcher involved in the data analysis who was not the professor of record.

Implications & Recommendations

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Humanizing pedagogies allow transformational process that teacher candidates, particularly people of color and in this case a Mexican American Latina (Valenzuela, 2016; Macedo & Barolomé, 1999; Freire, 1979) to deconstruct their biased perspectives about themselves, and their own culture, language, and communities. In the context of higher education and serving students enrolled in Hispanic Serving Institutions it is important to establish dialogue with P-12 stakeholders because we must no longer instill trauma in our students nor negate healing. To expect children and adolescents to initiate their own healing process from deficit perspectives (their own and those of others) is unrealistic and unfair. In the case of Angelika, her healing process and experiences of humanizing pedagogy did not begin until she reached her college years, which is too long. Establishing special courses all along the educational trajectory, with greater humanizing focus, such as heritage language and ethnic studies, or such Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses, will initiate the deconstruction of bias at earlier stages.

Prior to college, there are opportunities for children to learn their heritage language. In elementary schools, heritage language programs include Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools programs and Two-Way Immersion or Two-Way Dual Language Programs where the population of students includes English dominant and minority language (in this case Spanish) dominant students. These programs are arguably some of the most successful programs for academic achievement and success (Collier & Thomas, 2004), and providing access to these programs for heritage language speakers would be one way to avoid more language trauma and loss. Even in cases where heritage language students have had all of their instruction in English up until high school, Spanish enrichment and Spanish language arts classes are positive ways to help Spanish heritage learners develop a positive ethnolinguistic identity (Parra, 2016). The emergence of Mexican American Studies (MAS) programs are another avenue for providing not only cultural awareness and positive identities within Mexican American and Spanish heritage youth, but linguistic competencies and confidence as well.

If students are not provided opportunities to learn Spanish in elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities must do a better job of offering more programs to support Latinx populations in a variety of ways. In particular, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) need to offer courses that offer culturally relevant curricula and simultaneously implement programs that support first generation students (García & Okhidoi, 2015), particularly, ethnic studies and Chicana/o Studies courses. Similarly, Núñez' (2011), findings attest one way to support the transition to college of Latinx students is by offering courses that facilitate exposure in multicultural and interdisciplinary curriculum. These courses should be available for all students starting at the beginning of their college enrollment. All universities can broaden their programs' scope and offer courses that address multicultural issues within different colleges. Garcia and Okhidoi (2015), identify specific ways higher education institutions can support first generation students through transitions, enrollment, retention, and successful graduation experiences in college. In this way, students will be able to reconnect with their cultural and linguistic heritage. It is important to note that Angelika attended an HSI and was provided some opportunities for such development.

In closing, the metaphor of Angelika using her 'own desk' to represent her (Figure 4), has important implications for teacher preparation programs and educators of teacher candidates of color. Angelika achieved her academic goal of finishing her degree, and beyond embracing her own identity and honoring her rich lived experiences, it is her determination to

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be a professional educator to serve her own community which sets her apart. With her decision to return to her childhood home and community as an educator, she fully embraces her own healing journey, and positions herself as a holistic educator who promotes *educación*. In addition, she accepts and celebrates all her funds of identity. If we, as educators of future teachers, can support students' transformational process to accept their culture and reclaim their language and heritage, then we are aligned with Valenzuela's (2016) call for educating critically conscious teachers with ideological clarity, which is a valuable goal. Our aim is to foster this dynamic and humanizing pedagogy, which will create a generation of educators more equipped to not only do no harm but to heal, educate, and empower culturally and linguistically diverse students.

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