

Being born and raised in El Paso, Texas gave me a unique experience of borderland culture which most people are not exposed to. It is a great bicultural upbringing, which blends United States and Mexican culture as one. While these two cultures compliment one another in distinct ways; socially and economically, they also clash and cause serious conflicts within the community. I have grown to know the community and people, and understand the complex nature of a border city and how identity and binationalism are integral to it.

Growing up, my family would often disregard Mexican culture, by speaking to me in English only, and not acknowledging Mexico or its customs. I would get a sense of Mexican culture when moving around the city, or visiting my grandparents or other family members, who still felt a stronger connection to it. My parents assimilated to Anglo-American culture and were doing the same thing to me, although I did not recognize it at the time. I grew up not knowing how to act when it came to identifying my own culture, but also didn't know better. I remember one time, when some of my close friends who did speak Spanish, and had a closer connection to Mexico, called me white. This was one of the first times I started to question my identity and have a conflict within myself as to who I was. I did not feel white, my physical features made me look more Mexican than they did, but for some reason I was being viewed as something that I wasn't. After moving to Central Texas, I felt a need to get closer to my Mexican culture and try and integrate it more into my life, or to look for individuals who cultivate that culture. When I was surrounded by it, I didn't really care too much for it, but once I moved, I felt the need to get more of it. I now realize how important my Mexican identity is and how growing up in a binational community has helped to foster that.

The El Paso - Juarez region is the largest bilingual and binational workforce in the western hemisphere. Having grown up in this type of community, I feel it is extremely important to study identity and binationalism, so that society can fully grasp how these communities work and praise all that they have to offer. I also believe that once the majority of the United States is able to understand these communities, we will see a decrease in the hate and discrimination that is brought upon them. I have lived my life surrounded by binational people. Now that I live in Austin, I feel a need to spread this understanding to my colleagues and friends. Austin is a growing community, it faces a huge influx of people moving in, and it is creating drastic change. People are moving in from all over the country, and from other countries as well. This is making the concept of identity really important here in Austin, because the families moving here, are grappling with their own identity and how they fit into the society they find themselves in.

I moved to Austin in 2012, and three years later received my bachelors degree in History, a subject that I believe is truly important, especially in these times where basic facts are brought into question and lies prevail. We need to work to further develop our narratives, both personal and national, with factual evidence and continue to study and teach history. Before graduating I was able to obtain a teaching certificate in social studies. That same year I went on to get a teaching job at Del Valle High School in Del Valle, Texas. Del Valle High School is a Title 1 school, that has the highest low income, minority, and immigrant demographics in the greater Austin area. I feel blessed that I was able to secure a job working with a community whose population I feel very passionate about. I am able to serve as a role model to these students and help them understand how important their identity is and its role is in American society.

Engaging with these students and hearing their personal experiences has taught me a lot about the struggle of people who cross a border to achieve a better life. My students are oftentimes conflicted in their own identity, they are assimilating while at the same time trying to hold onto their culture from their country of origin. They are not people who lack passion or drive, they want change, they want to be happy and they want progress for this country. The United States is a melting pot and this bleeds into education, which makes it a difficult thing to approach. Education in the United States requires that we learn how to serve every community and culture, with sensitivity and respect. Teachers are grappling with diversity in the classroom and trying to figure out how to reach each student by differentiating their instruction. I feel committed to helping these students reach their full potential and finding success in their goals. I want them to be proud of themselves, and the background they come from. I want to help them accept who they are, and understand that their culture makes them a unique individual, and to always fight and advocate for themselves. I want them to see that they have a lot to contribute to the world and the society they live in. They offer a different perspective than the norm of Anglo-American culture. I am committed to serving this community, and as a Mexican American who has felt conflicted with his own identity in the past, perhaps I can offer my personal experience as a guide for others.

While working at Del Valle High School for the past four years, I have found myself having to collaborate with a multitude of different people, on a variety of different projects. I rely on others to help me reach my goals and they rely on me as well, it is a team effort. I have worked with my social studies team to create and implement lessons for our classes. We tackle issues not only related to students and teaching, but issues facing the school, or tasks we need to

get completed. I like to listen to my colleagues and what they have to say, I take value in everything that is discussed and try to always learn from my peers. Working with others has taught me that I do not know it all, and in order to learn, I must listen. Instead of having self doubt I try to participate and offer my own perspective, because perspective matters. We need to talk and listen to one another if we are ever going to understand each other. I truly believe this is important, especially in regards to the difficult topics we will be discussing in the teacher institute. Because border people can be misunderstood, and misrepresented, we must listen to their narratives and begin adopting them as American narratives.

Through this teacher institute, I was able to build a stronger connection to my roots and contribute my perspective of being from the borderland to others. I gained a better understanding of my culture, and was able to see the bigger picture of border people and binationalism. I learned through this program, ways to transfer my knowledge to my students, who face similar issues related to their identity. I will use the strategies and resources that were shared with me. This program enhanced my teaching by allowing me to better understand the students I am serving. I am able to see their struggle and have a clearer insight into how to better serve them. I will be able to talk about the topic with more confidence, and I will implement ideas of acceptance and resilience, when discussing immigrants and minorities in this country. I will be able to build in my students, a sense of pride in who they are, and compassion and empathy for rest of the immigrant and binational community.