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### **Bordado a Mano: Testimonio de la Vida de un Maestro (Stitched by Hand: Testimonio of an Educator)**

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**Bordado a Mano: *Testimonio* de la Vida de un Maestro**  
**(Stitched by Hand: *Testimonio* of an Educator)**

by

Stephanie C. Bohlman

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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in Higher Education Administration

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## Abstract

In the United States there is a shortage of teachers of color. The shortage is exasperated through a lack of funding in education, racism in K-12 classrooms, and through non-inclusive traditional teacher preparation programs. One of the methods thought to increase recruitment, improve teacher training, and increase retention of teachers of color is through the creation of Grow Your Own teacher preparation programs. Grow Your Own programs were created as alternative to traditional teacher preparation programs as they are in community colleges, placed in rural communities, and have a focus on culturally responsive pedagogy. There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of Grow Your Own programs and their retention of teachers of color.

Therefore, this study explored how a Latinx teacher candidate experienced his education at a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program. Through using *testimonio* and counterstory single case study, I used in depth *plática* to best understand how a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies to navigate his educational journey. The findings showed that to recruit and retain teacher candidates of color, Grow Your Own programs must ensure that teacher candidates feel connected to the faculty, staff, cohort, curriculum, and community. If teacher candidates do not feel a sense of connection they will be forced to move into using survival mode bi-cultural acculturation strategies which in turn lead to lower retention rates, lowered academic success, and a decrease of institutional connection.

Finally, the implications of the study suggested that Grow Your Own programs need to first create connection with the community to best understand the population needs. Second, programs must ensure that staff and faculty are trained in culturally responsive pedagogy to best serve teacher candidates. And third, programs must create a culture of acceptance and inclusion so that teacher candidates of color feel safe enough to learn and succeed in their program.

## **Acknowledgment**

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## Chapter One

In the United States, the national teacher shortage is continuing to grow with gaps found in high need licensure areas such as math, science, special education, Spanish, and teaching English as a second language (U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). Shortages are also found in rural towns and urban cities as compared to suburban neighborhoods (U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). Further, there are great teacher shortages in racially and ethnically diverse educators (U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). Communities, K-12 schools, and institutions of higher education have been wrestling with different recruitment, retention, and graduation strategies to attract more people into the profession of education (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Bianco, Brandehoff, & Gist, 2019). One of the strategies is the implementation of a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program which aims to increase teacher candidates in specific communities (Milner & Howard, 2013). In 2015, the *Star Tribune* reported on a Grow Your Own program in rural Minnesota aimed at recruiting teachers of color, noting that:

a 27-year-old information technology technician for [school] plans to enroll in a “grow your own” teacher preparation program set to launch this fall at Elementary in [Minnesota], a town that has seen an influx of students from Sudan, Mexico and the Karen region of Burma, their families drawn by work at the plant. Like other rural Minnesota districts, [this town] has struggled to attract teachers of color (McGuire, 2015, para. 2).

The community in this town felt the need to create this Grow Your Own program to culturally enrich the education of their young community members. The Grow Your Own program was an instant success due to the collaboration between the community, the K-6 schools, the local community college, and a nearby university.

Three years after the initiation of the program, a follow up report was conducted by the *Austin Daily Herald*:

One of the ways that APS ... had been able to retain teachers and grow leadership was the 2+2 program, which was a partnership among APS, ... [the] Community College and ... [the] University which was created specifically in the face of teacher shortages and housed in ...[the] Elementary School. Berger said they've been able to hire some of those students who were able to quickly apply what they've learned in the classrooms at [the GYO program], as teachers. Last year, five teachers were hired from the 2+2 program, further cementing themselves into the APS district (Yang, 2018, para. 19).

The Grow Your Own program came from a collaborative workforce of people working to address the community's specific needs. The program successfully recruited, retained, graduated, and employed future teachers while meeting the demands of the surrounding communities. Therefore, a Grow Your Own program can not only meet the need of closing the rural teacher shortage, but also increase the percentage of teachers of color in Minnesota.

Grow Your Own programs were created to provide higher education opportunities in communities that lacked access to higher education institutions (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). However, much of the research on the impact of Grow Your Own programs have been in highly populated cities (Hallett, 2012), and there is little research on Grow Your Own programs in rural

spaces, much less, rural and Midwestern towns (Milner & Howard, 2013). The lack of research in these specific communities is important to note because without a perspective on the environment, a program cannot be accurately assessed.

Teacher shortages have been and continue to be detrimental to the success of P - 16 students (Howard, 2003). The vast amount of teacher shortages has a negative impact on students in both the educational quality of instruction and the preparedness of educators (Howard, 2003). Students are therefore forced to learn in overcrowded classrooms and with under-prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kohli, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Overcrowded classrooms can cause teacher burnout and for students to fall behind due to too many students for an educator to keep track off. Also, having under-prepared teachers who do not have the proper qualification nor education to teach means that those students are not receiving quality education.

Racially and ethnically minoritized people are not equally represented in the teaching field as their white counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Scholarship exists to explain the reason behind that lack of representation between ethnic and racial groups in higher education. Some of the research places a focus on barriers to recruitment (Irizarry, 2011; McNulty & Brown, 2009) and retention (Keels, 2013; McNulty & Brown, 2009) of students of color at predominantly white universities (Harris, 2017). While other research focuses on student's academic preparation (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Torres & Fergus, 2012;), student engagement (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012), acculturation strategies (Alamina, Kim, Walker & Sisson, 2017; Dennis, Fonseca, Gutiérrez, Shen & Salazar, 2016; Omizo, Kim, & Abel, 2008), language barriers (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010), and access to education (Gándara

& Contreras, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). While this scholarship which examines how students experience higher education at predominately white universities is important, it is equally crucial to address the impact of the environment which creates, upholds, and sustains the barriers resulting in fewer educators of color (Kohli, 2014). More specifically, this study focuses on Latinx teacher candidates in higher education who graduated from a Grow Your Own program and the conversations around acculturation and the environment.

The theories and studies on Latinx student's identity development have undergone many changes in higher education (Salinas, 2020). The first models of Latinx identity explored issues of language, culture, and acculturation (Broesch & Hadley, 2012). Moving into today's social issues, what it means to self-identify as Latinx has drastically changed (Salinas, 2020). Researchers are now debating indigeneity (Rossini, 2018; Salinas & Lozano, 2017; Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018), LGBT issues (Contreras, 2017; deOnís, 2017), language (Sam, 2006), citizenship (Krogstad & López, 2014; Unzueta Carrasco, & Seif, 2014), generational status (Dennis et al., 2016; Krogstad & López, 2014), and even titles and names (Salinas, 2020) as top issues regarding Latinidad. However, many of these issues dismiss the experiences of Latinx students who are raised in and grow up in predominantly white areas.

Latinx students who live in predominantly white communities face different types of racial and ethnic issues compared to those who live in predominantly Latinx communities and even predominantly communities of color (Broesch & Hadley, 2012; Krogstad & López, 2014; Zirkel, 2002). Latinx students who are raised in white neighborhoods tend to experience their education through a bi-cultural acculturation lens (Félix-Ortiz, Newcomb, & Myers, 1994). Bi-cultural acculturation posits that Latinx students can move through four different categories:

Latino-identified individuals, highly bicultural individuals, American-identified individuals, and low-level bicultural individuals (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994). This acculturation model states that students can occupy more than one cultural style of being simultaneously without having to give up a piece of themselves (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994). This acculturation model provides a lens in which people can live in the borderlands without feeling guilty or ashamed of betraying a piece of themselves (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the Midwest, many teacher preparation programs are held at predominantly white institutions (Tai & Goldring, 2017). These institutions have a steady record of low retention and graduation rates for students of color thus contributing to the shortage of teachers of color (Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2013). To recruit and retain more teachers of color, specifically more Latinx educators, teacher preparation programs need to be re-designed (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Grow Your Own programs are one way to re-design teacher preparation models (Coffey, Putman, Handler & Leach, 2019). Grow Your Own programs are alternative teacher preparation programs centered around rural and diverse communities (Warren, 2011). Due to the new models of Grow Your Own programs in the United States, there is little research on their effectiveness in recruitment and retention of teachers of color (Valenzuela, 2017), but observed impacts suggest they are promising alternatives to traditional white-centric teacher preparation programs (Gist, 2018).

Grow Your Own programs are also used to address the national teacher shortage in addition to recruiting and retaining teacher candidates of color (Valenzuela, 2017). This specific type of program allows for mutual collaboration between four-year universities, local schools,

and community members (Skinner, Garretton, & Schultz, 2011). Domina and Ruzek (2012), found that high school graduation rates and college access increased among students of color because of programmatic practices and comprehensive partnerships between institutions of higher education and high school districts. Therefore, Grow Your Own programs are crucial to the development of homegrown teachers of color who will end up working in their own communities (Valenzuela, 2017).

Due to the community-focused and culturally responsive teaching-centeredness of Grow Your Own programs, they are viewed as a best practice in teacher preparation (Hallett, 2012; Warren, 2011; Wills, 2017). Yet, there is little research on the effectiveness of the program. There are certain Grow Your Own programs around the nation that are celebrated for their continued success in teacher preparation. The first known Grow Your Own program in the United States was the Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Center at Cal State University Sacramento founded in 1970 by teachers (Wong, Murai, Bérta-Ávila, William-White, Baker, Arellano, & Echandia, 2007). The second was the Grow Your Own program in Illinois titled “*La Nueva Generación*” which began in 1990 and focused on immigrant and Latinx communities (Hallett, 2012; Warren, 2011). These programs thrived in urban areas with a large population of people of color. While there has been success in Grow Your Own programs in large communities, what the research is lacking is a focus on Midwest, rural, Grow Your Own programs focusing specifically on Latinx student experiences.

Even with Grow Your Own programs focusing on recruitment of students of color, most programs are still predominately white (Taie & Goldring, 2017). In rural communities in the Midwest, the largest racial population is white (Valenzuela, 2017). Therefore, even with an

increase in teacher candidates of color at Grow Your Own programs compared to traditional teacher preparation programs they are still a numerical minority in these teacher preparation programs (Wong et al., 2007). The focus then becomes, how are Latinx teacher candidates experiencing and navigating their teacher preparation programs. There is some research studying Latinx teacher candidates at traditional teacher preparation programs (Carrillo, 2016; Irizarry, 2011). Most of the research explores teacher candidates' experiences with courses (Carrillo, 2013; Milner, 2008), fellow white classmates (Amos, 2010; Cross 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Urrieta, 2010), and student teaching experiences (Amos, 2013; Coffey, et al., 2019).

Bi-cultural acculturation began with a focus on Latino/a/x's who did not fit nicely within a traditional unidimensional acculturation model (Jones & Mortimer, 2014). The focus on bi-cultural acculturation assumes that acculturation is a fluid experience for people and people engage in different strategies to navigate their current environment (Jones & Mortimer, 2014). Therefore, the focus of the study was to understand how Latinx teacher candidates navigated their teacher preparation program by using different bi-cultural acculturation strategies.

### **Research Questions**

This study explored how a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies to move through their teacher preparation program. The research questions were:

RQ1: How did a Latinx teacher candidate describe their use of bi-cultural acculturation strategies in their Grow Your Own Program?

RQ2: When did a Latinx teacher candidate feel the need to use bi-cultural acculturation strategies to navigate their Grow Your Own Program?

RQ3: Why did a Latinx teacher candidate use bi-cultural acculturation strategies in their Grow Your Own Program?

### **Description and Scope of Research**

Through my study, the data gave us a perspective on why a teacher candidate chose certain strategies to navigate his program. The data also allowed us to understand when the teacher candidate was choosing strategies or when he felt he did not need to use strategies of bi-cultural acculturation to navigate his program. The theoretical framework used to guide this work was Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) bi-cultural acculturation models. This model was to provide a lens in which Latinx people could move between, through, and around multiple cultures without having to feel guilty or ashamed of where they were placed on a model.

The participant was recruited from a Midwestern Grow Your Own Program located in a rural community. This specific Grow Your Own program admits 15-20 teacher candidates every year to fill the cohort. In this program, approximately 20-25% of the teacher candidates self-identify as a person of color. The specific population targeted was teacher candidates who identified as Latinx or had ancestral ties to Latin America. I used purposeful recruitment strategies to select the Latinx teacher candidate (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). To gain access to the participant, I contacted the program director for access to the participant to conduct my research. I emailed all the students from the Grow Your Own program an invitation to participate in the study.

I conducted the research using *testimonio* and counternarrative case study methodology at the rural Midwest Grow Your Own program which licensed K-6 educators. I collected the data through *pláticas*, which are a specific form of *testimonio* methodology and method to focus on

the participant's narrative. I conducted open-ended *pláticas* with one Latinx teacher candidate. I used a *plática* protocol for clarity and consistency focusing on topics pertinent to the research questions. However, the conversation was guided by the participant stories for the *pláticas*.

I analyzed the data collected following the method of Chicana feminist epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 1998) which allowed me to create a narrative of the participant's successes and challenges of using bi-cultural acculturation strategies throughout his life. The Chicana feminist epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 1998) engage the participant in the co-construction and de-construction of data analysis. The participant in this study chose to not engage in the analysis of his *testimonio*. I transcribed each interview and engaged in thematic analysis. Once the transcript was completed, I sent the participant the transcript of the *plática* for him to review and edit. The participant did not have any comments regarding the transcript nor analysis of the data.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Due to the teacher shortage in the Midwest, it was important to understand how a teacher candidate worked through the systems of a teacher preparation program. Understanding the experiences of a Latinx teacher candidate will lead to improved and more successful teacher preparation programs and quality educators. Since Grow Your Own programs are regarded as a best practice (Valenzuela, 2017) to increase the number of teachers of color, it is crucial to explore its impact on Latinx teacher candidates. Therefore, the location of the Grow Your Own program became an important component of the research. This program is in a rural industrial town in the Midwest. The community is comprised of established families who have lived there for generations as well as new immigrant families who have moved there for work. The racial and ethnic demographic of the community has changed drastically with half of the incoming

kindergarten class being students of color. The same racial and ethnic demographic change is seen in the Grow Your Own program with about 25% of the teacher candidates self-identifying as people of color. Since the Grow Your Own program is increasing in racial and ethnic diversity, the largest representation in the program is Latinx teacher candidates. To understand bi-cultural acculturation strategies, I choose to focus on Latinx teacher candidates and their experiences in the Grow Your Own program.

This study is significant to the field of higher education, Latinx identity development, and teacher preparation programs. First, the study is significant in the field of higher education because it demonstrated multiple ways that a Latinx undergraduate teacher candidate navigated higher education. The study also provides practitioners, faculty, and administration an opportunity to understand bi-cultural acculturation strategies as used by a Latinx teacher candidate. Since acculturation strategies are rarely discussed in higher education programs, this research allows practitioners, faculty, and administration to learn more about bi-cultural acculturation models.

Second, the study is significant in the field of Latinx identity development. There is minimal research that has expanded on bi-cultural acculturation models. This research has shed light on how a Latinx teacher candidate processed information, made decisions, and followed through. This research also helped legitimize moving past mono-acculturation (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994) strategies to more advanced bi-cultural or multi-cultural acculturation strategies. As the world becomes smaller, people can join multiple communities and adapt to multiple cultures which in turn can shape the way they experience the world.

Third, the study is significant in the field of teacher preparation programs. Even though teacher preparation programs are housed at institutions of higher education they operate within additional boundaries due to the state licensing agencies. Therefore, teacher preparation programs will have different take-aways from this study. Leaders of teacher preparation programs can now understand the significance of recognizing the different bi-cultural acculturation strategies students use in their program and how to help students successfully complete their programs. Also, this study can help leaders of teacher preparation programs understand the unique needs of Latinx teacher candidates while attending a Grow Your Own program.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

I made two main assumptions moving into this research. First, I assumed that the Latinx teacher candidate was able to discuss their bi-cultural acculturation experiences with the Grow Your Own program freely. This meant that the participant felt comfortable during the *pláticas* to share their stories with me.

The second assumption is that the Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies. The bi-cultural acculturation model (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994) states that people are not placed within a rigid acculturation model. Rather, people can fluidly move through different strategies depending on the situation, the environment, and the content. However, there was a possibility that a participant did not use any strategy to move through their Grow Your Own program.

## **Positionality**

Through this study, I viewed the data through the lens of a 1.5 generation immigrant who self-identified as a Mexican cisgender woman. While I have never been a part of a teacher preparation program as a student, all my post-secondary schooling has taken place at predominantly white institutions that house teacher preparation programs. Currently, I work in a College of Education at a predominately white university in the Midwest. My role is a Director of Student Success in the education department. Although I work in a College of Education, the specific Grow Your Own program studies is not a daily component of the work that I do on campus.

Some of the pre-judgements I had for this study were directly tied to my lived experiences and research interests. The first pre-judgement was all predominantly white institutions are not in the interest of recruiting nor retaining ethnically and racially diverse people. The second pre-judgement was hesitation around the all-white professors who work in the Grow Your Own program and their effectiveness of working through a culturally responsive lens. The third pre-judgement I had was that my presence as a visible Latina may change the way the participant interacted with me. Lastly, my expectation of the study was that people would be willing to talk with me openly about their experiences using bi-cultural acculturation strategies in the program.

Through the data collection phase of the research, I encountered many issues regarding participant recruitment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the nation was in a global pandemic which meant that participating in my research was not priority for the participants. While I had high hopes of speaking to many participants that soon became less of a priority as

the country began shutting down, people were losing their jobs, and the death toll quickly rose. Part of the positionality that I took on during the COVID-19 pandemic was ensuring that this research did not supersede the national crisis and instead centered the real lived experiences of the possible participants.

### **Key Terms**

To best engage with the reading, I have provided some key terminology and a brief description. This terminology section will lay the foundation of the study and more specifically, provide the lens in which I am using when I write.

**Acculturation.** Acculturation is the process of cultural group (a) interaction with cultural group (b) (Berry, 1976). There are many different models of acculturation that explain how people in each culture interact, act, and re-act to new people and new cultures. More specifically, the research focuses on the impact of the environment and the relationship of culture (a) and culture (b) (Berry, 1976). Most of the work focuses on the non-dominant cultures and their ability to choose their level of interaction with the dominant culture.

**Bi-cultural Acculturation.** Bi-cultural acculturation (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994) specifically seeks to understand a bidimensional look at acculturation at the different experiences people have. This research looks at Latinx people and their acculturation models navigating between and through Latinx and Anglo cultures. Bi-cultural acculturation states that people can move between categories and cultures in a fluid motion depending on their circumstances. This view of acculturation provides a lens in where people can express their true selves without fear of repercussions.

**Grow Your Own.** A Grow Your Own program is a specific type of teacher preparation program. This program grew out of a community-based lens of educational equity in the 1970s (Valenzuela, 2017). The Grow Your Own program focused on building relationships between low-income and communities of color with universities that housed teacher preparation programs (Coffey, et al., 2019) in efforts to recruit, hire, and retain local qualified teachers.

**Latinx.** The focus of this study is on the United States of America, specifically the Midwest. It is important to include the boundaries of this study, because *Latinidad* is found all over the world. So, it is unfair and unnecessary to engage in a discourse of “correct titles” or to create a word that encompasses so many people. Therefore, the context of the study is Latinx people in the Midwest, United States of America.

The word Latinx emerged from the U.S.-centric LTBGQQIAA (Lesbian, Transgender, Bi-sexual, Gay, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Ally) community to promote inclusivity and to de-center the masculine narrative (Padilla, 2016; Scharrón-Del Rio & Aja, 2015). The Spanish language is gendered and most Latinx communities operate within a patriarchal society. Therefore, some U.S. based Latinx communities believe in creating a different culture that is not bound to traditional gender expectations and constructs. I intentionally use Latinx to center the LBTGQQIAA community and to remove any preconceived notion of the participants’ social identities. The word Latinx allowed the participant to openly share their identity with the audience, when they chose to do so.

I intentionally used the term Latinx in this study to ground the research in a holistic understanding of Latinx people in the United States. “Latinx ... is not a race. Indeed, people of Latin American descent comprise various races, depending on ancestry and context, as the social

construction of race continues to change through time” (Salinas & Lozano, 2017, p. 2). Latinx is used to describe people who have cultural or ethnic ties to Latin America, more specifically North America, Central America, and South America. The word Latinx emerged in 2014 in social media circles and has now been used in multiple peer-reviewed research articles (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

Since 2014 there have been many arguments against the word Latinx. Some claim that adding an X is grammatically incorrect (Santos, 2017). Other people argue that the Spanish language is being Americanized and colonized and therefore, the language should be left untouched (Guerra & Orbea, 2015). Lastly, people who understand the need for gender inclusion in the Spanish language have claimed that adding an *e*, instead of an *x*, makes the language gender neutral and grammatically correct (Blas, 2019). Regardless of the opposition against Latinx, I believed it important to engage in inclusive language, specifically for the Latinx LGBTQ community and regardless of language purity, to understand how all Latinx teacher candidates use bi-cultural acculturation strategies.

***Testimonio.*** A *testimonio* is a narrative from the person who experienced the event. In this research, the *testimonio* is both the method and methodology used to better understand the participants’ lived experiences. Rooted in Critical Race Theory and expanded by Chicana and Chicano Studies, *testimonio* as a methodology is a lens used to center the participants in the research (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). *Testimonio* allowed for the participant to share their truth and bring to light any wrong doings. *Testimonio* as a method was used to capture the participant’s stories. For this research, I used *pláticas* as a *testimonio* method.

***Pláticas.*** *Plática* is a Spanish word meaning a conversation. A *plática* is usually between people who are familiar with each other and comfortable enough to share stories. The *plática* is in place of a traditional interview for method of data collection. In this research, the *plática* is comprised of a protocol of inquiry questions but is not tied to those questions. During a *plática*, the conversation is directed by the participant, not the researcher. This is a form of liberation that engages the participant to be in control of the situation, what information they decide to share, and how that information is distributed.

### **Summary**

This study explored how, when, and why a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies while navigating his Grow Your Own program. As the nation seeks to recruit more teachers of color, institutions are not changing to accept a growing student body diversity (Valenzuela, 2017). Therefore, this study focused on the Grow Your Own program model of teacher preparation to understand how a Latinx teacher candidate navigated a different environment. The significance of this study will help staff, faculty, and administrators learn more about how Latinx students use bi-cultural acculturation strategies to navigate systems of higher education.

In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of the literature relating to different models of acculturation, Grow Your Own programs, and more information on Latinx identity development. The literature review includes information that is pertinent to the research questions and that creates evidence for the need of this study. Chapter Three is the methodology section of this study. This section describes the *testimonio* and counternarrative case study methodology which includes an explanation for the research design, participant recruitment, instrument for data

collection, analysis of the data, a timeline of the dissertation, and lastly a human subject approval through the institutional review board. Chapter Four is the findings section of this study. This section goes into detail regarding the participants life and stories of bi-cultural acculturation strategies. Lastly, Chapter Five is the discussion and implication chapter. This chapter is used to tie the findings to the literature review as well as provide implications for future research, for practice, and for theory.

## Chapter Two

To understand the nuances of acculturation in higher education, it is important to unpack a lot of preconceived notions about Latinx people in the United States as well as the relationship between the environment and Latinx people. Latinx is used as a gender-neutral word to group people with cultural or ethnic ties to Latin America (Blay & Ramirez, 2016). To begin, it is important to understand the word Latinx, what it means, what it does not, and why I chose the word for this study.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the continental Americas were ambushed and destroyed by colonizers of European background (Martinez & Iyer, 2008). The colonization process murdered and eliminated over 90 percent of the native indigenous people of the land (Fernández-Armesto, 2010). Throughout this mass genocide, colonizers murdered people, removed their culture, and silenced them through the elimination of indigenous languages (Utley, 1984). Now, most of the people living in North America, Central America, and South America speak the colonizers' languages (Fernández-Armesto, 2010). Depending on where the colonizers came from, most people now speak English, Spanish, or Portuguese as their main language (Fernández-Armesto, 2010).

Language is part of culture (Maldonado-Valentin, 2016). Language is a tool that is used to weave individuals together into a tapestry of sameness of connectedness, into a family. Because the native languages of the Americas were eradicated, I must write in both English and Spanish, the colonizers' languages, because those were the languages taught to me. Just as I seek to make connections with people through language, I also choose to use the word Latinx as an inclusive catch--all for individuals of or descendants from Latin America.

Latinx ends with an X. Which is uncommon and improper in the Spanish Language (Guerra & Orbea, 2015); however, it is connected to indigenous languages of Mexico such as Nahuatl (Engel, 2017) and Zapotec languages (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). The Spanish language genders words ending in *a* (feminine) and *o* (masculine) (Blas, 2019). Yet, gender neutral words are automatically deferred to masculine endings. By assuming that neutrality is the same as masculinity, the Spanish language is, in turn, *machista*. *Machista*, which translates to male chauvinist (Herrera, Owens, & Mallinckrodt, 2013), is a word in Spanish that is used to explain a person, process, or environment that enforces harmful and rigid stereotypical gender roles. By using the term Latinx, I chose to reject the *machista* and sexist culture and instead countered with a word that includes people who are trans, non-binary, and/or gender non-conforming.

Latinx is also used as an ethnic or cultural identity marker. Therefore, I used Latinx to include all people from Latin America and/or people with cultural and ethnic ties to Latin America. Latinx is also an ethnic classification used by people from Latin America and their decedents (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). Racially, Latinx people can be White, Black, Asian, Indigenous, and Mixed. Due to this multiracial identity, Latinx is not a race (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). In order to better understand the connections between Latinx teacher candidates and Grow Your Own programs the literature review must highlight the connection between the environment in the United States and the relationship of inclusion, exclusion, and otherness with Latinx people.

### **Educational Environment**

The culture of exclusion, nativism, and racism found in education is a direct product of the United States environment (Davidson & Burson, 2017; Huber, 2010). Culture is created,

upheld, and enforced through social construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Social construction is a set of values, norms, behaviors, and expectations that are co-created by the people in a specific culture. Therefore, the current social construction of the United States environment is a creation of the culture of whiteness and white America. Culture is also molded by legislation through policies and practices (Copeland & Mamiseishvili, 2017). This next section reviews the impact of political tactics in the education of Latinx people in the United States.

### **Political Tactics**

The history of education in the United States has different meanings depending on which social identities people held and depending on the time in which they identified with them (Harrington & Harrington, 2011). Not only does education mean different things, but also education was used for different purposes. Education for Indigenous peoples of the United States was used as a tool of forced assimilation (Anderson, 2002). Children were forcefully removed from their homes, parents, language, and culture to indoctrinate them to white culture (Anderson, 2002). Stolen and enslaved Africans were barred from education as a means of control and coercion by the white slave owners and politicians of that time (Span & Sanya, 2009). Children of Asian immigrants could not learn with white children and were forced to stop speaking their native languages in classroom (Ancheta, 2006). Lastly, children of Mexican descent received inequitable educations due to their language, socio-economic status, and color of their skin (Botti, Clark, & Macdonald, 2007).

In the United States of America, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) was a trade between the United States and Mexico. The trade gave present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming to the United States for \$15 million and a

settlement of all claims against Mexico to Mexico (Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848). After the treaty was signed, the residents of that land were forced to decide between re-locating to Mexico or becoming United State citizens (Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848). If they stayed, the residents were technically awarded full civil rights, rights which were not extended to people of African descendants nor Indigenous people (Tudico, 2010). While that was the treaty, not all people received full civil rights.

The residents who stayed were classified as “white” racially and could pursue education more easily (Tudico, 2010). After the official classification of “white”, a few Mexican Americans entered colleges in Santa Clara and UC Berkeley (Tudico, 2010). These students were the sons of wealthy landowners and were predominantly of Spanish descent granting them access to higher education (Tudico, 2010). Access to higher education became difficult for mestizos and low-income families. Mestizo – which translate to ‘mixed’ people - were of Indigenous or African and white racial backgrounds (Arriaza, 2004). During the early 1900s, racial classifications were deemed necessary as a form of identifying those who had rights-- white Americans-- versus those who did not, such as non-whites, African Americans, Indigenous people, Asian Americans, and Latinx Americans (Roediger, 2006).

Another influential political decision was granting higher education access to veterans. After World War II, Congress passed the G.I Bill of 1944. The G.I Bill created financial opportunities for veterans to attend colleges and universities. With the G.I Bill, more institutions of higher education began admitting Latinx students (Rivas-Rodriguez, Torres, Dipiero-D’sa, & Fitzpatrick, 2006). However, due to racist admission practices, millions of Latinx veterans were unable to navigate institutions of higher education and therefore could not use their G.I Bill

benefits (Rosales, 2011). Therefore, the American GI Forum was created to assist students in gaining access into these institutions (Ramos, 1998). The American GI Forum's objectives secured Hispanic veteran rights as well as created opportunities for post-secondary education (Zuniga, 2017). Even though the Latinx population had more access to higher education, it was still hard to enroll without the help and guidance of community members and organizations (Ramos, 1998).

The main barrier to higher education in the 1970s was the cost of college tuition and fees. Therefore, one of the resources that assisted students in enrolling in higher education was the Ford Foundation, which provided monetary support for "Spanish-speaking Americans" (Ford Foundation, 1970, p. 41). Another resource was the creation of Colegio Cesar Chavez in Mt. Angel, Oregon, created in 1973 for Latinx students in the area (Maldonado, 2000). Additionally, Victor Alicea alongside the New York State Board of Regents, built Boricua College, a private institution, in Brooklyn in 1973 to serve Puerto Rican and Hispanic students in their area (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund program began in 1975 to encourage Hispanic students to complete higher education through monetary relief efforts (Hispanic Scholarship Fund, 2017).

Even though Latinx schools and resources emerged for students to succeed, the overall racial and ethnic climate towards Latinx people in the United States was hostile (MacDonald, 2004). In 1973, *Douglas, W. O. & the Supreme Court of the United States case (1973) US Reports: Lau v. Nichols, 414 U.S. 563* declared that public schools cannot discriminate against non-English speaking students and must provide special services to students who speak multiple languages (MacDonald, 2004). The ruling mandated that children should be allowed to speak

any language in the K-12 setting. Even with the ruling, bilingual children still faced discrimination and were not being granted an equitable education (Chapa, 2005). Still, with the creation of affirmative action for all racialized and minorities populations, Latinx people were still receiving inadequate education (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 1996), employment discrimination (Montejano, 1987), harsher criminal sentences than their white counterparts (Homes, Harmon, Hosch, Daudistel, Perez, & Graves, 1993), and housing discrimination (Kenney & Wizzoker, 1994). The discrimination that continued made it more difficult for Latinx students to access higher education.

To engage minoritized and marginalized communities in higher education, Reagan's 1986 seven-point strategy for federal aid to higher education created a shift in student federal financial aid (Gardner, 1986). This strategy was a piece of legislation aimed to fund federal financial aid to increase access for students of color, low socio-economic students, and students from rural and urban regions (Gardner, 1986). The strategy outlined seven changes needed to secure student success in college. The strategies were: one unsubsidized loan program and one supplemental grant program, eliminating national direct student loan program, eliminate Pell Grants and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant changed to a loan program, eliminate part-time student aid, only merit based financial assistance, and federal aid to schools who are "worthy" (Gardner, 1986).

However, in the Latinx community, the change of legislation resulted in a decline of enrollment in institutions of higher education because Latinx students were less likely to take out loans versus grants (Botti, et al., 2007). Other downfalls were fewer funds allocated to institutions that primarily served Latinx students, had low TRIO participation, and few

fellowship opportunities (MacDonald, 2004). Seeing as student enrollment was decreasing, the federal government enacted the Higher Education Act Reauthorization of 1992. Under Title III Part A. Section 316 of the HEA was the creation of Hispanic Serving Institutions (Higher Education Act of 1965).

Hispanic Serving Institutions are “colleges and universities that serve large numbers of students who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino” (Landen, 2004, p.186). These institutions were classified as Hispanic Serving Institutions to best reach Latinx students in their communities and to provide accessible college options. In the late 1990s, Hispanic Serving Institutions made up less than three percent of all higher education institutions in the United States. However, during the early 2000s, they enrolled over 60 percent of all Latinx students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). With large portions of Latinx students enrolling in Hispanic Serving Institutions, state institutions began to panic due to a decline in Latinx enrollment.

Latinx access to higher education was once again on the rise and in 1998, the Higher Education Act created Title V to provide grant opportunities to Hispanic Serving Institutions. The grants allowed Hispanic Serving Institutions to invest in recruitment, retention, and graduation of their students (U.S. Department of Education, Programs, 2017). The creation of these institutions gave momentum for the huge influx of Latinx students in higher education in the following years. While a lot of the focus was on recruitment, retention, and success of documented Latinx college students, undocumented students were left out of the conversations.

It was not until the early 2000s, that undocumented people in the United States could proceed with trying to access higher education (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2019).

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was an executive action enacted by President Obama. This executive action came into effect due to the failed Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (2009-2012) which would have created a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people. DACA granted undocumented children (ages 15-31) lawful presence in the United States. This meant that DACA recipients could not be deported. DACA also granted lawful status, which meant that college students were not able to receive federal financial aid to assist in paying for college.

In 2017, there were about 690,000 people living in the U. S. who applied for DACA status and not all applicants were Latinx (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2019). In the United States, there are only 19 states which grant in-state tuition for DACA recipients (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). In the other 31 states, DACA recipients are charged out-of-state tuition or international student rates. Due to the DACA terminology, these students cannot apply for scholarships that require U.S. citizenship or a completion of the FAFSA leaving many undocumented students without the financial resources to attend college.

Nationally, only 26 percent of undocumented Latinx youth ages 18-24 enroll in college (Zimmerman, 2011). One of the main reason's students do not attend college is due to their financial situation. In our current political climate and with the potential termination of DACA, students are questioning if going to college is even worth it. The DACA program provided students some relief that they could study without fear of deportation. While citizenship status is one area of concern for some Latinx students, there have been other barriers to overcome beginning with the K-12 system of education.

## **K-12: Structural Racism and Nativism**

In the early 1900s, formal elementary and secondary education was emphasized as a priority for all white Americans. Latinx students were not afforded the same quality of education due to “racism, their economic condition, and the rural characteristics of the Southwest (which) precluded them from completing elementary and secondary school” (Olivas, 1982, p. 562). In the 1950s, many school districts indirectly and directly ensured Latinx students did not enter high school (Botti, et al., 2007). Before *Brown v. Board of Education* (1953), schools were segregated, which led to poor school conditions, lack of educational material, and unequal teacher preparation. In 1967, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967) created a summary report of racial isolation on public schools. Their data found that students experienced more segregation after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) than before the ruling (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967). Some of the causes for racial isolation were sanctioned racial discrimination, policies, and practices in urban school systems (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967). Another area is housing discrimination including separation of racial and economic groups which lead to discriminatory permits, inspection standards, ability to build a house, and racial zoning ordinance (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967).

Due to these educational discrepancies, Latinx students struggled to move past the eighth grade (Donato, 1997). Therefore, Latinx students did not have the education needed to enter college until after the 1960s due to those blatantly discriminatory practices. Once the courts declared these practices unlawful, Latinx students were able to continue onto high school and

prepare for college. However, the battle against institutional barriers continued for Latinx students.

In the United States, the 1960s-70s saw an advancement in civil rights from Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Second Wave of the Women's Right Movement of 1960, the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s. With these movements, Chicano and Puerto Rican youth activists, "demanded meaningful access to higher education by demanding curricula that represented the student population, faculty members of color as role models, cultural and research centers, and financial aid" (Botti, et al., 2007, p. 476). Latinx students created El Plan de Santa Barbara (1969) and demanded equitable access and opportunities in higher education.

Currently, in the United States the Latinx population is rapidly increasing yet remains the least educated ethnic group. Only 70.5 percent of Latinx people in the United States hold a high school degree and only 17.2 percent hold a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The first barrier to college degree attainment is high school graduation. When looking at graduation rates of high school students there is a discrepancy between students of color and their white peers. Only 89.6 percent of all high school students graduate high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The racial and ethnic breakdown includes 94.1 percent for white students and that number drops to 70.5 percent for Latinx students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). One reason that students drop out of high school is because they need to work to help support their family (Johnson, Simon, & Mun, 2014). Another reason involves gender discrimination in the Latinx community that reinforces the stereotype that girls should focus on taking care of the family, and not education (Johnson, et al.,

2014). Regarding gender, Latino high school students have a low high school graduation rate of 69.5 percent while Latinas' graduation rate is at a 71.6 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The last reason is the school-to-prison pipeline that negatively effects Black and Brown students (Johnson, et al., 2014).

Because only 70 percent of the Latinx population graduate high school, they have lower opportunities to attend college compared to their white counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Therefore, low high school graduation rates create barriers to college recruitment due to admission standards of a high school degree or GED. To increase Latinx enrollment in college, universities must create partnerships with middle schools and high schools in their area. These partnerships serve all stakeholders, as more students will be able to attend college, high schools will have engaged and motivated seniors, and colleges will have a greater pool of applicants in the admission process.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher Education: Structural Racism and Nativism**

The history of Latinx students in higher education is not as well documented nor as closely researched as other marginalized populations (Tudico, 2010). After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, former Mexican citizens were allowed into institutions of higher education (Tudico, 2010). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in practice awarded light skinned Mexican American's the racial classification of "white" and therefore, the ability to attend college (Roediger, 2006). The environment of racism and nativism in the early 1900s was noticeable in the microcosm of higher education (Roediger, 2006).

Similarly, the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century echoed many of the same stereotypes, prejudices, and oppressions that had been faced before. Faced with low enrollment some state institutions

changed their admission practices to attract students to their institution. Texas adopted a “10 percent solution.” This recruitment strategy mandated automatic enrollment of 35 public universities to students who graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school (Brown, Lopez, & Santiago, 2003). This strategy allowed universities to get around the banning of affirmative action efforts since most of Texas schools were highly Latinx populated (Brown, et al., 2003). California created a “five percent plan” that granted high school graduates, in the top five percent of their class, admission to any public institution of higher education (Brown, et al., 2003). Florida created a similar plan titled the “20 percent admission plan” which also granted high school graduates in the top 20 percent of their class admission to public institutions of higher education. This plan came with a stipulation that high school graduates must complete a college preparatory curriculum before attending their institution (Brown, Lopez, & Santiago, 2003).

In the early 2000s, in the age bracket of 18-22-year old’s, approximately 35 percent of Latinx people went to college (Fry, 2002). Even with an increase from previous years, the enrollment increases still did not match up with the demographic increase of Latinx people in the United States. At that time, Latinx people made up nine percent of all undergraduate students and close to 60 percent of those students enrolled in two-year colleges (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2002). Most Latinx students began their higher education careers at community colleges and over 50 percent of all Latinx students enrolled in college were geographically located in California and Texas (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Financial concerns led many Latinx students to attend a community college largely due to the distance from home and affordability of those institutions (Brown, et al., 2003; Fernández & Martinez, 2004). While Latinx students began at community colleges, some hoped to transfer to four-year

universities, yet the transition remained difficult due to student family struggles, personal experiences, and financial hardships (Suarez, 2003).

Today, Latinx students face another barrier in higher education including navigating the different system structures of both community colleges and four-year institutions. Community colleges enroll 57 percent of Hispanic students but only 17 percent of those students complete their programs and graduate with an associate degree (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). Due to the low number of completion rates, it is important to explore the environment in which these students are failing. Even though community colleges have a higher success rate of recruiting Latinx students, they still fail to retain and graduate those students. This is an important point out because even institutions who are able to recruit students of color are still unable to create learning environments for those students to thrive in.

Harris (2017) conducted a phenomenological study on Latinx transfer students. Six themes emerged from transfer student's experiences of going from a community college to a top tier one institution. The themes were institutional support, transfer experiences, strategies for persistence, financial issues, study skills, and family/community support. The students persisted at the tier one institution because they learned how to overcome the barriers as well as they immediately made important connections with faculty and staff at their new institution. Learning how to maneuver the environment played a huge role in their student success. Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) also found that co-curricular engagement and involvement was crucial to student success.

Some Latinx students began their higher education journey at a community college either as a short-term certificate program or as preparation for transferring to a four-year institution

(Tovar, 2015). Latinx students were motivated to begin this journey yet, they soon were lost in the shuffle and did not complete their goals. Latinx students wanted to attend four-year universities but lacked support in successfully transitioning from community colleges (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The relationship between community colleges and four-year universities best serves Latinx students as they are transferring from one institution to another. The successful transition from community college to four-year institutions is important because of the requirement of a bachelor's degree to attain a teaching degree. Since most Latinx students begin higher education at a community college, the transition from community college to four-year institution is instrumental in the recruitment and retention of Latinx teacher candidates.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

Teacher preparation programs are housed all over the United States. The mission for accredited teacher preparation programs is to produce teachers who can be recommended for a license in their state or nationally. Depending on different programs the values, goals, and mission statements can vary. However, one recent goal noted for most programs is the need to increase recruitment and retention of teacher candidates of color. When looking at all public-school teachers, Latinx and African American teachers only make up six percent and seven percent respectively of the total teaching population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). While efforts to recruit teachers of color are vocalized, “efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color are rarely accompanied by policy and programmatic changes that adequately address their unique learning needs” (Pham, 2018, p. 1). There are a plethora of issues and barriers that teacher candidates of color face while enrolled in their teacher preparation program.

One of the issues is a hostile racial climate. Solórzano, et al., (2000) identified that having a hostile campus racial climate can begin with racial microaggression in academic spaces as well as social spaces. These microaggressions have an impact on the academic and social life of students of color, which in turn leads to the necessary creation of academic and social counter spaces. Some overt forms of discrimination that Latinx students have faced include racial, ethnic, and sexist jokes or stereotypes in the classroom (Gómez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008).

Another issue is invisibility due to the Black-white binary when discussing race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Students who identify as Afro-Latinx are also discounted in the Black-white binary because their multi-ethnic and at times, multi-racial identities posit them as different than Black students. The environmental and cultural differences between those with Latinx culture can at times confuse the race conversation. Other Latinx voices are at times rendered invisible on discussions of race and racial constructs because they are not viewed as students of color by their white classmates. Amos (2010) researched the effect of whiteness on students of color in a multicultural education classroom. Amos (2010) discovered that students of color felt frustration, despair, and fear in their classroom due to the actions, inactions, and comments from their white peers. The researcher also discussed the idea that students of color were already silenced by whiteness as soon as they stepped foot on the predominantly white campus (Amos, 2010). Solórzano, et al., (2000) study also demonstrated the discouragement, frustration and exhaustion of African American student's stress caused by their white peers. Therefore, one issue of recruiting and retaining Latinx educators is a hostile campus racial climate that is upheld by whiteness and systems of whiteness.

Not only do Latinx students have to worry about racism but research has shown that Latinx students experience different barriers depending on their gender identity. Rintell and Pierce (2003) researched Latina paraprofessional experiences as teacher candidates and found no negative treatment by fellow classmates or faculty. However, Gómez, et al., (2008) researched Latino paraprofessionals and found that they experienced negative treatment by fellow classmates and faculty. One piece of retention of Latinx students is the socio-cultural environment in where they learn (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). If students do not feel safe in their environment, then they cannot learn appropriately and therefore, it negatively affects their academic performance.

Amos (2013) researched the experiences of Latina paraprofessional teacher candidates. The participants shared barriers such as academic difficulties, microaggressions, and financial burdens. The students felt academically inadequate, overwhelmed by the whiteness in the classroom, left out of social group activities, disrespected by classmates, targeted by stereotypes of immigration status, and unsafe in the classroom (Amos, 2013). Even though institutions want to recruit more teachers of color the current systems in place are not set up for student success. Certain barriers such as academic preparation, microaggressions and racism, and financial stress must be addressed for Latinx teacher candidates to successfully complete teacher preparation programs.

Therefore, to create an anti-racist and community-based teacher preparation models, all partners need to come together to co-create a new model of teacher education. Rogers-Ard, et al., (2019) argued that the movement to transform teacher education lies in the hands of the

community, school districts, and higher education partners. One avenue of meeting this goal is through Grow Your Own teacher preparation programs.

### **Grow Your Own Programs**

To create an anti-racist and community-based program, there are four elements necessary to create a positive collegiate racial climate. These include:

a) the inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color; b) a curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color; c) programs to support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color; and d) a college/university mission that reinforces the institution's commitment to pluralism (Solórzano, et al., 2000 p. 62).

Without any one of these elements, a university can have a negative racial climate. To recruit and retain more teachers of color, teacher preparation programs need to be welcoming non-hostile spaces. The academic component also must be re-designed along with the co-curricular model (Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2017).

Many teacher preparation institutions in the Midwest are held at predominately white universities with predominately white professors and Eurocentric curriculum (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Picower, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). This can lead to students of color feeling tokenized and isolated on campus and in the classroom (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). One of the ways that institutions of higher education are seeking to re-design teacher preparation models is to create Grow Your Own programs.

Grow Your Own programs are an alternative teacher preparation program centered around rural and diverse communities (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). The goal is to create accessible

educational spaces for students where there is not already a traditional teacher preparation program (Milner & Howard, 2013). Most of the time, Grow Your Own programs are found in rural communities or are in connection with community colleges (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). Due to the community model, most Grow Your Own programs are held at community colleges or in K-12 classrooms. The instructors are college professors who meet the accreditation requirement of teaching classroom method courses for licensure. Because these programs are mostly completion programs, the students receive content in two academic years including the student teaching semester. Grow Your Own programs are a more accessible way to graduate with a bachelor's degree when compared to a four-year university (Milner & Howard, 2013).

While the main goal of Grow Your Own programs is to graduate diverse teachers for diverse classrooms across the country, Skinner, et al., (2011) discussed the importance of dismantling white supremacy through Grow Your Own programs. They stated that empowering individuals to teach in the same communities in which they grew up would create a transformational shift in the communities. Therefore, communities of color can use Grow Your Own programs to empower the education of their young ones by creating curriculums, educators, and classrooms that are culturally responsive and do not adhere to white supremacist notions.

Sleeter, Neal, and Kumashiro's (2014) research also elaborated on the importance of collaboration between teacher preparation programs and school districts with a high population of students of color as one form of dismantling white supremacy. "Grow Your Own programs are highly collaborative, community-rooted, provide intensive support for recruiting, preparing, placing, and retaining diverse classroom teachers" (Rogers-Ard et al, 2019, p. 27). Due to the new models of Grow Your Own programs in the United States, there is little research on their

effectiveness in recruitment and retention of teachers of color (Valenzuela, 2017). Observed impacts suggests that promising alternatives such as university-K-12 partnerships, articulation agreements, and memoranda of understanding (Skinner, et al., 2011) to address teacher shortages and lack of racial and ethnic representation in educators when compared to traditional white-centric teacher preparation programs (Valenzuela, 2017).

Grow Your Own programs are one way to address the national teacher shortage in addition to recruiting and retaining teacher candidates of color (Valenzuela, 2017). This specific type of program allows for mutual collaboration between four-year universities, local schools, and community members (Skinner, et al., 2011). Domina and Ruzek (2012) found that high school graduation rates and college access increased among students of color because of programmatic practices and comprehensive partnerships between institutions of higher education and high school districts. Therefore, Grow Your Own programs are crucial to the development of homegrown teachers of color (Valenzuela, 2017).

Due to the community-focused and culturally responsive teaching-centeredness of Grow Your Own programs, they are viewed as a best practice in teacher preparation (Hallett, 2012; Warren, 2011; Wills, 2017). Yet, there is little research on the effectiveness of the program. There are certain Grow Your Own programs around the nation that are celebrated for their continued success in teacher preparation. The Grow Your Own program in Illinois titled “*La Nueva Generación*” started in 1990 focused on immigrant and Latinx communities (Hallett, 2012; Warren, 2011). Another Grow Your Own is the Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Center at Cal State University Sacramento founded in 1970 by current teachers (Wong, et al., 2007). Both programs were the earliest Grow Your Own programs in the United

States. These programs thrived in urban areas with a large population of people of color. What the research is lacking is a focus on the impact of living in the rural Midwest, while attending a Grow Your Own program has on Latinx teacher candidates. With such high emphasis on the recruitment and retention of Latinx educators, this research also explores the use of bi-cultural acculturation strategies at a Grow Your Own program. Not only does the physical location and external environment play a role in student success, but it also plays a significant role in identity development.

### **Identity and Environment**

In the United States, Latinx identity has been studied using different quantitative and qualitative formats. Each study was conducted to better understand the relationship between race/ethnicity, culture, and the environment. Since there is a short history of Latinx students in higher education there have been few identity development models created to explain the formation of identity as Latinx/Chicanx/Hispanic.

### **Racial Models**

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, colonizers, and *conquistadores* from Europe set sail across the oceans to explore the rest of the world (Martinez & Iyer, 2008). In Latin America, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, colonizers/*conquistadores* created a racial caste system to gain power which dehumanized Indigenous and African peoples (Martinez & Iyer, 2008). The racial caste system categorized humans by creating labels depending on the color of their skin, the racial identity of who they married or the racial identities of their parents (Figure 1)

The upper two castes included white only. Below these came the castes formed by individual of mixed European and Indian (Indigenous) ancestry, the Mestizos. Next in the



identification in Latin America, 36% White, 30% Mestizo, 20% Mulatto, 9% Amerindian, 3% Black, 1% Asian and less than 1% Creoles & Garifunas.

In the United States, the racial classification system was more complex. Whiteness was not solely based on the color of your skin but was also determined based on who could receive the title of being white (Roediger, 2006). Due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexican residents were granted the white title, but only in practice. Those citizens who were of mixed descent did not receive the same rights as those who were lighter in skin tone (Roediger, 2006).

In the U.S., there is no category of race that encompasses Latinx people. In the 2020 Census, question 8 asks if the person is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Question 9 asks what the person's race is and has options of: White, Black, or African American, American Indian, or Alaska Native, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Other Asian, Other Pacific Islander, or some other race. However, Question 9 confuses Race with Ethnicity and Cultural origins by adding White, which is a social construct, along with Korean or Japanese, which is an ethnic/national origin identity. Since race is a social construct, it can be used in multiple ways to either benefit a group or disenfranchise another (Roediger, 2006). Because there is no Latinx race, many of the identity development models focus on ethnic and cultural viewpoints.

### **Ethnic Models**

Ethnic models were created to better understand how a community with shared experiences make meaning of their environment and how that environment shapes how people experience the world. Building on Torres' (1999) work on cultural identity model, Ferdman and

Gallegos (2001) provided a model of Latino identity which focused on six different orientations of *Latinidad*. This model was used to provide a view into how Latinx people choose to identify and what that identity meant to them. The six orientations were Latino integrated, Latino identified, sub-group identified, Latino as “other”, undifferentiated / denial, and white-identified (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). In this model, there is a larger focus on race and culture in relation to the environment. The participants expressed that their identity formation was in direct relation to their environment. If they were in a largely homogenous community, they felt more comfortable to be themselves when compared to a largely white homogenous community.

Torres (2003) researched the relationship between the environment, family influence, and Latino identity development. The findings explained that Latino ethnic identity development was influenced by the environment in which the student was raised, the make-up and structure of the family, generational influences in the home, and self-perception of their status in society (Torres, 2003). Therefore, the environment played a crucial role in how a person chose to identify. Not only does a person’s identity development emerge because of the color of their skin, or their ethnic origins, but also it is shaped by the community culture in which the person was raised.

### **Cultural Models**

One of the first studies conducted to understand Latinx identity development was by Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994). Their study sought to identify a multidimensional construct of cultural identity formation that assessed bi-cultural and mono-cultural orientations. Bi-cultural orientation means that a person has more than one culture and therefore views the world through

multiple lenses. A monocultural orientation means that a person was raised with a singular culture and therefore only views the world through that lens.

To understand bi-cultural and monocultural orientation, the researchers used a quantitative research instrument, which they used to survey 130 Latinx college students. The research instrument focused on Latino/a culture to measure cultural identity while using language and behavioral/attitude/value-based indicators.

The findings determined that this instrument yielded ten reliable scales for measuring cultural identity, including three language scales, four behavioral/familiarity scales, and three values/attitudes scales. This measurement created four categories: Latino-identified individuals, highly bicultural individuals, American-identified individuals, and low-level bicultural individuals. Each classification was an explanation of how those individuals viewed their bi-cultural or mono-cultural identity. These classifications did not put people into “boxes” but rather helped explain certain behaviors, attitudes, or values that Latinx people have. This study focused on acculturation strategies of Latinx people in the U.S. but allowed individuals to explain their identity past their race or ethnicity.

Torres’s (1999) research expanded on Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) study on bicultural acculturation and created an Orientation Model. Torres’s (1999) Bicultural Orientation Model measured Latinx student’s cultural orientation. Students’ choices were between Hispanic culture and Anglo culture. This model looked at identity and acculturation to understand student cultural orientation. The Bicultural Orientation Model created four quadrants in which participants could occupy: Hispanic Orientation, Bicultural Orientation, Anglo Orientation, and Marginal Orientation. This model separated white identity from Hispanic identity as the ends of

the spectrum. While Torres's (1999) work is seminal, it did not help explain the nuances between race, ethnicity, culture, and the environment.

To understand how the environment factored into identity development, Torres, Winston, and Cooper (2003) explored the effects of geographic location and institutional types on identity within the Bicultural Orientation Model. The researchers also looked at stress levels within the Bicultural Orientation Model. The researchers discovered that students who lived in low-Latinx populated states identified more Anglo Oriented compared to the students who lived in high-Latinx populated states (Torres, et al., 2003). The results of the study also suggested no relationships between institutional type and acculturation strategy (Torres, et al., 2003). Lastly, the data showed no relationship between acculturation strategies and stress. This study showed the importance of the environment in identity development for Latinx students which in turn correlated with the study Torres (2003) conducted. In conjunction with racial and ethnic identity development models, acculturation models also investigate the relationship between culture and the environment.

## **Acculturation Models**

### **Evolution of Acculturation**

Park's (1938) model of acculturation as a theoretical model was used to understand how people from differing cultures communicated across difference and negotiated ways to avoid conflict. His framework consisted of three cross-cultural communication stages: contact, accommodation, and assimilation. Park believed that assimilation was inevitable and irreversible (Lamar, 2018; Park, 1938). In addition, Gordon (1964) researched the effect of acculturation on the individual. Gordon stated that acculturation is unilateral and the individual from the visiting

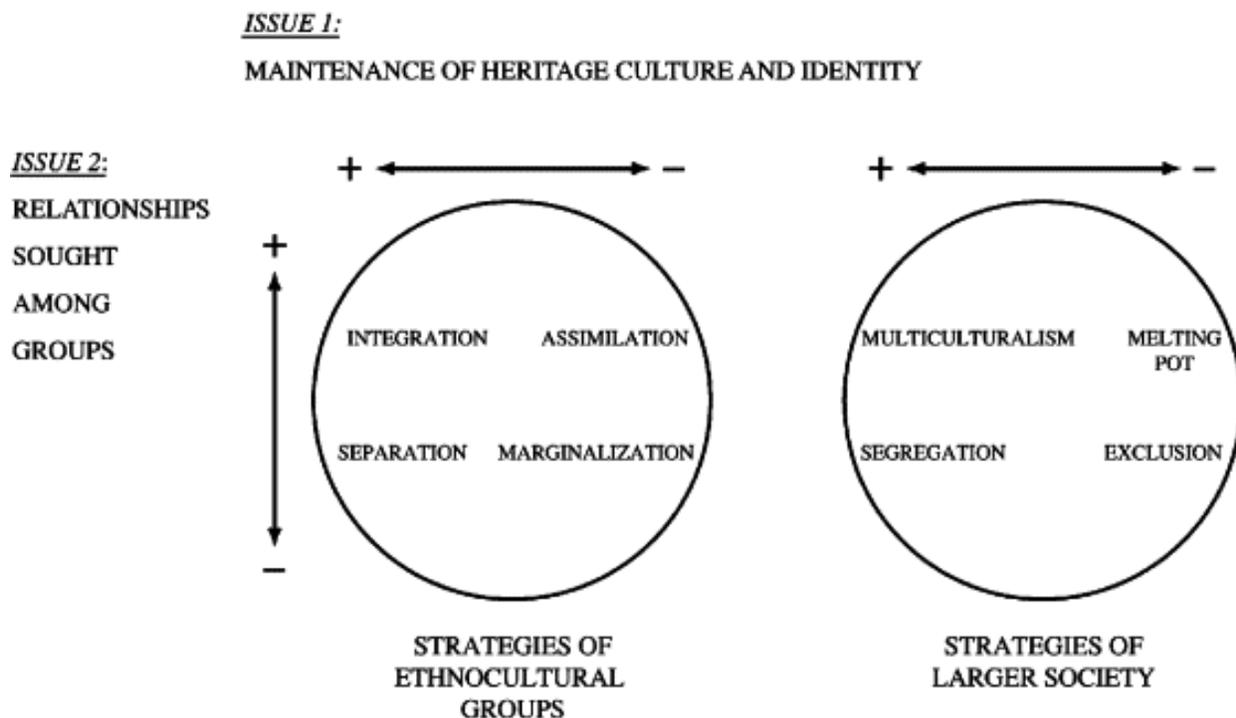
culture will take on the host culture and remove parts of their original culture (Gordon, 1964). Therefore, Gordon agreed with Park that assimilation was the only way for two cultures to live in the same space (Gordon, 1964). However, many researchers challenged that notion and began to explore how individuals move through acculturation strategies. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) researched the impact of individuals from differing cultures have on each other's cultures to create new cultural patterns for both cultures. They theorized that acculturative change is not instantaneous but rather happens throughout the length of interaction of both cultural groups. Padilla and Pérez (2003) expanded on Redfield et al., (1936) notion of individual acculturation to include the idea that individuals make a conscious decision of what pieces of their culture they are willing to give up and what they want to keep.

### **Relationship between Environment and Culture**

All this previous work on acculturation allowed Berry to research the effects of individuals from culture (a) encountering the established culture (b) (Berry, 1976). Decades later, Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado (1995) created a bilinear model of acculturation. The researchers' model depicted the individual from culture (a) learning about the new culture (b) while still maintaining their original culture. The researchers believed that individuals in culture (a) could move through both cultures simultaneously. Berry's (2005) research around acculturation highlighted the need for accommodations and adaptations between both cultural groups for acculturation to take place. If the acculturation process was not smooth it created conflict and acculturative stress (Berry, 2005). Fuertes and Sedlacek (1990) researched the impact of acculturative stress on Latinx students. Their research showed that Latinx students chose to maintain close ties to their community regardless of the new culture.

While acculturation focused on groups of people, there has also been research on how conflict affects individuals within the groups. Graves (1967) researched the effect of external cultural (b) influence and individual (culture a) participation in the external culture (culture b) and created the concept of psychological acculturation. Psychological acculturation varies between all members of the group and is directly tied to their participation or lack thereof in the acculturation process (Berry, 2005). This process, “requires sampling a population and studying individuals who are variably involved in the process of acculturation” (Berry, 2005 p. 702). Psychological acculturation can be observed through behavioral, psychological, and sociocultural shifts (Berry, 2005). One key observation is acculturative stress which can show up at an individual level created by anxiety, depression, or fear (Berry, 1976).

At the individual level, members of the group typically take on an attitude of self-preservation or participation in other cultures. In Berry’s (2005) work, this is presented as a dichotomous arrow from high to low maintenance of heritage culture and identity (Figure 2). That baseline then is cross-examined with a high to low cross-cultural relationship seeking model. People with high self-preservation and high relationship seeking are in the integration stage (Berry, 2005). The next stage is people with low self-preservation and high relationship seeking are in the assimilation stage (Berry, 2005). Then, people with low self-preservation and low relationship seeking are in the marginalization stage (Berry, 2005). Finally, people with high self-preservation and low relationship seeking are in the separation stage (Berry, 2005). These stages are focused on the non-dominant group and their ability to freely choose their level of involvement with the dominant group (Berry, 2005).

**Figure 2***Acculturation Strategies in Ethno-Cultural Groups and the Larger Society*

*Note.* Berry, J. W. (2005).

While much of the focus in this study is on the individuals within their own communities (culture a), it would be unwise to dismiss the impact of the external socio-cultural environment (culture b). That is why Berry (2005) added an additional dimension to understand the role of culture (b) and its influence on other cultures. This new model also followed the model of individuals. Therefore, societies with a high self-preservation and high relationship seeking are multicultural (Berry, 2005). Societies with low self-preservation and high relationship seeking are a melting pot (Berry, 2005). Next, are societies with low self-preservation and low

relationship seeking which practice exclusion (Berry, 2005). Finally, societies with high self-preservation and low relationship seeking are segregated (Berry, 2005). Therefore, there is a clear relationship between the environment and the individual.

### **Acculturation Models for Racially/Ethnically Diverse Students**

While acculturation models have been used to discuss immigration patterns across countries, it has less commonly been used to understand how multiple cultural groups come together in a system and environment of higher education. Much of the research on students of color center around acculturation strategies and acculturation stress. Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler (1996) researched the relationship between acculturation stress and academic success in Latinx college students. The data showed that acculturation stress was a threat to students' academic success in college. As if college was not already stressful, students of color must not only navigate the institutional environment but also work through acculturation and the stress and trauma associated with it. Therefore, Tsai, Ying, and Lee (2000) researched acculturation models to better understand what type of model helped explain the acculturation process best. Their research stated that bilinear models of acculturation were the best tool to measure acculturation in non-first-generation immigrants because non-first-generation immigrants were already navigating multiple cultures before they arrived at college. Therefore, they already had the tools necessary to be successful in college.

Because of the inherent tie between acculturation and the environment, there are many barriers that students face which make direct impacts for their future. In a study conducted by Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017), Latinx students were more likely to experience career barriers that were directly linked to low-self efficacy due to acculturation strategies. Therefore, if

students felt negatively about who they are, their culture, language, or beliefs, it would negatively impact their choices about which careers to pursue. Also, Nadermann and Eissenstat (2018) research mirrored the findings of acculturation and career making decisions on Asian American students. This means that students who do not feel accepted by the environment or felt “less-than” due to the climate of the institution, did not envision themselves in positions of power upon graduation.

The institutional climate also can have a direct impact in which acculturation strategy students choose. Alamina, Kim, Walker and Sisson (2017) researched how students’ behaviors and values aligned with different acculturation strategies. They found that these behaviors and values were subject to change regarding the perceived racism each student experienced. Therefore, a student can come to college with an acculturation strategy whose behaviors and values are positive and healthy and after experiencing racism at the institution can become disillusioned and disinterested in education. This type of macro-environmental stress can be a deterring factor to persistence in college.

Torres (2019) researched how first-generation, deaf, Latinx college students experienced acculturation stress during college. The researcher suggested that institutions must be cognizant of the multiple layers of identities that students bring with them to campus. Also, Lamar’s (2018) work on international graduate student’s acculturation strategies at the University of San Francisco showed that international students were more likely to use assimilation as an acculturative strategy when working within the higher education system. Some of the assimilation strategies included changing accents, clothes, values, and behaviors (Lamar, 2018).

Therefore, there is a continuous thread environmental impact, accessibility, and student's acculturation strategy.

Consequently, the combination of acculturation strategies and institutions of higher education must be explored further. In addition to research on acculturation strategies, this research also seeks to understand how Latinx students use bi-cultural acculturation strategies at a Grow Your Own Program.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Bi-cultural acculturation**

The theoretical framework guiding this study is the Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) bi-cultural acculturation model. The researchers created a quantitative research instrument to assess cultural identity for Latino/a students. This measurement tool was given out in survey format and used a nonprobability sample of 130 Latino/a college students. This instrument was also combined with previous acculturation scales for validity and reliability.

Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) sought to identify a multidimensional construct of cultural identity that assessed bicultural and mono-cultural orientations. This instrument focused specifically on Latino/a cultures to measure cultural identity while using language and behavioral/attitude/value-based indicators. The researchers stated that the previous literature on cultural identity focused solely on acculturation into the “American” society and stated that individuals who were placed in the “assimilated” category functioned the best in society.

Some of the key theorist used in this article were Keefe and Padilla’s (1987) research on Mexican American Ethnic Loyalty. Another theorist that was mentioned was Berry (1980) and the conversations around acculturation used in anthropology, psychology, and sociology. The

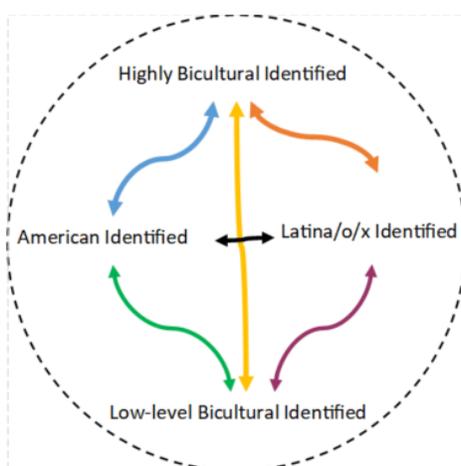
researchers also listed some of the previous measurements of Latino/a identity and how their current measurement added to that research or challenge the research.

The researchers used “several exploratory maximum likelihood factor analyses with oblique factor rotations” (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994, p. 103) to understand the data. The number of factors were chosen based on interpretability of the eigenvalues, high item loadings, and loadings on one factor. Each item was then grouped into scales and tested for reliability.

Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) measurement created four categories: Latino-identified individuals, highly bicultural individuals, American-identified individuals, and low-level bicultural individuals (Figure 3). Each classification was an explanation of how those individuals viewed their bi-cultural or mono-cultural identity and how familiar they were with multiple cultures. These classifications were not made to put people into “boxes” but rather help explain reasoning’s behind some behaviors.

### Figure 3

#### *Bicultural Acculturation Model*



*Note.* Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994).

Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) classifications included,

- **Highly Bicultural Identified Category:** People in this category have a high familiarity with both the American and Latina/o culture. There is also an equal sense of comfort using both English and Spanish. There is also a greater preference of interacting with Latina/o people over Anglo people. People in this category tend to be more politically active when compared to the American Identified Category.
- **Latina/o Identified Category:** People in this category have high familiarity with Latina/o culture and low familiarity with American culture. Also, they are the most comfortable speaking Spanish and least comfortable using English. People in this category prefer interacting with Latina/o people over Anglo people.
- **American Identified Category:** People in this category have a high familiarity with American culture and low familiarity with Latina/o culture. They also prefer English and are the least comfortable speaking Spanish. People in this category prefer interacting with Anglo people more than Latina/o people.
- **Low-level Bicultural Identified Category:** People in this final category have a low familiarity with both American and Latina/o culture. They are uncomfortable speaking Spanish but prefer it to speaking English.

Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) bicultural acculturation categories researched the impact of language, attitude/values, behavior, and familiarity with American and Latina/o culture on Latinx people that did not favor American culture as did Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) research. The cultural markers of the bicultural acculturation categories showed no difference on values

between the groups. Therefore, according to Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) language is not a sole factor in Latinx identity.

The bicultural acculturation scale is also used in this study because it does not “discriminate between individuals who identify strongly with both cultures (or who are able to negotiate easily in two cultures) and individuals who strongly identify with only one culture” (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994, p. 113). This scale is not used to shame individuals for their cultural awareness or knowledge or lack thereof. The bicultural acculturation scale also ensures that individuals who “struggle to retain their cultural identity are the same as the individual who abandoned their culture identity in shame” (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994, p. 114). This scale will not be used to assess the participants’ Latinidad but will be used as a tool to explain the various strategies used by Latinx teacher candidates in their Grow Your Own program.

### **Summary**

Chapter Two comprised of a brief literature review on Grow Your Own programs, models of acculturation, and Latinx student identity development. Grow Your Own programs have been studied to understand the relationship between higher education, local public schools, and urban communities in the United States. Yet, there is little research on the impact of recruitment and retention in the rural Midwest. There have also been many studies on different models of acculturation that help better understand the relationship between acculturation strategy and acculturative stress. Even further, there have been some models of acculturation that look specifically into Latinx identity through a bi-cultural or multi-cultural model. However, the literature has gaps in racial identity development and acculturation strategies. This

study seeks to understand how, when, and why Latinx teacher candidates in a rural Midwest Grow Your Own program, use bi-cultural acculturation strategies.

### Chapter Three - Methodology

In this study, I used *testimonio* as a methodology to better understand how a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies in a rural Midwest Grow Your Own program. In addition to *testimonio* I also used counterstory single case study as a joint methodology. The three research questions driving this study were:

RQ1: How did a Latinx teacher candidate describe their use of bi-cultural acculturation strategies in their Grow Your Own Program?

RQ2: When did a Latinx teacher candidate feel the need to use bi-cultural acculturation strategies to navigate their Grow Your Own Program?

RQ3: Why did a Latinx teacher candidate use bi-cultural acculturation strategies in their Grow Your Own Program?

Using *testimonio* and counterstory, the participant was able to share his stories regarding his bi-cultural acculturation strategies while attending a Grow Your Own program.

#### ***Testimonio***

*Testimonio* as a methodology is used to understand the “emotional force and intellectual depth...of *Latinidad* in the academy, in the community, and in the participants’ lives” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). *Testimonio* is also political with roots in liberatory pedagogy and *conscientización* (Friere, 1968). Liberatory pedagogy explores the intersections of politics, power, and teaching. This pedagogy makes educators responsible for the creation of a just and democratic society through working with their students (Friere, 1968).

In addition, *conscientización* is also known as critical consciousness. The role of *conscientización* is for people to first notice that they are being oppressed by verbalizing the

how, when, where, and by whom (Friere, 1968). Secondly, people can call out the oppression and therefore break the culture of silence surrounding the oppression (Friere, 1968). Third, through their critical consciousness of oppression, people can liberate themselves from the oppression by becoming change agents (Friere, 1968). Therefore, *Latinidad* is viewed as a political identity in which communities demand their voices to be heard especially in areas where they have often been silenced such as immigration, racial disparities, gentrification, access to education, workers' rights, and the over surveillance of bodies.

*Testimonio* began as a tool used in Latin America to provide an artistic means of self-expression, especially in movements of liberation (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Even though *testimonio* has a strong foundation in Latina Feminism, it is inspired by and advanced through the works of other women of color, including Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Marmon Silko (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Though *testimonios* have been used to provide insight into marginalized experiences with political oppression (Delgado Bernal, Flores Carmona, Aleman, Galas, & Garza, 2009), others have used it to help understand how Latinas navigate private and public *conversación* (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Private *conversaciones* of *Latinidad* are shared through *pláticas con comadres*, around *un cafecito*, and with close friends. These *conversaciones* create a space to share frustrations, concerns, joys, celebrations, or a *chisme* (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). The public discourse is different due to the constant censorship of Latinx expression (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The censorship can be done by other people or by the self through internalized racism. One example of public discourse is how researchers have used *testimonios* to document and theorize

college experience of documented and undocumented Chicanas (Perez Huber, 2012). Rivas' (2012) work on Latina's in doctoral programs explored how public discourse around Latina success in the academy is often invisible and consequently created an illusion of non-representation in the academy. Therefore, *testimonios* are used to, "theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity" (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 19).

### **Counterstory**

The second methodology used was counterstory. Counterstory as a methodology has been used to create space for marginalized people to better understand their lived experiences (Delgado, 1989). Counterstory as a methodology dictates that the experiences of the participants are intrinsically different than others due to their socio-political group (Martinez, 2014). Counterstory has its underpinnings in Critical Race Theory because it is initiated to value, empower, and shed light on the experiences of people of color, predominately African Americans (Delgado, 1989; Yosso, 2006). Through using counterstory, I forcibly created space to hear about the lived experiences of a male of color in education. However, with *testimonio* I also simultaneously chose to step back so that space can be absorbed by the participant whose *testimonio* was showcased.

In this study, I explicitly looked at the lived experiences of a Latinx teacher candidate who completed their teaching degree at a predominately white institution. Julius, the participant, was the only non-white student in his cohort as well as being one of few who identified as male. In a teaching profession that is mostly white and female, his counterstory shed light to the issues, barriers, and successes of being a male of color in education. Therefore, it was important to keep *testimonio* as a methodology and enhance it with counterstory. Using counterstory, I was able to

weave together the narrative of Julius's experiences growing up in a bi-cultural environment. Counterstory allowed me to provide the data in a narrative fashion (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) which also aligned with *testimonio*.

## Methods

*Testimonio* is not only a methodology but can also be used as a method (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As a method, *testimonio* is used to “share stories of survival [which] allows for collectivity and a deeper *amistad* and connection between the participant and the researcher” (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 3). Through the collective creation of knowledge, the *testimonio* serves as lived knowledge not based on empirical facts but rather as a form of cultural communal resistance (Brabeck, 2003).

*Testimonio* as a method can be used to collect data through oral storytelling, *pláticas*, confessional narratives, ethnographic work, autobiographical writing, and *novela-testimonios* (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In the study, I used *pláticas* as a method of data collection. *Pláticas* engage the participants in a critical *conversación* about a specific topic; in this case, their experience of using bi-cultural acculturation strategies while attending a Grow Your Own program.

Though *testimonio* is used as a liberation practice, Flores Carmona (2014) critiqued the method as it is used in western research. Flores Carmona stated, “I search the possibilities and explore the contradictions of being “*Malintzin* researchers and how we are replicating oppressive acts, when we translate and edit the voices of participants in educational research” (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 1). She elaborated through discussing the topic of translation from Spanish to English, which is used as a tool in western research to understand the participants' words.

However, through the act of translation, the researcher is in fact providing only “partial truths” (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 2) and in turn removing the participant voices from the *conversación*.

*Malintzin* was a person, became a legend, and now serves as a warning for Latinas. *Malintzin* was an indigenous woman of Mexico who was sold as a slave to the Spanish *conquistadores* in return for peace in the land (Elenes, 2011). During her time as a slave, *Malintzin* learned the Spanish language and became a translator for the Spanish. The Spanish valued her as an asset because she helped them maneuver throughout Mexico and in turn helped them colonize other Indigenous communities. Because of this, the name *Malintzin*, *La Malinche*, *Doña Marina*, was formed into a derogatory word for traitor (Elenes, 2011).

All the information on *Malintzin* comes from second-person data. There are no artifacts that express *Malintzin*'s story from her point of view. “Her own voice is not recorded in any text; her *testimonio* was never written” (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 2). And yet, she is stereotyped as a traitor to her people because she helped translate languages. The *Malintzin* researcher assumes the role of translator, traitor, collector of stories, bridge builder, and advocate from one culture to another.

The title of *Malintzin* researcher, speaks to the conflict of Latina insider/outsider researcher phenomenon. As a cultural chameleon, the researcher must engage in self-reflexive work to stay true to the participants stories. Flores Carmona (2014) goes on to say,

as *mujeres* Chicanas or Latinas, we also participate in our communities playing contradicting roles as educational researchers coming from the academy and as translators and interpreters for our communities. We play the role of writing our people

into academia – of translating them from everyday language to academic discourses (p. 2).

Therefore, when I used *testimonio* as a method, I reflected on my positionality as insider/outsider researcher or a *Malintzin* researcher through journaling. A *Malintzin* researcher is a cultural and ethical lens in which the researcher is in constant self- reflection through memoing about the research (Flores Carmona, 2014). The researcher must navigate the different nuances between the participants, the data, and themselves in relation to power imbalances in the *conversación* (Flores Carmona, 2014). The *Malintzin* researcher understands the caveat of researching marginalized populations to better understand the community and openly and often discusses the ramifications of “othering” effect it can have on the community (Flores Carmona, 2014).

The addition of a single case study is used as a method to best understand how a participant moves, explores, lives, or understand a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this case, I was looking at how a person navigated through the institution using bi-cultural acculturation strategies. In this situation the participant, is a single case found within the bounded context of the specific grow your own teacher preparation program. The combination of *testimonio* to showcase the single case study enhances the cultural congruency found in this research study.

### **Data Collection**

To best understand how a Latinx teacher candidate viewed his culture in relation to his current education environment, I used in-depth *pláticas* to learn more about his experiences at a teacher education program. A *plática* is “an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation”

(Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160). The target population was Latinx teacher candidates who were currently enrolled or had graduated from a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program in the Midwest. For this study, I used in-depth, open-ended, exploratory, face to face, one-hour long *pláticas*. The *pláticas* were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded to find themes. The *pláticas* were used to guide the conversation between myself and the participant. This type of data collection method was solely used to create a relationship with the participant. *Plática*, as a form of data collection, was not used to insert my voice in the data as this would go against the methodologies. Instead, I used the essence of *plática* as described by Guajardo and Guajardo (2013) to best gather rich, thick data.

*Pláticas* as inquiry begins with relationship building (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). The *plática* is not a space to take information but rather a space where participants' stories are honored, celebrated, and shared (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). The reasons behind the in depth, open-ended, and exploratory *pláticas* are that they allowed the participant a space to share their story without the fear of being silenced or critiqued because of their experiences (Rivas, 2012).

*Pláticas* also allowed me to accept all relevant responses to questions, explore uncharted theories, and delve deeply into new topics as they emerged (Schensul, et al., 1999). Although, the *pláticas* were un-structured to allow the participant full access to the space and time, I used a broad *plática* protocol to guide the *conversaciones*. The protocol was divided into three themes: regarding student demographics, regarding student's use of bi-cultural acculturation strategies, and regarding students experience in the Grow Your Own program. During the *pláticas*, I used an audio recorder to record the *conversaciones*, I did not take notes as to not distract from the

intimate *conversación*. However, after each *plática*, I recorded my observations, impressions, and key take-aways from the *conversación* to engage in good trustworthiness strategies.

Another important factor of these *pláticas* was the intentional thoughts regarding ethical research. “Conducting respectful, ethical research guided by our cultural knowledge can lead us to an in-depth understanding of our communities, especially when we reflect upon how to present the information and knowledge we gain from the participants in our research” (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 2). Because the design of the interview as a *plática* was conversational, I ensured that the stories being shared were reflected in the most culturally appropriate lens from the participants’ point of view, not mine as the researcher. *Pláticas* are “performed in a language we understood, through an expressive cultural form that felt natural, and in a way that was respectful and affirming” (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 162).

I, as a *Malintzin* researcher, negotiated with the participant of what was translated, shared, and transcribed. To engage in liberation work, the participants had ownership over their stories. First, after each *plática*, I shared the observation notes and transcription notes with the participant. Therefore, the participant was able to edit, omit, or add to their stories after the initial *pláticas*. This required a prolonged engagement, *amistad*, with the participant. Also, after analyzing all transcripts and creating themes, the participant was involved in member checks. This granted the participant control over the findings section. The ethical decision made was to ensure trustworthiness with the participant by only writing down the stories the participant wanted to be told and in the manner that they want it to be shared. As a *Malintzin* researcher, I acted as a conduit for their stories, not the narrator of their lives.

### ***Testimonio Protocol***

The participant was asked questions regarding three major themes. The themes in the protocol were written to learn more about the participant life, use of bi-cultural acculturation strategies, and experience in the Grow Your Own program. The themes allowed the researcher to broaden the types of questions asked to engage in an open-ended interview process. Due to the nature of *testimonio*, I did not have structured interview questions. Rather, the themes served as parameters to outline and guide me throughout the interview. The questions were emergent upon my observations and what naturally unfolded through the *pláticas*. The prompts are some of questions that were asked throughout the *pláticas*.

- Theme 1: Information regarding student's demographics, culture, views on education and why they chose the teaching profession. (Participants will be asked to bring a photograph or artifact that represents their culture.)
  - Why did you choose this photo and what does it represent for you?
  - Tell me more about yourself?
  - Your childhood?
  - Your K-12 experience?
  - Your college experiences?
  - How did your social identities play a role in your life and your culture?
  - How would you describe your culture growing up?
  - What role does culture play in your life today?
- Theme 2: Information regarding the student's use of bi-cultural acculturation strategies.
  - How has being involved in this program affected you personally?

- Such as...
  - communication patterns during class
  - the clothes you wear
  - the language you use
  - the way you take up space
- How is the program culturally congruent with the way you were raised?
- How is the program culturally different with the way you were raised?
- How have you had to change to successfully move through the program?
- Theme 3: Information asking the participant to describe the cohort, program, activities, or assignments in the program to better understand the environment.
  - Walk me through a typical week in this program.
  - How would you describe the culture of the program?
  - Do you share a similar culture with your faculty members?
  - Do you share a similar culture with your cohort?
  - Do you share a similar culture with your clinical site students?
  - How do you create friendships in the cohort?

### **Participant**

The participant of this research was a Latinx teacher candidate who graduated from a Grow Your Own program. For the audio recorded interviews, I used purposeful recruitment to best understand the experiences of the Latinx teacher candidate in the program. Purposeful recruitment involves selecting participants that are knowledgeable about the topic and are experienced with the topic (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, for this study, the participant must have

had experience with a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program and must have identified as Latinx. This participant was a graduate of a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program.

Since my focus was on one specific Grow Your Own Program, the participant was recruited through word of mouth and email. I asked the program director to send out a recruitment email on my behalf to all students and graduates of the program. I only had one participant who responded to the inquiry email and fit the demographics. Therefore, the focus of the research changed to a single narrative case study to best understand how this participant experienced their Grow Your Own program. I met and spoke with the participant a total of four times, via zoom, for a duration of one to two hours per *plática*.

### **Research Study Site**

For this study, I focused on one specific Grow Your Own program. The Grow Your Own Program is a completion program that prepares teacher candidates to receive a license in Elementary K-6 Education. A completion program provides 60 credits of content in Elementary Education to students who have obtained a minimum of 60 credits at another higher education institution. The completion program grants students a bachelor's degree as well as recommends them for license.

The Grow Your Own program is in a rural town in the Midwest. The program began in the early 2000s as a reaction to the rapid increase of Latinx migrant workers and African immigrants. The rise in population led to a quickly expanding early childhood and elementary aged students which left the community in need of licensed teachers. In the years to come, the K-6 school's racial and ethnic demographics began to change drastically.

In the research site, about 77% of elementary aged students are Latinx. This classifies the school as in the top 10% of racially and ethnically diverse elementary schools in the state. With more and more children of color attending school, administration began seeking ways to become culturally responsive to their community needs. The elementary school partnering with the local community college and the four-year institution joined forces to meet the needs of the students and families. It was decided that the community needed to have a home-grown teacher preparation. Therefore, graduates from the program would be more likely to be employed in the district. The Midwest regional based master's comprehensive university would graduate and license K-6 educators in the community. This was also in response to the growing diversity in their K-12 system as the students matriculated into high school.

Today, the program consists of predominantly teacher candidates who are from the community and about 25% of each cohort is made up of students of color, primarily Latinx. This percentage exceeds the statistic of a nationwide 18% teacher candidates of color (NCES, 2019). The community is a large support system for the program. An independent corporation has awarded any high school graduating senior a full scholarship if they attend the local community college for two years. Therefore, the students who are attending the Grow Your Own program only must pay two years of college. This makes obtaining a college degree more financially viable for all families.

**Program Description.** The Grow Your Own program is a completion program for students who already have an Associate of Arts degree or a previous baccalaureate degree. Students must apply first to the university and once admitted, apply for the Grow Your Own program during Spring admission and begin taking courses the following Fall. The program is

run as a cohort model to be completed after four “full-time” semesters including student teaching.

The Grow Your Own program curriculum is set up into four themes/semesters. Each theme/semester, students take four to five three credit courses to fulfill graduation and license requirements. The themes are S.T.E.M in elementary classroom, Ethnographers of language in elementary classrooms, Global studies in elementary classroom, and Action research in elementary classrooms. The faculty are all professors at the university. The program takes place in an elementary school with classes Monday through Friday from 8:00 am – 12:00pm. Each semester, students have a three-credit course of clinical practice in where they are placed with different instructors.

### **Analysis**

Data analysis in *testimonio* research begins with transcription of the *pláticas*. I used a recording and transcription app to type up all the verbal information that was audio recorded during the *pláticas*. In addition, I then went back through the auto-transcription to check for accuracy. I used Chicana feminist epistemologies as a lens for data analysis (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Feminism can be used to uphold and enhance the voices of the unheard, regardless of gender. That is why, Chicana feminist epistemologies posits that the participant’s voice during analysis is crucial to the true nature of *testimonio*. Therefore, not only was the participant empowered to share his *testimonio*, but he was also equally free to analyze his *testimonio* for context and accuracy as to enhance the final product (Delgado Bernal, 1998). First, I reviewed the transcripts. After reading each transcript multiple times, I began by coding large sections of the data and separating by themes from each of the four *pláticas*. Second, after all the transcripts

were thematically organized, I began to weave the participant's *testimonios* into a chronological order of lived experiences. After organizing the data into a chronological order, I went through the data again to select the stories which best highlighted the participants experiences with bi-cultural acculturation strategies. After selecting the stories, mixing the textiles of his experiences, and creating a tapestry of his life I shared a copy of the data with the participant for review and revision. The participant did not have anything to add and did not engage in data analysis.

The data showed up in Spanish, English, and both languages through Spanglish. I transcribed the data as it appeared and did not translate the words from one language to another. hooks (1994) stated, "to heal the splitting of mind and body, we marginalized and oppressed people attempt to recover ourselves and our experiences in language" (p. 175). Therefore, to translate Spanish into English for the readability and access to the oppressor would be in conflict and betrayal of the participants. Hooks continued, the power of speech is not simply that it enables resistance to white supremacy, but that it also forges a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies – different ways of thinking and knowing that were crucial to creating a counter-hegemonic worldview (1994, p. 171).

The methodology of *testimonios* is rooted in counter-narrative work (Latina Feminist Group, 2001) and therefore it is staying within the bounds of the methodology to not translate languages. Rather, if necessary, I will interpret the meaning of the *testimonio* so that others can understand the participants stories. In doing so, I am aware that I am engaging in colonizing practices against the participants but for the enjoyment of the reader.

## **Credibility**

To ensure credibility, I used member checks, research positionality, rich thick description, and peer debriefing. Member checks allowed the participant to control the data that was shared. This method of credibility falls in line with the method of *testimonios*. The second form of credibility was research positionality, which allowed me to be constantly reflecting on how my personal views and identities were guiding the study. Through positionality, was able to explain my “biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249).

The third form of credibility is a rich and thick description (Geertz, 1973). Through the findings, I used rich thick description when sharing the participant’s lived experiences. I also included data from the *pláticas* as evidence for the argument. The last form of credibility was peer-debriefing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer-debriefing is the strategy of constructively discussing and analyzing the study with peers within the field of higher education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this strategy, I worked with colleagues to expand and critique the process of the study, the findings, and the discussion sections to ensure a reliable study.

## **Research Positionality/Reflection**

Through this study, I viewed the research through the lens of borderland-mestizaje feminism (BMF) (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). Borderland-mestizaje feminism is a multi-lens perspective of consciousness which seeks to bring light to marginalized voices and (de)center privileged voices (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). BMF is influenced by Anzáldua’s (1987) book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which the author “birthed *la conciencia de la mestiza*” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008, p. 256). Thus, BMF challenges the notions of dominance through the patriarchy,

white supremacy, and capitalism and instead centers Chicana lives and experiences. Through this research, I used BMF to expand the literature of acculturation, teacher preparation programs, and Latinx identity by stretching the theories to fit the participants' lived experience. This way, the participant was fully and accurately represented when he shares his stories.

To begin, my multi-lens view is that of a 1.5 generation Mexican cisgender, heterosexual, woman whose education has taken place at predominantly white institutions. Some of the borderlands I straddle are that of a 1.5 generation immigrant. Being born in another country but being naturalized in the U.S. places me in the borders between immigrant and non-immigrant. Compared to immigrants who are undocumented, residents, green card holders, or work visa holders, I have an immense amount of privilege. However, due to my brown skin, my immigration status is always questioned by others. Another borderland is being a cisgender woman of color living and working within the academy. My education provides credentials necessary to open locked doors, and in addition my gender identity and my race are social identities that allow me to enter sacred spaces in certain communities of color. Through BMF, I wanted to create a space where the participant, a graduated Latino teacher candidate, could share his *testimonio* of bicultural acculturation strategies used to survive, navigate, and overcome obstacles and barriers placed before him.

### **Human Subject Approval**

After the successful defense of my proposal, I submitted the study to the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board. I submitted all materials including the IRB form, informed consent form, participant demographic survey, recruitment letter, and interview protocol. Once the IRB was approved, I continued with data collection. I was approved on

March 6<sup>th</sup>, when the COVID pandemic had just hit the U.S. with full force. After two months of unsuccessful participant recruitment, I submitted a revision to the IRB to include a monetary gift for participants. Another 2 months passed, and I only had one participant. Therefore, I submitted a second revision to the IRB, this time to expand my search to all grow your own programs in the U.S. including a change in recruitment materials to include social media. Again, 2 months passed, and I had not received new participants. Therefore, with the guidance of my chair I modified my research methods, re-proposed my plan to the committee, amended my IRB once again. With the modification of the methods and methodology to do a single case study counter narrative, I was successful in collecting the data necessary to complete the project.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three provided a summary of the methodologies used in this study. The methodologies were *testimonio* and counter narrative to best understand how a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies at their Grow Your Own program. This chapter outlined the methods used, design, participant information, analysis, and credibility statement.

## Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to better understand how a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation strategies (Félix-Ortiz, et al., 1994) to navigate his Grow Your Own teacher preparation program. I sought to answer three research questions: how did a Latinx teacher candidate use bi-cultural acculturation strategies when navigating their Grow Your Own program, when did a Latinx teacher candidate use bi-cultural acculturation strategies when navigating their Grow Your Own program, and why did the Latinx teacher candidate use bi-cultural acculturation strategies when navigating their Grow Your Own program? Using *testimonio* and counternarrative case study methodology I was able to learn more about Julius throughout the *pláticas*.

I used *pláticas* as a data collection method wherein I had four conversations with the participant under the pseudonym Julius. The *pláticas* were done over zoom and were audio recorded and later transcribed. Through these *pláticas*, I learned a lot about Julius, and he shared many stories from his childhood, growing up, and his current life which helped me to better understand his experiences while attending the Grow Your Own program.

Through the *pláticas* and then later in the analysis of the findings I discovered that there was more to the participant's stories that lived outside of the Grow Your Own program and that those stories had a significant impact and tie to how the participant experienced their Grow Your Own Program. Therefore, I decided to organize this chapter in a chronological order of the participant's life. The stories shared are his experiences in education, dealing with racism, and different segments of experiencing bi-cultural acculturation strategy shifts. The data presented in this chapter were re-constructed from the four *pláticas* and stitched together to create a tapestry

of his life. The stories are shared verbatim from the participant without any alteration or additive statement from myself, the researcher. The data have purposefully not been altered as to stay true to the methodology and to honor the participant as researcher. This section is broken up into three main themes: growing up, attending the Grow Your Own program, and life as a current educator.

## **Growing Up**

### **The trailer court, my home**

I went to school in a little town of 2000 people in Minnesota. In my, like, demographic survey, I state that I was born in Texas. Obviously, I don't sound like I'm from Texas because I've lived here in Minnesota. My dad was born in Mexico and my mom was born in Los Altos, so we've been here long enough that I've lost any semblance of an accent. But that doesn't take away the fact that at home I spoke 100% Spanish with my mom and with my dad I spoke Spanglish and 99% of the rest of the people I interacted with were Midwest, like, people.

So, I grew up in a trailer court, and that little, tiny town, and 100% of the trailer court was nonwhite, pretty much all Mexicans. I didn't realize what it was when it was happening, I didn't realize what it was until I was older. So, what had happened to the trailer court. My family was the last one living in the trailer court because they - they took all the trailers away and all the families left the town and seeing all the families that I grew up with, move - move away from the town, never to return and seeing their homes demolished. Having everyone around me gone, and their homes destroyed, so that they could make townhomes for the white people. They gentrified the trailer court that I grew up in, so that little white town that I grew up in all the minorities, lived in the trailer court, like 100% of them. And they were all gone after they gentrified it.

They made townhomes that none of the Mexicans could afford, including my own family so we all kind of sort of got screwed.

So, looking at, that situation that I experienced, I didn't realize the - the level of impact that that had on kind of my - my own cultural identity and my kind of sense of security. The fact that I, as a fourth grader, thought it was just kind of normal, what was happening to see all my childhood friends, moving, and seeing their homes, being taken down by heavy equipment. It just really - really opened my eyes to see how these sorts of issues are given the green light from the top down. 30 plus families, 30 plus homes leveled. And all those families displaced. Not even one of them could afford to live in the townhomes that they built. I thought nothing of it. I thought, Oh, yeah, we're just moving to a new town. I didn't realize what had happened or why it happened. But the fact that that sort of situation can take place. Well, you can look at it two ways. You can look at it like, Hey, we're building new housing, or you can look at it like, Hey, we got rid of all the Mexicans. And I guess there's a little bit of truth in both perspectives. And it wasn't until I was an adult and I learned what gentrification was that I realized that I had an experience of my own.

### **Moving from home to a hostile environment**

So, I was in fifth grade we moved into, like, an even smaller town. We moved from the trailer court to a village of 100 people. We went from a community that had more of a - a subdued kind of prejudiced viewpoint to an openly racist viewpoint. For less than \$13,000, my parents paid for our house, and they purchased it from the only other minorities in town which was a Mexican grandma and grandpa, and they live next door to the house that they had sold us. So that was an experience that I had. I went from somewhere where I was surrounded by people

that were like me, people that spoke the same language that I spoke, ate the same foods that I ate, people that I had known and built relationships with, family friends, to an - an openly hostile environment where I wasn't welcome by anyone, where I knew nobody, where people treated me differently because of the way I looked, color of my skin, or whatever.

In the small new town, I felt like I was seeking validation from people that I didn't necessarily care about. Which was odd because from kindergarten until fifth grade I was always around people like me because everybody looked like me. But at school, I was around, everybody else, white people. So, when my home was gentrified, I continued to go to the white school while living in an even more closed minded, more prejudice, more racist community. It was, at times it felt like I was struggling to find my identity.

So that was where I really started to see how prejudice and how racist people can be. It didn't explain to me why, but how it can make somebody feel and how that mindset can almost be contagious. Where I found people that were almost like emboldened to use racist comments when they saw other people doing it, too. Because we were a new family in town, and I guess there's a sense of novelty with that. And yeah, it was tough growing up there and it was just a place that I couldn't wait to leave. And the town was in the middle of nowhere. We had a bar, and we had a post office and that was it. There was no gas station. I was 10 years old with no license, no car. So, I was trapped. And that was where I spent a lot of my childhood, a lot of my upbringing was around there. So obviously, one could buttheads and choose to not see eye-to-eye on things, but you want to belong, no matter where you are. I mean, a kid wants friends, a kid wants to hang out with people. I mean, it is not as if I could get on my bicycle and pedal 20 miles to my old town. So, I got used to it, I got used to just being around prejudice, being around

racism to different degrees. So, I kind of developed thick skin. And it almost became normal for me to just be around racism. I thought that people are racist, everybody is a little bit racist, because that's how they are here in this town and it was just kind of an experience that really stuck with me.

I think that having had that experience in a small town and then a smaller, more prejudiced town made me more resilient. But at the same time, it was kind of a strange feeling to never feel like I truly belonged, and college finally allowed me to see beyond the confines of little rural white majority communities. It just kind of helped shape my - my experience.

### **Who am I?**

There was a moment, a couple moments, where I kind of questioned who I was or who I should be, or how I should feel about who I am. And there's, I guess, a couple of reasons for that. The first reason was, going to a small-town school where everyone is white, I guess, the - the percentage of diversity and I mean, nonwhite students at my school was less than 5%. And that's - that's a pretty - pretty liberal estimate. I was always around white people. And white people at my school didn't always accept anyone that wasn't white. So, I learned to assimilate, I learned to - to blend in, to not stand out in ways that we're gonna make people not want to give me a chance. Basically, I had to prove that I wasn't one of the bad Mexicans or whatever - whatever preconceived notions people would have about Latino people.

So, it was always kind of, it was always like, I would hear like, oh, you're Mexican, or Oh, you don't sound Mexican. There's kind of a state of mind that - that, you gotta fit in, you got to assimilate to belong. So, at that point, I started to become a teenager and I'm living in this, really small - small, prejudiced town. My dad, at home, has always been a Spanish speaker. I

mean, he was born in Mexico, it's his native language, and I had always spoken Spanish with him. And during that - that challenging time as a teenager I, in my rebelliousness, I stopped speaking Spanish to my dad, I started speaking only English to him because I'm almost embarrassed to be different, embarrassed that I wasn't white, that I spoke Spanish with – with my dad instead of English with him. So, it was kind of a weird stage of being a teenager where I kind of felt like I didn't want to be who I was because of the place where I was at and had never been around any culturally comparable situations like the trailer court that I grew up in where everybody was a Latino and spoke Spanish. So, I had to be like - like everybody else. I had to know how to not ruffle feathers, how to speak their language. And I got out of that, it wasn't until I was in college that I was working at a Mexican restaurant and trying to use Spanish and I realized, Oh, crap, all this rebelling and not speaking Spanish to my dad has made me lose my second language. And I felt stupid after that because it was pointless. I mean, at the time, it felt right, I felt I was doing what I needed to do. But the impact that it had. I didn't anticipate I had no use for speaking Spanish. In a small, white community, it was not an asset at the time. And it wasn't until I needed it, that there was utility for it, that - that I realized it was missing.

Once I was out of the little town and around people of other ethnicities in college, I started to feel more comfortable, more confident. I became a little bit more open minded, because back then I thought, it's all about having the latest Abercrombie jeans or the Hollister cologne or whatever the white norm was. I was never around people that look like me outside from home. All my family is in Texas, Mexico, really far away, not here. Here it's just me, my parents, my brothers, and my sister and now my 10 nieces and nephews, but I didn't know who I was. I knew I wanted to belong.

I'd always been good at assimilating. I've always been good at being kind of, like, a shapeshifter, kind of a chameleon, I could get along with anybody because I had to, because to not wall myself off from possible connections and positive friendships I accepted everybody. And I think that's also been to my benefit as well because I still to this day. Everybody's got something to offer, everybody's got something that they're bringing to the table and I think otherwise you're just limiting yourself in the possible interactions or insights that you can gain from other people who maybe experience things differently than you have.

### **Teachers as Authorities but Value in Education, Always**

Growing up, I was always expected to do what was expected of me by my teachers. My parents always kind of deferred to them as the authorities. I was always kind of expected to abide by the rules, even though that did not always happen. They let me know that the teachers are the ones with the final say in the classroom. They had a belief that teachers are there to steer me in the right direction, and that they know what's best. So, in situations where there were behavioral concerns, and my parents would have to talk to the teacher, my mom was generally thinking that the teacher was probably telling the truth, and that there was some substance behind the concern.

But aside from that, my parents always did see a value in education. They encouraged me to want to have educational goals, and as a kid, I would say, I want to be this, or I want to be that, and they were always encouraging. I mean, more so my mom because she was more of the vocal one. But my dad was never the type to shoot down any of my hopes and dreams and my mom was the type that was actually encouraging anything that - that I felt like pursuing, whether it be education or otherwise. So, she had a really optimistic outlook and was very encouraging

for me pursuing the things that I felt passionate about, including education. So, it was more of a supportive mindset that they kind of brought to it, in addition to having that - that level of trust in the educators themselves to make the right calls when needed.

Neither of my parents graduated high school. My dad, the way he described it to me is that they didn't go to the 12th grade, and then graduated like we do here in the United States. But he did the obligatory amount of education and then started working full time. My mom, she had a pretty rough childhood, not the most consistent in terms of being stable, with a home and being safe and home, and she moved around a lot and was never at the same school long enough to really establish herself or kind of feel welcome. So, she made it to eighth grade, and she was done.

So, when I was in third grade my dad was naturalized. So, he became an American citizen and did the test, and we went up to the cities and there was a ceremony and everything. So, I kind of saw that as a first kind of example, I guess a leading by example. By showing that, hey, I had to work hard for something, and I got something to show for it. And then my mom also went back for her GED. I don't know what prompted it, but I just remember seeing a newspaper headline saying local grandmother achieves GED or something along those lines, because that was around the time that my first nephew had been born. I've got 10 nieces and nephews. As I've seen my nieces and nephews grow up, I've seen them multiply. And as many as I've got now, I see now more than ever that we live in a society where to be viable financially you need to be able to open certain doors. And that barrier between making a livable wage and living paycheck to paycheck is what degree do you have.

I'm trying to really lead by example by showing my nieces and nephews that they can do it. Because once you have done it's really a matter of sticking with what your passion is. But most importantly not being afraid to - to discover that. And I guess I just want to just show them that - that there's more out there than just a factory that you're going to work in until you can no longer work with no means of retiring with never taking a vacation.

There's kind of a, an ingrained mindset that certain Latinos have, that we don't do that, it's not what we do, we don't do this or that, or we can't afford this, or we can't afford that. Or we don't go to this school and the example that I try to - to demonstrate to my younger family members is that any barrier can be broken. And some are meant to be broken.

So that mindset where I am leading by example didn't really take hold until my oldest nephew, who's now going to be 25, started to grow up more and started to kind of share his thoughts with me and I started seeing him make some of the same mistakes that I made. And that's when I kind of started taking it more seriously and said I got to show these kids what's up. Just because I mean, it's one thing to have somebody tell you something, but if somebody is living what they speak, it's a whole nother type of effect, it just resonates more. I just, want to show them that there's hope for them, just as much as there is for anybody else that comes from a different culture from a different socio-economic background. Just don't sell yourself short.

### **Grow Your Own Program**

#### **Teaching Wasn't my Plan A**

Teaching wasn't my plan A. Plan A was derailed due to not having financial means to pay for school and again for not having financial means to pay for school, and for the third time, a traumatic event with a roommate. So FAFSA has an EFC, estimated family contribution. My

one-income family where my dad was the sole breadwinner is what was used for my FAFSA application. And my estimated family contribution was something like \$13,000 so they came to the conclusion that my parents were able to give me (money) for education. That was not possible, it didn't happen. So, I was accepted three times to (the first university) and the first time my financial aid fell through, the second time something happened, and they dropped me. And this was after I was there having meetings with my advisors and getting my courses lined up and scheduled and everything and I was dropped. And then the third time I finally moved to (the first university) this was after finishing my associate degree.

I graduated high school with a 1.89 GPA. My counselor told me that I couldn't do the medical stuff that I wanted to do because “realistically, with your grades, I just don't think that's a possibility”. So, I ended up going to a community college. I got in because I didn't take the ACT and had no intention of taking the ACT. I didn't have good enough grades to go to a university. So, I worked really hard and was on the Dean's list every semester there and then I was okay and prepared to go for my bachelor's as I had planned to go to (the first university). So, I finished the community college and then things happened.

I was living with a friend that I grew up with since kindergarten and he also had that same counselor from high school. She told him that the only thing that he would have a chance to be successful in was the armed services. So, he joined the Marines. This was 2006 when we graduated so this is the height of the Iraq war. So, he went to the Marines and did two tours over there had a bunch of really traumatic things happen. His job was, like, explosive ordinance disposal. So, he was defusing the roadside bombs and IEDs and what-not. And he had to kill

people. He had to see people that he worked with get killed and had several concussions from the IEDs blowing up and him being near the blast. So pretty severe physical and mental trauma.

Well, he had always been my good friend. So, we reconnected, and the time was right and we both wanted to go to school to make something of ourselves because that's what you do. So, we moved in together and he started having kind of flashbacks where he started to think that he was overseas and think that he was in Afghanistan and Iraq. And there was one time where he began like choking one of our girlfriends and then launched a fire extinguisher out the porch window into the street and took the microwave and chucked it across the living room and then he tried fighting me and of course the cops came. He had some charges and basically, I called my mom that night and I said I've got to move home, like, stuffs bad and, like, it's not gonna work living here.

So, the next day my mom came, and we loaded up everything that we could. Like, I had my stuff, like, I moved my whole life, like, I basically quit. I had moved everything there and moved all my stuff to go to school for exercise sports science and fitness as a pre-physical therapy major. That had been the plan the whole time and it was finally happening but then boom, drop of a hat, plans over, move back to Minnesota. And now I'm back in Minnesota with no job, not in school, with a friend who is probably in jail, like, that was bad. So, I'm, like, hopeless at this point, like, what am I going to do? Like, I literally have nothing, like, no direction no job, no means of income.

### **Journey to Para-Professional Work**

So, my brother who had the first kid his wife was working as a success coach at a school. And a success coach is an advocate for students and families. So, when there's a language

barrier, for instance, she can come in and translate but also find out what are the needs of the family. Say, oh, you need this we're going to take you down to the county whatever office to get you signed up for this service or that service. Basically, just like an advocate that kind of goes beyond what is normally provided by somebody in schools. So, she told me about a position that was being posted for a computer lab para-professional and it would be between two elementary schools. I had just tried to pick up a couple jobs since I had no school and my sister was asking for half rent, half utilities, and half groceries. So, I had to somehow find a way to make money. So, I'm like working at Applebee's and I started working for a startup grant at the college for a Parent Center and then at the same time I got offered the job for the computer lab para. So, I went from no job to three jobs.

Obviously, I quit the Applebee's job. I had no idea if I was going to be, like, good at it. I was walking into the interview and like there's like these little, tiny kids and I'm like, what am I doing here and, but I ended up enjoying it. And I was good at it. And that was my start in education, and it was a steppingstone, but things moved really fast after that.

So, yeah, I started first doing just para work. I came back and I was working at an elementary school, actually, two elementary schools, and I was split between them both doing paraprofessional work. I was in the computer lab, helping when the kids came to the computer lab. I was assisting them and really had no experience working with - with young kids. I went in just completely having no idea what to expect.

Like, I almost walked out of the interview when I walked into the building and went into the bathroom and the bathrooms, like, had the little urinals. They're like, below my knee height and I'm just, like, I just felt so out of place, but the interview went really well. I got the job. And

then I basically started taking on more responsibilities throughout the school district and just really found out that it's something that I'm good at. So, then, I started teaching in an after-school program doing enrichment classes. Then, in my second year I took over directing the after-school program. So, that involved going out in the community and finding different community members that were willing to come in and offer something that's engaging to the students. I was like, way in over my head but actually just crushed it, like, we had over 50% of kids in the school sign up for enrichment classes and this was voluntary. So, I was teaching beatboxing class and I was teaching origami and I was teaching Computer Club and doing my para work at the same time too. So, it was a really enlightening experience and something that I had no idea was even possible for me. I just kind of made the best of the situation. And then that kind of led me down the path to get into the first cohort of a program that was offered in partnership with the public school and (the teacher preparation program).

### **Grow Your Own Program**

It was a long time in the making. It was my fourth or fifth year with the district when the program started. Unfortunately, being that it was a program that was in its infancy several of the students dropped out. Others basically took any teaching position that was offered after completion of the program. Namely, six individuals who were working in the school district and they would take ESL positions with no training, no previous indication that they wanted to be ESL teachers. There were no K-6 classroom teacher positions available, so this was kind of what was left. And those teachers were just put into those roles. Now why do I take issue with that? Well yes there's a teacher shortage and you need to fill the position but, in my opinion,, students deserve somebody whose expertise is to bridge the gap, because the gap is there. If the gap were

not there, they would not be English learners. So, to put somebody with - with a lack of training with the lack of expertise in this position just seemed like a really short-sighted decision on the side of school.

### **The Cohort had a Lack of Professionalism**

During the program itself I was most stricken by the lack of professionalism some of the teacher (candidates) demonstrated. Wearing shirts with swear words on them into our elementary school or smoking outside of school and coming back into our evening classes. Snapping at students, like finger snapping, and just complete lack of professional etiquette. It was really kind of disheartening to me to see that behavior from some, not all, but some of the candidates in the program because it just kind of cheapened the feeling of being a licensed teacher.

And I don't know if it was the fact that I had, that I was fortunate to have, four plus years of working in education. Prior to starting my bachelor's education, I don't know if that was something that set me up for being able to navigate the education system, but it was just shocking to see the sort of attitudes that some of the teacher candidates were demonstrating. It almost felt, truth be told, like high school again. The level of cliques and gossiping, it was brutal.

And it was especially carved out for myself because I had had previous professional relationships with the professors. So, when the professors came in and I knew them that irked my classmates. I was now somebody that they needed to compete with. Somebody that was seen as, as some sort of threat. I mean, I think, some really did feel like a threat to them or their

potential of getting a job even though I had no intention of applying for any jobs in that district because I felt I had already spent enough time in the community.

So, they were just, they were cruel. They were cruel and the way that teenagers and high school teenagers in middle school can be. So, to be working in this professional capacity for so long and things to be going swimmingly to now being basically in this kind of backstabbing culture. It was, it was tough. It was really tough. It was probably one of the biggest challenges I had to overcome was this adversity from my colleagues.

### **I was Expected to Drop Everything I'm Doing**

So, I was working IT for the district and I knew how to fix things. And when I was in the program, I was there with the intention of training to become a teacher. There would be little technology things that would pop up that anybody would be able to navigate but it became the expectation that any sort of technology or technological question I was just expected to just drop everything I'm doing and go and save the day. And initially I was fine with doing that, however, it made people more reliant on me for solving simple problems. That's not fun. So, when I started kind of pushing back on it, no I'm not going to plug in that mouse, that's not my job, people started to think that, oh, yeah, he thinks he's too good to help. When I literally have been the only one that's been helping for a year and a half.

### **Cohort Cliques**

I also made the mistake of saying yes to a date with a girl that asked me out from the program. I kind of knew the possible outcomes and one possible outcome was that things don't work out. Well things did not work out so, now, suddenly, I was ostracized. Like people took sides. That was in the second year. So even though I continued with a professional demeanor, I

was cordial with her, we were fine with each other, but other people felt that they now needed to pick sides or treat me poorly. So that that was just another part of it.

And I think the fact that I was a guy who spoke his mind. Like, I've always been open to a change in my views, changing my perspective, changing my opinion based off new information. If I feel a certain way, I'll express myself and if you feel a different way, you're welcome to express yourself. I've always been open to discussion, collaboration and I think it's a societal kind of feeling but some people think that a discussion or a disagreement automatically assumes confrontation or assumes an argumentative mindset. Most people were very kind of protective of their ideals and anytime somebody would express something that was a little contrary or different from their point of view they kind of took it as a personal attack on them.

So basically, at the end, like basically the whole last semester, I showed up. I just showed up and I just did my work. I kept all my thoughts to myself and I participated only to the degree which I was expected to. I wasn't just slopping off. I knew when to express my opinions or I would do the reading, or I would do the work. Not to sound arrogant, but I would know what I was taught. When I shared in class that got to certain people that didn't do the reading or didn't do the work that – that my preparedness made them come off as unprepared. So, it was just to the point where - where anytime I would say something a couple of groups would just kind of have a sort of attitude and in an environment that the basis is to educate, to have so many people against it. The interactions with the people that I was around just felt very artificial and it just it killed my - my desire to be inquisitive, my desire to engage in any meaningful discourse, because these people didn't want to. They just wanted to get through the program they wanted to get their - their job and they wanted to start working. I just, I had to change the approach to

learning that I had to come in with and basically just - just take it. Take it as it was given without any questions or any feedback or get the scrutinizing eyes of my fellow teacher candidates. So that was one of the unfortunate changes that I had, as an individual, to do to get through that program.

They say that you won't always remember what someone said but you'll always remember how they made you feel. I think that's true. I remember more of the negative experiences I had in education than the positive points. There were only a few good teachers that I had but those teachers, they really did make an impact and they did inspire me and shape my practice. As an educator, I definitely know what a collectivistic sort of attack on an individual can do to their sense of self-worth. When you think about what's going to cause somebody to not want to come to school, what's going to cause somebody to not want to come to work, to quit their job, drop out of school and if you have a group of people that are in a combined effort trying to make your life harder, they're trying to cause harm to you. I don't know, I just felt ridiculous. I graduated. I was one of two people in our cohort that applied for the graduate induction program and I completed that and got a job. And I was the first one in the graduate cohort that also, despite what everybody might have hoped for, succeeded and that's what I set out to do.

### **Life as an Educator:**

#### **Importance of Representation**

Now, in my gap year during our first back-to-school event, I sat down, and I was ready to take in all this information. Like this bright eyed first year teacher who was ready to go. And then, this person walks on the stage who looks like my dad. And I'm thinking, this guy's not

welding. This guy is not, he doesn't have grease on his shirt, this this guy doesn't look tired. The guy could have been my uncle, or my dad and I almost started crying because I had never - never and at the time I was like 29, never in my life had I seen somebody that I could identify with, in a position that is not a factory worker or a line worker or an undocumented laborer. Never in my life had I seen that and here's the leader of the third largest school district in the state. And he looks like someone I could be related to. It was the most powerful experience I had had in terms of cultural identity because it was at that moment that I felt like I do belong here. And if me, an almost 30-year-old at that moment in time, could feel that powerful of an impact I can only imagine what seeing somebody that you can identify with be the leader of the classroom and be your teacher to have somebody that you can look up to. I had never had a Mexican teacher let alone no teacher, well I recall having had one African teacher, but aside from that, white, white male, white female. I mean, there's a huge representation of white women in education. I'm not, nothing against women at all it's just so largely represented. The fact is that there are so many other ethnicities so many other cultural groups that have no representation no voice in the conversation. And it starts with, it starts with the image.

Looking ahead 100% absolutely yes, I would encourage them (teachers of color) to, even a little bit of inclination that they may be interested in career in education, reach out to somebody that they know. Maybe a teacher that they're close with and ask about putting them in contact with a teacher for an observation just to figure out if it's something that they want to do. Because if it is then you can get the ball rolling, so to speak, on making it happen. It doesn't happen overnight. It's a decision that you have to, I guess, have had some time to think through. Just

know that what you're doing as an educator (of color) matter. Just by being a teacher of color you being there in the classroom matters so much.

### **Philosophy and Values of Education**

Don't be afraid to fail. So, my identity as a Latino male first generation college student has given me a lens to identify the struggles that my students are experiencing and what might be preventing them from being successful in the long term. Ultimately, a success for me as an educator is creating that spark in a student today. That's really what it comes down to is being able to find what is holding them back, or I should say, and what is going to drive them forward to reach the level of success that they need. I firmly believe that today 2020 everybody needs at least a high school diploma. If we're looking at financial viability that's really one of the things that I'm most passionate about. Creating a change as in the rate of graduation for non-white students.

I shared last year with my fifth graders the rates of graduation based on demographics (at their school). All I did was I shared the graph with them, and they started asking their own questions, like, why is it this low for these people? How come these people are not dropping out. And they had their own questions, and they had their own ideas for solutions. But it was eye opening for them. So, when we put it in the context of out of this many people this many of you would not graduate but if you were born to a different type of family this many of you would graduate. And you can't change who you were born to you can't change where you were born or how much money your family has but you can hold a vision. And that's just going to be something that - that I want to help them see is the value in sticking with education.

The fact is that it won't be easy but there are people that believe in you there are people that will help you get there, and you don't have to do it alone. And that you're going to make some mistakes along the way and that's okay because as long as you're learning from your mistakes and as long as you don't give up and lose sight of your vision you will get there. And the numbers don't lie. I don't think anybody sets out wanting to drop out of school. But often there are circumstances that impact the future outcomes of students and engagement in school is so diverse.

The school (I teach at) is everything my school was not. But at the same time, it really feels like the trailer court that I grew up in and now being a Spanish immersion teacher I'm able to see these little kids that I grew up with who are on track. And if I can make school fun for them if I can give them the encouragement and build up their self-esteem, I can find what makes them curious what makes them want to learn more then I'll do it. And ultimately, it's about their long-term viability because nobody wants to struggle now or later. And by putting in the legwork now you're gonna make the future a lot less of a struggle. And just so much more meaningful with so much more room to grow and not having to worry about, oh, what am I going to eat? Are we going to have enough money to pay the bills but instead worrying about where am I going to send my kids to college or where are we gonna go on vacation, for fun, because we have the means to do that?

My current values regarding education are, I know it's kind of a buzzword, but equity. And I guess what I mean by equity is equal access to all opportunities. We had a conversation yesterday during our Spanish immersion team meeting that there was a perception in the community that to get into the Spanish immersion program you must know somebody you have

to have a connection. And one of the big discrepancies that we have with the haves versus the have nots is access to information. If I don't know the program exists how would I ever apply for it? How would I ever get in? If I don't know where to look for it? How am I gonna begin to even try to access an application for this special program? That's just one example of many. So, the equity in terms of finding a means to get the opportunities to all families I'm big on that.

### **Being a Teacher**

So, right now my position is as a third grade Spanish Immersion teacher. And I'm one of two teachers at that grade level. This position aligns with having a chance for students to be exposed to multiculturalism and particularly through immersion through using the language in a way that they may or may not at home. Having a blend of native and non-native speakers that really allows people from all every different level of exposure to the language to really - really get the most out of the program. And I just really like that aspect of the program and I was never aware of such programs prior to my career. So, to be able to teach there in that program and to be using a language that I have been speaking with my family at home with friends outside of school using that in school is something that really lends a lot of value.

For me, it means a lot. I mean, we - we know who the underserved population is more often than not, it tends to be people of color students who are minorities whether it be socio-economic or if their ethnic minorities. It means a lot to me to be able to be a positive force in their lives through education. These particular students need to be served through a good education and me being in the position where I'm able to have such a positive impact on these group of kids and this school is the place where it can happen and is a reflection of the community as a whole in terms of the demographics.

And it's just it's just really nice to be able to work at this type of school to really sort of serve a purpose to fill a need that is really - really there. So yeah, we are affecting outcomes for the future. And then it's some could say it's just teaching but it's just making a positive impact and hoping that that turns into positive choices that are gonna help them be successful for the future.

Like on the first day of school the kids say, ah, why do I have to sit by certain people. And I told them, don't ever say that again, like, I don't ever want to hear you say that again. You understand me and I said you're not sitting by your friends right now. Like, he doesn't get to say mean things. If you allow these thoughts to govern your actions, it's just a slippery slope. So, if I just let it go then the idea is going to be there in his mind as if they are second (class) people. I had to explain to him why everybody's just as worthy of time as any other person just because they're not your best friend doesn't mean that you need to speak to them disrespectfully.

So, I really made it a point to solve conflicts as they come up my class and that was in the school that already has many behavior referrals. And my classroom had one of the lowest amounts of behavioral referrals because I would problem solve them there. Like, we've made so much growth social emotional that I feel like without them having that consistency in our classroom they would act like every other middle schooler.

A lot of the teachers that had worked with these kids that said that this particular group of kids is the most challenging group that they've ever encountered, and this is coming from veteran teachers. So, the fact that they haven't ran me into the ground I guess is, a testament. The ability to stick through the tough times. I mean, I won't lie I won't say it's been easy at all my school it's

known for having very high rates of teacher turnovers. And coincidentally enough this is the first year that that has not been the case because we've got new leadership.

Typically, over 50% of our staff is new every year. So, you can imagine what that lack of consistency does for student behavior and what have you. And this particular school that I landed at just happens to be the school in when I was in my master's program. We had teachers from (the district) that were kind of preparing us for the different buildings that we might be assigned to. And this particular school came with a, like a disclaimer. And there was one of one of my fellow residents she was a para at that building and she's giving stories of what do you do when kids are destroying the classroom and like literally destroying everything and hitting everyone and breaking stuff and they we're all like panicking like just fingers crossed I hope I don't end up with that school and lo and behold I ended up there and I'm going into my fourth-year next year. Some days are more challenging than others but the fact that I'm able to work in this school and feel successful is more than enough to keep me coming back.

We also have the most diversity. Well, we're in the top of the most diverse schools in (the district). Our school has the highest number of ESL students in the district and the connections that I've made with these kids are, I mean, it's what I live for. Like these kids, like, they look up to me, like I'm their dad or like, their brother and I'm honored to have that - that impact on them. And the reason that I went into education the reason that I teach with the passion that I do and the reason that I'm pushing the message that I am it's because I want these kids to say I can do this. I don't have to end up in jail I don't have to end up at a minimum wage job for the rest of my life I can go to college I can have a plan and I can achieve it.

I would love to have all my students of color show some interest in being educators but obviously you can't push somebody to be a professional and choose a career in something that isn't their passion. But regardless of if I help them find their passion then I think that's been a success. And I think a big part of that is having more equitable representation of teachers of color in the classroom, and even not just in the classroom but in the buildings as well. And I want to do something about that.

I also today I applied for racial equity advocate. It's a two-year cohort focusing on issues of equity in education. So yeah, I just signed up for that because, I mean, I've always had beliefs that the playing field is not level not even close. But now I see as a professional group that are working to address that and I think that's awesome. I mean, I've been looking to find a vehicle to be able to take some action and this is it. And to be involved in something greater is going to be a really cool experience.

The values I have as a teacher, as I said earlier, is to really focus on the future. And I guess what I mean specifically by that is to graduate high school that's one of my ultimate goals for all students is to see them earn a diploma because of the huge value in obtaining one in terms of giving them financial viability. And not only that but just to have a sense of achievement. So, I just really believe in creating an intrinsic value for education for all students and to do everything I can to move them towards their high school diploma and towards creating that drive and that understanding of why they deserve a high school diploma. I've personally believed in the deep importance and seeing the societal value for higher education. But I just now really see that that's something that's gonna be a huge - huge asset to students in terms of being successful in the future.

### **Reflecting on Grow Your Own Program**

I'm happy to have been a part of it. If it hadn't been for that program coming (to town) I wouldn't have been able to earn my teacher licensure. And it was in my first year working for the district that I was made aware of the program. So, I was really fortunate that they did come to my district. It was the first of its kind and it's still going strong. I'm not sure what their numbers are this year but it's - it's an opportunity to earn a teacher licensure in the district through the university. So, I'm happy that I was able to be a part of it. Though there were awesome learning opportunities for everybody involved I think they've taken everything into consideration and continued to make adaptations to the program. And now the program advisor who took over has been a huge force for building the program. Especially trying to actively recruit outside of just word of mouth and having predominantly white women and men participating in the program. She advocated for people from outside of her own community to be a part of the program and ultimately have educators that are, as I was saying earlier, are a reflection of the demographics of the communities that they serve. So, I think that was really an opportunity to do that as well. If you have people that are in a community like mine which is highly diverse there's more likelihood that teachers of color would be a part of this program to join the education field.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

This chapter had three major segments to the narrative: early childhood, Grow Your Own Program, and life after graduation. Within each segment, I pulled together conversations of connectedness, experiences with racism, feeling like an insider/outsider, and resilience. In the first segment of early childhood, Julius shared his experience of gentrification. He took us

through the journey of forced migration through the eyes of a third-grade boy. He experienced that disconnection in identity which occurred when his family and himself moved to a white rural town. I also saw the beginning shift from one culture to a creation of a bi-cultural acculturation model.

In the second segment, Grow Your Own Program, Julius shared his journey of obtaining a bachelor's degree and his teaching license. This journey included transferring to different institutions, experiencing loss and disconnection with his intended major, dropping out and feeling hopeless, experiencing joy in his work, and his experiences at the Grow Your Own program. In this segment, I also was able to see shifts in bi-cultural acculturation strategies as well as how, when, and why, Julius chose to engage in different strategies.

In the last segment, life after graduation, Julius was optimistic about his career in education. He shared stories about how he sought to inspire other marginalized children to care about their education, how he valued representation in the classroom, and lastly, how he moved to continue his equity focus on education. Again, I noted the different strategies used to navigate the new terrain of being an educator of color.

Overall, the conclusions of the data suggest that people's life experiences have a direct correlation to how, when, and why they choose to engage in bi-cultural acculturation strategies. It was because of this long, extended, use of *testimonio* that Julius was able to share all these stories. These stories gave us, the readers, a deeper view into bi-cultural acculturation strategies and how they are used to navigate many institutions of education in the United States.

**Summary**

Chapter four revealed an in-depth view of Julius's *testimonio*. In this chapter, the participant's transcript and data was organized in a chronological form from early adolescents to life today. Each story was carefully curated as they individually gave perspective to a person's life but were stitched together to create a beautiful tapestry of Julius's lived experiences using bi-cultural acculturation strategies while navigating early life, the Grow Your Own Program, and their current work in academia.

## Chapter Five: Discussion & Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine how, when, and why a Latinx teacher candidate used bi-cultural acculturation (Félix-Ortiz et al., 1994) strategies while attending a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program. Overall, in this study, I connected the importance of previous lived experiences which helped explain and serve as a springboard to better understand Julius's experiences using bi-cultural acculturation strategies during his Grow Your Own program as well as in his current job as an educator.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed literature that explained the progress and differences between different models of acculturation. There was also an explanation of Grow Your Own teacher preparation programs and how those differed from traditional teacher preparation programs. Lastly, I discussed the different models of Latinx identity development found in the United States. The literature review was used to shape and focus the study.

In Chapter Three, I explained the methodology, research design, recruitment tools, instrument of data collection, and analysis used to collect data. This chapter explained *testimonio* as a methodology and method of collecting data. The method of collecting data was through *pláticas* and *conversaciones*. In addition, I used counterstory single case study in the research design. Counterstory was used as a methodology in conjunction to *testimonio* to deepen the intensity of the experiences of the participant. Single case study was used as a method to understand how this participant experienced their time at the Grow Your Own teacher preparation program.

Chapter Four showcased the data in a chronological and narrative format. The three main sections were stories of growing up, attending the Grow Your Own program, and life as an

educator. Within these large narrative themes of marginalization, otherness, connectedness, and resiliency were stitched throughout the chapter.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter Four was broken up into three main narratives of growing up, attending the Grow Your Own Program, and life as a current educator. Each of these themes were in narrative format to stay in line with the methodology of the participant being the creator and narrator of his own lived experiences. As the researcher, I found the stories told in the first narrative as crucial and defining moments in which we witness bi-cultural acculturation strategies emerging in Julius's life. We see how moving from different cultures as a young person affects someone's thoughts and perceptions of themselves, in this case, negatively. In the same breath, we can see how those negative experiences allowed the participant to grow emotionally, become resilient, and were used to create new ways of navigating his bi-cultural lived experiences.

In the second narrative of attending the Grow Your Own program, we saw trends that followed the literature review. The participant also began at a community college and had difficulty transferring to a four-year institution. Due to financial difficulties and poor advising the participant was not successful in the first round of attending a university. This is where we can see the importance of Grow Your Own programs by creating academic spaces where programs and institutions are able to increase the diversity of educators in the United States. Because Julius's first experience with university was turbulent the option of the Grow Your Own, in addition to the support found with faculty and staff, created a perfect situation in which he could succeed academically. However, he also shared stories of where he had to continue to flex his bi-cultural acculturation strategies to succeed in the program.

The last narrative discussed how Julius was currently experiencing the academic field as a professional. It is clear, through the stories shared, that representation of diverse educators and people in the education field played an important and crucial role in both identity development and positive association with education. Julius shared stories of feeling represented because the superintendent looked “like his uncle” and feeling that his socio-political identities created a positive representation for children of color and more specifically boys of color in his classroom. In addition, Julius shared stories of how he sub-consciously taught his students different strategies of bi-cultural acculturation for them to be successful in their future, which includes graduating high school.

Chapter four was created to share Julius’s stories and life in a narrative and chronological format. The format of chapter four was done intentionally to shape the intricate, messy, and difficult experiences that he went through. Even though some of the stories shared were sad, there was a lot to learn both for those who share his identities and especially for those who do not share his identities.

## **Discussion**

In the first section of Julius’s life, we learned about his life growing up in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood. Abruptly in fifth grade, his family moved from that community to a small town in where they were ethnically and racially the minority. The departure from home a) to home b) caused a shift in his self-perception. Even though both locations were in the same state of Minnesota they provided different experiences for Julius. It is in this section where I saw the beginning of the bi-cultural acculturation framework described by Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994). While living at the trailer court, Julius would fit in the Latino

Identified Category. This is because of the mono ethnic, Latinx, environment in where he grew up. This environment provided ample opportunities to be around Latinx, and more specifically Mexican children, adults, culture, and language.

When Julius and his family moved to the small white town, he began to feel different and not accepted for who he was. He said, “I went from somewhere where I was surrounded by people that were like me...to an openly hostile environment where I wasn't welcome by anyone.” In this section, I noted that Julius observed the difference in cultures. Looking at this through Berry’s (2005) work on acculturation and maintenance of heritage, culture, and identity I noted that Julius felt marginalized by the community and the community used the strategy of segregation when dealing with him and his family. Julius feeling segregated and different from his community made him feel less than and ashamed of his culture and heritage.

Growing up in that environment he felt trapped, got used to being around racism, and felt like he never belonged, which created a sense of difference with being Mexican. He stated, “I was always around white people. And white people at my school didn't always accept anyone that wasn't white. So, I learned to assimilate.” In this section, I noted a shift to the American Identified Category in Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) bi-cultural acculturation model. Julius preferred to speak English instead of Spanish and preferred to interact with Anglo people instead of Latinx people. Julius clearly stated that he assimilated to blend in. This is a clear strategy used to survive in the culture he was living in. Racism is and was used to dominate, oppress, and extinguish non-white language, cultures, values, and traditions. Julius, as a teenager, choose to assimilate (Berry, 2005) as a form of self-preservation, as a form of resiliency because of the strategies used by the larger society remained segregated (Berry, 2005).

While following Julius's *testimonio*, he shared a story of how he began his journey in higher education. He began at a community college after his high school guidance counselor told him he would not make it at a four-year institution. In the review of literature, I explored how Latinx students choose to attend a community college due to cost (Fernández & Martinez, 2004) or to transfer (Tovar, 2015). However, the success rates of transfer are low (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016) due to institutional support (Harris, 2017), transfer experiences (Amos, 2010; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Solórzano, et al., 2000), faculty and staff support ((Pham, 2018), and financial issues (Tovar, 2015). He attended the community college nearby to earn a high enough GPA to be accepted into his dream university. He succeeded in his goal and was enrolled. However, those plans changed quickly due to issues with his roommate and not feeling safe at that institution. He moved back home with no plan, no job, and feeling hopeless. Luckily, he acquired a job at an elementary school as an IT tech, another job at a restaurant, and a third job at the Parent Center.

His job at the elementary school propelled him to move into a para-professional role which allowed him to spend more time at the school and working with children. This is where his passion for teaching began and where he explored the possibility of teaching as a profession. It was in that experience where he learned about the Grow Your Own teacher preparation program.

It is in these stories where I noticed a shift in his perception and the strategies used to navigate the different cultures. Even though he was the only person of color in the cohort and the cohort was comprised of mostly women, Julius experienced a lot of isolating moments which required self-sacrifice in order to continue on his path towards education. Using Berry's (2005)

acculturation strategies, he showed signs of integration into this new environment. Because the town where he worked was more multicultural in nature, Julius was able to maintain his cultural identity while simultaneously building relationships among other groups. During this stage in life, we saw the beginning of the shift to Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) Highly Bicultural Identified Category. In this category, people are comfortable using both languages and have high familiarity with both the American and Latinx culture. This was made possible because of the shift in location. This new town was more multicultural which allowed Julius to shift strategies from acculturation to integration (Berry, 2005). I also believe that his previous experiences coupled with his new community provided him with a different outlook in life which contributed to his success in his Grow Your Own program.

Julius shared many stories of his experiences during the Grow Your Own program. Some of the experiences were very positive. Due to his work at the schools, he felt very connected with his professors who also worked at those schools. Research states that connection and having connections are key to the success of Latinx students in higher education (Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2017). Another positive experience was with the clinical experiences he had during the program. Again, there was a trend of feeling connected to the cooperating teachers which made this experience more enjoyable for him (Milner & Howard, 2013). Both positive experiences have a clear connection with feeling accepted and respected both as a professional and a person (Solórzano, et al., 2000).

However, there were some negative experiences during the program which forced him to shift the bi-cultural acculturation strategies. All those negative experiences had to do with his academic cohort of classmates which ties to the literature which examines the importance of the

campus culture and retention (Solórzano, et al., 2000). First, he shared a story of how unprofessional some of his classmates came to class or to the elementary schools. The lack of professionalism he said cheapened the experience for him. The lack of professionalism then went into how the cohort became “like high school again” with cliques and gossiping. The participant felt targeted because some classmates did not like the fact that he had different professional relationships with the faculty than they did. He also felt targeted because of his IT skills. He felt used by his classmates and that he wasn’t allowed to be a student but had to also be an IT tech for them. All the petty arguments and disagreements left him feeling isolated in the class which is also found in the research that states that student belonging or feeling accepted in class has a direct tie to engagement (Gómez, et al., 2008). He ended up closing and participating less and less in the classroom (Gómez, et al., 2008). He said, “The interactions with the people that I was around just felt very artificial and it just it killed my, my desire to be inquisitive, my desire to engage in any meaningful discourse.” Julius’s strategies of bi-cultural acculturation were directly tied to the environment and the people or community where he was located. Even though he was in the same multicultural town, with professors who respected him, and in a diverse school, the power of having a white monoracial class negatively affected his experiences in the program. Through the stories shared, I could see how the micro-climate affected him negatively (Amos, 2010). It was almost as if when he was in class, he decided to use Berry’s (2005) separation strategy of acculturation since the class cohort was engaging in exclusionary strategies.

As we moved through the *pláticas*, we arrived at the now. It was clear, that Julius valued education and representation of identities in the classroom. He shared a story of seeing the

superintendent for the first time and how that experience was so powerful for him. Which is an experience he hopes his students have when they have a teacher who has similar identities as them. He expanded on the importance of having more teachers of color in the field of education and more specifically, for non-white students to feel comfortable in their own culture in white dominated institutions (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Clearly, this is something he did not have growing up.

He also talked about how his philosophy and values of education have changed and are the driving force behind his passion for teaching. He said his motto is, “don’t be afraid to fail” which is connected to his goal of ensuring all his students go forward to receive their high school diploma. Even though his license is only K-6, Julius is instilling and demonstrating different types of strategies of being successful and overcoming challenges to his students. He really is pushing for equity in education. Not only in resource allocation but also ensuring that all the students in his classroom feel safe, accepted, and valued. His focus as a teacher is on the future so that his students are set up for success regardless of what life throws at them.

Overall, the findings revealed how bi-cultural acculturation strategies are used to navigate obstacles. Julius perfectly demonstrated how these strategies begin as young as elementary school and how they evolve and shift as different situations arise. The findings showcased the importance of connectedness as a tool used to create harmony and balance between different cultures. Overall, the findings demonstrated that no single bi-cultural acculturation strategy is “best.” Rather, the findings showed how resilient Julius was and how his “shape-shifting” abilities allowed him to overcome challenges and obstacles that were presented to him due to the clash of cultures.

## **Limitations**

There were some limitations encountered in the study. To begin, because of the narrow scope of the project being Latinx teacher candidates enrolled or graduated from a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program, the participant pool was limited to 10 possible participants. Then, the geographical and racial demographics of Minnesota proved to be a limitation. Minnesota is a white state with most people of color living in the Twin Cities region. The geographical location of the Grow Your Own program was at a rural town not near the cities. Also, I began recruitment in March 2019, and with the widespread global pandemic of Covid-19, the process of participant recruitment was challenging. Potential participants did not respond to inquiries for participation for over six months. I tried reaching out to the pool of participants every other week and through different forms of communication. With no response, I applied and was approved for two different IRB revisions. The first revision was an expansion of the pool to include all Grow Your Own programs in the United States and to use social media as a recruitment tool. The second IRB revision that was approved was to use monetary incentive to award and thank the participants for their time and energy, still the response was non-existent. Therefore, I had to change and expand the methodology and method of the study to account for the single participant I had available. Because I had one participant, I decided that the best action step was to do a counternarrative single case study focusing on the participant and the program as a bound case. The last limitation was transferability of data and findings to other institutions and Grow Your Own programs. Due to the nature of a counternarrative single case study design, the findings were more specific and bound to a case, yet still there is much to learn.

### **Implications for Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was Félix-Ortiz, et al., (1994) theory on bi-cultural acculturation strategies. Even though this theory is over 25 years old, it was the most appropriate for the study. The theory focused on explaining different areas of bi-cultural-ness which describes the experience of people choosing a cultural perspective, either temporarily or permanently. The theory did not prioritize a cultural area over another nor make assumptions regarding people in those areas. Due to the non-judgmental tone of the theory, it made the most sense to use for this study.

This is especially important because it is congruent with the current study's methodology of *testimonio* and counterstory. This study can be used to further expand the conceptual framework by the means of qualitative research. The current study showcased the versatility of these bi-cultural acculturation strategies and how they were used strategically by Julius rather than the strategies being imposed on him. The current study expands on the research of bi-cultural acculturation strategies and helps to further the theory. Julius showcased how bi-cultural acculturation strategies can be "turned on and off" in a matter of seconds depending on the situation. This can be connected to the theory of code switching which began in the African American community (Du Bois, 1968). Code switching allows for people to use different words, tones, sounds, language, expression, dress, posture, etc., to navigate environments as a form of self-preservation. Similarly, Julius used bi-cultural acculturation strategies to navigate his Grow Your Own program and his current profession. Lastly, this theory allows for the multi-ethnic and multi-racial experiences of Latinx educators to shine through the black / white binary. Using

this theory, researchers can allow Latinx educators to shape their own narrative and explain their stories through their own words.

### **Implications for Practice**

With such a vast need for teachers of color in the United States, institutions that wish to increase and retain their population of students of color must understand the importance of connection. Creating Grow Your Own programs which focus on recruitment of teacher candidates of color have a responsibility of ensuring retention and overall success in the field of education. It is unethical to only care about recruiting teachers of color and not care about how those teacher candidates experience their education. One of the ways to ensure that teacher candidates of color feel supported in their education is through connection building strategies. This finding is important because it is split into connection to faculty and staff, connection to classmates, and connection to curriculum and field experience. The practice of engaging in connecting building strategies demonstrates to students of color that they are cared for, valued, and respected, as members of the larger academic society. Connection through relationship building helps teacher candidates of color build trust with the institution. The connections built will help with retention and graduation of teacher candidates of color because students feel more comfortable in the classroom.

The first area of connection is to faculty and staff who work in teacher preparation programs, specifically Grow Your Own programs. Teacher candidates spend the most time with faculty in their Grow Your Own program. Grow Your Own programs were created to challenge the notions of white supremacy in education. One area to consider is the racial and ethnic representation of the faculty and staff in the program. In addition, all faculty must have a strong

understanding of working with racial and ethnic K-12 students as well as teacher candidates with a lean towards cultural responsive teaching.

Therefore, the first recommendation for faculty and staff is to engage in authentic and constant conversations with all their students, but more specifically their students of color. This means getting to know your students more in-depth than you would at a traditional teacher preparation program. Using a theory such as Funds of Knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) can aid in the process of meaningful relationship building. While the theory was created for K-12 learners, all the strategies and implications can be used toward adult learners.

The second area of connection is that to fellow classmates. As we learned from the Julius's stories, a lot of the disconnect both growing up and in the Grow Your Own program were due to fellow classmates creating non-welcoming and at times hostile environments. Creating a culture of acceptance and anti-bullying lies on the faculty. Even though teacher candidates attending Grow Your Own programs are all adults who are responsible for their own actions, it is still the responsibility of the faculty member to ensure that all students feel safe in their classroom. Therefore, the second recommendation would be to create a classroom of acceptance and mutual respect for all the learners to be successful. Using a book such as *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Hammond (2015) can provide faculty with a wide range of strategies to use in the classroom. In addition, faculty should take note of the new PELSB unit rules in 2022 which will add culturally responsive pedagogy as a teacher candidate dispositions. This will mean analyzing the teacher candidates to ensure that the program graduates teachers who are culturally responsive and will not cause harm to folks of color in education.

The third and last area of connection is that to the curriculum and in part the field experiences. Grow Your Own programs differ from traditional teacher preparation programs because of the location, student demographics, and curriculum. It is then crucial for the curriculum to match the experiences of the students in the program. This means including racially and ethnically relevant teaching pedagogies, teaching extensively about different types of learners, and immersing students in field experiences in where they can connect with their communities. The third recommendation would be for Grow Your Own programs to take an assessment of their community, program, and students. Once that assessment is complete the program needs to evaluate if their current curriculum is meeting the needs to the community and if their students are prepared to meet the needs of the community. If not, the program should evaluate and make changes where needed to ensure that their teacher candidates will be successful in the field of education.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The implication for future research would be to collect more data from other participants. The research can be expanded to include all teachers of color who have attended a Grow Your Own program. While this study focused on Latinx identified educators of color, there is still a lot to learn about how educators of color experienced their teacher preparation programs especially while using methodologies such as *testimonio* and counternarrative case study. Due to the high demand of educators of color, it is crucial to best understand how people are navigating their institutions of higher education. Especially since in most states, obtaining a bachelor's degree is the only way of getting a teacher license. Through the research methodology of

*testimonio* and counterstory, we can learn a lot about how educators of color are experiencing their education at institutions of higher learning.

Another implication for future research would be to continue using the bi-cultural acculturation strategies model. This study showcased how this model goes beyond a point in time and can be used as a research tool to better understand the lifelong impacts of certain experiences. This model is also beneficial in helping understand why, when, and how a person responds to situations and how those responses, or strategies, shed light into cultural differences.

### **Summary**

Chapter five provided a summary of the analysis, discussion, conclusion, limitations, and implications for research, practice, and theory. I discussed the need of connection and relationship building as key components to both students feeling connected to the program but also to faculty and staff being able to retain teacher candidates of color in their programs. The overall findings of this study imply that for teachers of color to succeed and become licensed educators, they need to feel valued, accepted, and respected in their teacher preparation programs. Without this simple, yet somehow missed, piece of information teacher preparation programs will always be wondering how and why their teacher candidates are not successful in their programs.

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