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**Examining Issues of Identity and School Success Among
Latina/o High School Students in a Mariachi Band**

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**Examining Issues of Identity and School Success Among
Latina/o High School Students in a Mariachi Band**

by

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Dedication

For Monica Hernandez

y

para toda mi familia

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Examining Issues of Identity and School Success Among Latina/o High School Students in a Mariachi Band

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the experiences of Latina/o students in a high school mariachi and how they affect success in school during the course of a year and a half. The main research question is “how does mariachi membership influences ethnic cultural identity perception and schooling experiences for a group of Latina/o high school students?”

The study is based on a qualitative research design, incorporating methods from ethnography and case study research and will rely on a sociocultural perspective on identity (Vygotsky, 1978, Holland et. al, 1998, Holland & Lachicotte, 2005) and Chicana feminist theory (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to illuminate the voices of the students and their experiences of *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa, 1987), or navigating between two cultures.

Observations, field notes and ethnographic interviews containing descriptive and structural questions were conducted to understand how mariachi membership influences

ethnic cultural identity perception and schooling experiences for a group of eleven Latina/o high school students. The interviews included students from age fourteen to seventeen, the mariachi director and assistant director, and the principal of the high school. Six of the eleven students interviewed participated in follow-up interviews and a focus group, and their experiences will be highlighted in this study.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), high school status (refers to students who did not complete high school and are not enrolled in school) dropout rates have decreased among all of the subgroups between 1980-2010, yet Latina/o students continue to have the highest high school dropout rates at eighteen percent compared to ten percent for Black students and five percent for White students, among sixteen to twenty-four year olds. In Texas, as of the 2008-2009 school year, forty-two percent of Latina/o students had dropped out, compared to thirty-five percent of Black students and seventeen percent of White students (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2009). Solórzano (2005) points out that there are not enough Chicana/o students graduating from high school and college with bachelor's and graduate degrees due to the fact that "at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels, Chicanas and Chicanos attend schools whose educational conditions are some of the most inadequate in the U.S." (p.37).

In order to understand the chronic failure of the educational system for Chicana/o students, Solorzano and Yosso (2000) suggest several criteria:

- (1) We must understand the ideologies that have led to this failure by focusing on the intersections of race, gender, and class in the context of Chicana/o education;
- (2) We need to challenge the ideology that underlies educational inequality and look upon a student's culture as an asset rather than a deficiency and an obstacle;
- (3) Utilize the Freirean model to incorporate social justice into education;

(4) Teachers must make extra efforts to incorporate the histories of all of their students in the classroom until the textbooks no longer ignore or distort the histories of People of Color; and

(5) In our research, as we examine both the beneficiaries and the victims of the current system, we must listen to the voices of the people most affected by the failures of the schools by using such methods as individual, family and community histories (p.56-59).

What these items have in common is that they support culture and language, which are important aspects on students' identity development.¹ Perhaps, if these criteria could be met within all classrooms and Latina/o students' identities were nurtured, more students would be less likely to drop out (Nieto, 2000). The need for schools to value students' culture and identity is exemplified by Valenzuela (1999), who states that "in a world that does not value bilingualism or biculturalism, youth may fall prey to the subtle yet unrelenting message of the worthlessness of their communities" (p. 264).

In the 1970's, art educators saw the wave of immigration as a "window of opportunity" for justifying arts education as a "universal language", or unifying agent, essential at a time when students' first languages were beginning to be taken into account (Davis, 2005, p. 86). Dewey (1934/1958) shined a light on the importance of the arts in the following statement, "If all meanings could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist" (pp. 73-74). Making a connection between

¹ I am referring to how students' identify themselves and to which groups they feel they belong

performing arts and cognition, the Charles. A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin found that

An interest in a performing art leads to a high state of motivation that produces the sustained attention necessary to improve performance and the training of attention that leads to improvement in other domains of cognition (Dana Arts & Cognition Consortium, 2004).

Subsequent attempts to validate the need for arts education in schools have been numerous. Davis (2005) points out that causal relationships in general are difficult to isolate to say specifically that arts participation (and not good content area instruction) directly caused improvement in academic achievement, and instead describes eight ways the arts are “celebrated”, or encouraged and implemented, in K-12 education: (1) arts based – arts serve as a basis for general education, (2) arts infused – arts as well as visiting artists are used to enrich lessons within content area instruction, (3) arts included – arts are included in the daily course listing, (4) arts expansion – the arts are expanded from outside of the classroom into the community (ie., taking field trips), (5) arts professional – the role of the professional artist is the desired /expected goal of all students, (6) arts extras – after-school arts programs, (7) aesthetic education – viewed as ways of knowing, perceiving, and attending to works of arts across content areas, and (8) arts cultura – represented by a wheel of culture that illustrates the semiotic connections between cultures of individuals with the larger culture of humankind which includes worldviews of cultures (families, communities, school, local media), Cultures (nationalities, races and ethnicity) and Culture (shared common humanity) (p.105-107). Using an arts cultura curriculum, it “would not only honor the art that individual children

produce, but equally the art that they value, from cartoon characters to rap music” (Davis, p. 108). Within the arts cultura model, while appreciating their differences, “students encounter their humanity – their particular otherness, their shared alienation, their common struggles as artists and as children to make sense of it all.” (Davis, p. 110)

Extracurricular activities have the potential to open up opportunities for cultural identity expression and meet the needs mentioned by Solórzano and Yosso (2000) and Valenzuela (1999). Examining the relationship between the involvement in extracurricular activities and early school dropout (not completing eleventh grade) in their six-year longitudinal study, Mahoney and Cairns (1997), distinguished between “highly competent” students (highly popular, high achieving students from high socioeconomic backgrounds with low aggression) and “least competent” students (those are less popular, low achieving, have high aggression and who are marginalized and/or otherwise determined to be at-risk for failure in school). They presume that participation in extracurricular activities by “highly competent” students will have little to no effect on the early school dropout rate in that they are “already firmly embedded in the system and the values that it represents” (p. 242) and therefore less likely to dropout, and in turn focus their study on a research sampled of three hundred and ninety-two students determined to be at-risk. Findings indicated that the school dropout rate among at-risk students was significantly lower for students who had previously participated in extracurricular activities compared with those who had not participated.

Linking prosocial (volunteer and church-related) activities to academic success and low rate of involvement in risky activities, Eccles and Barber (1999) conducted a

longitudinal study in which they explored two possible mediators, peer association and identity formation, among other types of extracurricular activities, including the team sports, performing arts, school involvement and academic clubs, which were selected because “they require effort and provide settings in which students can express their identities and passions”. The study included 1,259 mostly white, working and middle class students from Detroit and began while most students were in the sixth grade. The authors found that students involved in the performing arts in the tenth grade enjoyed school and were less frequently engaged in risky behaviors at both the tenth and twelfth grade levels, and had a higher grade point average (GPA) in the twelfth grade. Although Eccles and Barber (1999) affirm the idea that “adolescents seek out an identity that allows them to be actors in their social world and that allows them to feel effective, successful, and connected in their everyday activities”, they do not account for the affective results experienced by marginalized and culturally and linguistically diverse students, such as the in the Star of Texas High School mariachi that participated in this study.

In many urban high schools, extracurricular activities abound, providing outlets for students to express themselves outside of academics. Typically, activities include band, sports, choir and dance. Less commonly provided are culturally-specific activities, such as mariachi band, which incorporates music reflective of the Latino culture (Jáuregui, 2007, Sheehy, 2006, Frolick, 2004, Dodd, 2001, Jáquez, 2000). Although extracurricular activities are often offered outside of the school day and are ungraded

(Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), many courses are offered during the school day in the arts, including the mariachi class at Star of Texas High School (pseudonym).

In this study, I want to examine Latina/o students' participation in a high school mariachi band and how their participation in the group affects their schooling experiences and cultural identities. In this study, the voices of the students will be emphasized so that their stories and experiences can be used as tools for learning.

Research Questions

The major research focus for this dissertation is on how mariachi membership influences ethnic/cultural/linguistic identity self-perception and positive academic schooling experiences for a group of Latina/o high school students at Star of Texas High School.

More specifically:

- 1) What does it mean for the students to be a member of a mariachi?*
- 2) What role has the mariachi played in the formation of students' cultural and linguistic identities as Latinas/os?*
- 3) How has participating in the mariachi positively impacted their academic schooling experiences?*

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how issues of identity, such as language and culture, as experienced by the Latina/o high school students' participation in a mariachi band, affect their academic achievement. The intention is to focus on the positive, just as Delgado Bernal has pointed out, "rather than focus on the failures of

Chicana and Chicano students, we can ask how their cultural knowledge contributes to the educational success of some students” (Delgado Bernal, 2006). In this case, instead of focusing on the high dropout rates among Latinos or low test scores specifically, I want to see how the students’ ability to express their culture via their participation in the mariachi band contributes towards identity development and academic success.

Design and Overview of Study

The study uses Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 2006) and a sociocultural perspective on identity (Holland et. al, 1998; Holland and Lachicotte, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) to examine the role that students’ participation in a mariachi band has in their negotiation of identities and school experiences. Because of my interest on learning about students’ perspectives, this study uses an interpretive (Schwandt, 2004) and a case study qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg. 2003) to explore students’ identities as Latinas/os and high school students. In order to understand the students’ perspectives and move beyond the notion that students in the mariachi class are simply there to provide entertainment, I asked the students a series of questions about experience and subjectivity and the role of the mariachi in regards to their schooling (Holland, et. al, 1998).

When I initially began this study, my intent was to discover how the offering and inclusion of a mariachi class during the high school day influenced the identities of the students who participated in the class. Being a former school mariachi member myself, I thought that the student’s participation in the mariachi class would allow for cultural

expression and in turn enhance their sense of ethnic/cultural/linguistic identity. I was focused on what the mariachi class provided as a whole for the students and how or if it affected their academic success in school.

Epistemological Foundations

People are often surprised and/or confused to find out that I identify myself as Chicana. Besides not understanding what the term means, and being third generation Mexican-American, most people expect me to identify myself simply as “American”. Perhaps it is due to the fact that I speak English as a first language with a hint of a Texas accent. Now that I am married and have acquired my husband’s Czech surname, Neshyba, people are even further stumped as to what my race/ethnicity is. However, even with my maiden name, Vásquez, I was often asked if I was Egyptian, Chinese, or Indian or simply, “What are you?” Even though I remember my mother wearing a yellow T-shirt with “Chicana” written in large, dark-green cursive lettering across the front, I knew little about the Chicano movement until I was an undergraduate at UT Austin. I slowly began to see how Latinas/os were and are discriminated against and vowed to do something about it. Now, I too, am involved in *la lucha [the struggle]*, and have been working in the support of pro-immigration and bilingual education, and education policy issues related to English Language Learners.

As I began to be more involved as a Chicana, I also looked back at my past, and realized that I had become very assimilated and “Americanized” in my way of thinking and needed to “unlearn white supremacy” (Urrieta, 2007, p.118). My bilingual parents

decided to raise my brother and I to speak in English only and not to teach us Spanish in order to avoid the persecution they suffered growing up in the 1950's. Although I grew up hearing older family members speaking with each other in Spanish and even singing in Spanish at church during Spanish mass, I was never conversed with in Spanish. All I knew was how beautiful it sounded to me and how I wished I was fluent so that I could have conversations with my great grandparents, my frequent caregivers, who only spoke in Spanish and always just smiled at me and said things to me I never quite understood, besides the obvious commands and reprimands. My grandparents, who were all born in Central Texas and had very limited educational experiences due to family obligations, are all bilingual, but only spoke to me in English.

I also remember how I felt as a new student being bussed from a rural area in the southwest to a junior high school on the east side of town (the school district's attempt at integration). I noticed that in my life science class, the affluent White students who were bussed from the northwest side of town were all sitting on the left side of the room while the Latino students from the neighborhood were sitting on the right side. I felt torn; should I sit on the left or the right? As I glanced to the left, the students appeared to be happy and were engrossed in conversation. As I glanced to the right, the Latino students appeared tired, worn out, and withdrawn. Not knowing what to do, I decided to sit in the middle section, in between a white student and a Latina student. I quickly befriended the Latina student, Sebastiana, who was very kind to me, although she soon warned me that if I wanted to be successful, I should not spend any time with her or the other Latinos in the class, as she and others were either in gangs or involved in drugs and/or prostitution.

I was shocked, then extremely saddened. With a conflicted heart, I decided to begin talking to the White students and soon became friends with them in class, although I was never invited to their house or to do anything outside of school. I felt that to them, I was still brown, and did not belong in their circle. However, I began to think that I needed to be more like them in order to fit in.

So as time went on, I had the “colorblind” mentality, thinking I was accepting people into my life solely for their personalities and not acknowledging their cultures and backgrounds. Subconsciously, I was limiting the amount of Latina/o friends I had as I believed that they would “bring me down” somehow. For many years, the only Latinas/os I considered to be my friends were also related to me.

After spending most of my life trying to assimilate to the Anglo American culture, I came to realize that I had been living beneath an invisible veil. I was afraid of how others would judge and treat me if they knew that I was Mexican-American, so I never discussed or shared it with anyone besides those who I knew were also of Mexican heritage. However, I knew that I could not fully identify myself as White (although I am listed as such on my birth certificate) because of my physical appearance, neither could I fully identify as Mexicana because of my lack of fluency in Spanish. I have since discovered that I was on the borderland, “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 1999). The term borderland has become a common term within Chicana feminist theory and is often used to describe the place that lies between two cultures, two identities. Now that I have decided to identify

myself as a Chicana feminist and to move away from always portraying myself as the “good and obedient Latina”, I am no longer afraid of who I am and what I represent.

Gloria Anzaldúa describes the basis of Chicana feminism as follows:

What does a thinking subject, an intellectual, mean for women-of-color from working-class origins? It means not fulfilling our parents' expectations; it means often going against their expectations by exceeding them. It means being in alien territory and suspicious of the laws and walls. It means being concerned about the ways knowledges are invented. It means continually challenging institutionalized discourses. It means being suspicious of the dominant culture's interpretation of 'our' experience, of the way they 'read' us. (Anzaldúa, 1990)

Chicanas identify as ‘Latinas’ to signal solidarity with other U.S. Latinas, whether they are U.S. born or from diaspora groups, in addition to identifying as U.S. women of color in our solidarity with African-American, American Indian, Asian-American and other U.S. womanists and feminists (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). According to Villenas (2006), as U.S. Latinas, we represent an incredible diversity, yet we are too often homogenized and racialized in addition to being dispossessed of economic and institutional political power. I believe in what black feminist, bell hooks (2003), professor and activist, calls a “beloved community”, which includes equality, mutual respect, and justice and where there is no hierarchy among the various types of discrimination because they all oppress someone in some way. hooks believes that feminism is for everyone, including men, who want to work towards change in society and against marginalization due to class, race and gender, To say that one type of discrimination is worse than another would be discriminatory in itself because it would be implying that one has more value than another. Within this context, it is of interest to understand how the mariachi

students manage to deal with various types of discrimination at school and in their communities every day.

According to Jiménez (2006), “Pedagogy on the borderlands is a place of possibility; where there might be moments when multiple views are voiced and heard, where everybody might see the same river” (p. 226). Anzaldúa (1987) describes borderlands best as “a symbolic place for mestizas to live and thrive with multiple identities, ambiguities, and contradictions” (p.226). In terms of identity, the mestiza term “has come to mean a new Chicana consciousness that straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities – that is, living with ambivalence while balancing oppressive powers” (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Reflective of daily life for the mariachi students, “ part of a mestiza consciousness is balancing between and within the different communities to which one belongs” (Delgado Bernal, 2006).

Such is the atmosphere of the mariachi classroom at Star of Texas High School where although the students may belong to various social groups and/or come from different backgrounds, the classroom remains a safe place for not only collaboration and performance, but friendship and mutual understanding. It is a place where the students can receive much needed ‘cultural nourishment’. Gonzalez (2002) defines cultural nourishment as “individuals and material elements that replenish the students’ cultural sense of selves” (p. 193).

Delgado Bernal, et.al (2006) defines border/transformativa pedagogies as involving “cultural politics that incorporate as social practices the construction of knowledge(s) capable of analyzing conflicts over meanings” and therefore are able to

“offer a cultural critique of material conditions of subaltern communities that invoke politics of change to transform society in order to become truly democratic” (Delgado Bernal, et.al, 2006). In other words, communities and/or groups that have been typically silenced in the past due to their marginalized status should have the opportunity to mobilize and become societal change agents. When striving for democracy, Elenes also discusses the need to move beyond trying to sway people towards our way of thinking, and instead focus on finding a “common language of the philosophical arguments in any particular issue” in order to “dilute any notion that there is one exclusive truth, thus denaturalizing the hegemony of dominant discourses” (p. 251). In the arena of education, this is especially important; instead of providing an essentialist, mainstream education that excludes various points of view and discourages expression of non-dominant cultures, policy makers and administrators need to consider the positive effect of providing classes that promote cultural expression, such as mariachi, and allow students the opportunity for their cultures to be valued, as well as expose and share components of their culture with others.

Using a Chicana feminist epistemology validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues such as immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism and limited English proficiency (Delgado Bernal, 1998). As a Chicana graduate student, I have learned to analyze more critically how the educational system has maintained the use of a one-dimensional pedagogy that reiterates perspectives reflective only of the dominant race. As an elementary bilingual teacher, I did what I could behind closed doors to infuse multiculturalism into the curriculum and promote and

value the students' native language(s). The more years I taught, the more I became curious to find out what was available for linguistically and culturally diverse students as the secondary level. I often would wonder to myself what types of services would be offered to my elementary students as they went along in their academic careers; would they have opportunities to continue to build on their native language and receive support at they continue to learn English? Would they also have opportunities to have their culture(s) valued? As a former member of a student mariachi band and remembering what it did for me emotionally, culturally and linguistically, I chose to conduct this research with the members of a high school mariachi band so that Latina/o student narratives can continue to be heard and validated.

Freire (1974) explains that education either conditions the younger generation into acceptance of society's status quo or becomes "the practice of freedom" through which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to transform their worlds. In order to achieve critical consciousness, one must have the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society. According to Freire (1974), traditional ways of schooling prevent students who are not from the dominant culture from being fully human, and unable to free themselves and their oppressors from oppression. In this study I posit that by having the opportunity to identify with the Mexican culture through participation in a school mariachi band, students may be able to avoid the traditional ways of schooling that typically attempt to assimilate students into the dominant culture and therefore break away from the cycle of oppression.

Most importantly, Latina/Chicana feminist thought is about excavating resilience, or *sobrevivencia*; knowledge and acts of improvisation for ‘outlasting domination’ (Sandoval, 2000). Through *sobrevivencia*, the tools with which the students are able to navigate and counter dominant ideologies both within and outside of school can be understood. By learning of the students’ experiences as members of the mariachi band at Star of Texas High School and how they have navigated their academic journey, I intend to shed light on these “tools”. This study will explore *sobrevivencia* as a trait that supports the learning and identity of the high school Latina/o students in the Star of Texas High School mariachi band.

Personal Connections

Due to various factors, I was born and raised in Texas speaking, reading and writing only in English. Although I did have many opportunities to listen to Spanish as spoken by the elder generations of my family, I only learned “survival Spanish”, or at least enough to communicate my immediate needs or wants; definitely not enough to hold a conversation. My family’s resistance to teach Spanish to the younger generation was due largely in part to the ridicule and punishment they received when they were children, being primarily Spanish-speaking when they began attending school. Likewise, many students in Texas in the late 1950’s were punished for their native language use in public schools. Although bilingual instruction was practiced in public schools in the late 1800s, by 1918, the Texas legislature established an “English Only” statute which made it a federal offense to teach in any other language besides English. As a result, students were

subsequently punished for speaking in any other language besides English at school until the late 1960s (Crawford, 2004). During this time a strong emphasis was made on the “Americanization” of Mexican-Americans which allowed second language learning at the high school level only (Blanton, 2004). According to Perez (2004), controlling language use was a means of domination and was justified as essential to the integration and building of the state of Texas. Admonishments such as, “Don’t speak that ugly language, you are American now”, not only reflected a strong belief in Anglo-conformity but denigrated the self-esteem of Mexican-American children (Ruiz, 1998). As a direct result, many children (including myself) were raised speaking only in English due to their parent’s efforts to keep them from being chastised, punished, and discriminated against at school.

Being born and raised in the same city as where Star of Texas High School is located, I attended local public schools, specifically an elementary school in a lower-middle class neighborhood, middle schools in low-income areas and a high school in an affluent suburb. Although I always attended urban schools, I never attended a school within my neighborhood, which was a combination of low income, affordable housing and lower-middle class homes. As an elementary student I attended a school near my maternal grandparents’ home due to an approved transfer request my parents (who both worked late for the postal service every day) received after expressing that we lived on the outskirts of town and did not feel comfortable with my brother and I arriving home from school by ourselves, especially since they both worked in the city. The school was in an inner-city neighborhood and ethnically diverse. I attended school there from

kindergarten until the end of the sixth grade. Throughout my years at the elementary school, I had friends of many nationalities and do not recall ever feeling uncomfortable or being treated unfairly for being of Mexican-American descent.

Although my parents only spoke to my brother and me in English, they often used Spanish as their “secret language” and continued to use it when speaking to their parents. They also often took my brother and I to Spanish mass at our church, where I learned to sing all of the prayers in Spanish, although I did not understand most of what I sang. Above all, our house was filled with music of a variety of genres; my mother being a lover of classical and contemporary music, and my father an avid fan of rhythm and blues, funk and soul. But closest to my parents’ hearts were the *rancheras*² of Lucha Villa and José Alfredo Jiménez, whose records were often played in our home. When I began to show an interest in music at an early age, my parents were delighted and did whatever they could to support me; even when money was scarce.

Both my mother’s and father’s side of the family were very musical and either sang or played a variety of instruments, or all of the above. My maternal great-grandfather José Loera was a musician by trade in Central Texas, playing guitar, violin and the accordion, and would often take my grandmother, Concepción Reyna (Loera) along with him to perform, who also sang and played the same instruments. My paternal great-grandfather Lorenzo Ramirez was also a musician by trade playing the saxophone. Many of the other men on my father’s side of the family, played trumpet in addition to

² Rancheras are songs about love, patriotism and nature and originated on ranches and on the countryside of Mexico.

other instruments and were often invited to play with various bands. One of my father's cousins and uncle often played together during mass on Sundays, it was an English mass, but all of the music was sung in Spanish, mostly in *ranchera* style. Music was something that surrounded me both inside and outside the home.

While still in elementary school, I began to play the violin after joining the school orchestra in the sixth grade. At the beginning of the school year, all of the sixth graders had to select whether they would be in band, orchestra, or in a general music class, so the band and orchestra teachers did their best to perform for us to recruit students. Initially I had really wanted to play the saxophone as my father had when he was in school, but after listening to the orchestra teacher play beautifully on the cello, I decided to join the orchestra after considering the fact that I can barely blow up a balloon. Realizing that the cello would be cumbersome to carry around, I opted for the viola, only to be told that my arms were too short, so violin was my last option. I learned to play the violin fairly quickly since I learned to read music at age six while taking piano lessons³.

Later, when I was to begin the seventh grade, my parents decided that it was safe enough for me to come home after school to an empty house (my brother was in high school by this time). At this time the school district had recently changed the school boundaries in an effort to integrate students from different backgrounds and neighborhoods. Consequently, all of the students in my lower middle-class southwest neighborhood as well as students from an affluent suburb in the northwest part of the city

³ I took piano lessons from the daughter of one of my mother's coworkers who was majoring in piano performance at a local university.

were bused to a school in a predominately low-income Latino neighborhood on the east side of town. During this year I experienced three types of culture shock; 1) being bused to a school with kids who I had never attended school with before (although I had lived in the neighborhood since age four) and who were predominantly White, 2) being in a school with Latina/os who seemed to have lost hope for the future and were either in gangs, using drugs, pregnant or simply disinterested in school. In my seventh grade life science class alone, there was a Latina who already had two children and was rarely in class, a Latino who sat next to me and drew pictures of spoons of cocaine during class, and Sebastiana who had advised me to stay away from her and the other Latina/o students in that class if I wanted to get ahead), and 3) being in school with students from very affluent backgrounds (the first time I ever saw a limousine was at my seventh grade prom). Although I did have other classes with a more diverse group of students, including high-achieving Latinas/os, the race, ethnicity and class divisions were very apparent. In time, I eventually found a diverse group of friends who lived both near my new school and in the affluent northwest suburb, although it was only the Latina friends who I had made from the east side of town that would invite me over to their homes for sleepovers or parties. I also made a couple of friends who lived in my own neighborhood, but we only talked on the bus as we did not have any classes together.

On the first day of my seventh grade orchestra class, I was excited to realize that it was three times the size of my elementary orchestra and that about half of the students were Latina/o. I continued to enjoy playing the violin and with the encouragement of my seventh grade orchestra teacher and the support of my parents, I began to take private

violin lessons and practiced at home every day, while managing to maintain high grades and place on the academic honor roll. With the help of my private teacher and support of my parents, I won a University Interscholastic League (UIL)⁴ violin solo competition in my division that same year. Being somewhat shy and quiet at thirteen, it was an extreme confidence boost for me! I soon began auditioning for city and regional orchestras.

After my seventh grade year, the school boundaries were redrawn, which then required me to attend another school that was still about the same distance as my previous school, but closer to downtown. While the intent was still to integrate the schools, the students from the affluent areas in the northwest part of the city were no longer being bused to schools in low-income areas on the east side of town. It was at this school where I was first given the opportunity to play in a mariachi band and had the pleasure of playing violin in the mariachi under the same director who started the mariachi program at the school in the late seventies and later at the high school chosen for this study. It was a wonderful experience! It was the first time I had ever participated in an activity where I felt that my culture and language were valued and promoted. It was 1987, the year pop star Linda Ronstadt released the record *Canciones de mi Padre*, a collection of mariachi songs she had grown up singing with her family. Although I was very familiar with most of the songs on the *Canciones de mi Padre* record having listened to them at home and at family functions, I remember feeling so proud that these songs

⁴ The University Scholastic League was established in 1910 by the University of Texas and provides extracurricular academic, athletics and music competitions for youth throughout the state of Texas.

were now receiving recognition from a very established and famous pop star who made the songs available to a much wider audience. Feeling validated, I was able to play each song on my violin with confidence and pride.

However, when faced with the decision to choose between the only high school that offered mariachi and a newly built high school in an affluent area, I chose the latter. After being recruited by the incoming orchestra director at the new high school, (who had been a judge in some of my violin auditions), I decided not to attend the high school where mariachi was offered because at the time I was considering a career as a professional violinist, and felt that the orchestra of the affluent school would have a more prestigious reputation than the mariachi at a school in the inner-city. Unfortunately, my private teacher moved away after my sophomore year and I was never able to find a suitable replacement that both challenged me and also allowed for creativity. By my junior year, I realized that the orchestra director was only interested in me as a competitor, not in helping me grow as a violinist. As a result, my interest in competition began to wane, as did the orchestra director's interest in me. My plans to become a professional violinist as well as my motivation to play the violin faded away by the time I graduated from high school.

What influenced my decision to choose to play in an orchestra rather than a mariachi was that by the time I entered high school, I had already succumbed to a hegemonic way of thinking; that it was better to suppress cultural expression to be more like everyone else and not emphasize the fact that I am Mexican-American if I wanted to succeed. That meant anything from turning down the Tejano radio stations at stoplights

to only speaking in English. As Pinar (2004) states, “Despite early-20th-century progressive fantasies of the school as a laboratory for democracy, the truth is that the American public schools have functioned to make immigrants into “Americans” and to prepare all citizens for jobs in an industrial-now largely postindustrial-economy” (p.17). By deemphasizing students’ native language along with the ability to express themselves culturally, schools will continue to perpetuate the production of automatons, students who do what they are told and do not deviate from what is considered to be normal and/or acceptable behavior.

The importance of being compliant and competitive yet indistinguishable in order to succeed in school is exactly the message I received through most of my K-12 schooling. Except for my eighth grade year when I participated in the school mariachi band, I never participated in cultural events outside of family events and never let on that I was a heritage Spanish speaker in any of my Spanish classes. I wanted to blend in to the American mainstream society. I even initially resisted being accepted to the University of Texas as an undergraduate because I was accepted on the condition that I join a program designed for minority (specifically African-American and Latina/o) Texas public high school students that had high grade point averages, but did not score highly on a college-entrance exam, and who were also first generation college students. I couldn’t understand why I was given an exception when so many other students were not. I hadn’t accepted my Latina/o identity. I didn’t know how to deal with it. I just wanted to be accepted into the university as a regular student. I was also upset that there was a one-thousand-dollar enrollment fee attached to the program, a fee I knew my parents could

not afford. But after realizing that was my only way into the university and with my parents' encouragement and thrift spending, I reluctantly enrolled in the program.

Once enrolled in summer undergraduate program, I was exposed to my own culture in ways I had never been before. For the first time in my life, I was surrounded by students who embraced their culture and language, many of whom who were bilingual. Although the program only lasted through my freshman year, with me still struggling to fit into mainstream society, I became inspired to learn more about my culture and language.

After finding myself and valuing my Mexican heritage and roots in the middle of my undergraduate trajectory, I have been able to experience Anzaldúa's notion of *la facultad*. Anzaldúa describes *la facultad* as "anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception" and causes a shift, which "deepens the way we see concrete objects and people", ridding us of our ignorance and making us more aware of ourselves. Knowing that I wanted to conduct an ethnographic case study on bilingualism and using my *facultad*, thinking back on my own high school experience and how I chose not to embrace my cultural heritage, I became interested in conducting my study on a high school mariachi band, while watching the Star of Texas High School mariachi perform at a Cinco de Mayo lunchtime celebration at my workplace at the time. At first, I just listened and enjoyed the performance, remembering songs that I used to play when I was in the mariachi years ago, but as I observed the performance I began to see each member of the mariachi band as individuals, reminding myself that this was not a professional mariachi group for hire, but rather a group of high school students who had chosen to

become members of the mariachi. I then wondered what role the mariachi played in their identity formation as Latinas/os and if participating in the mariachi band helped contribute to their academic success. I also remembered my own experience as a member of a mariachi band in middle school, and how this influenced my own identity as a Latina.

One of my goals in studying the high school mariachi at Star of Texas High School is to address Slattery's (2006) call for "a postmodern deconstruction of all texts and the affirmation of an eclectic array of alternatives in schools and classrooms so that the negative impact of hegemony can be overcome" (p. 39). To provide a mariachi classroom in a public school is one step towards the deconstruction of hegemony that goes beyond the traditional extracurricular course offerings and connects to Latina/o culture and perhaps will shed light on yet another alternative that can be offered in public schools.

Significance of the Study

With Latina/o students consistently maintaining the highest dropout rate among the various subgroups, how they are currently being supported during the school day must be examined. While not all Latina/o students are English language learners (ELLs), there is much research on various types of cultural and linguistic programming for ELLs at the primary level, and yet there is still a great need for research on what has been done at the secondary level for long-term and recent-arrival ELLs (as well as reclassified students who are no longer considered limited English proficient) to not only increase English language development, but to also ensure academic progress and thus school completion.

Latina/o students who have never been classified as limited English proficient are also included in this study to find out how participation in the mariachi class has affected their ethnic cultural identity formation and schooling experiences as well. It is my hope that this study will shed light on a mariachi class, a fine arts class, offered at the high school level that provides much more than entertainment for the school and the community and in turn will create discussions as to how more of these types of programs can be implemented in schools.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter I introduces the focus of the study and provides a rationale for the use of Chicana feminist theory in educational research as it relates to the high Latino dropout rates and the accompanying research questions on identity, school achievement, and students' participation in mariachi bands. I also include an autobiographical sketch of my educational, cultural and linguistic experiences and the effect mariachi participation had on my own life to provide a frame for this dissertation and why I chose to conduct this study.

Chapters II describes the conceptual framework of the study and summarizes a literature review for this dissertation. The term *identity* is defined within the context of this study to gain an understanding of the complexities and fluidity of the various identities the student's express both within and outside of school. A brief history of mariachi music is also provided to describe its origins and development over time, and related studies involving mariachi groups are described. Research on bilingual education

and Latina/o academic achievement is also included to provide a context for the mariachi students' academic histories and trajectories.

Chapter III describes the research methodology used in this study. The qualitative methods used are described and an overview of the study is provided. The chapter ends with the researcher's positionality, issues of trustworthiness and limitations in regards to this study.

Chapter IV describes the research findings and is based on eleven mariachi students, eight females and three males. Each case is listed in the order that I met each student, as I typically only interviewed one student at a time due to the class time constraints. Data obtained from the mariachi directors is also included.

Chapter V includes the analysis and implications for further research. The data analyzed in this chapter comes from all eleven students interviewed as well as from the mariachi directors and the school principal.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this chapter, I describe the conceptual framework that informs the study and present a literature review that locates my study within the landscape of studies and work addressing Latina/o students' success or failure at school and within studies examining the role of mariachis within communities and schools.

Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and pedagogy (Delgado Bernal, 2006) represent the major theoretical framework for this study. Within this framework, the concepts of *borderlands*, *la facultad*, and *mestizaje*, as presented in Ch. 1, are applied to the study of Latina/o students' participation in a mariachi band. Also relevant for this study is the concept of power as described by Foucault (1977;1982) and the concept of *transformational resistance* proposed by a Chicana epistemology to respond to issues of power. Both concepts relate strongly to a Freirean critical perspective on education, which I discuss in the last section of this chapter after completing a literature review on educational issues related to the focus of this study. In conjunction with Chicana feminist epistemology, Holland et al's sociocultural perspective on identity (Vygotsky, 1978, Holland et. al, 1998, Holland and Lachicotte, 2005) is also used.

A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY

For most high school students, high school is a time to begin to identify themselves in a variety of ways, whether it is in the friends they choose, the classes they enroll in, the activities and clubs they belong to, or simply in how the students elect to

spend their time both within and outside of school. When I was in high school, I remember feeling conflicted as a freshman and sophomore student, especially in Spanish class. To emphasize the fact that I spoke English as a first language I would speak Spanish with a Texan accent in class. “Too often, minority students believe that they must choose between a positive ethnic identity and a strong academic identity” (Nasir & Saxe, 2003).

The concept of identity, according to Holland et al, (1998), can be described as a self understanding to which one is emotionally attached that informs one’s behavior and interpretations: “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves who they are and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (p. 3). This is particularly evident in adolescence, when teenagers are struggling to find out both who they are and to which group(s) they belong. In reference to groups, Holland and Lachicotte (2005) illustrate that “communities of practice identify, by correlating the usage of a variety of cultural artifacts or emblems, sets of characters in interaction that participants learn as the organizational means for their own activity” (p. 32). Holland and Lachicotte (2005) distinguish between a Meadian and Eriksonian identity frame in that instead of providing an overarching, all-encompassing definition as the latter (Eriksonian), the former (Meadian) is understood to refer to people’s multiple identities of a person and “is a sense of oneself as a participant in the social roles and positions defined by a specific, historically constituted set of social activities” (p. 3).

Holland et al’s (1998) definition of identity is relevant to this study in that while each student may display multiple identities throughout the school day depending on the situation (in an academic class, in the cafeteria, during extra-curricular activities, etc.),

within the mariachi group the students not only share a common identity as members of the mariachi but also as members of a cultural group that represents their language, home countries and/or communities. The freedom to speak freely to teachers and students in Spanish and/or codeswitch in English/Spanish is somewhat limited within the context of the typical high school classroom. However, the mariachi classroom provides students the opportunity to express themselves culturally via their instrument and/or voice through the use of Spanish.

Peregoy and Boyle (2005) speak of the importance of language and how it helps shape identity:

Because the language we speak is so intricately interwoven with our early socialization to family and community, it forms an important element of our personal identity, our social identity, our racial identity, our ethnic identity and even our national identity. (p. 45)

Therefore, the language we learn from infancy, our native language, has a direct connection to identity formation and the use of it should be encouraged both inside and outside of school. Relatedly, culture is interconnected with language and also needs to be valued. Regarding mariachi music, what school administrators, teachers, and/or the society in general may fail to realize is that is much more than a musical style or aesthetic that it represents; for many people it provides a connection to their family and/or community.

According to Holland, et al (1998) Vygotsky, “construed symbols learned through social interaction, as so many ways in which people free themselves from the tyranny of environmental stimuli”(p.6). These socially-constructed symbols allow one to transport to

the past, or more specifically trigger a specific memory. For example, for me, listening to a mariachi sing “Los Novios” transports me back to my wedding day and brings profound emotion and sentiment as I remember all who attended, many of whom have since passed on and were only there in spirit. In that moment, I was so overjoyed to be surrounded by my family and friends and share with them a piece of my culture. Like other forms of art, the symbols produced by mariachis can elicit powerful reactions from many people.

For those who are not familiar with mariachi music or appreciate it as a form of cultural expression may be quick to dismiss it as novelty background music that a distinctly uniformed band plays on Friday nights at the local Mexican restaurant or a customary Cinco de Mayo celebration. As a consequence of this surface-level type of cultural understanding, Holland, et al (1998) writes:

“Clearly one’s social position – defined by gender, race, class, and any other division that is structurally significant – potentially affects one’s perspective on cultural institutions and the ardor of one’s subscription to the values and interpretations that are promoted in rituals and other socially produced cultural forms. (p. 25)

Mariachi as a Performing Art: A Review of Literature

An interest in a performing art leads to a high state of motivation that produces the sustained attention necessary to improve performance and the training of attention that leads to improvement in other domains of cognition (Dana Arts & Cognition Consortium, 2004). Mariachi is a type of performing art. Like participation in a band, orchestra or dance troupe, students who participate in a mariachi are able to express themselves through their *trajes*, bodies, instruments and voices. What sets the mariachi apart from other types of performing arts in schools is the culture that it represents.

One of the few texts offering a thorough description of mariachis is the educational book by Daniel Sheehy (2006) entitled *Mariachi Music in America: Expressing Music, Expressing Culture*. According to Sheehy (2006), the origins of many of the instruments that are played within a mariachi band, such as various types of guitar, harp and violin, were first introduced in 1519 by six musicians who were among the three hundred men that marched with Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés from the Gulf of Mexico to Tenochtitlan. The making of these instruments, musical forms and the social value of mariachi music soon became widespread during Spanish colonial rule (1521-1821).

According to Juareguí (2007), it is believed that the term mariachi was first documented in reference to a festive context on May 7, 1852, in a letter written in Spanish from Father Santa Anna, who was in charge of the Rosamorada parish, to Bishop Diego Aranda y Carpintero. In the letter, Father Santa Anna complained about events he witnessed at a plaza on a Saturday involving men playing cards at a table and others dancing and yelling with drunkenness. Father Santa Anna claimed that these men are known around the area as *mariachis*. He then confiscated their instruments, told the men playing cards to stop, and had them pick up anyone who had collapsed from drunkenness that lay on the floor. He later explained that the same *Alcalde* (mayor) who had promoted him also provided financial assistance to bring more musicians to the plaza, this time with the party running from Saturday to Monday. Feeling as though he was being made fun of, Father Santa Anna announced that he would be retiring to Pueblo de San Juan Bautista. It was evident that the mariachis were not going away, and that they were being

encouraged to stay by being paid by the government. Historian Jean Meyer discovered the letter in 1981 and the original is housed in the Historical Archives of the Archdioceses of Guadalajara.

The many types of musical forms played by the mariachi include the *son*, *canción ranchera*, *bolero ranchero*, *huapango*, and *polca*. Although some of the lyrics to songs sung by mariachis were found to be objectionable to authorities in the 1700's and may still be found suggestive or inappropriate in certain settings, Sheehy (2006) points out that the “meaning of a song for both the musician and the listener may be very different from the literal meaning of the song” and that “knowing that the meaning of music is situational helps us grasp how mariachi music can be a statement of social identity” (p. 51). The context in which a song is sung is most influential in the way it is interpreted and internalized by the listener.

For example, the same two people can listen to the song “El Rey” (the King) one of the most commonly known songs sung by a mariachi, and have two completely different interpretations or perhaps have no interpretation at all and instead connect the song to something or someone in particular:

*Yo sé bien que estoy afuera
pero el día en que yo me muera
sé que tendras que llorar
Llorar y llorar
llorar y llorar
Diras que no me quisiste
pero vas a estar muy triste
y así te vas a quedar
Con dinero y sin dinero
hago siempre lo que quiero*

*y mi palabra es la ley
no tengo trono ni reina
ni nadie que me comprenda
pero sigo siendo el rey
Una piedra del camino
me enseñó que mi destino
era rodar y rodar
Rodar y rodar
rodar y rodar
Después me dijo un arriero
que no hay que llegar primero
pero hay que saber llegar
Con dinero y sin dinero
hago siempre lo que quiero
y mi palabra es la ley
no tengo trono ni reina
ni nadie que me comprenda
pero sigo siendo el rey.*

[English]

*I know very well that I'm on the outs
But on the day I die,
I know you'll be crying
crying and crying,
crying and crying
You'll say that you didn't love me
but you're going to be so very sad,
and you will remain so
Chorus:
With or without money
I do whatever I want
and whatever I say, goes
I don't have a throne nor a queen,
nor anybody who understands me
but I still remain the king
A stone in my path,
Revealed to me that my destiny*

*was to go rolling along,
rolling and rolling,
rolling and rolling
Afterwards, a muleteer (mule driver) told me
It's not important to arrive first,
but to know how to arrive
With or without money
I do whatever I want
and whatever I say, goes
I don't have a throne or a queen,
nor anybody who understands me
but I still remain the king*

(original artist unknown)

Literally interpreted, the song “El Rey” could be understood to be about a very egocentric, noncommittal male who is unwilling to admit his faults; as someone who admittedly will never change his ways because he is “the king”. On the other hand, when performed, the song is typically sung by a male who, while exuding tremendous confidence in his stance, also emits the pain behind the lyrics of the song in the manner in which he sings, exhibiting the contradiction of someone who tries to appear as if they have everything under control when in fact they do not. The slow tempo of the song adds to the feeling of loneliness and melancholy the song emits when sung.

Sheehy further explains that the term “mariachi” was no longer shunned and gained acceptance in high society by 1905 as it was a symbol used by the elite class to represent the town or state from which they came. After migration was accelerated due to the Mexican Revolution and a massive shift in Mexican rural to urban population, mariachi music evolved due to the interaction and new conglomeration of the various

styles brought by musicians from all different regions and backgrounds (Juaregi, 2007, Sheehy, 2006). Along with the changes in population, the popularity of mariachi music grew exponentially, especially *corridos*⁵ that often related political and wartime events and brought out the personalities of the main characters in these events (Jaureguí, 2007). The resulting post-revolutionary nationalism positioned the mariachi as a symbol of México and what it meant to be Mexican. By 1920, local support enabled mariachi groups to play professionally full-time and by the 1930's mariachis were included in Mexican films and radio. Juareguí (2007) describes these changes as a result of “a mestiza mold, characterized by two main parts; the foreign and the indigenous” (p. 135). Jaureguí (2007) clarifies his use of mestiza by stating that it does not mean that it refers to a cultural mestizaje that is “harmonious nor homogenous”. The collective identity of México is in constant flux; both conforming and reforming at the same time, due to its shared cultural background, such as spoken language, manners, ways of dress, and food customs (Juareguí, 2007).

Around the 1950's, in addition to using the violin, guitar and harp, the modern mariachi included the trumpet, vihuela, and guitarrón. The vihuela is a five-stringed instrument with a middle-range sound, while the guitarrón is a six-stringed instrument with a lower pitch; both have round, convex bodies. The fairly lightweight yet large guitarrón was more portable than the much heavier harp and began to replace its presence at performances (Mr. Vasquez at a mariachi history talk at a local university, 2012).

⁵ A *corrido* refers to a type of Mexican folk music in ballad format that often tells a story about current events.

Although the vihuela and guitarrón were based on Spanish instruments, they were created in Mexico.

The expansion of mariachi music throughout Mexico later spread to the United States, and eventually mariachi education within public schools began to gain importance. In 1966, Bella Ortiz, a teacher in San Antonio started a mariachi music program in a local elementary school and began mariachi ensembles at the high school level in 1970. Five years later, she was asked to start similar programs in eight other schools; all of which became so popular that the programs were imitated in schools throughout Texas. According to the Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas Online and the San Marcos Mercury Newspaper (2012), Texas State University began its annual "Feria del Mariachi" concert in 1999, which included the university's own mariachi ensemble as well as other groups. Now in 2012, the event has expanded to a two-day event, which includes mariachi research presentations and instructional seminars about instrumentation, stage presence, arrangement, and mariachi traditions for participants including middle and high school students. They also hold a mariachi competition for all of the mariachis participating.

In Texas, the University of Interscholastic League (UIL) is a University of Texas affiliated organization that provides schools an opportunity to compete against each other in the various content areas as well as in athletics and fine arts. As of January 2008, according to the periodical, *The Houston Chronicle* (2008), the "University Scholastic League has agreed to recognize mariachi as a category in its music competitions". Therefore, according to documents obtained from the UIL website in August of 2008,

beginning in 2009, mariachi ensembles have been allowed to compete in the area of Medium Ensembles as either a traditional mariachi or experimental mariachi. Both the traditional and experimental mariachi ensembles must consist of a minimum of eleven members, with a maximum of seventeen, with the traditional mariachi having strict guidelines as to how many players are allowed per instrument. Now in the twenty-first century, mariachi music is widely known throughout the United States and is commonly used in celebrations as a symbol of the Mexican culture.

Very little scholarship has been developed regarding high school students' participation in mariachi bands. In this section I foreground one educational text about mariachis that provides an in-depth look at mariachis and three master's theses and dissertations that highlight benefits of individuals' participation in mariachi bands and/or music. Only one of these theses focuses on students as participants.

Focusing on two communities, in the dissertation *Cantando de Ayer: Performing History, Ethnic Identity and Traditionalism in United States-based Urban Mariachi*, Jacquez (2000) emphasized the changing traditions of mariachi music within two urban settings: Austin, Texas and Ann Arbor, Michigan. The study included ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with the respective communities from 1991-1996. The results show how mariachi music exposed issues of nationalism, ethnic identity, traditionalism and history not typically found in mainstream media. The basis of this study provides context with which to connect to the stories and/or experiences as told by the mariachi students in this dissertation. The fact that the students are able to have their voices and stories heard not only sheds light on their experiences within the mariachi at Star of

Texas High School but also adds to the literature on identity, dropout prevention, arts education and bilingualism.

Using the connection that mariachi music is traditional Mexican folk music and is very popular in immigrant Latino communities, Frolick (2004) wrote his master's thesis, *Using Cultural Material as an Educational Tool in AIDS Prevention*. The thesis focuses on the use of a series of songs in the style of mariachi music. The songs were written by a mariachi musician and educator and were recorded by professional mariachis. The songs were then distributed via cassette as a cost-effective way to provide and introduce health education messages regarding AIDS to fifty male recent Latino immigrants, specifically day laborers who self-reported "high-risk" behaviors, in Los Angeles, California. The participants from fifteen different locations received a copy of the cassette, a cassette player, headphones and batteries upon completing HIV testing during HIV screenings and two weeks later responded to a survey and answered questions during a face-to-face interview about AIDS prevention information that was provided on the cassette. The findings indicate that the cassettes were useful in educating recent Latino immigrants about AIDS prevention. The AIDS prevention messages that were provided in the style of mariachi music, a musical form familiar to the population targeted in this study, allowed the messages to be more readily received and internalized by the participants. This thesis offers an example of how mariachi music can be an innovative, creative and effective method for disseminating important health information and how it can be used to reach out to a larger community.

Finally, the master's thesis *Playing Mariachi Music: Its Influence in Student's Lives / An Ethnographic Study of Mariachi MECA* (Dodd, 2001) investigates how participation in a student mariachi (offered by the Multicultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts program of a non-profit community based arts association) influenced the lives of students, increased identification with their cultural heritage and contributes to academic success. The study was conducted in Houston, Texas and included observations and interviews over the 2000-2001 school year with eighteen students (twelve boys and six girls) and staff members, all between the ages of fifteen and twenty-eight and who also traveled internationally as a mariachi group. All of the interviews and observations took place during rehearsals three nights a week over the course of the 2000-2001 school year. The results showed that the MECA program positively contributed to academic success, community involvement, and strengthening of student identification with their cultural heritage. Although the term "academic success" is not clearly defined nor is the type of data analysis mentioned, the author does indicate the benefits of participating in Mariachi MECA in the following statement: "MECA students develop self esteem and utilize their social capital through dealing with the complexity of rehearsals, performances, practice, tutoring, as well as keeping up with their academic studies, family and social life" (p.77). The MECA program not only provided mariachi education, but also served as a catalyst for their academic progress. Dodd also mentions that "through the implementation of an ethnic arts program which teaches cultural heritage and community activism, students develop a sense of security and trust through relationships with staff and fellow students" (p. 81). Dodd's study

relates to this dissertation in that it focuses on how mariachi participation has enhanced the lives of students; but differs in that Dodd's study involves and discusses a community-based after-school arts program and includes students of various ages, whereas this study involves a high school mariachi course that can be taken for credit and provides more in-depth focus on the school experiences of the adolescent students.

CONTEXT OF STUDY

Latina/o Student Achievement

Failure of minority students in the U.S. has been the function of the deficit habitudes and low academic expectations for these students that predominate American classrooms (Diaz and Flores, 2001). Students often disengage from the learning process because of exposure to piecemeal, superficial knowledge and culturally irrelevant curriculum (Cummins, 1986).

As cited by Soto, Lucas's research (1991) illustrates how language minority students benefit in high schools where value is placed on the students' language and culture, high expectations are made concrete, school leaders make their education a priority, there is well-designed staff development, variety of courses and programs are offered, counselors give special attention, parent involvement is encouraged, and staff members commit to empower students. By including a class such as mariachi as a course elective for all students at STHS, the school administration is sending a clear message that cultural expression is valued and encouraged. Similarly, in Gándara's *Over the Ivy Walls* (1995), the Chicano students who achieved academic success had parental support,

a hard work ethic and in a study by Zalaquett (2006), helping factors were a strong family unit, value of education, responsibility towards others, sense of accomplishment, friendship, scholarships, community support, and school personnel.

In *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela (1999) reveals in her study of a high school in Houston that, “in any given year, 1200-1500 students enter the 9th grade; at the end of any given year, only 400-500 graduate” (p. 42). Valenzuela goes on to uncover the fact that because twenty-five percent of the ninth-graders have been retained and thus in their second year as ninth graders, “this suggests that the dropout problem is directly associated with low levels of achievement that are especially evident among 9th graders” (p. 43). In the study, district-sponsored task force investigations included the following problems: teachers hold low expectations for youth; youth feel that teachers do not care whether they stay or leave, communications between the school and the families typically include no Spanish translation, an insufficient # of bilingual counselors, coupled with inadequate counseling and course scheduling, scheduling problems that left as many as 40% students without the correct # of classes or with incorrect classes, improperly certified or noncertified ESL teachers, a shortage of teachers available to sponsor clubs and extracurricular activities, and an inadequately funded ESL program. (p. 51)

When they seek to explain the persistence of underachievement and high school dropout at the high school, students, parents, and community members inevitable return to the language of “caring”. For them, “caring” connotes concerns over inequitable schooling resources, overcrowded and decaying school buildings, and a lack of

sensitivity toward Spanish speakers, Mexican culture, and things Mexican. (Valenzuela, p. 58)

From teachers' perspectives, the way students dress, talk and behave "proves" that they do not care about school (Valenzuela, p. 61). Students argue that they should be assessed, valued and engaged as whole people, not based on their appearance. The individual histories that students and teachers bring to the classroom necessarily influence the chances for successful relationship building (Valenzuela, p. 73). Fine (1991), as cited by Valenzuela, conducted a study on dropouts in an inner-city school and found that by viewing academic as the exclusive domain of the school, teachers are committed to maintain the existing boundaries between the home and school.

Trujillo (1998) interviewed teachers who stressed the importance of students becoming "part of the American mainstream" via an emphasis on English over Spanish and improving test scores, which is reflected in the transitional compensatory bilingual education program which is very different from the maintenance bilingual/bicultural program operative in the 1970's.

Transitional bilingual education programs assume that society is fair and therefore implicitly accepts the conception of empowerment that developing the skills and capabilities are all that is necessary to succeed in school and society. Another underlying belief is that people can succeed if their capabilities are improved, especially competence in English (Trujillo. 1998, p. 11)

According to Ovando (2003), Krashen notes that the high Latino dropout rate, often attributed to bilingual education, is in fact the result of a complex set of background

variables. These include poverty, racism, an unempowering school culture (Cummins, 2000; Nieto, 1999), school tracking practices (Oakes, 1985; Olsen, 1997), a dearth of successfully schooled Latino role models, and a lack of engaging reading materials in the home and school environments.

Value of Bilingualism in the U.S. Context

Another factor that has contributed to the dropout rate is the institutional tendency to not value bilingualism. In fact, language is often viewed as a barrier to Latino educational success (Valenzuela, 1999, Tienda, 2009). However, it is necessary to clarify that although most Hispanic students begin attending schools in the United States in their primary years (Tienda, 2009), not all of them are classified as English language learners (ELLs). Due to the fact that the majority of the students in the mariachi band in this study learned English as a second language and that all of the songs are sung in Spanish, an understanding of the education policies, both past and current, regarding English language learners is essential to understanding the schooling environment to which many of the students have been subjected.

As a result of the Bilingual Education Act (1968), community activism, and litigation by Spanish speaking parents in the Southwest, many elementary and some secondary bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs were implemented throughout the United States (Ovando, 2003). The *Lau* decision was the result of a class action suit representing 1,800 Chinese students who alleged discrimination on the grounds that they could not achieve academically because they did

not understand the instruction of their English-speaking teachers. Basing their unanimous decision on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the justices concluded that equal treatment of English-speaking and non-English-speaking students did not constitute equal educational opportunity and, therefore, violated non-English-speaking students' civil rights (Ovando, 1977) Because *Lau* did not prescribe specific curricular content or methodology to restore the civil rights of the students in question, it was possible that a broad range of programs with diverse philosophical underpinnings, from "assimilation as quickly as possible" to "separatism without discrimination" (desegregation notwithstanding), could satisfy the spirit of the law.

In 1974, The Congress of the United States enacted the following provision of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act:

No State shall deny equal educational opportunity on account of his or her race, color, sex or national origin by . . . the failure by an education agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional program.

The Act stipulates that "this provision recognizes the ultimate responsibility of the State for the implementation and monitoring of educational programs for limited-English proficient students" due to the fact that it is addressed to the states, and the term "education agency" is used.

According to the *Lau* Remedies, bilingual education should be implemented in all school districts with at least 20 ELLs who represented the same language. While such students were accessing academic content through their home language, teachers were to instruct them in ESL so that they could eventually reach a level of English competency

that would enable them to compete at grade level with their peers in monolingual English classrooms. In the court case *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), the school district in Raymondville, Texas, was charged with violating the civil rights of ELLs under the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974. In response to this case, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals established a three-step test for determining whether school districts were taking “appropriate action” as required by the act for assessing programs serving language-minority students: (a) The school program must be anchored in sound educational theory, (b) adequate resources and personnel must be evident in the school program, and (c) the school program must reflect sound practices and results, not only in language but also in such content areas as math, science, social studies, and language arts (Crawford, 1999; Ovando & Collier, 1998).

Although there are many other issues concerning the continuous disenfranchisement of Latino students, it is also important to “pursue the ‘successful aspects’ of language-minority populations and the need for alternate research paradigms” (Soto, 1997). To move in that direction, I use a critical theoretical perspective that affirms Latina/o students’ knowledge and identities.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology and Critical Post-modernist Perspectives:

Transformational Resistance

The students’ participation in the high school mariachi band may be seen as a form of transformational resistance. Transformational resistance (Delgado Bernal, 1997) is a “framework to understand some of the positive strategies used by Chicana and

Chicano students to successfully navigate through the educational system” and graduate from high school.

For Foucault (1998), power does not function as a center but exercise through a net-like organization. This suggests that we are all caught up in the circulation of power relation, both the oppressors and oppressed. Power is also a productive network which runs through the whole social body because it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, and produces discourse. According to Boggs (1976), Gramsci uses the term hegemony to illustrate the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations.

As acts of resistance, according to Sandoval (2000), there are six ways to counter the effects of dominant forms as ideology: (1) the ability to speak outside the terms of ideology (speech of the oppressed), (2) language of “revolution”, linked to the simultaneous destruction and remaking / transformation of the world, (3) method of semiotic-mythology, which can be described as reading the signs of power, deconstructing them and breaking down dominant ideology, (4) silence as a form of resistance refuses to engage ideology at all, (5) “contemporary poetry” leads back to the sign itself to find the “meaning of things” beyond their inscription in language, and (6) “meta-ideologizing” in order to prove the original dominant ideology as naïve and no longer natural and to reveal, transform, or disempower its signification in some other way. These types of manipulations have proved essential for survival by those who have been oppressed and marginalized.

Although in a Foucauldian view, institutions as a whole can often be seen as aiming to “make docile bodies of the inmates (students) to create an efficient machine” (Foucault, 1977), it is imperative that teachers encourage their students to reflect on issues that are important to them and time to explore solutions to things they feel need to be changed in the school, or in other words, engage in critical bicultural education.

Darder (1996) defines critical bicultural education as:

A practice that is based on the framework of critical bicultural education will provide for students the opportunity to explore their own world as they seek also to understand how the dominant culture affects their lives and how they view themselves as human beings. (p.96)

This definition of critical bicultural education can be applied to critical bilingual education because “how the dominant culture affects their lives” includes the aspect of language, which is essential part of communication. Darder (1996) describes how critical bicultural pedagogy is built on a theory of cultural democracy, where each child can learn in his/her language and learning style. She also supports a dialectical view of the world, particularly as it relates to the notion of culture and the bicultural experience, beginning “with the fact of human existence and the contradictions and disjunctions that, in part, shape it and make its meaning problematic in the world” (p. 80) For example, according to a dialectical view, schools are sites of “both oppression and empowerment” (p.81) in that those in the dominant society continue to have the advantage in schools by having their culture most often represented and recognized while those outside of the dominant society continue to be marginalized and educated in a way that maintains their low status

in society. This form of cultural invasion negatively influences the lives of bicultural students and their families. Freire (2005) explains:

The dominant class, then, because it has the power to distinguish itself from the dominated class, first, rejects the differences between them but, second, does not pretend to be equal to those who are different; third, it does not intend that those who are different shall be equal. What it wants is to maintain the differences and keep its distance and to recognize and emphasize in practice the inferiority of those who are dominated. (p. 128)

As teachers should not feel inferior to dominant-class learners, they should also not feel superior to lower-class students who lack nutrition, grooming, speak a dialect, use a certain syntax, semantics, or with an accent. Nor should teachers take revenge or feel that lower-class students are “incapable”. Too often, educators perceive Chicana/o students’ culture and language as deficits to overcome instead of strength to cultivate. (Yosso, 2006)

While Freire (2005) feels that language of the dominant culture should be taught to lower-class students in order to give them the tools necessary to fight against injustice and discrimination, he also feels they should be taught to recognize that their own language is just as important and that they should not be ashamed to use it. By utilizing a dialogical model of communication, conditions can be created for students of color where they can find their voice through opportunities to reflect, critique, and act on their world to transform it (Darder, 1996).

In order to act critically and engage in praxis, the interconnectedness of language and society needs to be understood. According to Bakhtin, language consists of a sociocultural aspect that every person adds to a dialogue; “consciousness is cultivated in

a specific social context and words and utterances are inserted in specific meanings that are meaningful only for a particular social group” (Moraes, 1996, p.39). From the perspective of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue, in order to achieve emancipation and social freedom, the pedagogy of both the oppressor and the oppressed must be addressed in order to justify existence and its meaning. On his idea of multivoicedness, Bakhtin “maintains that people are not homogeneous even if they belong to a certain ethnic group (Moraes, 1996, p.126-127). Even within the various ethnic groups, there are a multitude of voices due to different life experiences, education, environment, beliefs, etc. In relation, Freire “perceives dialogue as a helpful way to challenge social and ideological constructions used to oppress a social self” (p. 134).

Anzaldúa (1987) speaks for all those who feel marginalized by others because of their language as she says:

If you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. (p. 81)

Language acceptance is critical for all those who interact with children regularly; whether it is a student, parent, guardian, teacher, etc., in order to understand and foster self-awareness, self-confidence and self-identity within each student, especially those who are marginalized by the educational system as a whole. If more teachers, parents and administrators understood that language is an integral part of one’s identity, perhaps they would think twice before transitioning them from a bilingual classroom to a mainstream English classroom “as soon as possible”. Perhaps they could also think twice before telling students that Spanish or languages other than English are not allowed to be spoken

in the classroom. In addition, if students were made to feel as though their culture was valued and encouraged to discuss it, share it, and be proud of it, then maybe they wouldn't be in such a hurry to acculturate and assimilate and be more likely to retain their first language and self-identity and become more adept to navigating between cultures.

This navigation can be best understood through Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of *mestizaje*, or the mixture of races, ideologies, cultures and/or biologies:

En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the *mestiza*. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave – *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness. (p.102)

Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness takes into consideration all of the races, ethnicities, and cultures that one identifies with and how they are negotiated between on a daily basis. However, Perez-Torres (2006) remind us that even the acknowledgment of certain cultures is not without conflict:

“At the same time, as a historical and social fact, *mestizaje* is one of the unifying factors that invaders, migrants and immigrants from Mexico have shared across time; all are born from a history of violent encounters. From the earliest explorers of what is now the U.S. Southwest to the African and indigenous peoples enslaved both in Mexico and in the United States to the latest migrant workers braving the militarized U.S. Mexico border, a *mestizo* heritage forged by the often repressive deployments of power ingrains in the *mestizo/a* racial and cultural subject an identity intimate with uneven legacies of colonial and imperial pasts” (Perez-Torres, 2006, p. 92)

It is interesting to imagine what the world will be like in a few centuries; when there are quite possibly no distinct lines between the races. Perhaps there will be a new way to

divide people into definitive categories. Regardless, it will be imperative for all those involved in the education of youth to ensure that they are taught how to think critically and interactively. Therefore, the content and quality of teacher education is extremely significant.

In elaboration to the statement that “education is a political act”, Freire (2005) discusses how teachers need to be able to engage in critical praxis:

Critical study correlates with teaching that is equally critical, which necessarily demands a critical way of comprehending and realizing that the reading of the word and that of the world, the reading of text and context. (p. 40)

Unfortunately, the school system in the U.S. is not structured in a way that teachers can easily engage in critical praxis. “Knowledge acquired in school – or anywhere for that matter – is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways; its emphases and exclusions partake of a silent logic” (McLaren, 1989, p. 169). Essentially what is being taught in schools is the result of the dispensation of knowledge deemed important for students by policy makers and state officials. According to McLaren (1989) “knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in a nexus of power” (p. 169).

If more teachers engaged in critical study, especially those who teach in lower socioeconomic areas with disenfranchised students, perhaps more students will be able to gain more self-confidence and have the opportunity to have their voices heard and make a difference in their communities. According to McLaren (1995), critical bilingual education:

...needs to be formulated within a goal-oriented social praxis. Political praxis should occur in which every group is encouraged to distrust its own certainties

and yet strive to solve the conflict of needs among competing groups situated asymmetrically in relations of power. (p.244)

In order for this to happen, teachers need to be able to provide a warm and nurturing environment where the teacher and the students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and emotions. Challenging power relations is central to critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) which is based on an analysis of structural as well as cultural power. By teaching the students how they can participate in critical pedagogy, teachers are empowering them with the idea that together with the community, they can promote change in the future.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to examine how issues of identity affect schooling success, I will use a qualitative and interpretive approach. Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) describe qualitative research as:

...a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

This dissertation proposal employs a qualitative case study research design, as defined by Gall, Gall and Borg (2003), “an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p.436). Yin (2003) specifies the boundaries for case study as an empirical inquiry that, 1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; 2) copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points: and as one result relies on multiple sources of

evidence, which include interviews, observations and field notes, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion; and as another result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p. 13-14).

This case study is bounded by various contexts; the Latino high school students, their experiences as students and members of the mariachi in class and during performances, in addition to their relationships with the mariachi directors and administrators as illustrated via interviews. Through qualitative research techniques, the relationships and resulting interactions between these contexts and issues of students' identity will be uncovered.

Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes were used to capture my thoughts, feelings and reactions after each observation and interview. Initially I would jot notes down during and after observations while the students practiced during class in the band hall. Later, as the study progressed, I began to wonder if my note taking was distracting to the students as they practiced as it was very hard to find a spot that was inconspicuous, so I then typically recorded myself reviewing my thoughts, feelings and reactions on a digital recorder as I sat in my car in the parking lot before I drove back to work.

Observations

My initial observation of the mariachi class in December 2007 was to get an idea of who was in the group and how they interacted as a whole. At that time there were

twenty-one students in the STHS mariachi. One student who consented to participating in the study left in January of 2008 after giving birth to a baby, returned in March of 2008, and due to time constraints I was not able to interview her until after the school year ended in June of 2008. Another student dropped in January 2008 but returned by February 2008. Three other females who did not participate in this study dropped out of the mariachi class in January of 2008 for various reasons, including lack of interest or the need to make-up credits not earned during the previous semester due to failing grades. As of May 2008, there were eighteen students still enrolled in the STHS mariachi.

As the observations continued throughout 2009, I began to focus my observations on particular sections of the mariachi as they often divided up between 2 sections; the *armonia* (guitar, vihuela and guitarrón) and the *melodia* (trumpets, violins and harp) during classroom practice. Observations and notes were also taken during performances I attended at Star of Texas High School and other schools within the district.

Ethnographic Interviews

Although observations and field notes were conducted and collected, the main source of data collection comes from the interviews, which allowed me to examine the students' perspectives on their involvement in the mariachi. According to Seidman (2006), "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.9). An

initial interview⁶ was conducted with each student. As I began to interview the students, I began to discover almost immediately those most willing to share their experiences, and those who were not. I did not have to ask my first interviewee for an interview, she volunteered and was very eager to share her story. However, not all of the students were as enthusiastic, which resulted in my decision to do in-depth interviews with five out of the eleven students initially interviewed.

The interviews were semi-structured and would last anywhere between twenty minutes to an hour and a half (the length of one class period). The interviews conducted with the two mariachi directors lasted from thirty minutes to two hours, depending on their availability to interview. The interviews with the school principal took about thirty minutes each. With the students, the interviews took place during the class period, often with music in the background from the class practice, (which was held twice a week for an hour and a half) in a room adjacent to where mariachi class took place, in the hallway, or in the mariachi directors' office. The interviews with the mariachi directors took place either in their office after class, after school, during student holidays and/or at a coffee shop.

Data Collection

The primary source of data for this study includes 25 interviews: individual interviews with three male and eight female Latino/a students from the mariachi band at Star of Texas High School, and in-depth follow-up interviews with five of the students. The sample I obtained is reflective of the overall gender representation of the mariachi

⁶ The interview guide I used for this study is attached as Appendix I.

group in that there were more females than males. Each interview was an average of thirty minutes long. Due to time constraints, a focus group interview was only conducted with three of the students included in the follow-up interviews. The mariachi directors, the principal of the school, and the music director of an organization that runs academic, athletic, and music competitions for Star of Texas High School and many other schools in Texas were also interviewed on an as-needed basis in order to gain more information about the students' backgrounds, school environment and what opportunities are available to them as members of a high school mariachi band.

Field observations were conducted both before and during the same one-hour-and-a-half class periods in which the interviews were conducted at Star of Texas High School in 2008-2009, with the observer role being supplementary to the interviewer role once interviews began. I also was invited to, attended and observed various performances between 2007 and 2009, which occurred both on and off campus and included performances at various schools, a district-wide All-City Mariachi Music Festival at a community cultural center and a school-sponsored *pachanga*⁷.

So that a clearer picture can be provided regarding the students' academic history, secondary quantitative data came from students' academic records maintained by the school district. Student data was obtained from school district records to describe the students' academic achievement progress of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Information regarding language proficiency progress in English was intended to be collected via the Reading Proficiency Test in English and the Texas

⁷ A *pachanga* is a Spanish word for celebration

Observation Protocol, which are both now termed as part of the Texas English Language Proficiency System (TELPAS), but was unattainable for various reasons; either the students was never identified as limited English proficient or they were reclassified before a database was created. What was obtained was the latest student status in reference to language, which is indicated by a code of LEP (currently identified as limited English proficient), F (first year monitoring status upon exiting a bilingual/ESL program), S (second year monitoring status upon exiting a bilingual/ESL program) or 7 (student has exited a bilingual/ESL program more than two years prior). Length of time in US schools was also collected from school district records. Information about whether or not a student participated in a Bilingual/ESL program, intervention program and/or dropout prevention program participation was obtained during the interviews. Data regarding student demographics, date of entry in US schools, date of LEP classification, date of reclassification as non-LEP, and socioeconomic status was obtained from the school district. This information will provide a descriptive overview that will reflect student progress in school regarding both academics and language proficiency.

Before I began this study, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Texas and written consent from the school district where I conducted the study and from the parents of the students involved (under the age of eighteen) or the students themselves (over the age of eighteen).

In addition to the obtaining the desired qualitative data, I also asked for information indicating whether or not the students participated in any other extracurricular activities.

I also kept field notes about my impressions, feelings and reflections before and after each interview as well as audio recorded and transcribed each interview.

Before the interviews began in May 2008, weekly observations of the mariachi were made from December 2007 (excluding the two-week winter break and one-week spring break) to April 2008 both during class and also during school and other public performances. Due to the approval of the initial IRB in December of 2007, observations from the fall semester of 2007 are not included.

Data Analysis

Eleven mariachi students participated in this case study. In an attempt to maintain a level of organization, I used Creswell's (2003) generic steps for analyzing data:

- 1) organize and prepare the data for analysis by transcribing interviews, typing up field notes, sorting and arranging the data depending on the sources of information,
- 2) read through all the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning.
- 3) begin detailed analysis with a coding process, organizing the material into "chunks" before giving the "chunks" meaning,
- 4) use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis,
- 5) use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis as well as figures or table that convey descriptive information about the research site and each participant, and make an interpretation or meaning of the data. (pp.193-196)

I used Atlas.ti qualitative data software program, available via software license online, to help organize and analyze my data. I coded the data and created themes that described participants' meanings in relation to the research questions. Some of the initial categories were motivation, family and achievement. Some of the themes included Mariachi as Motivation and Mariachi as Family/Cultural Connection. Emerging themes discovered in the interviews will be described in detail in the Results chapter.

While all of the mariachi students were invited to participate, only the eleven students who returned consent forms were interviewed. From those eleven students who returned the consent form, six were selected for follow-up interviews because of their willingness to speak freely during the interviews. The students who were not selected for follow-up interviews had the tendency to answer the interview questions in as few words as possible and/or would not elaborate. All of the students selected for follow-up interviews were very engaging, thoughtful and willing to converse. Because there already were a larger number of females than males in the mariachi, I did not worry about having an equal number in gender. The sample I obtained is reflective of the overall gender representation of the mariachi group.

Member checking and triangulation of data collected and interpretations was conducted. Member checking is an important part of triangulating the researcher's observations and interpretations. When research participants review interview transcripts, observation notes or narrative text they often provide corroboration and feedback (Stake, 1995). Each research participant was given multiple opportunities to review data materials and provide further response to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Positionality

As I began to conduct classroom observations in late fall of 2007, I immediately was forced to recognize that a separation had to occur within myself to allow the researcher to observe and write fieldnotes as opposed to the former mariachi player/violinist to sit, enjoy and sometimes critique the musicians. My first few visits as an observer were difficult; I had trouble taking my eyes off of the violin section and thinking of ways they could improve, and sometimes a certain song would trigger a long-forgotten memory, which would divert my attention and sometimes bring tears to my eyes. Recognizing this dilemma, I went ahead and allowed myself the first few days to get the students used to having me in the room while I enjoyed the music and forgot about which instruments were out of tune and/or the musical notes that were not played correctly. From then on, I was able to make more objective observations on the students' interactions with each other and the mariachi directors, realizing that "even though values are embedded in social science and educational research, objectivity should remain an important goal in the human sciences". (Banks, p.6)

A few months later, as I began to interview and get to know the students, I found myself confronted with a different dilemma. Through the interviews, I realized that some of the students were in jeopardy of dropping out of school, due to their disenchantment with teachers and/or the curriculum and their tendency to skip certain classes. With my professional experience as a bilingual tutor, teacher, program specialist and curriculum coordinator, I became torn between intervening in the students' education and not

interfering at all as to not affect the interviews and my rapport with the students. As a researcher I wanted to gain as much insight into the experiences of the students as possible, but as an educator I felt compelled to help. As a result, I often stopped the interview the talk to the students about their academic concerns an shared information about resources available, such as free tutoring offered at the school as well as websites that offered online tutorials. After realizing how my decision to focus on mariachi students came directly out of my personal experience as a member of a mariachi and subsequent choice not to join the only mariachi band available at the high school level in Star of Texas School District, I now believe that the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct, which mirrors their life experiences and their values (Banks, 1998, p. 4). My interview questions were developed with my own mariachi and schooling experience in mind. Although I do consider myself to be an insider due to the fact that I, myself, am a former mariachi player from the same area, I am also an outsider in that I did not attend a high school in a low socioeconomic area and did not experience the opportunity to express my Mexican heritage through mariachi class in high school. However, Merton (1972), concludes that both insider and outsider perspectives are needed in the "process of truth seeking." He states, "We no longer ask whether it is the Insider or the Outsider who has monopolistic or privileged access to social truth; in-stead, we begin to consider their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking" (p. 36).

It wasn't until long after I completed the interviews that I realized that I had let my penchant for the violin play a factor in whom I selected for this study. Although only

about half of the STHS mariachi participated in this study, I included all five of the violin players. In total, the majority of the students who participated in this study played string instruments. None of the trumpet players were included in this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that four factors be taken into consideration when establishing the trustworthiness of findings from qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility, which refers to the confidence one can have in the truth of the findings, can be established by various methods. I chose to use triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2003). Data triangulation involves the use of a variety of data sources in a study (Denzin, 1978). Regarding triangulation, I collected and examined data from multiple sources through multiple methods, in particular, field notes, interviews (supplemented with data from key informants) observations, and document reviews that included school newsletters, programs, and school district documents regarding students' academic performance. Approximately 20 documents were eventually reviewed and coded for analysis.

Study Timeline

Preliminary observations began in December of 2007, as soon as the UT IRB and the AISD research application were approved. Interviews began in May of 2008 and ended in February of 2010. The bulk of the data analysis and writing took place between 2010 and 2011, with editing and revising to beginning in the spring of 2012. Final review and the defense took place in the fall of 2012.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this dissertation lies in the fact that similar to Gluck and Patai (1991), I was reluctant to ask certain types of questions for the fear of probing the students too far to discuss topics they may not want to talk about, which sometimes prevented me from giving them “the space and the permission to explore some of the deeper, more conflicted parts” of their stories. In my first few interviews, I also tended to interrupt them with another question at times, thinking they had already finished answering the previous question, only to realize that they had more to say. I then learned to pause for a few seconds after the interviewee has finished speaking before moving on to the next question.

Another limitation was the fact that most of the student interviews occurred within the mariachi and band director’s offices or just outside the classroom where the mariachi practiced. There were frequent interruptions; phones ringing, the band director coming into his office and talking on the phone while we were recording interviews, and students coming and going from the classroom, who often stopped to chat with whomever was being interviewed. Although music was in the background of every interview, neither the interviewee nor I found it distracting, as it was the nature of the class and an everyday occurrence within the mariachi classroom.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

MY FIRST VISIT TO OBSERVE A PERFORMANCE AT STHS

Dec. 13, 2007, 7pm at STHS Theatre (Holiday Performance)

After obtaining permission from Ms. Reyna and the school district to conduct my research with her mariachi, she invited me to attend their Christmas Concert prior to beginning my observations of the mariachi class. I happily accepted and looked forward to the concert, not really knowing what to expect. As I arrived at STHS, I realized that not only did I not know where to park, but I didn't even know where the performance was being held. Although I had been to STHS before as a high school violin player and also as a new teacher attending professional development for Star of Texas School District, I had no idea where to go, so I just followed some parents that looked like they knew where they were going. As I began to walk through a hallway, I noticed Mrs. Reyna telling a student in her mariachi outfit to hurry. Not wanting to disturb them with the performance about to start, I decided to keep following the parents and ended up in the cafeteria. However, after seeing signs on tables that said "Reserved for Junior Varsity Booster Club Members" and noticing that there was a projection screen showing various football plays, I realized that I was in the wrong place. So I began to walk back from where I came, thinking that maybe Mrs. Reyna would still be there, but she was not. Luckily for me, a young Latina student from the cafeteria, who must have noticed my wandering around, asked me if I was here for the banquet. When I indicated that I was

actually looking for the holiday concert, she told me she did not know where it was, but an African-American parent who was walking by kindly told me that she was headed that way and motioned me to follow her. On the way there, she asked me what was going on in the cafeteria. When I told her, she sighed, “Oh, I bet my boy is in there. He told me he had to be at school at 6pm...but this happens every year! My kids always have things going on at the same times, and I have to choose which to attend”. When I lightheartedly suggested that at least she can attend them all in one day, she reiterated that she can’t, someone is always left out.

At this point we had reached the cafeteria, and I found a spot in the center of the theatre at the end of a row. An older gentleman sat next to me mentioning, “This is a good spot for pictures”, but when a lady sitting in front of him put her toddler on her lap, he promptly moved to another seat. I turned around in my seat and was pleased to see so many families present for the concert.

The theatre looked very new. The carpet and seats were very clean and comfortable. The band/orchestra director mentioned in the middle of the evening that this was their first time to play in the theatre, and appreciated that it was much better than playing in the cafeteria.

The choir was the first to perform. During the last song, one of the mariachi students sang a duet with a female choir student. He walked to the stage with confidence and seemed to ignore the audience yelling out his name with cheers. His voice was clear, strong, and beautiful. I later learned that his name was Alex.

After the choir performance, the orchestra students began setting up their chairs and stands. I immediately recognized that the same mariachi student (Alex) who had just sung with the choir also played violin in the orchestra. I noticed that there was a mariachi player (wearing mariachi uniform) playing the cello in the orchestra. Alex had his black and white formal tuxedo on (which the rest of the males in the choir were wearing), which is why I did not realize beforehand that he was also in the mariachi.

The symphonic band played along with the orchestra, in which there seemed to be at least five mariachi members. Overall, there seemed to be few players in both the orchestra and the band. Estimating, there were about eight violins, two violas, two cellos, and about fifteen band members. I honestly had never seen such a small band and orchestra from an urban high school with a large overall population. When I was in high school, we had twenty violins, eight violas, six cellos & two basses. I wondered if the small size of the orchestra is due to lack of interest or if grades kept some players from participating.

After the orchestra played two songs, they left the stage and the band played three holiday songs. I noticed that the orchestra director was also the band director, with Mrs. Reyna listed as the assistant band director. She helped move mics & stands as each group left and entered the stage. Meanwhile, the choir director gave thanks to the faculty in the audience for being present, which seemed to be about a total of four people. The mariachi was the last group to play. I counted twenty members on stage, six male and thirteen female, which was somewhat surprising to me since I thought at the time that historically, mariachis were a predominantly male group. I wondered to myself if there

was a predominance of females in other high school mariachis and am eager to interview the students at STHS about this. The songs that were performed at this concert were all very popular songs to those familiar with mariachi music.

- Canta, Canta, Canta sung by female solo (by Jose A. Jimenez)
- Un Rinconcito en el Cielo sung by duet (Traditional)
- Solamente Una Vez sung by female solo
- El Milagro de tus Ojos sung by 5 males (came out into audience)

Each of these songs holds a very special place in my heart, and it was very hard not to get emotional as I think of my family who has passed on as *Un Rinconcito en el Cielo* was performed:

*Voy a buscar
un rincón en el cielo,
para llevar, a mi amor.
Voy a buscar
un rincón en el cielo,
para escondernos, tu y yo.
Un rincón en el cielo,
juntos unidos los dos.
Y cuando caiga la noche,
te daré mi amor.
(repeats)*

*I'm going to search for a little corner in heaven,
to take you, my love.
I'm going to search for a little corner in heaven,
to hide us, you and I.
A little corner in heaven,
united together, the two of us.
and when night falls,
I will give you my love.*

(lyrics by Ramón Ayala)

In choosing to study this particular high school and the students in the mariachi class, the intent is not to generalize the experiences of Latina/o youth, but rather to go

beneath the surface of the mariachi as an icon of Mexican culture. Instead of simply recognizing the mariachi as a cultural music group that represents STHS and/or the larger community, I wanted to profile the students individually, digging deeper into who was choosing to be in the mariachi class, why they chose it, and what were their experiences regarding identity and schooling.

The notion of Anzaldua's *mestizaje* (1987) can be used as a guide to understand how the mariachi students at STHS are able to navigate their daily lives while negotiating their identities both inside and outside of school. This includes their identities within their families and communities. The negotiation of identities occurs nebulously; there are no distinct borders or boundaries in the spaces in which the students' identities are expressed. Both within and outside of the school day, many of the students in the STHS mariachi are involved in many other clubs and/or activities, having to negotiate and adapt themselves to their respective communities and environments within each space. Depending on the dynamics within each space, several forms of identity may be expressed in different ways by each student. It is important to note that in concordance with Anzaldua's *mestizaje*, these expressions are not always being expressed individually or in a turn-taking manner, some expressions may even occur concurrently.

In this chapter I describe the main research site, Star of Texas High School, based on my observations, with the focus being on the eleven participants in the study, three males and eight females, through information gained during the interview process. Pseudonyms are used for all names of people, places and events that could be possible identifiers of the participants in this study.

Research Site

The site where fieldwork was conducted was at Star of Texas High School and at various performance locations within the school community and central Texas. At this school, as of the 2007-2008 school year, the student population consisted of seventy-nine percent Latina/o students, fourteen percent African-American students, six percent Anglo students and less than one percent Asian students. Eighty-percent of the students on this school participated in the free/reduced lunch program, and overall, the school was characterized by a large percentage of students living in the low socioeconomic status (SES) category (see Appendix B). Percentages have remained consistent in subsequent school years, with a growth of about two percent in the Latina/o student category in the 2009-2010 school year.

I chose Star of Texas High School as the location for the study because it is one of the two high school campuses (out of a total of thirteen high schools) within the Star of Texas School District in 2007 that had a student mariachi band as well as a mariachi course that any student may elect to take as an elective. Although I am familiar with both high schools (location and population), I chose Star of Texas High School due to the fact that it is where the mariachi program began in the Star of Texas School District more than thirty years ago. It is also the same high school that my mother and her five siblings attended and graduated from in the 1960's and 70's, which was useful in determining the changing demographics and course composition of the campus. When my mother attended STHS in the 1960's, it was a predominantly White campus, with very few

minority groups represented. According to the Texas Tribune online database, in the 2007-2008 school year, the predominate group represented was Latina/o at 81 percent, followed by African-American students at 12.9 percent. White students comprised of 5.2 percent of the student population at STHS.

STHS first opened in 1953, just south of the downtown area. It is the oldest high school in the area. In the beginning of this study in 2007, there were 1,520 students at STHS. Towards the end of this study, there were 1,332 students enrolled at STHS. It is located in a predominantly low-income area, with several low-income housing apartment buildings nearby. However much of the attendance area that is closest to downtown has become gentrified, with the new homeowners often tearing down the original home in favor of much larger, contemporary homes.

The mariachi program at STHS began in 1980 under the direction of Phillip Ramirez* (pseudonym), who had a prolific career as both a violinist and violist and music teacher in Texas, Georgia and California, performing with numerous orchestras prior to being recruited by the Star of Texas School District to begin the mariachi program at a middle school and high school (Mr. Ramírez, 2008). He was originally from the Central Texas area and earned his bachelor's degree from a local university. Mr. Ramirez had just started to reconnect with mariachi music while performing with philharmonic orchestras in California, with "faint recollections of listening to it as a child" (Mr. Ramirez, 2008). With assistance from the middle school's band director, they decided to keep the "violins and trumpets on their respective instruments and placed all other students on the guitar, vihuela and guitarrón" (Mr. Ramirez, 2008). The first group

of middle school students in the mariachi program fed into a neighboring high school, which thus kept the mariachi program going year after year. According to Mr. Ramirez (2008):

This experience was special because central office and school administration were excited and offered encouragement for what I was doing with my students. Teachers, staff and parents were also supportive and offered their help.

Mr. Ramirez attributes his personal success to a pilot string program he was selected for at age nine (he was one of eleven students chosen) in 1948, run by the local university. The string program was established in response to the shortage of string teachers in the United States after World War II. The students practiced three days a week after school and on Saturday mornings (Mr. Ramirez, 2008).

In 1986, Mr. Ramirez was awarded “Teacher of the Year”, which was a year before I had him as maestro of the middle school mariachi, where I played violin. He was both “the first music teacher and the first Hispanic teacher” to receive this award in the Star of Texas School District. I never knew that he had won such an award; only that he was very warm and always encouraging us to “have fun”. He retired from the Star of Texas School District in 1999 (Mr. Ramirez, 2008).

Having such a large Latina/o population, I was interested in focusing my study on STHS, specifically on students who participated in the school mariachi and explore the significance of mariachi participation for the students, what role it has played in the formation of their cultural identities, and how it has positively impacted their schooling experiences. Having a bilingual space such as the mariachi class could be seen as a space in which their cultural identities can be expressed and also serve as a motivating space in

that maintaining passing grades as that is a requirement for participation in Texas. The school and all students in this dissertation are identified by pseudonyms.

School Principal

Dr. Carrillo was included in the interviews to provide insight as to how the mariachi was viewed by STHS administration, teachers, parents and community. I also believe that the school administration sets the tone for the campus, and I was eager to find out what it was at STHS.... was it a warm, welcoming place, or cold and harsh? Dr. Carrillo agreed to participate in the study, but expressed that he would prefer one interview, lasting no more than one hour, instead of five one-hour interviews as indicated on the consent form. I complied with his request and conducted a follow-up interview with him to help with data triangulation in the summer of 2008.

My first impression of Dr. Carrillo was that he was very charismatic and well spoken. He wore a dark suit during our interview and every time I saw him in the hallways at Star of Texas High School. He always walked with his body held straight and head held high. He worked as a district administrator in South Texas prior to becoming principal of Star of Texas High School. In 2009, two local civil rights groups called for Dr. Carrillo's resignation, citing consistent low test scores and graduation rates. School district officials were quick to defend Dr. Carrillo and noted that the school has improved test scores. Dr. Carrillo continued to remain principal of Star of Texas High School during the remainder of this study. As indicated earlier, the school principal initially would only agree to one interview; however I was able to do a quick follow-up interview before the 2008-2009 school year began, as I was curious to find out what was

going to happen to the mariachi program after Mrs. Reyna left at the end of the 2007-2008 school year, especially since Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez were so well-respected and admired by their students and the staff at STHS. Knowing that the number of available mariachi instructors was limited, I was a bit worried that the mariachi program might dissolve or be placed under the direction of someone with little or perhaps no experience with mariachi music. I wondered how it would affect the dynamics of the class and in turn, the identities and schooling of the students. I even contemplated looking into (which I did) the requirements for becoming an instructor of mariachi myself as I began to worry about what would happen to the mariachi program at STHS.

Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez

Although the STHS mariachi class and its students were the focus of this study, I also wanted to include data gathered from the mariachi directors (Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez) at Star of Texas High School in order to collect additional information on the mariachi students, the class and the group itself. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight from Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez, on their perspectives regarding the mariachi class (space) and program at STHS as well as their perspectives and experiences with the students that participated in this study.

The mariachi director, Mrs. Reyna, was also the assistant director for the high school band at STHS, including the marching band. She also teaches a guitar class that feeds into the mariachi; most students take the class for one year prior to joining. The assistant director of the mariachi, Mr. Vásquez, was a student at a local community college at the time of this study. Both Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez have extensive

backgrounds as mariachi musicians and have performed professionally in various mariachi groups. In addition to their responsibilities at STHS, they also spend time each semester at the middle schools recruiting students to join the STHS mariachi:

We help at the middle schools. Mainly that for us, it's more of a recruiting. So when we have free time we go visit the middle schools, help them out, or if we have to teach a class for them, we'll teach a class for them, and then kind of just so that the kids see us there, so when they come to high school, they're not scared. So it's more of that, of recruiting, getting to know them so that they at least know us before they come over here. (Mrs. Reyna, 2008).

Being aware of the social-emotional states of her freshman students is an important factor for Mrs. Ramirez. By making time to visit the middle schools and becoming familiar with the students, she is ensuring that they walk into a warm and safe environment once they reach the STHS mariachi classroom.

I first met Mrs. Reyna at a friend's wedding where she was performing with a professional mariachi before the reception was about to begin. I had my back to her as she began to sing beautifully, her voice rich and full, and when I turned around to watch, I recognized that it was Mrs. Reyna, the STHS mariachi director I had observed at my workplace on Cinco de Mayo. Already having decided to use the STHS mariachi as the focus of my study, I wanted to obtain permission from Mrs. Reyna prior to asking the school district for permission in order to avoid any tension upon my classroom visits and observations. Knowing that I had to act fast, I decided to follow the mariachi out of the room as they were walking out and finishing their last song. I managed to walk quickly enough to get in front of Mrs. Reyna and quickly introduce myself and hand her my business card, briefly explaining my study and asking for her permission to allow me to

interview her mariachi students. She immediately expressed interested and gave me her approval right then and there.

Mrs. Reyna started playing in a mariachi in high school where her father began a mariachi program. He is now retired and has his own professional mariachi group. Inspired by her father, Mrs. Reyna plans to follow in her father's footsteps and retire with her own mariachi group one day. She began playing professionally in a mariachi during college and continues to play professionally currently. She and Mr. Vásquez had played in a professional mariachi together for several years before she took over the role as mariachi director at STHS in 2006. Mrs. Reyna describes herself as strict and very serious.

Mrs. Reyna expressed that performing in a mariachi had several aspects of importance for her; "I guess the main thing is just, because it represents our culture, um, it's one of my favorite styles of music to play, and it's fun to perform for people.

Mr. Vásquez was raised by his grandmother in Laredo, Texas. He began playing in professional mariachi bands at age thirteen. In addition to teaching at STHS, he taught beginning and classical guitar as well as music theory at a local music school. He also teaches adults who want to learn to play mariachi music. They both agreed to participate in interviews in order provide more information on the background of the students and to help with the triangulation of data. He is self-described as "crazy, critical and hard".

After the end of the 2007-2008 school year, Mrs. Reyna moved due to her husband completing the requirements for a doctoral degree in music and obtaining employment as a professor in another city. I attempted to obtain permission to interview

the new mariachi director informally on her background and her perspective on how the mariachi impacts the students, but to no avail. Since I was able to observe the class on her first day as the new director, the class and I met her at the same time. She quickly made it clear to the class that she was hired as assistant band director and was mariachi director by default, mainly for the facts that she could not speak Spanish and never listened to mariachi music before then. Although Mr. Vásquez was there to help the new mariachi director at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, he left a couple of months later after not being paid for his services and accepted a position as a mariachi director out of the district. He continues to maintain contact with many members of the STHS mariachi, especially via social media such as Facebook.

MARIACHI CLASS

The mariachi class met daily for an hour and fifteen minutes as it was offered as a course elective, similar to other performing arts courses, such as band and choir. During the first year of this study, the Star of Texas High School Mariachi performed almost monthly at a variety of venues, whether school district sponsored or not. Because they are very well know throughout the city, they are often asked to perform at city, state and even national functions. While I was invited and did attend four of their public performances, my main source of observation data was obtained directly from the classroom, which I observed twenty different times between 2007-2009. (See Appendix A)

While all of the mariachi students were invited to participate, only the eleven students who returned consent forms were interviewed. From those eleven students who

returned the consent form, six were selected for follow-up interviews because of their willingness to speak freely during the interviews. The students who were not selected for follow-up interviews had the tendency to answer the interview questions in as few words as possible and/or would not elaborate. All of the students selected for follow-up interviews were very engaging, thoughtful and willing to converse. Because there already were a larger number of females than males in the mariachi, I did not worry about having an equal number in gender. The sample I obtained is reflective of the overall gender representation of the mariachi group.

Research Participants

As I began conducting observations of the mariachi in December of 2007, there were twenty-one members total enrolled in the mariachi class at Star of Texas High School. In January 2008, one had left school after she gave birth (she returned in late March, 2008, and I was able to interview her in June of 2008), three females had their schedules changed by the school counselor due to lack of interest or low grades (all mariachi students must maintain passing grades in order to participate in mariachi performances as it is a requirement for all extra-curricular activities), and one was convinced to drop the mariachi class by a teacher who said that she “should do something more meaningful with her time” (she later returned to the group after the mariachi director spoke directly with the teacher). As of May 2008, there were eighteen students still enrolled in mariachi class.

In order to maintain consistency within this study, only those students who were enrolled in the mariachi class at the beginning of this study in the fall of 2007 through the spring of 2009 were invited to participate. Although the mariachi class consisted of eighteen members total, six males and twelve females, only eleven consent forms were obtained and those eleven students participated in interviews. Of the eleven students, eight are female and three are males. Seven of the eleven students were identified as speaking Spanish as the primary home language. Six of the eleven students have been in the Star of Texas School District since kindergarten. Of the six students who participated in in-depth interviews, five were female and one was male. Next I present a brief profile of each of the students who participated in the interviews. The purpose of presenting the profiles is to demonstrate the unique personalities, identities, goals and experiences of each of the students in the mariachi class that are involved in this study.

Stefany

Stefany, a very vibrant and engaging personality, volunteered to be the first student interviewed and was very eager to participate and tell her story. Her family is originally from Zacatecas, Mexico. She was born and raised in central Texas and is proud to be bilingual in English and Spanish. Stefany was in bilingual education classrooms in elementary school until the fifth grade and in an ESL classroom in sixth grade. She indicated that she feels more dominant in Spanish and prefers to speak in Spanish. During our interviews, she interchanged between Spanish and English, particularly using Spanish when describing or using idioms. She is the second youngest

of six daughters, all whom she describes as “nerds”, a term she does not use to describe herself. Her father writes lyrics and submits them to record companies in a search to find music to accompany his lyrics. He also owns his own construction company.

Stefany plays the violin in the STHS mariachi and shared that “mariachi music is what we grew up with” and that she is very familiar with it. She learned to play the violin in the sixth grade when she was in the school orchestra and learned to play the flute in the eighth grade when she decided to join the school band. She joined the mariachi after attending a mariachi performance at STHS and being recruited with the other violin players from the STHS orchestra during her sophomore year. Shortly thereafter, most of those recruited decided to quit the orchestra and remain in mariachi, except for two brothers (Alex and Antonio).

In mariachi class, Stefany considers herself to be “the spirited one, the motivator of the group”. She likes to dance for fun, “like at quinceneras with my parents”. She is very close to her family (including extended family that live nearby) and joins them every Sunday for mass at a nearby Catholic church. Her parents are very supportive of her participation in the STHS mariachi; so much so that her father is the booster club president. Stefany also was a class officer and served as the parliamentarian.

Stefany herself has done very well in school in the past; she scored so well on her state-mandated assessments the previous year that she was recommended for advanced placement classes, which she was taking during her junior year. Amidst her high test scores and the fact that Stefany’s parents have impressed upon her the importance of school; she has had a difficult time maintaining consistent attendance in all of her classes.

She admitted that mariachi class was the only class she was motivated to attend; she prefers not to attend any of her other classes due to her dislike of the teachers.

In the beginning of her senior year, for some reason, there was a schedule mix-up and she and four other mariachi students from the previous year were placed in classes that they did not register for, for example, Stefany was placed in an art class instead of mariachi class. Regardless, she would visit the class when possible. However, without her being in the mariachi classroom, it became very difficult to schedule further interviews as I was only allowed (via an agreement with the principal) to interview the students during their mariachi class time. After school was no longer an option as Stefany now had a night job at a local restaurant, which she secured to help out her parents, who were struggling financially. Shortly afterwards, Stefany became pregnant, yet managed to keep up with her classes by participating in a credit recovery program. Stefany graduated in May of 2009 and gave birth to a baby boy in July of 2009.

Maggie

Maggie, the second student I interviewed, was very soft-spoken and rarely made eye contact during our interviews and was not as forthcoming with information as Stefany. She was a junior at the time of this study and played the violin in the STHS mariachi. Maggie's parents are also from Mexico and moved to the United States before she was born. Maggie's mother is a bilingual teacher in the local school district. She was born and raised in central Texas, and is completely bilingual in Spanish and English. Maggie has two older step-siblings and one younger brother. She is involved in many

school activities, including mariachi, softball, and class officers, and takes all of her commitments very seriously. She is ranked in the top ten percent of her class. Maggie joined the STHS mariachi with the encouragement of her friends. Her favorite song to play in the mariachi is *El Cascabel*. In one interview, when asked if her parents would be attending a performance, she said no, since her parents had driven to Mexico that morning to visit her grandfather who had suffered a heart attack. With a look of sadness, she said that she would have gone with them, but that she had commitments to the mariachi band and her softball team. She is very proud to be a member of the mariachi and believes that her participation in all of her extracurricular activities motivates her to succeed, although at times it is difficult to manage her time. Maggie graduated high school in May of 2009.

Olga

Olga, the third female I interviewed, is one of two mariachi members (along with Rosita) I interviewed that is not bilingual in Spanish and English, and she was somewhat embarrassed to admit this fact. Her grandparents, parents, herself and her siblings were all born and raised in central Texas. Although her grandparents and parents are bilingual in Spanish and English, and have told her that she used to speak Spanish as a little girl, Olga has no recollection of it. As she talked, she expressed embarrassment that she does not speak Spanish, but indicated that she is trying to learn via Spanish classes at school. She does love mariachi music, although her involvement with the mariachi band happened by chance. At the beginning of her freshman year, she had spent almost an entire week in study hall, waiting for the office to create her schedule of classes. At one

point, one of the counselors asked her if she played any instruments, to which she replied, “I play the guitar”. The next day, she was handed her schedule, and noticed that “Mariachi” was listed as one of her classes. Begrudgingly, she went to the mariachi class, set on marching to the counselor’s office afterwards to protest her assignment, but to her surprise, she really enjoyed the camaraderie as well as the music. She continued to participate in the mariachi band throughout her senior year, even after her family moved outside of the Star of Texas School District boundaries. Out of the eleven students interviewed, Olga is one of two students (along with Antonio) that did not participate in advanced placement classes. Although I did not ask her directly why, she did indicate to me that she does miss a lot of school due to health complications. She graduated high school in May of 2009.

Roberto

Roberto, a freshman, was the first male I interviewed, and was mature far beyond his years. He describes himself as “good, funny, supportive, but sometimes lazy, not wanting to do work around the house” (Roberto, 2008). Although he plays off as the class clown, he is very aware of his actions and knows what he must do to be successful, both in school and in the future. He agreed to be interviewed as long as his mother did not have to be, referring to the original call for participants (which included parents) flyer that I initially sent home with the students. He indicated that his mother was very busy and did not want to be included in the study (subsequently I decided not to include parents in this study after several more parents expressed the same concern). Roberto and

his family are originally from Calvillo, Aguascalientes, Mexico. He began his schooling in Mexico, attending kindergarten and part of first grade there before moving to Texas. His family has “two ranches in Mexico where we grow fruits, every time we go down there we visit the family and we go to the ranch to pick the fruits there” (Roberto, 2008). His paternal grandfather has been in charge of the ranches in Mexico since Roberto’s family has moved to the U.S.

Roberto is bilingual in Spanish and English, “yeah, Spanish is like my natural language!” He is the youngest of five sons, and the only one set to graduate high school. He is intent on attending college and eager to apply his interest in art by obtaining a degree in architecture and to be able to provide for his family, “I wanna make more money than my dad!”. His dad works by installing irrigation systems in golf courses and has been doing so for fifteen years, travelling to wherever his company sends him across the U.S. His mother works at a local eatery as a cashier. Roberto also intended to begin working where his mother worked when he turned sixteen (and did so) “because I need to start helping out with the house bills, my parents both have a lot of medical bills”. Knowing that his brothers will never make very much money without an education, he is cognizant of the fact that he has to seek further education in order to make sure his family is taken care of.

Roberto played viola in his middle school orchestra and wanted to join the mariachi while in middle school, but was told by the director there “there are no violas in the mariachi”. Undeterred, when he entered STHS as a freshman he enrolled in a guitar class and mariachi class, both taught by Mrs. Reyna. Roberto shared that his mother

“likes mariachi music more than classical, because of the words”, which is why he chose not to join the STHS orchestra. In addition to playing in the mariachi, Roberto was also on the golf team and equipment manager for the softball team. He says that his participation in all of these activities help to motivate him in school, especially since he was aware that participation in extracurricular activities will be considered for college admission. Roberto continued to play with the Star of Texas High School Mariachi throughout his high school years and graduated from Star of Texas High School in 2010.

Alex

As my observations continued, it became obvious that Alex was a very visibly confident young man. Alex sang and was the only male violin player (out of five violin players) in the STHS mariachi. Alex was the second male I interviewed and also a senior who had participated in the mariachi class since his freshman year. The unofficial leader of the group, giving the cue with a gesture (slightly lifting his violin from his shoulder) to begin a performance, Alex was also very poised and commanding in his stance. He had a rich baritone voice and was very highly regarded by the mariachi and the mariachi directors. After only several observations of the mariachi class, it was evident that Alex was the only violin player that practiced playing the music at home in preparation for class the following day. This was most evident during a “mariachi test” in which Alex was the only one that was able to play the music while accompanied by a trumpet player.

In addition to playing violin in the mariachi, he also plays violin in the very small Texas Youth Orchestra. He is one of the few members of the mariachi that plays

professionally with a mariachi outside of school. He also participates in a youth orchestra outside of school, an orchestra Alex considers to be of much higher caliber than the Star of Texas High School mariachi and for which he had to audition.

In the beginning of the interviews, Alex identified himself as “energetic, trustworthy, honest and very personable” (personal communication, 2008). Although he identifies himself as “Mexican”, he does not have a preference as to how he is referred to by others, whether it be “Hispanic” or “Mexican-American”. He was born in the United States and does not profess to be bilingual in Spanish and English. Alex’s younger brother, Antonio, was also in the mariachi class and participated in this study.

The most unique element of Alex’s interview was that although he played his violin and sang beautifully, he did not elaborate very much on the cultural representation of the mariachi. He described playing in the mariachi as a different “structure” of music, outside of the classical music he plays in orchestras. When asked if he ever has the desire to understand the Spanish lyrics he is singing, Alex replied, “People always tell me – listen to the words, but I never listen to the words of any music, even in English, all I hear are pitches, rhythms and sounds”. His favorite songs, “La diferencia” and “Volver, volver”, have no special meaning for him; he simply appreciates the technical difficulty of the songs. An example of his self-view, he considers himself a “crutch” for both the mariachi and the orchestra; without him, “they wouldn’t be able to play”. For Alex, participating in the mariachi was another space for him to showcase his talents.

His long-term goals include going to college in Texas and majoring in music, possibly in music education. He participated in the College Forward program, designed to

provide guidance and support to first-generation and underrepresented high school students intent on going to college. The program requires that the students apply for the program and maintain a 3.0 grade point average.

In the summer of 2008, Alex was awarded several scholarships, one being from a local housing authority (*One Voice* community newsletter, 2008).

Erika

Erika, whom I noticed right away during my observations due to her seemingly natural singing ability, was a senior and valedictorian of her class when I met her. She played guitar in the mariachi at STHS and did not join the group until her senior year.

When asked if she grew up listening to mariachi music, Erika replied,

No...well I always kind of heard the music, but I never like...honestly even now I don't like *listen* to it, it's not like on my iPod or I don't have CD's...but I like it. I wanna do it in college, they have one at Texas State. They've won like first place for two years already...on like a competition with other colleges. They're like the best. (Erika, 2008).

Erika was very proud to be a member of the mariachi and looked forward to participating in one in college. Originally from Monterrey, Mexico, Erika is bilingual in English and Spanish. Her family moved to the United States when she was four years old. She has one older sister a few years older than she, with whom she does not get along. Although her sister lives at home and is attending the same local university that Erika plans to attend, Erika plans to live on campus so that she can focus on school and be away from her sister:

because it's too many years and she's not moving out and so I'm like I need to go... and you get the better feel of the school, more resources and friends... and college life. [Erika, 2008]

Eager to begin a new chapter of her life in college, Erika also is very much a teenager and wanting to fit in to her environment; like most of the other females included in this study, Erika typically dressed in oversized button-down shirts or t-shirts and jeans and rarely wore makeup. She was a very high achiever, having taken dual-credit courses (courses taken in high school that count for both high school credit and college credit) and also taking courses with regular students at the local community college at night. Erika is involved in many clubs and extracurricular activities in addition to being in the mariachi, including College Forward and the STHS League of United Latin American Citizens – Youth (LULAC). Erika was identified as gifted and talented when she was in the third grade. She was identified as an English language learner in elementary school and was placed in the bilingual education (Spanish/English) program until the fifth grade, after which she was reclassified as English proficient and no longer in need of bilingual education services.

With her father having dropped out of high school when her mother became pregnant, Erika will be the second person in her family to graduate from high school and a first generation college student, along with her sister. Although her father was able to obtain his grade-equivalent diploma (GED) after moving to the United States, Erika still wishes more for her parents.

When Erika began dating Alex, it was much to the chagrin of the mariachi directors. Both Erika and Alex participated in College Forward, a program designed for

first-generation and underrepresented college students. For undisclosed reasons, both she and Alex were asked by the directors to leave the STHS mariachi after the last group performance at the end of the year.

Claudia

Also a senior, Claudia was the most introspective of all the mariachi students interviewed. She played violin and held it, strumming it occasionally throughout our first interview. Upon meeting her, she seemed to be very fun and engaging, but also very reflective and critical in her thinking. Claudia and Stefany were very good friends and like Stefany, she was eager to be interviewed. They often listened in while the other was being interviewed for this study and would occasionally chime in. She self's describes herself as "crazy and smart, and funny, I guess". She also shared that her teachers would describe her as "loud, because I'll correct them!"

Claudia grew up in South Texas and although she spoke Spanish with her family, she lived in a predominantly African-American neighborhood growing up and thus spoke only English outside of the home. She credits growing up going to Mexico twice a year to visit family as the reason why she was able to maintain her Spanish. After her parents' imprisonment and deportation, she and her siblings moved in with her older sister, who was attending college in a nearby city at the time.

Although her mother returned months later to collect her younger siblings, Claudia chose to stay with her sister so that she could finish her schooling and not return to her "old ways of hanging in the streets and stuff and I didn't wanna go...my sister

didn't let me go anyway" in the neighborhood where she used to live. By this time her sister had graduated with a bachelor's degree in History and was working for a local grassroots leadership organization. To help her sister out financially, she worked at a local grocery store thirty-eight hours a week, working after school and ten-hour shifts on the weekends. Mrs. Reyna shared that "if it comes between work and performing, she's going to work because they (Claudia and her sister) need that". At times when her work schedule conflicted with mariachi performances, Mrs. Reyna tells her,

Ok, ask for this time off from work, but as the date gets closer, it's like she feels pressure from both me and her sister, because I want her here because we need her because she's a really good player, and then the sister wants her to work because she needs her to help pay, so it's like what's more important? I think, her family, so...but she's been pretty even on that and she's taken a lot from her sister to come with us to go to whatever we need to go to...(Mrs. Reyna, 2008)

Being the only student in the STHS mariachi student who worked close to a full-time, forty-hour work week, Claudia has to do address issues outside of school that the other students did not. At times, Mrs. Reyna has even had to contact the manager of the store to request a work schedule change for Claudia after being initially rejected by the manager.

She was also involved in soccer and basketball at STHS, "anything I can do to keep from going home". Even though she was enrolled in Advanced Placement and Dual-Credit classes (where she could earn college credit), she was not optimistic about attending college, "I don't think I'm even going to go to college. College is whack, right Stephany?" Stephany replied by repeating the phrase in the affirmative from across the room. She worried that since she is working to help out her sister and also send money to

her mother in South Texas and father in Mexico, she wouldn't be able to afford college. She also admitted that "I just do the work, turn in stuff and get a grade, but I don't get it, I don't get it." When her friends ask her for help after seeing that she received a high grade on an assignment, Claudia says, "I don't know, I just do the work and blank out." Her ultimate goal is to go "back to San Antonio when I'm older and help out, because it's crazy down there".

On March 31, 2009, Claudia received the Cesar E. Chavez "Si Se Puede" award from a local non-profit organization, *People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources* (PODER) for her demonstration of "leadership that is changing lives and transforming communities" (PODER newsletter, 2009). She was also a member of Young Scholars for Justice (PODER newsletter, 2009), and as a member, participated in PODER's four week leadership development program. With PODER, Claudia has presented on various topics, including informing youth on chemicals in cosmetics and globalization (PODER newsletter, 2009). After debating for the last few years, Claudia decided to move back to San Antonio and live with her mom during her senior year and graduated in May 2009.

Antonio

I first met Antonio, Alex's younger brother, as a sophomore when I first began this study and was fortunate enough to interview him again at the beginning of his junior year. He is the youngest of five children (four males and one female) in his family. He mentioned that all of his brothers and sister are musically inclined, including his mother and grandfather, who both sing. Unlike his older brother, Antonio is smaller in stature, a

bit more relaxed and soft-spoken. He is very sports oriented; enjoying football and with plans at the time to try out for the wrestling team. He is the only one that plays the guitarrón in the mariachi and he also played the cello in the orchestra. Antonio learned to play the cello after his adoptive father bought him one when he was in the fifth grade. Like Alex, he prefers to play classical music. Antonio mentioned that he and Alex were the orchestra teachers for their orchestra class since their orchestra teacher is the band director and does not play any string instruments. He also played in the Texas Youth Orchestra with Alex and participated in the College Forward program. He also plays guitar and trumpet. Antonio demonstrated a confidence similar to Alex's when describing his importance to the mariachi at STHS, "everyone depends on me [playing the guitarrón] because I provide the rhythm and keep everyone on time". His favorite songs to play in the mariachi are "*Viva Veracruz II*" [Live Veracruz] and "*El Cascabel*" [The Rattlesnake] because of their level of difficulty. "*El Cascabel*" has solos for the guitar, guitarrón and vihuela in the middle of the song and via my observations of Antonio is a definite stand out in his performance. Similar to Antonio, when he plays in the mariachi he stands up straight with his head held high. Antonio maintains a smile throughout his performances, appearing to enjoy every minute.

Antonio admitted to not being a perfect student, often daydreaming and consequently failing some of his classes as a freshman and sophomore that he had to repeat as a junior. Antonio shared that without his brother, he became the only Hispanics in the Texas Youth Orchestra. He attributed his newfound focus to his current girlfriend, who also participated in the mariachi but not a participant in the study. He did mention

that his mother was suffering from cancer and undergoing chemotherapy, having both good and bad days. He has no relationship with his biological father. Although he does want to earn money for himself and his family, he stated that he preferred to focus on school at this point. He looked forward to attending college in Texas, majoring in music as well.

When discussing the new mariachi director that took over the mariachi class during Antonio's junior year, he admitted to having a bit of a rough time due to her lack of Spanish language knowledge and new mandates that require all mariachi students who play band instruments to be in band. He no longer was in orchestra his junior year because the time for class was the same time as mariachi class. Consequently, there was no one in orchestra that year. However, Antonio was still participating in the Central Texas Youth Orchestra. Unfortunately Antonio became very ill his junior year and spent a lot of time in the hospital, making it impossible to conduct any further interviews with him. I later found out that he suffered from a rare lung disease and underwent a double lung transplant.

Rosita

Rosita was a senior at the time of this study and played the flute for the STHS mariachi. She was born and raised in Texas. Her mother is White and her dad is Hispanic. She didn't grow up bilingual but she said that now that she is older her parents "are like, you should learn it, you should learn it, but I'm like, it's kinda late, you know, but I understand most of it, I just don't feel confident speaking it".

She also was very active at STHS; plays the piccolo in the band and is involved in a peer mediation group, and cheerleading. She joined the mariachi after being encouraged by fellow band members and after convincing Mrs. Reyna that she could play the flute in the mariachi. With her parents recent divorce, she “tries to stay busy”, because if she doesn’t, she “stays at home with my mom, which is boring!”. She is the youngest of four children, and has two brothers and a sister. Rosita is taking Advanced Placement classes as well as Dual Credit classes. She worked full-time during the summer at a local restaurant that her aunt owns and works there on the weekends during the school year to help pay for anything necessary for band, mariachi and cheerleading. She admitted that she is “a real big like procrastinator, that’s like my biggest problem, I’ll put everything off until the last second, that’s a bad thing, but I’m working on it!”. She planned to attend college, although she is not sure where, only that she “I don’t know if I want to leave, I like it hear with my family”. She plans to be a neo-natal nurse.

Roxana

Roxana, a junior at the time of this study, was the last of the five violin players in the STHS mariachi to be interviewed. Quiet, yet articulate, I was eager to interview her. Roxana is originally from the same area as STHS, and her parents are from Mexico. She is bilingual in English and Spanish, although she feels that she is now more fluent in English. I soon discovered that she was highly motivated and had already been accepted to a local university as an undergraduate student. She describes herself as a very focused student. All of her content area classes were Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which are more rigorous. In addition to playing in the mariachi, Roxana also played soccer, was

a member of a university outreach program and Mu Alpha Theta, a mathematics honor society for high school students. Her long term goal is to become a neo-natal nurse like Rosita.

She was encouraged to join the mariachi by her friends and joined her sophomore year. Her favorite song to perform with the mariachi is *La Bikina* after she first heard Luis Miguel's version of the song while spending time with a cousin.

Due to scheduling and time constraints, my interviews with Roxana and Rosita were significantly shorter than the interviews with the other participants in this study.

Christine

Christine was the last case study participant I interviewed due to scheduling difficulties since she missed most of her junior year due to a pregnancy. She played guitar in the STHS mariachi. When I first observed Christine in January of 2008, I noticed that she wore very bulky sweatshirts, but I paid no attention to this as this seemed to be a common way many students dressed at Star of Texas High School. I had also noticed that she appeared somewhat withdrawn during mariachi practice and kept to herself for the most part; rarely speaking in class. It was not until I overheard Christine talking to a group of girls during class about her hospital visit the night before due to Braxton-Hicks contractions that I realized she was pregnant. I had initially decided not to interview her since she was pregnant and I wasn't sure if she planned to return to school. I also was concerned about her health and did not want any of my interview questions to cause her any stress.

Shortly after my initial observations, Christine gave birth to a baby boy. She returned to school a couple of months later, but because of scheduling I was not able to interview her until after she graduated from high school in 2008. Because school was no longer in session and considering that she worked full-time to help support her new family, we met at a local eatery and at her place of employment (a nationally-known coffee shop) to have the interviews. Never having spoken to her at great length and seeing her keep mostly to herself during my observations, I was expecting Christine to be somewhat timid and a bit standoffish. To my surprise, she was very engaging during our interviews.

A Look into a Mariachi Clinic at STHS

Shortly after my observations had begun, Ms. Reyna had informed me about an upcoming mariachi clinic that would be held on a Saturday at STHS for all participating mariachi students within the Star of Texas School District. Other mariachi directors from mariachis throughout Texas were in attendance. I am choosing to include detailed field notes on this clinic because it was an event where I was able to gain a bit more insight into the personalities and identities of the participants in this study by watching them interact in a larger group with other mariachi directors in charge.

There are two mariachi directors, Mr. Lopez and Mrs. Galicia (pseudonyms) from Irving, Texas, who began the mariachi clinic by introducing themselves and letting the students know that mariachi is very big where they are from. Mrs. Galicia told the

participants that at the middle school where she is the mariachi director, there are three-hundred and forty-two students enrolled!

All of the participants in this study are present at this clinic. I quickly scan the students present for the clinic and see that as whole, this group is much more culturally diverse than the mariachi at STHS. As the students find their places on stage to begin practicing with Mr. Lopez and Mrs. Galicia, Alex introduces himself to the them and volunteers to signal the start of the music. During this song, a vihuela player from another school in the Star of Texas School District joins Alex in a vocal solo. This student also has a deep, rich voice. Alex then begins to sing louder while the vihuela player tries to harmonize with him.

After the first song was over, I made eye contact with Stefany and she gave me a big smile in return. Mrs. Galicia moves Alex to the first chair of the first violin section (which is considered to be representative of the best player of that section). She also decides to move Claudia from the second violin section to the first after Claudia confirmed that she could play the first violin part (the first violin part is usually the melody, while the second violins play the harmony). As I look at the violin section, I noticed that Alex is still the only male violin player. Mrs. Galicia then asks the group to watch Alex for direction. She then points out to the group that Alex demonstrates confidence in his stance, and that “girls need to be able to do that too, and shouldn’t feel like they are not supposed to because they are women” [Stefany and Claudia giggle in response while Maggie looks down, refraining from eye contact with Mrs. Galicia]. Mrs. Galicia walked over to Stefany, and although I could not hear what she told Stefany, I

saw Stefany's demeanor change to a more serious one and her response was a very clear "yes, ma'am". Now the group splits up, with Mr. Lopez taking the guitars, guitarrones and vihuelas to another section of the theater. Mrs. Galicia remains on the stage with the violins and the trumpets.

Mrs. Galicia now tells Alex that she "knows he is a fantastic violin player" but she needs him to "step out of the picture" for a minute so that she can hear and practice with the other violins. Mrs. Galicia teaches crescendo to the students by asking the students to squat and play more loudly as they come to a standing position. She then asks Alex to demonstrate crescendo to the violin section. Stefany and Maggie are asked to "play more strongly", explaining that she "likes third violin parts (a second harmony) because they are powerful". When Mrs. Galicia asks if the students can shout out "orale" during a performance, Stefany responded that "STHS does", as the rest of the students from the other schools present look at each other in bewilderment. Stefany then turns to them and appears to explain [inaudible] what the meaning of "orale" is and why they are being asked to use it during a performance. (Fieldnotes, January, 2008)

Themes

DEFINING THE MARIACHI CLASSROOM

The Mariachi Classroom as a Safe Physical Space

For many of the students, the mariachi class represented a physical space where they felt free to express themselves culturally and linguistically without worrying about how they were being perceived by others. Although the STHS mariachi class practices in

the same space as the band hall (band class is held at a different time), the hallways leading up to it and even the band hall are covered with posters and pictures from past performances with various mariachi directors, as well as awards and trophies that the STHS mariachi has won over the past thirty years. During my observations, once they walked through the doors to the band hall where they practiced during class, they all seemed to take deep breaths and relax a little, sometimes venting (in both English and Spanish) to the mariachi directors and the class regarding things that occurred in other classes during the day or that occurred recently. For the mariachi students, the physical space of the classroom was somewhere they felt welcomed and to which they belonged.

Antonio did mention that he would describe STHS as “ghetto”, but not because of the school’s appearance or age, more so in regards to the students within the walls of STHS, adding that there have been some gang-related incidents, especially during passing periods, when there are many students in the narrow hallways trying to make it to their next class, or before or after school.

Well, I wouldn’t say...some people would say ghetto, but it’s not the school, it’s the kids. The influence, the [parking] lot, the fights, just dumb things. There was a lot of fights last semester, this semester there’s only been like one or two. I think it’s gradually growing...I think by the end of the year people are going to go crazy. I’ve been hearing a lot of beefs. Everybody’s mellow until supposedly a *gang member* says something bad about a color. That’s the only time, only when passing periods, when there’s like a collide of a bunch of kids...or before school, when everybody’s grouchy...or at the end when everyone wants to leave...that’s the only time fights really happen, never in the classes, unless there’s two kids that really can’t stand each other. (Antonio, 2008).

In quantifying the number of gangs at STHS, Antonio mentioned that there are four predominant gangs and how he has managed to avoid joining them:

Bloods, Crips, I think Latin Kings and another one, their color is black I think. I've been asked to join many times, this year and last year, and I've refused. I don't know why, I don't know what they see in me, I guess that I'm musically trained? [laughs]...I have no idea...I've been asked to be in all of those. I did have one threaten me one time, "*If you don't join us, we'll find you*", and I was like "*fine, come find me*". I don't back down to anyone. (Antonio, 2008).

Although gangs in themselves can be considered to be a safe space for some students who are in search of belonging to a group, Antonio had no interest.

Mrs. Reyna talked about she tries to be more than just the mariachi director to the students; "I try, I try. A lot of them, they'll come after school, or during their other classes, and I try to talk to them as much as possible". Mrs. Reyna knew that the mariachi classroom was a safe space for the students to occupy and from my observations; I noticed that she often allowed them to stay in the mariachi classroom after class to work on other classroom assignments or to practice.

Throughout my observations within the mariachi class, nothing more has happened than a disagreement between players during practice and/or the mariachi directors for reasons such as not having practiced playing their respective instruments.

For Stephany, the mariachi classroom was a different kind of safe physical space; the space was safe in that it was more of a refuge that she could escape to and forget about all of her other classes and the fact that she was failing them. In talking with her about her current academic status in school, I asked her if she knew what she needed to do in order to pass her classes, to which she responded:

Go to class.... that would be a good start. Um...I don't know, maybe they'll take up my, my work, it's basically just work that I don't turn in. I mean I don't go...If I miss a day, and the next day I'm like, why, the next time I have a class I'm like why should I go, I don't even know what they're doing. But I end up going, and

he'll explain it to me, so I'll end up catching up anyway. And I'll stop going, then I'll go again and I'll catch up...(Stephany, 2008)

Not being entirely sure if she was referring to one particular teacher or all of her teachers, I asked Stephany if all of her teachers were willing to work with her to help her with any content and or assignments she may have missed:

Not most of them. I don't [*sigh*]...they changed my schedule, so I have a new English teacher. I used to have her and me and her did not get along. She's like "good to have you *back*", and I'm like "ummm" [*rolls eyes and makes a face*]. (Stefany, 2008).

Stefany went on to describe her most recent writing assignment, which partially explains her dislike for English class:

And she was pressuring me yesterday to write an essay, and I'm like "I don't know what to write about. She told me, "write about mariachi, of incidents that happened or something", and I'm like, "Nooo" [*giggles*]. It has to be something I *want* to write about, so it could be good". (Stefany, 2008).

Trying to explore exactly what Stefany was having difficulty with, I asked her about the writing prompt for this assignment:

It was, she gave me a um, a prompt that said something like, "*Write about, write an essay about an incident that happened that resulted in personal pride*" or something like that. I don't know what to write. I'm going to try to change my schedule again so I can get out of her class. (Stephany, 2008).

As Stefany continued, I began to wonder if perhaps she was not receiving the kind of necessary support to be successful in the classroom. Given that the English teacher mentioned in the above quote tried to make the assignment more culturally relevant for her by suggesting that she write about an incident that occurred in mariachi class, she perhaps failed to realize the Stefany needed more guidance with her writing assignments:

Writing is my weakest subject. I don't think any help would help me out. Like if they give me an essay [prompt] I will sit there and I will think of a million things, but none of it, like, you know like, or either that I will sit there and I'm totally like spaced out and I'm like, what do I do, what do I write about? And I have no idea, like I cannot write a story; I'm like challenged when it comes to that. (Stefany, 2008).

In the mariachi classroom, Stefany is able to receive consistent feedback and through my observations, is very comfortable asking the mariachi directors for assistance and or clarification.

The Mariachi Classroom as a Safe Cultural Space

For the purposes of this study, I am defining the mariachi classroom as a “safe cultural space” for this reason that it is not only a place where the students practice mariachi music; it is also a communal space where they express themselves through the music, and sometimes venting, discussing and encouraging each other in Spanish, English or both. In congruency with the Xicana Sacred Space (Soto, et.al, 2009) that “functions as a decolonizing tool by displacing androcentric and Western linear notions of research in favor of a Anzaldua's (1999) Mestiza consciousness, the safe space of the mariachi classroom allowed for reflexivity, cultural and linguistic strength building and conscious raising among the students.

Throughout most of my observations and visits between interviews, it was very evident that the students who chose to remain in the mariachi class each semester enjoyed the mariachi class. They all seemed to have a good rapport with the mariachi directors who were consistent in providing constructive feedback. Although the students respected the directors and followed their directions, they were very informal in their

conversations and seemed very comfortable around them; oftentimes joking around in class. Therefore, even before I began to conduct interviews, I began to perceive that, for some students the mariachi class was a chance to perform in front of an audience, for some it was a chance to express their culture, and for others it was a much needed safe space where they could speak Spanish freely with each other (only two students included in this study were non-native Spanish speakers and only spoke in English). The interviews and further observations both confirmed and challenged my first impressions as I began to realize how each of the students' personalities and identities were nuanced in various ways that forces me to mix my perceptions together; there was not one particular thing that the mariachi class represented for the students, but rather a multitude.

For Roberto, being a part of the mariachi classroom was a very positive experience. "I like being in this (mariachi) class, because now I feel free, to be with my *gente* [people], allows time to be me". Roberto viewed the space as free from status quo expectations and conducive to the expression of community cultural wealth, "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005). As opposed to being acknowledged as culturally deficit via critical interpretations of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), the mariachi classroom serves as an asset and resource for the students.

For several of the students in the STHS mariachi, issues with establishing residency within the United States and/or having the necessary documentation to work in the United States proved difficult, and became a thread of discussion for these students

when they were not practicing their instruments in class. Although Erika was valedictorian, she was offered a limited amount of scholarships, as she was an undocumented student. “I think we are half way through [the process of obtaining residency status]...I wanna see my grandma and my grandpa, I haven’t seen them since we left” For Claudia, it was her mother who was deported to Mexico, although she had already obtained residency status.

But now I barely get to see my mom. My mom, like she wants me to go live over there with her. And I can’t because I already have a j...like, if I do go back, they’ll uh, like my old friends, they’ll like jump my a-, they’ll jump me, supposedly, there’s all this other stuff...(Claudia, 2008).

The mariachi class also provided a safe space for some students who were taking classes where they felt marginalized for the cultures and ethnicities they represented:

It’s difficult because, well having my, a lot of family members that are here without permission, it’s hard to just to not be scared for them, like you never know [voice lowers], you never know if they’ll be thrown in jail or something, it’s just hard to live with the fear...but like since I have the advantage of being from here, I just try to do my best just for my mother and father who came here illegally. For them...(Roxana, 2008).

In contrast to Roxana, Claudia speaks her mind and advocates for herself and others:

I’ll correct them, you know like in History class or whatever, when they’re talking about immigration and illegal aliens this and illegal aliens that - I’ll be like "No person is illegal", and they’ll (teachers will) argue with me, calling them criminals and *quien sabe que*[who knows what] – they are human beings. (Claudia, 2008)

This conversation began with Claudia discussing how there was a new student in class with beginning level speaking ability in English, who was asking her what the word “alien” meant. Not knowing what to say to the student so that he wouldn’t feel othered,

she began to describe a monster-like alien, “the ones with the big ol’ heads and their green skin”. Because it was a white teacher, she told him:

You’re a freakin’ racist, that’s what you are, and he just gets mad, but he doesn’t do nothing. My friends say, “You’re crazy”, because they don’t want to go against him, you know? They’re scared of him. Nobody else says anything.

Claudia went on to question why immigration is such an issue, “they forget about their ancestors and that *we* were here before *them*”. For Claudia, immigration was a very well-known subject as she and her family had dealt with consequences of immigration policy due to her parents’ imprisonment and deportation. She and her siblings were born in the U.S, and she lived with her sister, a college graduate and grassroots organizer.

I didn’t even know who my sister was until my mom got arrested. My dad was deported five years ago and my mom was deported in May, but she was in jail for three years before she got deported. When she [my sister] was young, she was on the streets all day every day. (Claudia, 2008).

For Claudia, the mariachi classroom was a place she could escape her current home situation and feel part of a community.

Regarding the question about whether or not they feel it is difficult to be a person of color in the United States, most of the students added that they do not care or choose not to listen to hecklers that may be at a performance, at school or anywhere: “I don’t care. I’m like *this is me*”. (Erika, 2008). For Antonio, “I just ignore it. They’re not going to stop me”. For Rosita, “I just feel like, I am who I am, so, if you don’t like it then...”[*raised eyebrows and grinned*].

Linguistic Diversity Within the Mariachi Classroom

Within the mariachi classroom existed a bilingual (English and Spanish) space where students shifted between languages simultaneously because all of the students had the ability to do so. Although being bilingual in Spanish and English was not a requirement to participate in the mariachi at STHS, most of the students during the time of this study were bilingual in English and Spanish and often spoke a mixture of both languages to each other in class. To be clear, I am not referring to the term *bilingual* here as the ability to speak fifty-percent of the time in one language and fifty-percent in the other, rather, I am using the term to refer to the use of two languages, in this case Spanish and English, with no length of time attached to either language. Within the mariachi classroom, everyone was bilingual to varying extents.

For the two students who did not, Olga and Rosita, they were able to decipher almost everything said to them within this hybrid of an exchange, and they were not vilified for only answering in English because the rest of the mariachi accepted their bilingualism as being proficient in all areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and being able to listen and comprehend in Spanish. Rosita viewed the use of Spanish in a very additive way:

I understand most of it. Sometimes it's kinda weird, cuz you know, the kids will like talk in Spanish, and it's just like I can't really talk to them because of that, but I don't know, I've always loved mariachi music and any kind of Mexican music in Spanish, like even if I don't know what they're saying, I still love the beat, and I love the way people speak Spanish, I just can't do it [*laughs*]. (Rosita, 2008)

Being completely fluent in Spanish was not an issue for Rosita; she valued the ways in which others used it, including herself, and was not embarrassed by the fact that she was not fluent.

Three of the students, specifically Roberto, Stefany and Christine, shared how their parents not only maintained the use of the Spanish language at home but also stressed the importance of bilingualism: “Yes, that’s why they always told me, never just study in one (language), always keep both of them, because later on you’re going to get a job and be able to apply for a bilingual one” (Roberto, 2008). Roberto also shared that his mother “doesn’t know much English, but she understands a little bit”. He also indicated that most of his friends speak mostly Spanish, with the exception of one,

They speak it, but their scared of it. They’re scared that we’ll make fun of them because they are pronouncing it wrong, and I’m like “no, no, we want to help you, maybe you’ll even talk better”. Because every time we’re outside playing football or something, he’s always like, “see, I understand y’all, but I wanna talk in Spanish”. And I say, “go ahead, start, start!”, and he says, “Nah, then y’all are gonna laugh at me”. And I say, “Why would we laugh at you? You might have a cool, different accent, but you’re my buddy, there’s no reason to make fun of you”. (Roberto, 2008)

This example of Roberto’s exchange with a friend is evident of the kind and supportive nature he brings to the STHS mariachi.

For Christine, speaking Spanish was not an option at home:

That was my dad’s rule. He was like, I know we’re here for a reason, this is the US, I know it’s not Mexico but he had this one rule at home, he said No English. So I thank him for that because now I see where he was going you know, so, now I’m trying to do that same thing with my kid because I don’t want to my son to be like those friends that I have that their parents are like straight up Mexican and they do not know any word at all. I think that’s just dumb. *[laughter]* I really think it is. So...I’m trying to teach my son Spanish. (Christine, 2008)

Now that she has had time to reflect, Christine realized that her father was not only retaining the Spanish language within his family, but also instilling in her the idea the Spanish is part of their Mexican heritage. Like Christine's parents, Stefany's parents also impressed the value of bilingualism:

They said yea, that when I speak both I'm worth more to people. So, it is better for me to not forget Spanish but then again not to leave English behind. (Stefany, 2008).

As a result, Stefany was observed blending Spanish and English the most to communicate during the mariachi class.

Antonio hesitated when he answered "yes" to my question about whether or not he was bilingual; he later added that he "doesn't talk Spanish that much, but I can understand it really good", mostly with his mother who "is not the biggest English speaker", and that he tries to teach her English and she in turn tries to teach him Spanish. He also clarified that his first language was English. Antonio later explained that this was due to the fact that his mother, who immigrated to the United States as an adult, struggled to learn English and continues to struggle, and did not want her children (who were all born in the United States) to experience the same.

My mother wanted it like that because it was very hard for her. It was a struggle for all of us still...but it was really hard for her, because she didn't have papers at the time, so she was like, she's still working very hard. That's why I wanna get a job so I can at least try to help. (Antonio, 2008).

Antonio views his mother's struggle with English as part of her overall struggle to make ends meet, which could explain his reluctance to claim his bilingualism.

Although Spanish was her native language, Erika questioned what it meant to be fluent:

Like I questioned, I don't know. Cuz one time I asked my English teacher, what is like fluent, that I can speak it well? And he's like well so you can speak it and manipulate it like and be able to manipulate it to like persuade in a way, you know, like in writing and in words? So, I would say that I'm more fluent in English but I'm fluent in Spanish too, it was my first language. But, I wouldn't say I'd be like fluent in like writing-wise? (Erika, 2008)

In an effort to rate her own bilingualism, Erika is defining it as begin proficient in different areas, much like how students in the state of Texas are rated for their English language proficiency within the Texas English Language Proficiency System (TELPAS). However, Erika was technically never classified as an English language learner in the Star of Texas School District, never participated in TELPAS, and has no recollection of ever speaking Spanish in class, other than with friends:

I mean, it would be okay, I guess. But, I think if anything, Spanish was more among friends. I don't even remember really.... I mean I learned English really fast, like in Pre-K right away so I was kind of like, why am I in bilingual classes? By 4th grade I was like, man why am I in bilingual classes now? And I really liked this 5th grade teacher, and I was like, I want to be in his class and he was an all-English class. (Erika, 2008).

Seeing that Erika viewed a bilingual classroom as a remedial one, I asked why she felt this way, and she responded:

I guess because they [other students] make a big deal.... Or, they didn't make a big deal but if you're in bilingual it was kind of like, oh, you're in *bilingual*. I don't know how to explain it's just like you're like different than the rest... "Why can't you just be in regular *English* classes?"

Like many transitional bilingual education programs where the native language is not seen as an asset, Erika felt ostracized from students not in bilingual classes and seen as the *other*, or as if she did not belong.

Roxana also mentioned that she is

-more fluent in English because I kind of stopped speaking Spanish, but I can speak both. It's just like, in school I had to speak English more. At home I speak Spanish. (Roxana, 2008).

For Stephany, who was placed in bilingual education classes throughout her elementary school years, her bilingualism began to develop first at home:

I was raised around it well, my first language was Spanish, I learned English through my sisters because they were older so when I was younger they were in school so they spoke English perfectly. So, they would talk to me in English and talk to my mom in Spanish. And that is how I started learning English, little by little. (Stephany).

Feeling more dominant speaking in Spanish, she describes her Spanish proficiency in the following way:

No, I'm not excellent sometimes I get stuck on words, I mean, I speak it better than all my sisters and I speak it better than I do English but it's a little bit under excellent. (Stefany, 2008).

With Mrs. Reyna leaving for another school district, and with the hiring of mariachi director with no mariachi experience nor Spanish skills, some of the students expressed concern:

When I was in there right now it felt good because I haven't been in there for a long time. I gotta get out of art because me and art, you know...I'm kinda concerned about the new mariachi director though 'cuz she has no experience whatsoever in it. She told me, she admitted to me right now that she feels like she's drown – drowning because she doesn't know what she is doing. Um, luckily we know what we're doing. So we can kinda help her out. She doesn't understand Spanish at all, which sucks because we used to come, we used to speak Span-

Spanglish in there, you know? We used to mix it up a lot – it’s actually more Spanish than what it is English. (Stefany, 2008).

In her own words and way of expression, Stefany is able to articulate exactly what the mariachi space had provided linguistically under the direction of Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez. Within the mariachi group and its safe cultural space, they had created their own hybrid language with the blending of Spanish and English.

For the students in the STHS mariachi, being bilingual was both embraced and hidden. All were very open to the use of Spanish within the mariachi classroom because it was encouraged and never corrected or punished, and even though some spoke more English than others or vice versa, it was all accepted as a reflection of that particular person’s bilingualism.

MARIACHI PERFORMANCE

As a Family/Community Connection

Many of the students noted the strong sense of family and/or community felt during mariachi performances. Many of the parents of the mariachi students had either strongly encouraged and/or fully supported the students’ decision to participate in the mariachi.

My mom had been getting my [oldest] brother Luis into it, my brother just didn’t want to switch from playing classical music to mariachi because it was already hard enough; he was taking AP (Advanced Placement) classes. So when we (Alex and Antonio) got to that age, she said, “*Why don’t you go into the mariachi?*”, and we said, “*No*”, and my dad said, “*Oh, you’re gonna try*”, and we were like [lowers voice] “*OK, fine.*” I saw the instrument...what was it that I liked...my first choice wasn’t the guitarrón, it was actually the trumpet. My dad said, “*how come you don’t you play it [guitarrón], you already know the bass clef*”. And I was like [lowers voice], “*Nooo...OK, fine.*” The thing [guitarrón] is bigger than I am! (Antonio, 2008).

The community, which included teachers at STHS, the neighboring community as well as the Star of Texas School District were also very supportive, often attending mariachi performances both in and outside of school. The principal was aware and very proud of the positive connection to the community that the mariachi performances had created and developed over time.

When asked why she decided to join the STHS mariachi, Erika replied:

I don't know 'cause it's like my culture...my cultural background, my roots, I don't know, I really like it 'cause it's part of who I am and I hadn't explored that yet, so when I do, and when I'm performing, it's like, it's like part of me, like being *Mexicana*...I don't know, I really like it, it's fun. (Erika, 2008).

For Erika, being Mexicana is celebrating her culture and heritage through music, in this case, mariachi music. "I don't feel like I have to express it...it's just me, you know?"

Within the mariachi classroom, celebrating culture is a given for Erika; it is an allotted time during the school day where she can be herself.

Among all of the mariachi students, the most profound mariachi performance was in February 2008 when they were asked to play at a Barack Obama rally, the biggest crowd the current STHS mariachi had ever played for.

Like, he was like, probably like from here to where that second booth is over there. That's how far away he was from me. And this is when he was, um, barely, you know, racing against Henry or whatever. Um, who would have thought? [*laughter*] Look at where he is now, you know? (Christine, 2008)

For Christine, performing at the Obama rally left a lasting impression, especially reflecting on the fact that she once played for the current President of the United States.

It was really fun! I saw everybody's faces [in the crowd], and they seemed really into it. I was like, wow, I bet these people have never heard this music before, or

if they have, they've never heard it from a high school [mariachi]. So I was really pleased. We were confident that day, even though we were really scared because we didn't want to mess up, and we didn't. It was really cool. (Antonio, 2008)

For Antonio, the significance of playing for a much larger community outside of STHS was profound. Knowing that this may have been some of the rally attendees' first experience with mariachi music, he knew that he had to project his talent and persona into his performance. According to Mr. Vásquez:

It was awesome. I will say it was awesome. It did come to a point where I had to defend them a little bit...people just started to...I didn't see race, I just saw people jumping over the fence to our section. It pissed me off, so I called security and I told them, and they were um, cussing at me and blowing cigarette smoke in my face, and they were too stupid to realize that they [*points to the students, who were practicing at the time*] were right there. It could have gotten ugly quick, but it didn't. (Mr. Vásquez, 2008).

Thankfully Mr. Vásquez chose to handle the incident in a professional manner by calling security and without the students knowing what was going on. When they noticed that he was upset, he simply told them "you just need to get away from me right now" so that he could regain his composure in time for their performance. When I asked if the students were able to meet Obama personally, Mr. Vásquez said, "no, but he did thank them by name (of the mariachi group) after they performed. It was all a political ploy anyway for the Hispanic, or I should say Mexican-American vote". Mr. Vásquez was proud though, that the students were able to play for such a large crowd and spread the message that this genre (mariachi) "is here and isn't going away".

Although initially hesitant to answer the questions as to why he chose to join the mariachi, indicating that it was mostly out of musical interest and encouragement from his mother, Antonio did mention that he feels his culture is reflected through his

participation in the mariachi, “It feels like a part of who I am and what I do”. Aside from playing cello in the orchestra, playing the guitarrón in the mariachi allows Antonio to express who he is and make a connection to his cultural heritage while doing so. Mr. Vásquez also shared the same sentiment, sharing that although he was born in Monterrey, Mexico and raised in Laredo, he didn’t really know much about his cultural background until he went to Guadalajara recently:

Man, I remember walking around Guadalajara and being in culture shock...I would have been more culture shocked if I wasn’t in mariachi, if I wasn’t listening to the music. I feel, as far as culture is concerned, it really *keeps me there*, it’s who I am. (Mr. Vásquez, 2008).

For Mr. Vásquez, having been a professional mariachi player for many years and knowing the music keeps him connected to his Mexican heritage and identity.

In Erika’s case, her mom had wanted her to join the mariachi as a freshman in high school. “And I was like, *No*, because they’re going to make me sing, and I don’t want to sing”, to which I interjected, “but you sing so beautifully”, and she replied, “I know, I love to sing! And I regret not joining in my freshman year. I wish I could go back because band, I didn’t really get anything out of band”. She continued:

I really enjoy singing, and like when people enjoy me singing to them... like at the last performance (at an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting), they were really into it at first, and then they kinda like, they were just like [*slouches down in chair*], sitting there, lookin’, until I was like, “Animo, ánimo, ándale...sonrie” [a little excitement, c’mon...smile], and I got them going a little...I was like “están muy aguitados” [you are all very sad-looking] (Erika, 2008)

In addition to the outside connections made to family and the STHS community, some students also felt like they were part of the mariachi “family” when they were performing, such as Maggie, “Yeah, I guess like we all, I don’t know, how can I say this,

um, it's like we're all one, you know? Even though everyone has their own instruments and parts to play in the mariachi, as within any musical group, because the mariachi reflects the Latina/o culture, the students have a cultural bond when performing that unites them as Maggie stated, as a *family*.

As a Symbol of Student Ethnic/Cultural Identity

When asked about how they identify themselves culturally and ethnically, the students in this study had a variety of answers. Stefany, who uses Spanish most frequently in the mariachi class and also prefers to speak Spanish and listen to music in Spanish gave the following answers:

I say...I'm Hispanic, but I tell 'em that I'm Mexican by heart. The only thing that makes me American are the documents, the papers...basically my birth certificate. (Stefany, 2008).

Stefany has been able to maintain her Mexican identity and her value of the Spanish language throughout her academic career. Rosita also identifies as Hispanic when asked, but sees herself belonging to various spaces due to her bicultural family background:

I just say Hispanic, 'cuz I guess that's what I look like more, and I guess that's what people say I act like more, so I just say Hispanic. I come from two different backgrounds, two different kinds of families, so I guess really I'm all over the place. (Rosita, 2008).

What is interesting about Rosita is that although she has a stock answer when she is asked about her ethnicity, she knows that she is negotiating her identities when navigating between cultures, referring to this navigation as "being all over the place". Roxana preferred to identify herself as Mexican-American as opposed to any other term:

Ethnically? I go for like Mexican-American, I'm not sure, I don't like to use Hispanic, Chicano, none of that. I don't know, it seems like as if Chicano doesn't

really identify with us, and then Hispanic, it's like I don't know, I just don't like to use Hispanic. But whenever I have to fill out papers, I have to put Hispanic...and it bothers me, I just want to put Mexican-American. (Roxana, 2008).

When I asked her why she didn't identify with Chicana, Roxana replied:

I don't know, they're just like always confusing me, saying that "you're Mexican-American, not Chicano. And they put different things like, Chicano people are that like, I don't know, they just explain it differently to where I get confused and then I'm just like OK, I'm Mexican-American. I don't want to use it [the term].

Stefany described the term Chicano as:

Chicano is somebody who has Mexican parents but was born here, and when they say Chicano, like when we use Chicano here in school we mean those kids who are wearing lokes [sunglasses] and like button up shirts with the Nike corvettes, socks all the way up to their knees, when we say Chicano that's what we mean. Mainly speak English but are Mexican.

In Stefany's view, the term Chicano is a derogatory one, connoting an image of someone who displays a particular type of dress and mostly speak English, which she does not identify with in the least.

Roxana also offers an example of the distinction between her Mexican culture and American culture:

I'm not sure, I'm more Mexican I guess? Like, I have a lot of things I have to do, like Christmas is so different for us than like people from here, like Americans. We celebrate the 24th and 25th, and we stay up until like the next day. We like, we make everything...like our own food, like we don't go and buy the turkey, we go and kill the goat and all that...yeah, I never watch, I never watch! [laughs] (Roxana, 2008).

Being a very successful and highly motivated student, Roxana also has identified differences between American and Mexican culture in her own terms.

Antonio identifies himself as “funny, weird and nice to know”, and as far as ethnicity, it was evident that he may conflicted as to which he most identifies with:

Hmpf. I really don't know. Ummm...I have no idea. I have many people come up to me and say, “Was your dad African-American?”. And I'm like ummm, no, I really don't think...he may be half, but I have no idea. I only met him once when I was a kid. (Antonio, 2008).

Antonio and Alex were both unwilling to discuss ethnicity. Although Antonio never developed a relationship with his biological father (Antonio and Alex are half-brothers), according to Ms. Reyna, a White male whom was not married to their mother nor lived with them adopted both him and Alex. Alex never mentioned anything about his biological father, or his adoptive one. Their adoptive father was a strong supporter of them both and attended all of their performances, although he was a bit of a strong personality, according to Mrs. Reyna. Antonio referred to him as “Dad” and credited him with getting he and Alex involved in music, such as playing the cello and joining the Texas Youth Orchestra. Because of the apparent reluctance to discuss their home life, I decided not to ask Antonio and Alex any specific questions about their adoptive father. Although both brothers Alex and Antonio hesitated when asked to discuss their cultural ancestry, from my observations of classroom practices, performances and interactions with them, they both seem to appreciate the cultural space that the mariachi class provided, not only being another avenue in which they could showcase their talents, but also being able to be part of a group that represents their culture in a positive way.

For the students in the STHS mariachi, ethnic and cultural identities are in somewhat of a grey area for some, while very distinct for others. However, most are able

to express their cultural understanding, which is representative of who they are and what they value.

BREAKING GENDER BOUNDARIES

When asked about her parents, without hesitation Erika gave several examples of just how supportive her parents have been of her attending college next year as well as her passion for music:

Um, my mom's very...they're both very supportive of me going to college. They encourage me, always encouraging me to do better, supporting me with like, they had a Financial Aid Saturday here last Saturday to fill out the TAFSA [Texas Application for State Financial Aid], and we went. And they go to like performances...me and my mom are close and open, we talk a lot. But my dad...me and my dad use to always like, I was like a daddy's girl...but then I kinda grew out of that.

Erika's parental support has been instrumental in her drive to succeed; their encouragement and willingness to help her in any way they can motivates her even further. It is for her mom, though, that she is personally succeeding, for as with Stefany's mom, Erika's mom was only allowed to attain a certain amount of education in Mexico, much less than her male siblings, which appears to both frustrate and drive Erika:

Well, my mom, they told her she couldn't go past the sixth grade...they didn't let her go on to secondary school..it was like, "No, you don't need to, you're a woman...it was so messed up...AAAHHH...it sucks, like when she talks about it, she, she's always emotional. That's why I see that and I'm like, man, like not only how society values education so much, but I see how much my parents went through...I just wanna...not only do I want to do it [succeed] but I want to do it for them too." (Erika, 2008).

It was at this point that I had to break from the researcher role and tell her how proud I was of her; the fact that she is valedictorian alone is a major feat, but to also know what

brought you to that point is another major accomplishment entirely. Erika embraced her parents, her roots and used them to grow and achieve as much as possible.

DEFINING SUCCESS

After my initial interviews with the students, it became apparent that the need to define success in their own view was paramount to understanding what the students themselves viewed as “success” and to not bind the definition with test scores or grades. Most were able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses as well as what they viewed as success for themselves.

For Roxana, she framed her definition based on her own trajectory: [success is] passing all of my classes, just making sure I get everything done. (Roxana, 2008). For Stefany, it’s “getting to where you want to be. It’s just a matter of what you want...it’s the power of choice, you know? (Stefany, 2008). Rosita described it in a very similar way to Roxana and Stefany:

I guess it would depend on what *your* own goals are, and to me success for like in school for me it would be to pass all of my classes and graduate top ten [percent], so that I can go to the college I want, knowing that I succeeded in my classes, and knowing that our band was the best they could be this year, and the mariachi could be the best, and the cheerleading squad...[laughs]. (Rosita, 2008).

MARIACHI PARTICIPATION AS A CONDUIT FOR MOTIVATION

Most of the students who participated in this study were also participants in other extracurricular, after school or community-related activities. A common trait among all of my participants was confidence in themselves and in their performances. Erika, the valedictorian, was a member of several organizations both inside and outside of school,

including Latinitas, a “non-profit organization focused on informing, entertaining, and inspiring young Latinas to grow into healthy, confident, and successful adults”, and College Forward (as were Alex and Antonio), which “provides college access and college persistence services to motivated, economically disadvantaged students, in order to facilitate their transition to college and make the process exciting and rewarding”. Erika was very aware of the fact that the more extracurricular and community-related activities she participated in, the better her chances were of receiving college scholarships.

For Antonio, who indicated that he had a learning disability that most affected his understanding of math and science concepts, being consistently “nagged” in class to get his work done became so overwhelming to the point where he simply began ignoring his homework and class assignments, which ultimately led to poor academic performance. He also admitted, “I tend to go to Neverland in a lot of my classes, and I start to think about music, when I should be working.” “When I get nagged, I bark back, and sometimes I feel bad”. He also mentioned that he did not go to free tutoring at STHS after school because he would rather be taught by the teachers of his classes, not by teachers he does not know.

That’s what happened in Geometry class, my rebellious mind took over. I fall asleep in there. It’s just boring. It’s equation after equation, and his voice, the teacher’s voice in geometry...it’s the same note over and over...I hear him like a metronome and start thinking about music. (Antonio, 2008)

An additional outside-of-school support Antonio received was from the C5 Association, whose focus (according to their website) is on “empowering youth from economically disadvantaged and risk-filled environments to successfully complete high school and - as

the first of their family – enter college and equipped to do well once they get there”.

I’ve also got this other scholarship thing, it’s called Camp Cola, well, they changed it, it’s C5, it’s a program for leaders, leadership, they stay with you from seventh until senior year. They’ll give me a scholarship. I think C5 gives me money for all four years, I’m not sure. (Antonio, 2008).

For Antonio, being the sole guitarrón player providing the rhythm and thus being a leader for the STHS mariachi has provided an opportunity for the further development of the leadership skills he has been acquiring through his involvement with the C5 program.

Compared to my interviews with him during his sophomore year, by the beginning of his junior year, Antonio was much more engaging and positive about his academic progress.

For someone like Christine, participating in the mariachi served as a reminder of what could lie ahead for her future and the opportunity to go to college:

Do I like school? Yeah, I like it a lot. ‘Cause I mean, I just realized, especially now with this economy, like, if you don’t have, like, a career or nothing, you’re honestly just worthless. ‘Cause, like, if I were to go to college, I would be the first generation in my family. You know, like my parents came over here from Mexico obviously to find a better future, and it would be kind of selfish, selfish of me to not take advantage of that, you know? (Christine, 2008)

Like Erika, Christine recognized the sacrifices her parents made in coming to the United States in search for a better life, which in turn became a motivating factor.

For Erika, succeeding was not only a personal goal, but one for her family as well, “I’m not just doing this for myself, you know? I’m doing it for my parents too.” (Erika, 2008).

I really like mariachi class, and so I don’t know, I’m always looking forward to it, before it I’m like “yeah, I’m going to go play! It puts me in a good mood. But then also at the same time I’m like *Uuugggh*...like it give me a good mood to go about my day, but at the same time since I like it so much, I don’t really like my other classes, even though I have art classes before and after. (Erika, 2008).

The mariachi class has become part of what motivates Erika in school, even when she does not necessarily want to go to her other classes.

For Roxana, passing her classes is a non-negotiable: “It’s hard to get all the work done and be in mariachi, but I have to do it in order to play, so…” Roxana, who is a very focused and a high-achieving student, she has proven that she can participate in the mariachi at STHS and maintain a high grade point average at the same time. Stefany, knows that she has to pass her academic classes in order to perform with the STHS mariachi and sees that as motivation:

I’m honored to be part of it [mariachi]…it’s not anything bad, it’s actually something that, sometimes, you know I go, I go and I think, well, I gotta go, I gotta pass to go to competition. And it’s something that motivates me, and more than what other things do. Not that I am, you know, passing right now, but hopefully I will be to go to competition…in these next few months I’ll be passing and she [Ms. Reyna] talked to me, she was like “We need you, you need to try to pass”, and I was like “Ok”. (Stefany, 2008).

Stefany maintains that if it were not for mariachi class, she would more than likely not be in school at all.

I don’t know, like when I was younger, I was a straight A student. But when I got to middle school a lot of things started changing, things started happening, I started thinking differently, and somehow school, I can’t catch up with school no more…like it is hard for me to catch up with it now.. I messed up with school so much and that made it hard to catch up. All my sisters, they’re all nerds. Basically I guess you can say I’m the different one, the one with the attitude, the loud one, the one that’s running around all over the house that has the music booming out the speaker. (Stefany, 2008)

Like Claudia, Stefany has no problem speaking her mind, but has lost her motivation to succeed in school. By missing so many classes, Stefany is struggling to pass. When I

acknowledged that Stefany has a pretty heavy course load in terms of content alone, she replied:

Yeah, but I'm not passing all of them [classes]. I mean, my US history for example. They gave me AP courses because my grades were low through the whole year, but my TAKS scores were really, really high. One of the ladies from one of the programs here, she took me out of class and she said "I saw your scores, they are amazing, who would ever thought you would have scored this high". I was like okay yea, and she was going to put me in US history government for ACC but I missed one point in my writing, I got a 2 instead of a 3 so I couldn't take it. I had to take a test. So yeah, school is my weakness; I can't come to school for a full year. (Stefany, 2008).

What has kept her from dropping out of school is that she knows she needs to maintain passing grades in all of her classes in order to participate in mariachi performances, which she manages to do just before every performance, by making up assignments and/or tests at the last minute. When she shared that sometimes the mariachi students have to perform during the school day and thus have to miss other classes, I asked her if she felt that perhaps being in the STHS mariachi has affected her grades, or were her grades mainly a result from her lack of class attendance:

It's just me. Like the choices I make, that affect my grades. It's me being stupid that affect my grades. I mean, at the time, I don't think about my grades, I'm just like OK, let's go [skip class]. I just, I don't know, I don't think about like how it's going to affect me later on or anything, I'm just...*me voy a lo menso* [I'm going to be stupid] (Stefany, 2008).

At the same time, Stefany has in the back of her mind the fact that she must pass her classes in order to perform with the mariachi:

I'm like, yeah, I gotta do it because I have to go to competition with them, because I am the only second violin (plays harmony), so I gotta go. (Stefany, 2008).

Being part of the STHS mariachi performances is a non-negotiable for Stefany. Mrs.

Reyna confirmed that Stefany and Claudia often skip their classes but not mariachi class:

I know that...they even come and say, "I didn't go to my other classes, but I came to this one". Like they even tell me that! And I get after them, and they're just like, "well, I haven't gone to that class for a long time, so I'm not just gonna show up". And I talk to them, and I even talk to Stefany's parents, because her parents are real supportive of the program...there was this one time I told her that I had seen her grades and I told her that I was gonna talk to her dad, because she needed to turn in all this stuff and she was missing tests and all these grades, and she was really scared that I was gonna tell her dad. (Mrs. Reyna, 2008)

When I asked Mrs. Reyna how she felt knowing that Stefany and Claudia consistently come to mariachi class but not to their other classes, she replied,

It's kinda funny, but...especially Claudia. It's like she drags herself in here, but she wants to be here. And she drags herself here, but she's like tired the whole time. But I don't know, they still come. (Mrs. Reyna, 2008)

Stefany values her role within the mariachi and recognizes and accepts the responsibility that comes along with it. Ultimately, for Stefany, the mariachi class is what keeps her coming to school:

I always try to come no matter what...like if I leave, I'm always here before this class or by this class, to come to this class, and I try not to miss it. If I do miss it, it's because of something stupid like I got ISS (in-school suspension) or something, or I just didn't make it in time because of the security that just, they were being mean or something. (Stefany, 2008).

When I asked Stefany about her goals for the next five years, she replied:

[Sigh]...I don't know, I've never really, I don't...I try not to think of that. Cuz, I mean, I go to class the other day, and they gave us an index card and they told us, "OK, well, you gotta write what college you wanna go to" and I'm like, "I don't know", and then they said, "Well, then write what you wanna be", and I'm like "I don't know". Like I'm good at things, I just don't put no effort into it and then I give up at then end and then I'm like whatever, you know? Like singing, I came to mariachi to sing. But then I stopped, I quit...I was like, "no Miss, I'm not going to sing no more". (Stephany, 2008).

The ability to envision a positive future was very difficult for Stefany. While I observed her as a very lively and energetic member of the mariachi, it wasn't until the interviews when I realized that she had very little self-confidence. In addition to the physical space the mariachi classroom provided, participating in the mariachi became a sort of escape from the pressures for Stefany; somewhere she could feel positive about herself and as though she belonged.

FAMILY AND CULTURAL SUPPORT

At STHS, the mariachi has a parent-run booster club that coordinated all fundraisers and out-of-school events, such as banquets and awards ceremonies for the students. Stefany's father was the president of the booster club and present at all of the mariachi performances I attended. Alex and Antonio's adoptive father was also present at all of the mariachi performances.

TEACHER SUPPORT

Antonio was very emphatic when asked about the amount of support teachers give to the STHS mariachi, and even mentioned one particular teacher by name, Ms. Newman (pseudonym) as being most supportive, always willing to purchase whatever they are selling to raise money for the mariachi. Ms. Newman was also the head of the Visual and Performing Arts Academy, a group of teachers who work specifically with those students taking classes within that category, including the mariachi. Antonio also informed me that she was awarded the Teacher of the Year award in 2006 for the entire school district.

Some of the teachers, including Ms. Newman, were pointed out to me at several performances I attended.

Erika reflected back on when she first began to be interested in music and credits her middle school music teachers for motivating her musically:

“Well definitely like my middle school teachers...I really liked them and they were really good. And so they kept me there, you know, ‘cause if you don’t like the teacher, you’re not going to stay there, you know?” (Erika, 2008)

Maggie also mentioned that the teachers at STHS were very supportive of the mariachi, “Like in class, they’ll be like, ‘given them a round of applause for a great performance’ and stuff”.

With other teachers, Stefany continued to have a difficult time through her senior year:

I have government with a teacher who doesn’t like me at all. I had her last year, and um, I messed up a lot last year...I’m the first to admit it [*laughs*], I messed up a lot last year. Um...and I had her for my U.S. History, but it was an AP (Advanced Placement) course. They gave me AP courses because, regardless of my grades, I’m really smart, you know, I catch on quick, so they convinced me to take AP courses...but I totally failed...um, we didn’t get along. I guess that’s why this year when I had her, I walked into her class and I felt like if she was doubting me again. I gotta prove her wrong, of course, because I *have to* make it happen this year. (Stefany, 2008).

Knowing that she cannot skip classes as she did her junior year, Stefany is open to seeking help from a supportive teacher in order to stay focused and attend class:

I gotta go to my class, I have to, regardless of whether I don’t like the teacher or I do, I gotta work with it, I gotta focus...that’s one thing that’s really hard for me to do...I’m not used to it anymore. Drama in school doesn’t work for me this year, you know, I’m here to be here, to do what I gotta do. Not for myself, but for my parents...porque me crearon (they raised me)...I gotta do it for them. I don’t know...I need somebody to push me, so I don’t fall back into what I’m saying, and be a hypocrite about it. So I was gonna talked to one of my teachers so she

can keep up with me because I really need it, regardless if I want it or not.
(Stefany, 2008)

Stefany expressed that “Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez are like the coolest teachers ever” and appreciated the support and guidance they provided. During an interview, Mr. Vásquez shared that he would tell the students, “You need help? With anything, math, *whatever*, English...use me, utilize me...I’m still in college...”(Mr. Vásquez, 2008). He also discussed an important lesson that he tries to impart to his young students:

If anything, for these students, what I give them, if it isn’t help, like I said, in school or in music, I mean, or help in their personal lives...knowing that they don’t have to be the exact same way as everybody else. I think you lose a lot of yourself when you follow the whole crowd. (Mr. Vásquez, 2008).

While interviewing Mr. Vásquez, he preferred not to refer to most of the students by name as our interviews were conducted at a nearby coffee shop after school, where some of the students also come to study or visit with friends. Although he didn’t mention names, he tries to be available for his students, especially those who may be hanging around the wrong crowds or who are “dealing with issues a twenty-five year old should have” (Mr. Vásquez, 2008). Mr. Vásquez also imparts to the students that mariachi is “often associated with drinking and partying and heartbreak and whatever, but the thing they have to realize is that they shouldn’t perpetuate the stereotype”, which is something that he has had to endure as a professional musician and the reason why he had recently quit performing for a particular mariachi group:

And these guys piss me off. Because they take their little bag of drugs out and they’re like, “hey, *quieres, quieres*”? in front of people. I have to go up to them and say, “*por favor, guárdalo*” (*please put it away*). I feel like all of my hard work as a musician is wasted....(Mr. Vásquez, 2008).

For Mr. Vásquez, being in the mariachi is represents a connection to his culture and a musical genre that can and should transcend stereotypes.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

As many of the students indicate, the administrative support at STHS was lacking. According to Mrs. Reyna, the amount of administrative support increased dramatically during the year this study was conducted:

This year, it's been I think just this semester that we're really supported. Any needs, that we are in need of, we don't get the school support, but we get it from the administrative office downtown. So, I'll meet with them, and talk to them about what we need, that the students really need. They have been the ones that have supported us. Um, really here it's just been recently that I think the principal is starting to really starting to realize how strong it is and how important it is to the community. But I think he's just recently come around, last year I really didn't feel any support. The teachers who have been here for a while, they know what it means to the school. But I think the principal, being new; he really didn't understand how important it was. (Mrs. Reyna, 2008)

Whether or not the implementation of this study had an effect on Dr. Carrillo's newfound interest in the mariachi is unknown. However, for whatever reason, Dr. Carrillo's support of the STHS mariachi sends a message to the school and local community that the mariachi is valued.

Regarding the participation of the STHS mariachi in the UIL competition, Mrs. Reyna was aware of the guidelines for participation and adhered to them:

They give us a limit of two (solos), so each kid could only do two, so if they did – some of them played in both groups (traditional and experimental ensembles), some of them, and the ones that didn't play in two groups, they did a solo. Most of them got two medals because they participated in their max of two (Mrs. Reyna, 2008).

Change in Mariachi Directors

Fieldnotes from the first two days of school in 2008

As I walk into the familiar mariachi classroom, I notice right away that the new director is White and appears to be quite young. She is talking directly to the students as a whole group, indicating that she does not speak Spanish, nor does she have any mariachi experience. As she is relaying this to the students, she is somewhat abrupt with the students, especially with students new to the mariachi who speak little English, stating aloud that, “if you don’t know English, that’s going to be a problem”. Other students volunteer to help one of the new students by translating what the director is saying to the group. They also help the director spell his name as she takes class attendance.

I notice five new students are scattered throughout the room, with the nine returning students centered in the middle of the room. Mr. Vásquez waits his turn to speak to the students (about ten minutes after class has begun), and as he asks talks to the students, the students begin talking in both English and Spanish. Apparently annoyed by this, the mariachi director tells the students that they are “freakin’ loud”, and that if they want to get anything done, they need to shut up”. Stefany then asks the mariachi director if she knows about mariachi history, and when the mariachi director responds, “like what?”, she quickly adds, “ask me specific questions, and I’ll answer them”.

The mariachi director then suggests to the class that they should consider ordering coordinating polo shirts for performances, instead of always wearing the mariachi uniform to allow for “quick changes”. Upon hearing this, none of the students

appear interested in this suggestion, with Roberto exclaiming, “but it is a part of our culture!” , while Fernando remains silent, looks down and shakes his head.

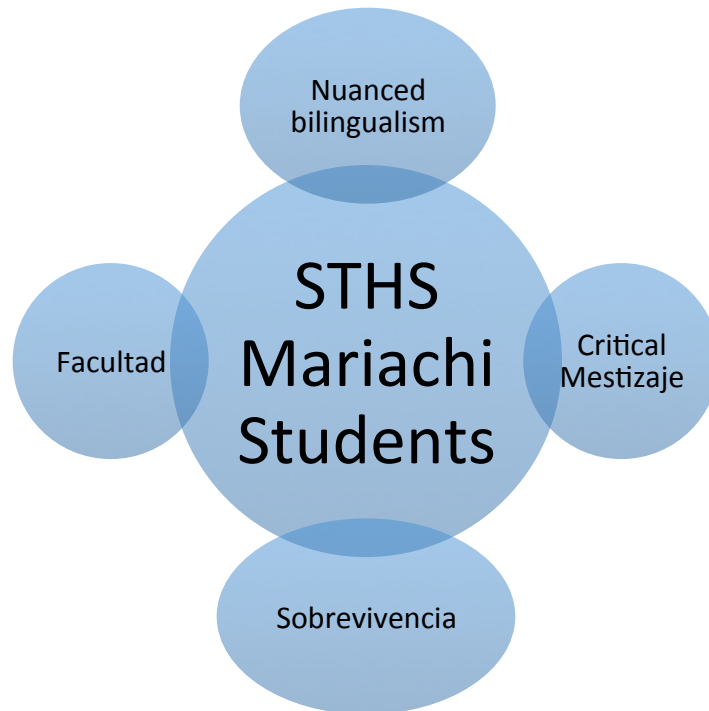
After Mr. Vásquez asks the returning students to get their instruments, they begin to practice on their own while the mariachi director stands by and observes wide-eyed. The mariachi director then expresses concern to Stefany, Maggie and Roxana about her lack of experience.

Conclusion

Overall, the interviews and observations were inspiring, humorous and heart-wrenching. Although most of the interviews occurred during class while the students were practicing in the background, it was important to me that I captured the students experiences within the mariachi environment, so for this reason I chose not to seek a more quiet location and instead embraced the fact that the music was important to the students and not viewed as an annoyance. The only time the students appeared annoyed was when the school announcements came on the loudspeakers! With some of the students, especially Stefany, Antonio and Claudia, there was so much internal struggle within myself because as a teacher, I wanted to do what I could to help them, both in and outside of school, but I didn't want to compromise my role as a researcher, so I chose to just be an active listener and stop recording the interviews or leave the room if I felt that the students needed a moment to cry or take a break.

The overall findings center on the students that themselves create a space as illustrated below for a nuanced bilingualism, freedom for cultural expression, critical metizaje and cultural representation as illustrated below:

Figure 1.1: Mariachi Classroom at STHS



Through my observations, field notes and interview data with the STHS mariachi students, directors and principal, I was able to discover that it was the students themselves that shaped the mariachi classroom (and not the other way around) within the borderlands of STHS and created safe physical and cultural spaces for themselves to retreat to and to feel valued, where could express a nuanced bilingualism, *facultad* (Anzaldúa, 1987), *sobrevivencia* (Sandoval, 200) and a critical *mestizaje*

(Anzaldúa, 1987 & Perez-Torres, 2006).

Roberto, Antonio and Claudia used the mariachi classroom as a space to exhibit *facultad*, which “deepens the way we see concrete objects and people,” ridding us of our ignorance and making us more aware of ourselves. Roberto’s ability to see other’s language ability, regardless of proficiency, allows him to serve as a promoter of the Spanish language and reflects that he has not conformed to the status quo of forgetting his native language in favor of English. Antonio’s ability to look out into the crowd at the Obama rally and see the smiling faces (although Mr. Vásquez indicated that not all were smiling) demonstrates his passion for mariachi music and appreciation for those who may be hearing it for the first time.

Claudia and Stefany both exhibited *facultad* (Anzaldúa, 1987) and *sobrevivencia* (Sandoval, 2000) in their critical perspectives and ability to stand up to their teachers. Claudia’s exposure to critical perspectives via the nature of her sister’s work allowed her to recognize oppression in her classes, as was the case in her history class during the deficit discussion on immigration. Also utilizing subversive acts of power, Claudia was able to dismantle the teacher’s bias towards immigration while translating for a recently arrive immigrant student, not allowing for the student to feel devalued. Although Stefany knew that she needed to attend her other classes, the mariachi class served as a reminder that she needed to pass in order to perform, which is why Stefany was able to reflect on her actions, using *facultad*, and acknowledge her decisions to not go to class as detrimental to her academic success. Claudia and Stefany both exhibited *sobrevivencia* by continuing to attend mariachi class whilst they were not attending their other classes;

by continuing to attend mariachi class, they made it very clear that it was a tool of hope for them, one that kept them in school amidst their struggles in other classes and/or outside of school.

The idea of a critical *mestizaje* comes from Anzaldúa's (1987) and Perez-Torres (2006) work, acknowledging that while the students are negotiating "between and within the different communities to which one belongs" (Delgado-Bernal, 2006), they are also creating an "active and impassioned assertion of a subculture into a larger national culture" (Perez-Torres, 2006). All of the students I interviewed made it very clear that the mariachi represents who they are, what they represent and the work they do and that they do not worry about how they are perceived by others and/or society.

I decided to term the students use of bilingualism in the mariachi classroom as "nuanced bilingualism" in order to describe the usage of Spanish and English as a fluid process; there wasn't an even percentage of usage, both languages were used interchangeably amongst all of the students. Contrary to what may be enforced in a bilingual elementary classroom, where the interchange of languages, or code-switching, is discouraged, the nuanced bilingualism allowed in the mariachi classroom under the direction of Mrs. Reyna and Mr. Vásquez permitted the students to communicate in a more relaxed way, without the pressures of adhering to a specific academic context. What made it even more nuanced was the ability for students like Olga and Rosita, who were not proficient in speaking Spanish, able to at least participate in discussions by listening and responding in English. Through these linguistic exchanges, the students were able to accept each other's abilities and work with them at the same time, which

created a type of family dynamic, where everyone looked out for one another, including the mariachi directors.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

Prior to beginning this study, I was under the assumption that I would be able to uncover how student participation in a high school mariachi band shaped and influenced the students' identities and trajectories in school. Instead, through the course of my observations, field notes and interviews, it became very apparent that it was the students themselves who shaped the mariachi as a whole and collectively made it a safe space in a variety of ways. The most unexpected finding from the study was the discovery of the students' nuanced bilingualism; the aptitude for combining the use of Spanish and English with no fixed terms on amount of use in either language, in order to communicate. Overall, the mariachi classroom and the mariachi itself allowed for linguistic and cultural freedom, where they could be free to express themselves in ways they could not in other classrooms at STHS.

Although I had initially intended to include assessment data gathered by the Star of Texas School District on the mariachi students. I ultimately decided against using it, both in an effort to avoid the implication that high test scores are always equivalent to achievement or vice versa, and because it was unnecessary and irrelevant to who the students were individually and what they represented as a group. Whether they passed a

standardized test or not had no bearing as to how the mariachi represented their cultures and identities. The students who had passed the statewide assessments were already highly motivated students who were participating in a variety of other activities. The students who struggled academically tended to not participate in as many activities, but were still passionate about being in the STHS mariachi nonetheless. The only data used for the purposes of this study regarded the students who were labeled as English language learner (ELL) while in elementary school to verify what the students told me themselves about how long they were labeled and if they received any bilingual education or English as a Second Language support during the time they were labeled, and for what length of time. I also looked at the data to determine when they were reclassified by their school Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) as English proficient. The only students who were labeled English language learners in this study were Stefany, Maggie, Roberto, Antonio, and Roxana. Although Erika mentioned that she was in was placed in bilingual classrooms, according to the data, she was never labeled as an English language learner. This could be due to the fact that the Star of Texas School District was reported by their local newspaper (citation left out to protect identity of location) in 2006 as to having failed to identify at least 2,000 students as English language learners that should have been identified previously according to their scores on language proficiency exams and their home language surveys (local newspaper, 2006). Stefany, Roberto, and Roxana had all mentioned during their interviews that they had been in bilingual education classrooms while in elementary school. After interviewing Antonio and observing his reluctance to elaborate on his bilingual ability, I was surprised to see that, according to

the data, Antonio had been labeled as an English language learner, while his older brother had not. However, this could have been an error made by the school district as with Erika. Even more surprising was that even though Antonio stated that English was his first language and that he only speaks Spanish with his mother, he was not reclassified as English proficient until 2006, which was his freshman year. This may have been the reason why he was initially hesitant to answer the question as to whether he was bilingual or not; as Valenzuela (1999) and Tienda (2009) stated, language is often viewed as a barrier to educational success, and he may have seen his classification as an English language learner as a negative due to how he was perceived by others, including teachers and administrators. Another factor could also be that perhaps the schools' LPAC committee failed to meet with Antonio's special education teachers to discuss whether or not Antonio was still in need of language support or primarily needed academic support and thus mistakenly kept him labeled as an English language learner. As a result, Antonio had come to devalue his bilingualism, which is an unfortunate outcome that is all too common with students placed in a bilingual education or English as a Second Language class at one time or another.

It is interesting to note that the very idea of navigating between two cultures may symbolize to some as the acceptance of cultural dominance, or the belief that one culture (American mainstream) has superiority over the other:

It is striking then, that the history of Chicano and Mexican American music would be viewed through a critical prism that diminishes the role of cultural hybridity. Within some Chicano cultural criticism, cultural mestizaje at times has been viewed as a type of assimilation. (Perez-Torres, 2006p. 92)

In this view, cultural mestizaje is stripped away of its fluidity between cultural and instead is reduced to percentages, implying that any combination of cultural aspects is accepting the power of the dominant culture. In the case of the students in the STHS mariachi, my findings indicate the opposite. Instead of trying to forget their cultural backgrounds and follow the rules of the mainstream curriculum, the students, such as Maggie, Erika, Antonio, Stefany and Claudia are strong in their cultural identity and refuse to stay silent, with each student bringing different experiences, talents and knowledge base. Together this can create “a critical mestizaje of musical forms”, which “stands as an active and impassioned assertion of a subcultural self into a larger national culture.” (Perez-Torres, 2006, p. 96). As a group, the mariachi was able to validate mariachi as a musical genre while also validating their cultural expression.

Similar to the findings of Zalaquett (2006) and Gándara, many of the students, including Stefany, Antonio, Alex, Olga, Roberto, Erika, Roxana and Rosita all had very strong parental support, many of who belonged to the mariachi booster club, which helped to raise money for the STHS mariachi. The support was both evident in my interviews with the students as well as by my observations of them in the audience at performances as well as at the mariachi banquet that was held at the end of the year to show appreciation for the mariachi and the mariachi directors. Although the other students such as Claudia and Christine did not have as much parental support, the mariachi class served as a familial group that both supported and encouraged them.

Recommendations

Growth of Mariachi Programs

Now in 2012, there are three high schools and six middle schools (compared to two high schools and five middle schools in 2007, and one middle school and one high school in 1987) in the Star of Texas School District that now offer mariachi classes as electives and perform as groups across the region. Although this is not evidence of a significant rise in mariachi programs, it is an indication that the popularity of the programs and its benefits are beginning to be validated and understood by the community, students, parents and administrators. Mr. Vásquez noted in one of the interviews that with the “now that UIL (University Interscholastic League) sanctioned Mariachi in Central Texas, it has become more popular, and they’re getting a lot of recognition”. Mr. Vásquez hopes that this will lead to an expansion of mariachi classes within the Star of Texas School District. The growth of mariachi programs throughout the United States needs to be recognized by music educators and administrators as a valid musical genre and promoted as a means to allow for cultural expression and linguistic diversity.

Need for Mariachi Class as a For-Credit Class

The continuation of mariachi music in secondary schools as credit-earning classes can only lead to a continuation of cultural expression that is much needed at a time where students’ sit through lecture after class lecture because their academic success is so closely related to their performance on standardized tests, and teachers are trying to cram

in as much instruction as possible within each class period, sometimes at the expense of student learning. In the mariachi classroom, each student brings with them their own likes/dislikes, talents, personalities and identities, making the group an impenetrable force that is created by the students performing together.

The transformation of musical forms through mass cultural distribution is one means by which Chicano musicians formulate a cultural mestizaje, one that highlights a hybridization of form as well as identity. (Perez-Torres, 2006, p. 95)

While the students themselves are each unique in many aspects and come from varied backgrounds, together they become a family that is strong in their cultural and linguistic identity, incorporating various elements from different types of music and languages, creating a space and sound that is their own. It is my recommendation that mariachi class for credit be expanded to more schools in order to provide other high school students the opportunity for cultural expression and linguistic diversity.

Promote the Expansion of the Mariachi Teaching Certificate

To date, only two universities in Texas, Texas State University and University of Texas-Pan American, offer a Mariachi Teaching certificate. For example, at Texas State University (according to their website) obtaining the certificate involves an additional seventeen hours of classes in addition to the Bachelor of Music in Music Education and includes classes in mariachi ensemble, mariachi history and methods, mariachi arranging, guitarrón and vihuela, and voice. By publicizing the fact that these programs exist will allow for the mariachi program to continue to grow and to not be assigned to band directors with no familiarity with mariachi music or the Spanish language, with neither the willingness to learn. Although the STHS mariachi students were able to endure and

stay in the mariachi with the new mariachi director after Mrs. Reyna left, they were able to do so because students who were in the mariachi previously had already established their collective identity as a family that supports each other. If it were not for those students, the mariachi classroom would most likely have lost the additive aspects of cultural expression and linguistic diversity and could have seen a drop in enrollment. In order to avoid this, I also recommend that only those band directors who are at least open to learning about mariachi music and the Spanish language should be assigned to a mariachi classroom.

Implications

Expanding on Current Research

The focus of this study stemmed from my experiences as an elementary bilingual educator in Texas. I always began each year with my students, regardless of the grade I was teaching, with the intention of providing an additive environment (Cummins, 1979, Crawford, 2004) where Spanish could be further developed while also facilitating the acquisition of English, thus promoting bilingualism for all of my students. What I had failed to realize from the very beginning of my teaching career is that the schools I was working in did not promote bilingualism for its students and instead focused on transitioning students from the bilingual education classroom to the mainstream English classroom as quickly and as early (whether it was regarding a student's age or time of year the transition was being considered) as possible. I slowly began to discover that although I valued bilingualism behind closed doors within my own classroom, outside of my classroom my students were being sent a much different message, especially once

they moved on from my class to subsequent grades and into classrooms where bilingualism was not valued. Over time, I began to wonder what was going to happen to these students – who would continue to support their literacy development in Spanish as they continued to develop their English skills? What would happen to them when they reached secondary schools where there were no bilingual classrooms offered? Was there any space where they felt free and encouraged to speak Spanish, besides in a Spanish as a Foreign Language classroom? Were there any options available to them that would allow for cultural expression, and if so, what was the outcome for the students?

Bilingual Education

Within the realm of bilingual education research, much has been written regarding second language acquisition, best practices for teaching in the various bilingual education program models such as transitional, developmental and dual language (Crawford 2004), bilingual teaching methodologies, how to provide a space conducive for promoting bilingualism, how to differentiate instruction for the various levels of English and/or Spanish proficiency in a classroom and how to promote family/community involvement for students in bilingual programs. What has been missing from this research is a study into what is the next step for students who were formerly in bilingual education classrooms and have or will transition to regular education classrooms at the secondary level with little to no second language support. How are they supposed to fully grasp concepts in their content area classes if they are in need of support in the development of academic English? The findings of this study suggest that providing a mariachi class not only provides an impetus for maintaining passing grades in order to perform, but also provides a space where the students can escape from the academic linguistic demands of

their content area classrooms and create a space where they can express their bilingualism, regardless of the proficiency level in either language. For example, if Stefany had opportunities to use a more nuanced bilingualism in other classes, perhaps she would be more motivated to attend. Therefore, the concept of nuanced bilingualism needs to be acknowledged by teachers and administrators as a student-centered means of communication.

Music Education

While there is much research on the value of music education as an extracurricular activity, much has yet to be written on the “cultural nourishment in the epistemological world”, or the “individuals or elements that replenish the students’ cultural sense of selves” (González, 2002) a class such as the mariachi class at STHS can provide. For the mariachi students, the fact that they were able to take mariachi class during the day as an elective as opposed to an before or after-school or extra-curricular activity provided them a very valuable outlet with which to express themselves and to be “culturally nourished”. More research needs to be done on other mariachi classrooms as well as other cultural groups that are able to take a class during the school day that allows for identity expression and group support and to also support mariachi music as a valuable and valid musical genre.

Education Policy

Although the State of Texas requires teachers to obtain bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) certification in order to teach in those respective programs, ESL certification is not required for content area teachers at the secondary level because they

are not the ESL teachers. According to the Texas State Plan for educating English Language Learners, Chapter 29.061, Bilingual Education and Special Program Teachers states that:

- a) The State Board for Educator Certification shall provide for the issuance of teaching certificates appropriate for bilingual education instruction to teachers who possess a speaking, reading, and writing ability in a language other than English in which bilingual education programs are offered and who meet the general requirements of Ch. 21. The board shall also provide for the issuance of teaching certificates appropriate for teaching English as a second language. The board may issue emergency endorsements in bilingual education and in teaching English as a second language.
- b) A teacher assigned to a bilingual education program must be appropriately certified for bilingual education by the board.
- c) A teacher assigned to an English as a second language or other special language program must be appropriately certified for English as a second language by the board.

In addition, the ESL class at the secondary level is usually a separate class for English language learners that does not count for credit towards graduation, and is typically reserved for the most recently arrived students who have minimal English proficiency at the beginning and low intermediate levels. While some schools are moving more towards asking all of their teachers to be certified in ESL, others are simply relying on the fact that a one or two day training will

properly equip their teachers with the necessary tools to teach their English language learners.

What this means is that many students who are learning English at the secondary level are in classrooms with teachers who are not certified in English as a Second Language because it is not a requirement for content area teachers (Math, Science, English and Social Studies). As a result, these students do not receive linguistically accommodated instruction in order to access and learn the concepts being taught in their content area classrooms, which can lead to academic failure. For students like Stefany and Antonio who struggle in their content area classrooms and were once labeled as English language learners, it is imperative that they receive instruction from teachers explicitly trained on how to scaffold instruction in order to make the content comprehensible.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As indicated in my acknowledgements, the process of obtaining a graduate degree was most definitely a long and arduous one. Prior to beginning doctoral work, I had imagined that I would be able to work full-time and complete the doctorate within three years. Eight years later, that was certainly not the case for me. As the years went by, I began to wonder why I had taken on the pursuit of a doctoral degree; often questioning myself after interactions with professors that did not appear to value my research interests. Although it has been a very tough road, I am very open about it with others, and I have and will continue to encourage others to pursue a doctoral degree if they choose to do so on their own

volition. For me, obtaining the doctorate has always been a personal goal; something that I knew could open doors that would otherwise remain closed. Accordingly, choosing to study the STHS mariachi was both a personal and intentional decision; knowing that the research on mariachi classrooms was sparse, I wanted to not only add to it but also relay to the students and to all mariachi students in other schools and/or countries that their voices matter and need to be heard and valued, as well as validate the mariachi classroom.

EPILOGUE

Stefany became pregnant during her senior year in 2008-2009, but was able to fulfill her graduation requirements by continuing to earn credits in the Delta (credit recovery) program and graduated with her class. Via email in April of 2011, she communicated that she “knew I’d would be a single mom the day I knew he was coming”. She gave birth to a baby boy in July of 2009. She also informed me that she had enrolled in classes at the local community college in the fall 2009, but had to drop her classes that first semester to care for her mother full-time after her mother was diagnosed with Leukemia. Her mother went through a successful bone marrow transplant in March of 2010 in another city in Texas, which forced Stefany to travel back and forth to care for her mother and also maintain their household in their hometown. In May of 2010, Stefany decided to enroll in a technical institute and graduated in August of 2011. Since then she has been holding two jobs: a part-time job at a chiropractic clinic and a full-time job at a pain clinic. In one of her last emails to me, Stefany wrote:

My mom is currently cancer free and in remission. My son is now a year and 9 months old and going into his terrible twos. I think i've gone a long way since we last spoke. My point of view of life definitely changed. And things only seem to be getting better. (Stefany, 2011)

Maggie graduated from STHS in 2009 and is now a senior at a local university and is pursuing a major in bilingual education as she had planned.

Olga graduated in 2009. She began attending an art institute, but decided to leave it in favor of another institute to train as a dental assistant. She graduated from that program in 2011 and lives in Texas.

Roberto graduated in 2010 and is now attending a university in the state of Texas majoring in civil engineering.

Erika graduated as valedictorian of STHS in 2008. She currently attends a local university. She is majoring in Art and Design and received an academic award in the spring of 2012.

Alex began attending a university in 2008 in a nearby city but transferred after his first semester to the same local university that Erika was attending. In 2010, Alex and another brother dropped everything to help care for Antonio after his double-lung transplant in another city. Their sister helped to care for their mother, whose cancer had become terminal. Sadly, Alex and Antonio's mother stopped responding to chemotherapy and radiation treatments to treat her cancer and was placed in hospice care in late 2010 while Antonio was still recovering from his double lung transplant. Their plight was published in a local newspaper after a local charity nominated them for an annual sponsorship program supported by the newspaper. "More than anything", they wanted an immigration lawyer to help their mother and the oldest three children (who were born in Mexico) gain U.S. citizenship, for which she applied more than ten years prior. Thankfully, five law firms stepped up to settle the family's immigration status (local newspaper, 2011). After watching a segment about Antonio's medical expenses, two local university students decided to hold a benefit concert in late October at the

university and donate all proceeds to Antonio via a medical student group at the university. Antonio's sister also held a benefit dance in early October of 2010 to raise money for Antonio's medical expenses. Alex and Antonio's mother passed away in early 2011, soon after Antonio was able to return home from his post-transplant treatment. It is unknown as to whether either Alex or Antonio is attending college.

Claudia attended a university within the state of Texas at least until the end of the 2010-2011 school year. In the summer of 2012, she worked as a camp counselor in her hometown for a summer camp that aimed at providing educational activities for girls ages nine through fourteen. It is unknown if Claudia is currently attending college.

Roxana graduated STHS in 2009 and is attending a local university, majoring in social work. She also works at the university part-time. Her current classification as a student is unknown.

Rosita graduated from STHS in 2009 and is currently a senior at the same local university as Maggie and Roxana and recently switched her major to Education, with plans on earning a teaching certificate. She plans to graduate in May 2013. She has worked part-time at a couple of retail stores since 2010. Her mother has recently been diagnosed with cancer, and in tribute to her and other family members who have lost their battles to cancer or are still fighting, she has decided to join an organization that raises money for cancer research via a four-hundred-mile bike ride that will take place in 2013.

Via email exchanges between 2009-2011, Christine informed me that she had moved to Houston in the fall of 2009 to be with her boyfriend who was attending the Universal Technical Institute. Christine had plans to attend the University of Houston in

the spring of 2010 depending on the financial aid and affordable day care available to her. However, since her boyfriend was graduating in the spring of 2010 and had already secured a job with a major automotive dealership in their hometown, they moved back home in June of 2010. After being unemployed for seven months upon moving back, she was able to secure a full-time job and began attending the local community college. In one of our last email exchanges, Christine wrote:

Life hasn't been easy, but after gallons of coffee and sleepless nights, when I get the degree it will have all been well worth it! (Christine, 2011).

Appendix I

Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Self

- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your family/family/teachers describe you?
- What types of things are you most interested in? What do you like to do for fun?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Where are you from?
- What is your racial/ethnic background?
- Are you bilingual? If so, how would you rate your speaking, listening, reading & writing abilities in both languages? If yes to the first question, please tell me how you became bilingual.

Home

- How would you describe your family?
- Describe your neighborhood.
- What language(s) do you speak at home? In what language do you speak to your parents and/or siblings?
- What does a typical weekday/weekend look like when you are at home?
- Do you work to help support your family or yourself financially? If so, where do you work and what do you do?
- Where do you usually practice playing your instrument?

- Where do you usually do your homework? Is there someone at home that can help with you with your homework?

Music

- What types of music do you enjoy?
- What or who influenced you the most musically?
- What was the first instrument you learned to play and when did you start?
- Describe how you feel when you are playing your instrument.
- What are some of your favorite songs to play/sing and why?
- Did you participate in mariachi bands prior to being a high-school student?
- Why did you decide to join the mariachi at your high school?
- Do you play in other bands? If yes, what types of bands are they?
- How do you feel as a member of the mariachi?
- What type of feedback do you receive from your friends and family about your mariachi performances?
- What type of feedback do you receive from fellow students, teachers, and/or administrators about your mariachi performances?

School

- How would you describe your high school?
- How is school different from home?
- How would you describe the students that attend your high school?
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- What are your grades like? Have they stayed the same since elementary school, or have they changed? If they have changed, why do you think that happened?
- What or who has influenced you the most academically?
- How have you managed school work and playing in the mariachi?

- How do you think your participation in the mariachi has affected your grades?
- What kinds of classes have you taken in high school?
- What other extracurricular activities do you participate in?
- How would you describe your relationship with your teachers and administrators?
- What are your current (personal and academic) goals? Where do you see yourself after high school?

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

- What is your position at the school and what are your general responsibilities?
- What is your racial/ethnic background?
- What is your educational background?
- What is your professional background?
- What did you know about mariachis prior to coming to this high school?
- What do you know about the mariachi at your high school?
- Why do you think students join the mariachi band at your school?
- What type of feedback do you give the students about their mariachi performances?
- Describe your relationship to the members of the mariachi band.
- What role does the mariachi play at your high school?
- How is the mariachi viewed/regarded in the community?
- How is the mariachi at your school viewed/regarded within the district?
- What do you know about the history of the mariachi band at your high school?
- In what ways do you feel that participation in the mariachi influences academic success among the members of the mariachi?
- Why do you think there are not more mariachi bands at other high schools in [REDACTED]?

MARIACHI DIRECTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

Self

- How would you describe yourself? How would your students describe you?
- Where are you from?
- What is your racial/ethnic background?
- What is your educational background?
- What is your professional background?

Music

- Describe your musical background.
- Do you play or sing music professionally? If so, what has been your professional experience?
- What are some of your favorite songs to play/sing and why?
- Describe what you feel when you are playing/singing.

School

- Describe your teaching experience.
- What inspired you to become a mariachi director?
- How do you recruit mariachi members?
- What does your job entail?
- Describe a typical day on the job at school.
- Describe a typical day during mariachi practice.
- What do you know about the history of the mariachi band at your high school?

- Why do you think students join the mariachi band at your high school?
- Describe your relationship to the members of the mariachi band.
- What type of feedback do you give your students about their mariachi performances?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
- In what ways do you feel that participation in the mariachi influences academic success among the members of the mariachi?
- Why do you think there are not more mariachi bands at other high schools in [REDACTED]?
- How is your mariachi viewed by other teachers at your school? In the community? In the district?

Appendix II

PARENT AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION RECRUITMENT FLYER (ENGLISH)

Dear [REDACTED] High Mariachi [REDACTED] and parents,

Hello! My name is Mónica Vásquez Neshyba and I am a graduate student in bilingual education at the University of Texas at Austin. I am inviting you to participate in my research study. But first, let me tell you a little about myself.

I was born and raised in [REDACTED], Texas and attended [REDACTED] schools, specifically [REDACTED] Elementary, [REDACTED] Junior High, [REDACTED] Middle School and [REDACTED] High School. I began to play the violin after joining the school orchestra in the 6th grade at [REDACTED]. Since I learned to read music at age 6 while taking piano lessons, I learned to play the violin fairly quickly. I enjoyed playing the violin and with the encouragement of my 7th grade orchestra teacher, I began to take private violin lessons. I won a solo competition in my division that same year. Being somewhat shy and quiet at 13, it was an extreme confidence boost for me! I soon began auditioning for All-City and Regional orchestras. While at [REDACTED] Middle School in the 8th grade, I had the pleasure of playing violin in the mariachi under maestro [REDACTED]. It was a wonderful experience!

As a student at UT Austin, I struggled to find my interest for the first five years, until I realized that there was a need for bilingual elementary teachers. After graduation, I immediately began teaching as a bilingual teacher while earning a master's degree. A few years later, I became a doctoral student and continued teaching until 2006. I have been working at the Texas Education Agency since then.

After learning about the high dropout rate among Latino high school students, I began thinking of what I could do to contribute towards a possible solution. As I watched the [REDACTED] High Mariachi [REDACTED] perform at [REDACTED] this past Cinco de Mayo, I realized how including the mariachi in my study would provide examples of how students use their identity as mariachi members to express themselves and how that can affect their academic performance. My goal is to show how the students in the mariachi are able to achieve academic success amidst the high dropout rate. In the interviews I will ask you about yourself and your family, school, and musical background. They will be stress-free interviews where you will have a chance to be heard and share your voice.

I would like to interview as many members of the mariachi as possible and their parents. If you are interested, please email me at mneshyba@mail.utexas.edu so that we can set a date where I can go over the consent form with you. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely, Mónica Vásquez Neshyba

PARENT AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION RECRUITMENT FLYER (SPANISH)

Querido Mariachi [REDACTED] de [REDACTED] y sus padres,

¡Hola! Mi nombre es Mónica Vásquez Neshyba y soy un estudiante graduado en la educación bilingüe en la universidad de Tejas en [REDACTED]. Les estoy invitando a participar en mi estudio de investigación. Pero primero, déjeme decir un poco sobre mí. Nací y fui criado en [REDACTED], Tejas y asistí las escuelas de [REDACTED], específicamente la escuela primaria de [REDACTED], la escuela secundaria de [REDACTED], la escuela media de [REDACTED] y la escuela secundaria de [REDACTED]. Comencé a tocar el violín cuando estaba en la orquesta de la escuela en el 6° grado en [REDACTED]. Puesto que aprendí leer música en la edad 6 mientras que tomaba lecciones del piano, aprendí tocar el violín bastante rápidamente. Gocé el tocar del violín y con el estímulo de mi maestra de la orquesta de 7° grado, comencé a tomar lecciones privadas del violín. Gané una competición sola en mi división el mismo año. ¡Siendo algo tímido y reservado cuando tenía 13 años, era un alza extrema de la confianza para mí! Pronto comencé a actuar en unas audiciones para las orquestas de la ciudad y regionales. Mientras que asistía la escuela secundaria de [REDACTED] en el 8° grado, tenía el placer de tocar el violín en el mariachi con el maestro [REDACTED]. ¡Era una experiencia maravillosa!

Como estudiante en UT Austin, luché para encontrar mi interés por los primeros cinco años, hasta que realicé que había una necesidad de maestras bilingües en las escuelas primarias. Después de la graduación, comencé inmediatamente a enseñar como maestra bilingüe mientras que ganaba una maestría. Algunos años más tarde, llegué a ser una estudiante doctoral y continué enseñando hasta 2006. Ahora trabajo para la Agencia de la Educación de Tejas.

Después de aprender sobre el número de estudiantes Latinos que no terminen la escuela, comencé a pensar en lo que podría hacer para contribuir hacia una solución posible. Pues mientras que miré a los Mariachi [REDACTED] cuando estaba [REDACTED] en el Cinco de Mayo pasado, realicé cómo incluir al mariachi en mi estudio proporcionaría ejemplos de cómo los estudiantes utilizan su identidad como miembros del mariachi para expresarse y de cómo eso puede afectar su funcionamiento académico. Mi meta es demostrar cómo los estudiantes en el mariachi pueden alcanzar éxito académico a pesar del alto número de estudiantes Latinos en Tejas que no terminan la escuela. En las entrevistas les preguntaré acerca de ustedes y su familia, escuela, y fondo musical. Las entrevistas serán libres de estrés donde usted tendrá una oportunidad a ser oída y compartir su voz.

Quisiera entrevistarme con tantos miembros del mariachi y sus padres que sean posibles. Si usted está interesado, por favor mándeme un mensaje por correo electrónico a mneshyba@mail.utexas.edu de modo que poder fijar una fecha donde puedo pasar la forma del consentimiento con usted. ¡Miro adelante a oír de usted!

Sinceramente, Mónica Vásquez Neshyba

MARIACHI DIRECTOR PARTICIPATION RECRUITMENT FLYER

Dear Ms. [REDACTED],

Hello! My name is Mónica Vásquez Neshyba and I am a doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas at Austin. I am inviting you to participate in my research study.

I was born and raised in [REDACTED] Texas and attended [REDACTED] public schools throughout my K-12 career, specifically [REDACTED] Elementary, [REDACTED] Junior High, [REDACTED] Middle School and [REDACTED] High School. I began to play the violin after joining the school orchestra in the 6th grade at [REDACTED]. Since I learned to read music at age 6 while taking piano lessons, I learned to play the violin fairly quickly. I enjoyed playing the violin and with the encouragement of my 7th grade orchestra teacher, I began to take private violin lessons. I won a solo competition in my division that same year. Being somewhat shy and quiet at 13, it was an extreme confidence boost for me! I soon began auditioning for All-City and Regional orchestras. While at [REDACTED] Middle School in the 8th grade, I had the pleasure of playing violin in the mariachi under maestro [REDACTED]. It was a wonderful experience!

As an undergraduate student at UT Austin, I struggled to find my interest for the first five years, until realizing that there was a need for bilingual elementary teachers. I graduated in 1999 from UT Austin with a degree in Spanish and immediately began teaching while earning a master's degree in Elementary Education with Bilingual Education Certification from Southwest Texas State University, which I finished in 2001. I became a doctoral student in 2004 and continued teaching until 2006. I have been working at the Texas Education Agency since 2006.

After learning about the high dropout rate among Latino high school students, I began thinking of what I could do to contribute towards a possible solution. As I watched the [REDACTED] High Mariachi [REDACTED] perform at [REDACTED] this past Cinco de Mayo, I realized how including the mariachi in my study would provide examples of how students use their identity as mariachi members to express themselves and how that can affect their academic performance. My goal is to show how they are able to achieve academic success amidst the high dropout rate.

I would like to interview you and gain your insights regarding the mariachi program and the role it plays at your school. If you are interested, please email me at mneshyba@mail.utexas.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Mónica Vásquez Neshyba

STHS ADMINISTRATOR RECRUITMENT FLYER

Dear Travis High School Administrators,

Hello! My name is Mónica Vásquez Neshyba and I am a doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas at Austin. I am inviting you to participate in my research study.

I was born and raised in [REDACTED], Texas and attended [REDACTED] public schools throughout my K-12 career, specifically [REDACTED] Elementary, [REDACTED] Junior High, [REDACTED] Middle School and [REDACTED] High School. I began to play the violin after joining the school orchestra in the 6th grade at [REDACTED]. While at [REDACTED] Middle School in the 8th grade, I had the pleasure of playing violin in the mariachi under maestro [REDACTED]. It was a wonderful experience!

As an undergraduate student at UT Austin, I struggled to find my interest for the first five years, until realizing that there was a need for bilingual elementary teachers. I graduated in 1999 from UT Austin with a degree in Spanish and immediately began teaching while earning a master's degree in Elementary Education with Bilingual Education Certification from Southwest Texas State University, which I finished in 2001. I became a doctoral student in 2004 and continued teaching until 2006. I have been working at the Texas Education Agency since 2006.

After learning about the high dropout rate among Latino high school students, I began thinking of what I could do to contribute towards a possible solution. As I watched the [REDACTED] High Mariachi [REDACTED] perform at [REDACTED] this past Cinco de Mayo, I realized how including the mariachi in my study would provide examples of how students use their identity as mariachi members to express themselves and how that can affect their academic performance. My goal is to show how they are able to achieve academic success amidst the high dropout rate.

I would like to interview as many as three administrators at [REDACTED] High School and gain your insights regarding the mariachi program and the role it plays at your school. If you are interested, please email me at mneshyba@mail.utexas.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Mónica Vásquez Neshyba

Appendix III

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN: SELECTED ELEMENTS (ENGLISH)

Title: *Examining How Issues of Identity Impact Academic Success Among Latino High School Students in a Mariachi Band*

IRB PROTOCOL # 2007-09-0065

Conducted By: Mónica Vásquez Neshyba of the University of Texas at Austin:
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Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carmen Martinez-Roldán of the University of Texas at Austin
Department / Office; Curriculum and Instruction
(office) 475-6564
Email: cmartinez-roldan@mail.utexas.edu

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to allow your child to take part. Your child's participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to allow your child to participate without penalty. Your child can stop their participation at any time and their refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

The purpose of this study is to learn what role the mariachi has played in the formation of the students' identities as Latinas/os and how participation in the mariachi band influences academic success. A maximum of 25 members of the mariachi, a minimum of 1 mariachi director, and a minimum of 1 school administrator will be asked to participate in the study.

All participants will choose the day(s) and time(s) of the observation(s) and interview(s). Participants will be given notice at least twenty-four hours prior to a researcher's arrival at their homes or other non-public places where they will be observed. The researcher will not show up unannounced.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask your child to do the following things:

- be observed and audio-recorded for 1-1.5 hour(s) a week during mariachi class, beginning in mid-December, 2007 until April 25, 2008
- be observed and photographed during mariachi performances
- participate in 5-6 individual interviews (40-90 minutes each) beginning May 2008
- participate in 1-3 group interviews (1-1.5 hour(s) each) beginning January 2009

Also, information regarding language, academic background and progress of the student will be obtained from the Office of Research and Evaluation at [REDACTED] ISD. This data will be added generally to the descriptions of the students' language, academic background and progress as told by the students themselves. Specific test scores and specific dates will not be stated in the study.

Total estimated time to participate in study is 30 hours for the students

Risks of being in the study

The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life.

Benefits of being in the study

There are no benefits for participation in this study.

Costs of being in the study

There will be no costs for participation in the study

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:

The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The **records** of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your child's research

records and will protect the **confidentiality** of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

If the researcher should observe child or elder abuse, confidentiality will be broken. State law requires the reporting of abuse to relevant agencies such as Child Protective Services or the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your child’s participation call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. You are free to stop your participation in this study at any time without punishment.

If you have questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact **Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects** at (512) 232-2685 or the Office of Research Support and Compliance at (512) 471-8871. or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

If students feels distressed while participating in the study that they should contact any of the school counselors, Gail Nord (414-7733), Adrianna Urbano (414-7710), Delma Perales (414-7713), or Holly Ingram (414-7709).

You may keep the copy of this consent form.

Your child, _____, is invited to participate in a study beginning December 10, 2007 and ending on June 3rd, 2009. Your decision to participate and allow your child to participate in this study will not affect your or your child’s current or future relationships with The University of Texas at Austin or the _____ Independent School District. If you agree to participate and also allow your child to participate, you may discontinue your and his or her participation at any time. Your signature below indicates that you have read the material above and have agreed to participate and allow your child to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Son or Daughter

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Assent form for child between 13 and 17 years of age

“I have read the description of the study titled *Examining How Issues of Identity Impact Academic Success Among Latino High School Students in a Mariachi Band* that is printed above, and I understand what the procedures are and what will happen to me in the study. I have received permission from my parent(s) to participate in the study, and I agree to participate in it. I know that I can quit the study at any time.”

Signature of Child

Date

B. We may wish to present some of the recorded data files and photos from this study at educational conferences, as demonstrations in classrooms or in professional publications. Please sign below if you are willing to allow us to do so with your data file.

I hereby give permission for the video and/or audio data file made for this research study to also be used for educational purposes.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

C. I consent to the release of my school records regarding language, academic background and progress from the school office.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

■ Permanent Student Identification Number _____

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN: SELECTED ELEMENTS (SPANISH)

Título: *Examinando como la identidad afecta el éxito académico entre estudiantes Latinos de la secundaria que están en un mariachi*

IRB PROTOCOL #2007-09-0065

Dirigido por: Mónica Vásquez Neshyba de la Universidad de Tejas en Austin:

Departamento / Oficina; Currículo e Instrucción
Telephone: (cell) 554-5617, (casa) 291-0063
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Patrocinado por: Dr. Carmen Martinez-Roldán de la Universidad de Tejas en Austin
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Email: cmartinez-roldan@mail.utexas.edu

Elementos elijidos

Pedimos su permiso para la participación de su hijo/hija en una investigación. Esta forma le provee con información acerca de la investigación. La investigadora principal también le explicará acerca de esta investigación y ella puede contestar las preguntas que tenga. Por favor, lea la información de abajo y haga preguntas sobre todo lo que no entienda bien antes de decidir participar en esta investigación. Su participación es totalmente voluntaria y usted puede negar su participación sin riesgo. Si quisiera terminar su participación, comuníquese a la investigadora principal. La investigadora principal le dará una copia de este consentimiento.

El propósito de este estudio es aprender más sobre el éxito de los estudiantes Latinos a pesar del alto número de estudiantes Latinos en Tejas que no terminan la escuela y creo que el grupo mariachi en la escuela secundaria de Travis es un grupo único que ha elegido mantener su identidad cultural. Un máximo de 25 miembros del mariachi, 1 director del mariachi, y al menos 1 administrador de la escuela serán solicitados para participar en el estudio.

Todos los participantes elegirán los días y las horas de las observaciones y de las entrevistas. La investigadora dará aviso a los participantes por lo menos veinticuatro horas antes de presentarse en sus hogares u otros lugares en donde serán observados. La investigadora no se presentará sin aviso.

Si usted está en acuerdo con este estudio, pediremos que cada estudiante haga lo siguiente:

- ser observado y grabado por audio digital al menos 1-1.5 hora(s) a la semana durante la clase de mariachi, comenzando a mitad de diciembre del 2007 hasta el 25 de abril del 2008
- ser observado y tomado de fotos digitales durante las presentaciones del mariachi
- participe en 5-6 entrevistas individuales (40-90-minutos para cada entrevista)
- participe en 1-3 entrevistas en grupos (de 1-1.5 hora(s) para cada entrevista)

Además, los datos con respecto al idioma, historia académica y el progreso del estudiante serán obtenidos de la Oficina de investigación y evaluación de [REDACTED] ISD. Estos datos

serán agregados de manera general a las descripciones de la historia académica y progreso que los estudiantes hayan compartido. Los resultados específicos de exámenes y fechas específicas no serán incluidos en el estudio experimental o en la disertación.

El tiempo total estimado de participación del estudio es de 30 horas para los estudiantes, y dos horas para los padres

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de este estudio?

Los riesgos asociados con este estudio no son más grandes de lo que pueda encontrar en la vida diaria.

¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios para usted y para otras personas?

No hay beneficios por la participación en este estudio.

¿Si decide participar en esta investigación, le costará algo?

No

¿Recibirá alguna compensación por su participación?

No habrá compensación por participar en este estudio.

Protección de la privacidad y de datos confidenciales:

Los datos que resulten de su participación se podrían poner a disposición de otros investigadores en el futuro para propósitos de investigación que no estén detallados dentro de esta forma de consentimiento.

Los expedientes de este estudio serán almacenados con seguridad y mantenidos confidencialmente. Las personas autorizadas de la universidad de Tejas en Austin, miembros del comité examinador institucional, y (los patrocinadores del estudio, si cualquiera) tienen el derecho legal de revisar los expedientes de la investigación y protegerán la confidencialidad de esos documentos. Durante el estudio, la investigadora principal le avisará cuando nueva información esté disponible que pueda afectar su decisión de permanecer en el estudio.

Si la investigadora observa abuso de un niño o de un anciano, la confidencialidad se romperá. La ley del estado requiere la divulgación del abuso a las agencias relevantes tales como servicios protectores del niño o el departamento de la familia y de servicios protectores de Texas.

Contactos y preguntas:

Si Ud. tiene preguntas, por favor hacerlas ahora. Si tuviera preguntas más tarde, quisiera más información, o quiere dejar de participar en esta investigación por cualquier razón, debe comunicarse con las personas que están en la primera página de este

consentimiento. Usted está libre de retirar su consentimiento y dejar de participar en esta investigación en cualquier momento sin castigo.

Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en esta investigación, por favor, llame a: **Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, La Universidad de Tejas, la Junta de Crítica Institucional para la Protección de Seres Humanos de Austin, 512-232-2685** o la Oficina de Apoyo por las Investigaciones y Conformidad a (512) 471-8871 o por correo electrónico: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu

Si los estudiantes se sientan pena mientras estén participando en el estudio, deben llamar a cualquiera de las consejeras de la escuela: Gail Nord (414-7733), Adrianna Urbano (414-7710), Delma Perales (414-7713), o Holly Ingram (414-7709).

Usted recibirá una copia de esta forma de consentimiento.

Su hijo o hija, _____, está invitado a participar en el estudio. Su decisión acerca de dar su permiso para participar en este estudio no afectará las relaciones futuros de usted ni de su hijo o hija con la Universidad de Tejas en Austin o del Distrito Independiente Escolar de [REDACTED]. Si decide más tarde que quiere dejar de participar en esta investigación por cualquier razón, debe comunicarse con las personas que están en la primera página de este documento. Si da su permiso a participar y de su hijo o hija, puede dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento. Su firma abajo indica que ha leído la información de esta forma y ha decidido que usted y su hijo o hija pueden participar en el estudio.

Nombre del menor

Firma de los padres o guardián legal

Fecha

Firma de la investigadora

Fecha

Forma de asentimiento para los hijos(as) de 13 y 17 años de edad

“He leído la descripción del estudio ‘*Examinar cómo la identidad afecta al éxito académico de los estudiantes de un mariachi de una escuela secundaria*’ y entiendo cuales son los procedimientos y lo que pasará en este estudio. Recibí permiso de mis padres a participar en el estudio, y estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio. Sé que puedo dejar de participar en este estudio a cualquier momento.”

Firma del niño

Fecha

D. Es posible que quisiéramos compartir la información grabado y fotos de este estudio en conferencias educacionales o demostraciones, en salones de clase o en publicaciones profesionales. Por favor firme abajo si quisiera dar su permiso para que podamos compartir la información de ustedes y de su hijo o hija.

Doy mi permiso de que la información de mí y mi hijo o hija grabado por video o audio para este estudio pueda ser utilizada para propósitos educacionales.


Firma: _____

Fecha: _____

E. Doy mi consentimiento para que la investigadora pueda usar información de mis archivos escolares acerca lenguaje, historia académica y progreso de la oficina de la escuela.

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____

Número permanente de identificación estudiantil de 

Date

Observations

Interviews

12/13/07	Christmas Concert 7pm	
12/15/07	Tamalada at local Middle School 10am	
12/20/07	Class (9-10am)	Dr. Carrillo (principal) 10-10:45am
1/16/08	Class 1-3pm	
1/18/08	Class 1-3pm	
1/23/08	Class 1-3pm	
1/25/08	Class 1-3pm	
1/26/08	All-City Mariachi Festival	
1/30/08	Class 1-3pm	
2/6/08		Mrs. Reyna (Mariachi Director) 9am-9:45am
2/13/08	Class 1-3pm	
2/15/08	Class 1-3pm	
2/18/08	Class 1-3pm	
2/24/08	Mariachi Pachanga at STHS 11-7pm	
2/25/08	Class 9-11am	
2/27/08	Class 1-3pm	
3/19/08	Class 1-3pm	
3/28/08	Class 1-3pm	
4/2/08	Class 1-3pm	
4/4/08	Class 1-3pm	
4/9/08	Class 1-3pm	Mr. Vásquez (Asst. Director) 4pm-5pm
4/11/08	Class 1-3pm	
4/16/08	Class 1-3pm	
4/23/08	Class 1-3pm	
4/25/08	Class 1-3pm	
5/9/08		Students during class 1-3pm
5/15/08		Students during class 1-3pm
16-May		Students during class 1-3pm
5/20/08		Students during class 1-3pm
5/22/08		Students during class 1-3pm
5/23/08		Students during class 1-3pm
5/27/08		Students during class 1-3pm
5/29/08		Students during class 1-3pm
5/30/08		Students during class 1-3pm
6/4/08		Students during class 1-3pm
6/9/08		Students during class-cleanup 11-2pm
8/27/08		Students during class 9-11am
8/28/08		Students during class 9-11am

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