

# Centering Equity in Teacher Education Research Through Pláticas Con Maestras

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## ABSTRACT

The Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership (CANDEL) program is committed to educational equity and supports, amongst others, K-12 schoolteachers, administrators, and teacher educators who are committed to bridging the worlds of theory and practice. As teacher educators, we advocate for those in doctoral programs to consider pláticas as a methodology that positions researchers and educators as equal collaborators, each with a wealth of experience to share. The historical roots as well as the five principles of plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) are considered. We discuss our positionality as Latinas and first-generation college graduates, as researchers and as platicadoras engaged in teacher education research. Furthermore, we provide examples of how each has used pláticas methodology to understand the experiences of teachers. We conclude by providing advice for doctoral students interested in using pláticas in their own research.

## KEYWORDS

*qualitative research methods, Pláticas, teacher research, Latinx, equity*

The Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership (CANDEL) program, through commitment to educational equity and programming that supports working professionals, offers meaningful opportunities for those school leaders dedicated to improving opportunities for our K-higher education students and their families. CANDEL welcomes and supports, amongst others, K-12 schoolteachers, administrators, and teacher educators as they develop as scholar practitioners who bridge the worlds of *thinking* about the classroom and *being* in the classroom. We propose that using pláticas (conversations) as a methodology brings us closer to bridging these two worlds. Through pláticas, we as a program and we as educational researchers acknowledge, value, and build on educators' experiences and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to move our field towards more equitable educational opportunities in service of our communities. By centering equity, we advocate for careful examination of the purpose of research, the issues examined, and the methodologies used to gather, analyze, and report data both in doctoral programs and in the larger educational research community.

Doctor of Education (EdD) programs are most often affiliated with schools of education, and many are offered alongside Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs. As Wergin (2011) and Guthrie (2009) noted, current EdD programs look very different than they did decades ago. Current EdD programs should be understood to include a course of study that has distinct purposes and learning

outcomes from those of PhD programs. Today's programs include dissertations that employ a variety of research methodologies while building on and reflecting EdD students' professional and lived experiences. We need to move away from the narrative that an EdD is a PhD "lite" and instead acknowledge and value the spaces that many EdD programs create within academia to bridge theory and practice. Wergin (2011) proposed that EdD programs need to adhere to the principle that, "Education at all levels has an important emancipating, rather than indoctrinating, function and thus is a powerful tool for social change" (p. 121). The CANDEL program is a prime example of a modern-day program that includes rigorous coursework, builds towards meaningful dissertation work, and above all, approaches the doctoral experience as an emancipating experience that centers equity and further prepares educational leaders to engage in social change. Pláticas can serve as a methodological approach that aligns with the program's values and goals in that the methodology seeks to dismantle traditional views of the researcher as the expert and participants as subjects and rather, positions all involved as social change agents.

In this article, we argue that doctoral students' choices of methodologies are as important as the topics they choose for their dissertations. More specifically, we propose that using pláticas as a qualitative methodology is a culturally responsive and powerful tool for centering equity in teacher education research as we work



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This journal is published by Pitt Open Library Publishing.



This journal is supported by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate: A Knowledge Forum on the EdD (CPED) [cpedinitiative.org](http://cpedinitiative.org)

impacting.pitt.edu  
Vol.9 No.3 (2024)

ISSN 2472-5889 (online)  
DOI 10.5195/ie.2024.443



alongside in pláticas with maestras (teachers). In line with pláticas methodology, we see ourselves working side-by-side with teachers as co-creators of knowledge and as fellow change agents. In addition, we reflect on our own experiences both using pláticas in teacher education research and as platicadoras. As Latina, first-generation college graduates and teacher education researchers, we are deeply committed to anti-colonial methodologies that are too often used to talk *to* teachers instead of talking *with* teachers. Pláticas as a methodology honors teachers' experiences and moves our field away from methodologies centered on simply extracting information. By using pláticas, we center community and engage with teachers about issues that impact them deeply in support of them and our shared professional field.

## PLÁTICAS

Pláticas have been defined as semi-structured, informal conversations, often embedded within the cultural practices of Latino/a/x communities, where knowledge is shared and produced through dialogue (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; González Ybarra, 2018; Preuss & Saavedra, 2014). Pláticas provide dialogic opportunities to learn, teach, and understand who we are in relation to others while recognizing how our experiences are situated within socio-political histories (Chabram-Dernersesian & de la Torre, 2008). Furthermore, pláticas are reciprocal exchanges through dialogues that are grounded in trust. Platicando “becomes the process of drawing on that knowledge and making meaning across experiences” (González Ybarra, 2018, p. 311).

The use of pláticas as a methodology has evolved over the past 45 years. Valle and Mendoza (1978) wrote about the cultural limitations of commonly used interview research methodologies and discussed pláticas as an intimate, friendly, and mutualistic manner to dialogue through conversations. They also identified pláticas as a more culturally responsive methodology for engaging with Latina/o populations. Pláticas as a methodology aligns with the cultural norms or formalities of Latinas/os within the interview process. Furthermore, Valle and Mendoza (1978) described the process of engaging in pláticas as a three-step process. Starting with “la entrada,” (the beginning), there is conversation around how the interviewer and interviewee are connected as well as the process for the plática. There is also conversation to find common ground. Next, the interviewer and interviewee engage in an “amistad interview” (friendship interview) that starts with informal conversation and moves into the main work of the interview where the interviewer attends to both spoken and unspoken conversation. In the final stage of the interview called “la despedida,” (the departure) the conversation may range from discussions about family to home to anything the interviewee may wish to discuss. However, although pláticas were being referred to as a methodology during this time, they were often seen as a precursor or nicety to be done in addition to a more legitimate qualitative interview method (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

It is critical to understand that pláticas methodology is grounded in Chicana/Latina feminist (CLF) epistemology which stems from the Chicana feminist movement of the 1970s (Garcia, 1989). Gloria Anzaldúa was foundational to conceptualizing the Chicana feminist epistemology that centers Chicana and Latina scholars' ways of knowing and the knowledge they bring to the research process (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Instead of approaching the interview process from the perspective of objective outsiders, CLF

acknowledges and recognizes the everyday lives of researchers and participants as strengths (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In 2016, Fierros and Delgado Bernal published a foundational piece, *Vamos a Platicar: The Countour of Pláticas as Chicana/Feminist Methodology*, that situated pláticas as a rich and more fully developed methodology.

Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) outlined five principles that “effectively depicts a plática methodology” (p.109). The first principle is that the research draws upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory, which along with other critical frameworks, centers the experiences of marginalized individuals and acknowledges the impact of inequalities in our society. The second principle states that plática methodology has a “relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge” (p.111). There is respeto (respect) for the platicadores, or participants, as creators and holders of important knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). The third principle is that plática methodology “makes connections between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry” (p. 112). Lived experiences are seen as connecting to the inquiry process and that discussions about educational experiences often overlap with conversations about family, gender, and language. Principle four situates plática methodology as providing a potential space for healing. It is a space in which past harms are acknowledged. The fifth and final principle is that plática methodology “relies on relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity” (p. 114). To create trust, researchers must be willing to also share and the plática allows for talking back and forth. According to Flores and Morales (2021), when researchers use pláticas instead of traditional interviews, they decolonize the Eurocentric methods of research that claim objectivity (Battiste, 2000; Flores & Morales, 2021).

In summary, pláticas as a methodology centers dialogue with the researcher asking questions and engaging with the participants through conversation. Plática methods create a generative data collection approach that allows participants and researchers to be considered collaborative partners in creating knowledge. Pláticas include the lived experiences of both participants and researchers as part of a two-directional research process, allowing them to be open and allow for vulnerability. Pláticas also allow space for healing from past trauma.

## OUR POSITIONALITIES AS RESEARCHERS AND PLATICADORAS

As Latina, first-generation college graduates and teacher education researchers, we are deeply committed to anti-colonial methodologies. As stated before, researchers too often focus on talking *to* teachers instead of talking *with* teachers. We propose that using pláticas as a methodology honors teachers' experiences and moves our field away from the current trend to de-professionalize teachers. We have used pláticas to center equity in our daily work of preparing and supporting teachers as administrators working in teacher education programs and as researchers interested in understanding the lived experiences of teachers, particularly those of Latina/o/é teachers. Our experiences can inform EdD programs that seek to encourage and support the use of pláticas methodology. Through these methodologies, we and others as educational leaders conducting research can center equity in ways that honor the wealth of experience of the educators they work with as well as their own.



Aligned with Fierros and Delgado Bernal's (2016) fifth principle of reciprocity, vulnerability and researcher reflexivity, we begin by sharing our own positionalities that have shaped our research. Our positionalities as Latina educational researchers are important to include here as numerous researchers have argued that the various identities we hold shape the topics and methodologies we choose to employ as researchers (Flores & Morales, 2021; Pedro Robledo & Garcia, 2023). Therefore, we will next share our positionalities to situate ourselves within the context of this work as researchers and *platicadoras*.

### Platicadora Marissa

As a K-12 student, I struggled in traditional academic settings. I identify as a Latina of Puerto Rican and Mexican descent who was born in Southern California and moved to the Central Valley as a young child. I grew up only speaking English. I am the oldest of four children who was born to teen parents that struggled financially for many years. Because of our low-income status, we were both house and food insecure and we moved homes quite frequently. I attended four different elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school all in Merced County, CA. I was able to attend the same high school for four years after my parents were able to purchase their first home in 1994 when I was in 8th grade. Due to the disjointed nature of my education and my well-behaved, quiet nature, I slipped through school with not so proficient grades, low reading abilities and even worse mathematical reasoning abilities. I struggled so much that my mother had me tested for special education services and I was within 5-10 points of qualifying for services. I remember attending that meeting with my mother, the school psychologist, and my teacher where they talked about me as having potential but needing a significant amount of support and remediation to catch up to my peers. I knew I wanted to be a teacher and I understood that to be a teacher you had to go to college. However, I was not on any track to attend college after high school. My school counselor put me in the lowest level courses that did not meet the college or career ready A-G requirements my freshman year of high school. I knew he did not believe me capable of much more, and like so many other Latinas in the United States, I had to prove that I was capable of the work. From there, it was a long and winding road through high school, community college, California State University, then to University of California as I worked my way through my education. I have held a job without a break since my 16th birthday, a reality that impacted my grades and educational experiences.

Because of these and other experiences as a student, teacher, and researcher, I understand that traditional methods of conducting interviews to extract data about populations who have been marginalized are not culturally congruent with me or participants like me. I do not believe that asking a question, noting a response, then moving to the next question will yield the information the researcher is truly seeking. The researcher should be in community with the participants and truly want to understand their experiences and go beyond simply extracting data. Cesar Chavez was quoted as saying, "If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him...The people who give you their food give you their heart" (n.d).

### Platicadora Margarita

I, Margarita, am the eldest daughter of Mexican immigrants who arrived in the U.S. in the late 1960s. My father came as a 17-year-old

young man with a 6th grade education to work and help support his mother and siblings in Mexico, crossing the U.S./Mexico border almost on a weekly basis. My mother came to the U.S. after marrying my father, dreaming of opportunities for a better life and opportunities for her future children. I was born in San Fernando, California two weeks after their first wedding anniversary and have three sisters and one brother. I started Head Start preschool and kindergarten speaking only Spanish. As a public-school student in the early 1970s, I was part of the forced busing era in the Los Angeles Unified School District that was a direct response to the court-ordered plan for mandatory desegregation. Instead of attending the school located three blocks from my home, I was bused to a school that was almost 45 minutes away. The school communities I was bussed to, including teachers, often let us know that we were not welcome. I do not recall a single teacher who looked like me or who spoke Spanish. I also experienced bullying in school due to a malformation of my left hand. The significant number of bullying incidents led to my parents requesting a meeting with the school principal, despite the language barrier. As my parents and I recall, the principal took no action other than referring me for psychological counseling. Those experiences led me to want to become a teacher who understood students like me - those who struggled to learn English and those who felt invisible by teachers and administrators in our schools.

I attended college, became a bilingual teacher, and taught across various grade levels and in a number of different states. I also had the opportunity to teach English in various other countries. I have always worked with multilingual students in underserved communities. Becoming frustrated with district and state English-only policies of the late 1990s, I attended graduate school and earned both my master's degree and doctorate degree in Human Development and Psychology with an emphasis in Language and Culture. I am now a teacher educator who supports current and future teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. As a full professor at a research-intensive university, one of the tensions I feel most is balancing the university culture to exalt my accomplishments while also practicing humility as my family and community have taught me. In sum, I am committed to this work of preparing and supporting teachers because it is more than work, it is part of who I am. I seek to create schools where each student sees themselves represented, respected, and valued.

## OUR USE OF PLÁTICAS TO CENTER EQUITY

As teacher education researchers, we have used *pláticas* in our work to share teachers' journeys in becoming teachers and to support teachers as they navigate our chosen profession. As former classroom teachers, we have a shared understanding of the complexity of the work and the multiplicity of demands teachers face daily. However, we also recognize that classrooms have changed significantly post-COVID 19 pandemic and value the knowledge of the teachers who are experiencing contexts different than those we experienced when we were last in the classroom. Next, we share our most recent experiences using *pláticas* to center equity in the work we do alongside teachers.



## Coming Home: The Journey of Latinas from Student to Teacher in Rural Central California

For my, Marissa's dissertation, I employed both pláticas and case study methodologies, as the goal was to approach the work as co-constructors of knowledge and side-by-side, understand the lived experiences of Latinas who live and work in rural central California, specifically Merced County. My research questions were:

1. What do Latina teachers see as challenges or barriers to entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?
2. What do Latinas identify as enriching to their experience entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?
3. What do Latina teachers perceive as possible strategies for districts, colleges, and universities to recruit and support other Latina teachers when entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?

Rashid et al. (2019) described a qualitative case study as a methodology that allows us to deeply investigate phenomena in a specific context. The focus for this study was a very specific lived experience—understanding the journey from student to teacher for Latinas who live, work, and who attended all P-12 schools in Merced County, Central California. While Merriam and Tisdell (2016) guided my work regarding the importance of being “richly descriptive” (p. 15), I did not approach the work from their perspective of seeing the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection. Rather, I sought to collect my data in equal collaboration with the teachers who were sharing their journeys. I utilized purposeful sampling by recruiting six K–12 teachers who met the required parameters for the study. They were all Latina (identified as female of Latin American origins), attended at least 10 years of their P–12 education in Merced County, held a current, valid teaching credential, and currently live and teach in a Merced County school district. Informed by Rashid et al (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I decided that the plática methodology within the context of the case study would be the best way to collaborate with the participants. The six participants take part in an individual oral testimonio and one group plática where they were asked questions about their life, their journey, and ultimately their successes when entering the teaching profession. Of the six participants, four of the participants taught in the district they attended while they were in K–12 schools.

When recruiting participants, several of the women told me they did not think they would have enough to say on the subject. They said their experiences were typical of any college student or teacher, but the structure of the plática allowed for the participants to truly share their experiences and feel their emotions as they discussed their barriers, opportunities, and recommendations to improve the pathway for other Latinas entering the teaching profession. Several of the conversations brought the participants to tears and together, we wept for the pain they experienced. We also laughed a lot because, when looking back on something that was challenging and knowing you did it, it was joyful. In using pláticas and leveraging my own experiences in the context of the case study, I was able to ask questions, provide prompts, and adjust as needed to gather some very rich data from the participants. Below are some examples.

Well, I know I hear stories, like when teachers say, “Well, is there somebody in your life that pushed you into teaching? Was there a special teacher that you looked up to?” And for me, there really wasn't anybody. Well, there wasn't anybody that looked like me, like that...I was like, let me look back and see in

elementary school, middle school, high school, was there anybody that looked like me, that spoke Spanish? And I don't think that really was anybody. (Camila)

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor said, “I think it's important to move people beyond just dreaming into doing. They have to be able to see that you are just like them, and you made it.” (Totenberg, 2012) It is difficult to dream of something if you cannot see it as a possibility or a reality. Heroes are important and they help people see that if someone that looks like them and talks like them can do something, then they can do it too.

For myself, even throughout the (credential) program, I was still working as a farm laborer. I was still working as an aide during the school year. I've worked in restaurants; I've worked in different little settings. So, it's always staying busy, even during the time off when there was no school as an aide, it was going to the fields. (Isabella)

For Isabella, the work she had to do while perusing her teaching credential was significant. She worked hard and made sacrifices, but they paid off as she later went on to describe her current job as a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade dual language teacher working in the school she went to in the community she came from.

I feel like to me, the greatest achievement was when I got hired at Planada Elementary, so that was my elementary school that where I went...for me, that was the biggest accomplishment, to go from a fifth-grade student to being a fifth-grade teacher in that same exact space with the teacher who had probably the biggest influence in my life, Mrs. Acosta. So, it was just mind-blowing to think, “Wow, I think I'm right where I'm supposed to be.” (Elena)

Isabella and Elena both live and work in Planada, California, a small, rural town in Merced County with a large population of students from Latino backgrounds. They are both graduates of the district and both currently work for the district as teachers. Many of the families earn their living in agriculture, working as farm laborers. Having several Latina/o teachers, administrators, and staff members allowed the students in the Planada Elementary School District to see themselves in their teachers and have mentors that will help the children to aspire to their dreams.

Unfortunately, the lessons we get in life are not all from positive experiences. Life is often unfair, and people suffer greatly. Elena described her relationship with her brother in the following quote that showed what she endured on her journey to becoming a credentialed teacher in her home community.

Throughout my entire life since I was a little girl that I could remember, I had a brother who was involved in gangs... So, my family went through a lot like him going to jail, violence in our home, being kicked out of our home by violence and things like that...he [my brother] created such a bad reputation for our family in the school system...So, when we went into school, some of them would be like, “Oh, you're his sister or you're his brother.” And so, they would expect that from us, but we were not like that. But in 2020... I was long-term substituting for a kindergarten class, and that teacher...she was losing her brother to cancer... I didn't want to fail her. It was in the middle of COVID, distance learning, so you need the positive energy for little kindergarteners, but I'm like, “My brother's on life support.” and we were really going through it. It was just insane. But I just used it to keep me busy, keep me motivated, and keep the bills paid. Yeah, and so he's still doing good. He



actually lives with us right now. He survived. He's blind and he's paralyzed in half of his body, but we make the best of everything, so I can't complain. (Elena)

The time Elena described here was terrible for her and her family. Elena was part of a close-knit, collectivist family. For her, when one member struggled, all the members struggled. Through sheer determination, she persevered and earned her teaching credential. Even through her own personal struggles, she thought of and prioritized the students she served and the teacher she was substituting for in a situation that would have made many other credential candidates drop out of their program. She used the work, held on to her aspirations, and used her love and loyalty to family and community to continue the work. At the end of the quote, she talks about her brother's current condition, saying that the family makes the best of the situation, so she "can't complain." The perseverance in the face of adversity was commendable.

Each one of the women who participated in this study faced many barriers and challenges that ranged from personal to professional on their way to becoming credentialed teachers living and working in Merced County. Engaging in pláticas allowed for each one of the participants to share their unique journey to the classroom that included moments of great joy, profound sadness, love in the form of sacrifice, and the solemn pride felt by these women as they recounted their journey from student to teacher. Given the demographics of Merced County and the academic outcomes for so many Latinas in the United States, the fact that each of these women achieved their goal of becoming a classroom teacher was commendable. They had the drive and audacity to dream and work for a different life. They used all the linguistic resources they had, bringing their full and complete self to school as both a student and as a teacher. They leveraged the power of a supportive family and community. They had mothers who wanted a life of independence for their daughters and were willing to sacrifice to make it happen. These women navigated systems that were not designed to facilitate their success and showed their determination through their resistant behaviors, not giving up when they faced challenges.

### Using Pláticas to Understand Teachers' Decision to Stay in Teaching

Over the past few years, I, Margarita, have been engaged in various projects using pláticas methodologies to document how teachers speak about their decisions to stay or leave the classroom. My interest in leading this series of studies came from several lived experiences. First, my own decision to leave the K-12 classrooms and enter higher education still elicits feelings of guilt. I remember feeling that I was abandoning my community and the students who most needed me. As a teacher educator, I was also seeing an upward trend of novice teachers leaving the profession within three years of graduating from our program. This was especially true of our teachers of color.

In our study titled *On the Verge of Leaving*, two colleagues and I engaged in a series of pláticas with four teachers. Each of the teachers had a past relationship with at least one researcher and had shared her struggles with making the decision to stay or leave the classroom within the past year. The teachers joined us as platicadoras in a study with the following research questions. First, how do novice teachers speak about and understand their experiences during the pandemic 2020-2022 years and their decisions to stay in their chosen profession? Second, what role, if

any, did teacher educators and teacher education programs play in supporting novice teachers' decision-making regarding staying in the field? Finally, what can other key stakeholders (colleagues, school administrators, and families) do to better support teachers during difficult times? All four teachers are first-generation college graduates, have teaching experience of less than five years, and teach in underserved communities. Monica (all names are pseudonyms), 26 years old, identifies as a Xicana female. She is a fourth-year high school English Language Arts teacher on the West Coast. Caryn, 41 years old, identifies as Indigenous and female. She is a third-year 5th/6th grade science teacher in the Southwest. Cecilia, 30 years old, identifies as Native American and female. She is a fourth year, fourth grade teacher in the Southwest. Claire, 26 years old, identifies as White and female. She is a third-year Kindergarten teacher on the East Coast.

Following Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016), we participated in four pláticas during which each participant shared their experiences and perspectives about the three research questions that guided this study. We engaged in pláticas during four 60-90 minute sessions, using each session to address one of the research questions in depth, with the last meeting focused on integrating our collective perspectives on the previous three pláticas. Each plática was conducted via Zoom and recorded, transcribed, and coded. We initially used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to uncover themes guided by the research questions.

We invited all four teachers to present our findings at the 2023 American Educational Research Association conference. Monica and Claire were able to join us with financial support secured by the team of researchers. Both Monica and Claire presented and had many questions from the audience. Monica and Claire commented several times that there were many presentations about teachers but had not met any other practicing teachers at the conference. In our work, we centered various issues of equity as identified by the teachers. For example, Monica and Claire both shared at the presentation that they had to use their sick days to attend the conference while at the same time they were required to engage in professional development. We also arrived together at the decision to highlight the misconceptions that exist about teaching (e.g. it's an 8 am - 3 pm job) and the financial implications (e.g. high-debt, low salary, and out-of-pocket expenses) of being a classroom teacher. As platicadoras, we also decided together what themes to center in our presentation and forthcoming publication.

Throughout the pláticas, in addition to the prompts the researchers had identified to address the research questions, we developed and deepened friendships. We became mentors and mentees. For example, Caryn has been mentoring me on how to infuse Indigenous epistemologies into my teaching and research. I have been mentoring Caryn as she applies to doctoral programs. We have shared personal and professional challenges and celebrations. At the start of one of our pláticas, Cecilia shared that she was expecting her first child, and we were all able to congratulate her. Impacted by this experience, Monica applied to an EdD program, was accepted, and plans to have her dissertation focus on supporting teachers of color. A full 18 months after the conclusion of this study, we are all still in touch and continue to support each other.



## ADVICE TO EdD STUDENTS INTERESTED IN USING PLÁTICAS FROM A RECENT GRADUATE

I, Marissa, recently completed the EdD program in the School of Education at UC Davis. I work for a County Office of Education, and when I told others in my organization that I was a student at UC Davis in a doctoral program, several people told me that they had started doctoral programs and finished all their coursework, but not the dissertation. For me, I can understand why many doctoral students do not finish the dissertation. When taking classes, many candidates are with a cohort in a structured environment with an instructor, a syllabus, and a schedule. The participants work on assignments, make presentations, and complete the requirements in a focused space and amount of time. The dissertation process does not always have this same structure. Individual advisors, committee members, and doctoral candidates will approach the dissertation in many ways. Some advisors meet with their doctoral candidates on a regular basis with a set schedule and targets to meet to complete by deadlines outlined by the school. Other advisors meet with their candidates by appointment, leaving the candidate to structure their own time. Because an EdD program is completed while a person is working in a full-time leadership capacity, if there is no set time to be somewhere or to complete something, school can get pushed aside for more pressing matters involving work, family, or other obligations typical of working adults.

Personal passion and motivation become key to sustaining a doctoral candidate through the dissertation process. The first step is having a topic of study that sparks deep curiosity within the researcher. Next, the methodology must be congruent with both the topic and the participants including the researcher and the groups being studied. When this happens, the researcher brings with them their whole authentic self, blessings, and barriers. Through sharing their experiences, they enrich the story of others. In this dance of give and take, the researcher and the participant work together to create a new way of knowing. A good conversation can be transformative and an engaging plática can bring forward more information about a lived experience than any formal survey or structured interview. The power and beauty of a plática is that it is a conversation among supportive people who embrace seeing experiences through others' perspectives. It can be a space for speaking truth, healing from trauma, and making new starts. In this space, it is also important to respect and honor the person telling their story with the ability to review the transcripts from the interview. There are times when people share more than they intend to, so preparing participants by telling them they will have the last say of what could be used in the study is important.

## CONCLUSION

Anzaldúa (1999) stated that "if we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories" (p. xxvi). We assert that this is also true of methodologies. Pláticas as a methodology flattens the hierarchy that has existed too long between educational researchers and teachers. Pláticas disrupts the narrative researchers must be objective and that our positionalities do not enter the space in which research takes place. By acknowledging that we are co-creators of knowledge and that we can all learn from each other, we can more effectively center equity in the work that we do in service of our communities.

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