

The Journal of Pedagogy and Creativity

 CATCH THE NEXT



The Journal of Ideas and Creativity

A Journal Created For and By the Catch the Next Community

Co-Editors: Rafael Castillo and Erin Doran

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With a mathematics book in one hand and the sun on the other, this student possesses the academic and spiritual forms of intelligence needed to succeed. These tools will open the young girl's heart and mind to connect with her inner world of values, intuition and meaning and her outer

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Editors' Foreword

Dear Readers and Colleagues:

Catch the Next is delighted to present the fifth volume of the newly renamed Journal of Ideas and Creativity. After much deliberation, we changed the title to reflect a significant—and growing part of the work reflected in this journal, as demonstrated by the creative pieces curated by our esteemed Poetry Editor, Fernando Esteban Flores.

Initially, the journal was established as a centerpiece for our community of scholar-practitioners who embody the spirit of lifelong learning and commitment to their students and the enterprise of higher education. We meant for it to become a place to exchange ideas, to provide moments of reflection, and, essentially, to inspire. We are thrilled to feature authors from across the CTN *familia* and the communities where we work.

We hope that you enjoy the works of this volume. As always, we are happy to support anyone interested in writing for the Journal of Ideas and Creativity. We accept research-based articles, essays, book reviews, and creative pieces. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you are curious about writing for us.

With gratitude,

Rafael Castillo

Erin Doran

Fernando Esteban Flores

Essays

Reflections on the Ascender/Catch the Next Program

By Teresita Ramirez-Rosas, Ph.D.

Sociological studies have revealed many studies confirming that positive reflections and representatives of a diversity of faculty engender many hopeful advantages, and successful projections are mirrored and duplicated. I attended the 2022 Ascender/Catch the Next Foundational Seminar May 27, in Dallas, TX. When I learned about the *Ascender/Catch the Next* readiness program, I was excited to become part of it because I knew students of color needed to see themselves represented in an academic environment.

I remember during my college formative years in Mexico, male professors dominated the academy—with a sprinkling of women. They were all referred to as doctors, yet I rarely understood that significance until I achieved my doctorate. At that precise moment, I learned the magnitude of what the Ph.D. in Mathematics represented. I was encouraged to reach that pinnacle of mathematics because I wanted to join their ranks and become representative of the minority of women I so much admired.

It is a sociological fact that students identify with their peers and form positive connotations when their identity is confirmed and reflected in their educators. I want to encourage and inspire my students as I had been encouraged and respected when I was at the university.

Aspects of a Successful Program

Below are three critical aspects of a successful program to help students transitioning from developmental courses to college courses:

Administrators:

A team of administrators is required who are interested in increasing the student population to help students become lifetime learners. The commitment from discipline and college administrators is imperative so that faculty and advisors are encouraged and supported to have the best intentions as mentors. Without the support of the administrators, faculty members might not feel uncomfortable investing time and effort to become committed mentors. With administrative support faculty members will acknowledge and support student-faculty mentorships because it is encouraged by the college. Faculty will develop a mentorship alliance with students as a campus-wide initiative formed and supported by the college.

Advisors:

One of the first interactions a student has with the college is with an advisor. We must have advisors willing to get informed about the Ascender/Catch the Next initiative to identify students who are good candidates to be successful in this program. Advisors must communicate well with the administrators to learn the process of selecting appropriate candidates for the program and the type of resources that these students must be offered to ensure they understand all the advantages of forming part of this program. Advisors also need to communicate with the faculty member to ensure that students have the necessary background to succeed in the courses they are signing up for.

Faculty

Faculty members must be willing to invest time to mentor students and help them navigate the course material and the college resources as successful strategies. Accordingly, faculty selected with high interpersonal skills will communicate with students in a comfortable fashion without making students feel overwhelmed and stressed out. Any relationship between faculty-student must be equitable so that students avoid stressful issues relating to any faculty member.

As a student, I remember feeling stressed no matter how nice a professor was; I was always overwhelmed talking to them and was afraid to make verbal mistakes. Faculty members must always go above and beyond, trying their best to convince students they are approachable and that students do not feel judged when talking to the professors. The best way we can do that as professors is by showing that we care about our students. Here are behavioral cultural factors that make faculty more approachable:

*Meet students with a smile and welcome them to our classes and learn their names as soon as possible.

*Talk to them and get interested in their past experiences in mathematics.

*Show them that we are interested in how they learn mathematics. In my experience, students get engaged in class when they notice that I am not there to throw facts about math but that I am genuinely interested in learning how they digest the information. I find out that as time passes, they start asking questions by telling me what they know and explaining what makes them

confused instead of just telling me: “I do not get it.” This shows me that they trust me with their misunderstandings and mistakes and that they know that I am not there to judge their math skills, but I am there to help them get new skills and keep working on the skills that they already have.

*We must show our interest in their success, not only in our course but their success as lifetime learners. We must show them and guide them to all the resources that Dallas College has to help students. Most of the time, students are not aware of all the resources that Dallas College has, and we must become the bridge between our students and the available resources.

Action Plan

We must have two main ingredients to make the Ascender/Catch the Next program work at Dallas Community College:

1.- Initial Support: To have administrators supporting Advisors and Faculty members to spend quality time for this program and the students that form part of the program. As a faculty member, I would feel more comfortable investing time in this program if we could get some Professional Hours as part of our participation in the program. This will ease one of the worries of getting all the professional hours needed in an academic year. Once the Advisor and Faculty member have the initial support of administrators, then we can give the initial support to the students forming part of this program.

Advisors are essential for this program to work. They will be the first point of contact with students and will oversee recruiting suitable candidates for the program. Therefore, advisors must have the time to learn how the program works and who would be good candidates for the program. I see that if we have well-informed advisors, we will have strong cohorts.

Faculty will be responsible not only for the material content but also for the daily student engagement with the program. Our job will be to know how students learn and use that information to keep them engaged in the program to be successful. We must become their coaches and stay actively involved in their learning and the challenges they encounter while studying. We need to provide support, not only about the class content but also to guide them to the available resources at the college. This will need our willingness to learn more about all the resources available to students and the people in charge of those resources to send students to the right person to get help when needed.

2.- *Faculty Engagement.* In my opinion, as a faculty forming part of the Ascender/Catch the Next program, we must be willing to get engaged in collecting data to improve our teaching methods and to evaluate student performance in the program:

Collect Data about Teaching methods.

Faculty must plan out the specifics before the course starts. Differences from a course that forms part of the Ascender/Catch the Next program must be earmarked. As the course advances, students from their strongest and weakest points must be adjusted to calibrate level materials and proper pedagogical approaches. In this case, we will need to start collecting the changes we are making and how the grades and engagement of the students change. This will help us to decide how we vary the material and the methods we used in previous cohorts to keep improving based on data. As time passes, the goal is to have stronger students in the program.

Data to Evaluate Student Performance

Data must be collected when we change materials or methods within the same cohort and when we collect data from semester to semester. This will help us learn about the methods that work and the ones we need to adjust. It is essential that even if a technique does not work for a cohort, we do not discard that method because something that does not work for a cohort might work for another. Therefore, we must document the material, the grades obtained while using that material, and the background that the students have because teaching a class is not just about the material and the grades. The student's experience has the human aspect of being part of the support system for students. So, we must document how comfortable we feel with courses in the program as we teach more classes to keep track of what we do as faculty, too.

Cariño—the Cultural Ingredient

One of the central tenets of CTN is the cultural factors important for establishing a strong **Cariño** base as part of the first cohort of Ascender/Catch the Next at Dallas Community College. I want to thank the college administrators for going above and beyond to bring this program to our students at Dallas Community College as I am convinced we can make a real difference in our students if we work together as a *Familia* to help students with *Cariño and respeto*.

Dr. Teresita Ramirez-Rosas is professor of mathematics at El Centro Campus in Dallas, Texas.

Who I Was, Whom I Became, and Who I Still Am

by Teresita Ramirez-Rosas

Lately, I have been reflecting on who I am as a professor, why I teach the way I do, and why I started caring about equity and culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. Was I wired to teach this way, or did I become this type of teacher? While reflecting on this, I realized that I could not be the professor I am without acknowledging how I was raised. Now, I know that to help my students, I needed to know myself better and be honest with myself about all the things I needed when I was a student: things that were provided and things that were not, and which ones I could provide to my students.

Who I was: When I was a child, I loved to teach my little sister's math, and I could play hours being a Math teacher until I made one of my sisters cry because of a bad grade, and my mom would ask me to stop. I have known since then that I wanted to be a teacher.

I also grew up in a family that believed men were supposed to study and get a career to support a family, and women needed to be raised to be homemakers. But somehow, I was always opposed to that mentality, and I got in trouble with my parents for wanting to attend high school. Was I angry because they gave me such a hard time when I wanted to study? Yes, I was! But I never stopped dreaming of studying, getting a good job, and owning a computer...yes, that is all I wanted, to have a computer!

So, who was I? I was the product of a family that believed men were the ones that needed education. I always had to fight for almost everything I wanted (from simple things like going out with my friends to getting into high school). But in the end, I was loved, protected, and raised to be a good homemaker by my parents.

Whom I become: I always felt that my brothers were treated better than me just for being men (was that true? I am not sure, but that is how I felt back then). So, I grew up putting much weight on being fair with others because I felt I was not treated fairly. Being fair to others became so important in my life.

When I started teaching, being fair with all my students was imperative because I felt I lacked fairness growing up. I believed I should treat all students the same. For several years, I was

a fair teacher; I would never open homework for one student, and if I were to open homework for one student, I had to open it for everyone.

When I started working at Dallas College, the Dean then asked me to attend some talks about *Equity*. I had never heard that word before, so I went to this talk with an open mind to learn something new. I heard for the first time the difference between *equity and equality* and why equity was so significant. I remember that day going back home thinking (and overthinking!) about equity vs. equality. When I got home, I started looking for the definitions and read more about these new concepts. As time passed, I started thinking about equity when I was teaching. I remember the first time a student came to me after attending this talk and asked for an extension because one of her kids was sick. In my brain, my immediate thought was to say *no*, but somehow, I stopped myself, and I thought about being a mom and knowing that my world was so complicated when one of my kids was sick. So, instead of saying a “no,” I put myself in her situation and how much it would mean to me to have an extra day to finish something when my world is tossed around seeing one of my kids sick. That day, I decided to give an extension to that student and give her some words of encouragement from mother to mother. Getting out of that classroom that day, I realized the difference between equality vs. equity. This student needed an extension because her life was complicated at the time, but it did not mean the student was giving excuses for not doing her homework. Giving her this extension meant a lot because she could concentrate on taking care of her kid and still manage to have time to submit her work and still count towards her grade.

This helped me to think back and reflect on all the times that I had someone by my side to help me in critical moments in my life, like going and getting into high school (my dad helped me) or the person who helped me sneak out so I could take my admission exam to college (my sister-in-law helped me), or all the professors that believe in me and supported me in so many ways mathematically and morally, and so many more people that I have encountered in my way where I am now, and the ones I will meet that will help me to get even further. Without all these people believing in me, being there when I needed them, and giving me a chance to get better, my future might have been so different from the one I have now, and I thank them for all that.

Now I know that I became a professor who believes in equity and supports my students because I realized that I am not here by luck or just because I consider myself a hard-working person who believes in fairness; I am here because so many people supported me and believed in

me and gave me chances and opportunities to become who I am now. I am the product of so many people willing to help me when I needed them the most, even if sometimes I did not realize I needed help.

Who I still am: Now that I am reflecting on who I am, I cannot stop thinking that I should never forget how I arrived at this mindset that I have now. I am a person who believes in equity because of how I grew up in a family that believed that only men were worthy of getting an education and because I found people who showed me that, as a woman, I was also worth of getting an education. Even though these two things might seem the opposite, I am a product of these two mindsets colliding.

I still consider myself a fair person who believes in equity, that we all deserve the benefit of the doubt, and that we all can achieve great things in life, not only if we work hard but also if we have the right people willing to believe in us and allowing us to show how much we can achieve with the proper support.

Who I am as a professor: When I meet my students for the first time, I aim to know the person, not just the student. I ask them about their hobbies, which helps me bring them back during our classes to connect with them. I need to ensure all my students know that I notice *them* and that I am interested in *their* learning and them as people. I also need to show them that I make mistakes and am not perfect. Connecting with my students is essential because that usually translates into them trusting me with their mistakes. In mathematics, errors must be acknowledged, and we study them to see if we are making a typo with an easy fix or misunderstanding the material. Learning about equity made me more aware of how I teach mathematics. It made me realize there are more things to teach behind a mistake than we realize. Therefore, I emphasize that making mistakes in class is a good thing, and my goal is to make mistakes part of the learning process and remove the bad reputation mistakes have in a math class.

How I teach mathematics now results from acknowledging who I was growing up and how I became a professor who believes in equity. This new way of seeing things has helped me notice my students' struggles and find a way to help them. And I am not talking about helping my students just mathematically; I need to help them as people, not only as students.

What is Next: Being part of the Ascender/Catch the Next *familia* has given me reaffirmation that practicing equity and culturally responsive teaching is making a difference in the life of our students (and my own life, too!). In my Ascender familia, I have new role models to follow and learn from to become better prepared to support students like I was helped when becoming who I am now, without forgetting where I came from.

I dedicate this reflection with cariño to my Ascender/Catch the Next familia, which inspires me to support our students at Dallas College every day.

Dr. Teresita Ramirez-Rosas is professor of mathematics at El Centro Campus in Dallas, Texas.

Short Story

Willie Stargell's Fork

By Frank Kavanaugh

I had not slept well. The recurring headache from an old baseball injury kept me awake. I yawned a couple of times during Communion as I said weekday Mass. Afterward, in the middle of conversing with a parishioner, I yawned again.

"Father Compa," the lady said, "You, okay? Need a coffee?"

She turned away, allowing me to head back to the rectory. I couldn't stop yawning.

At the door, an older man I didn't know caught me. He was stooped, but his eyes were full of fire. Instead of a greeting, a "Hah!" dripped with cynicism and anger.

"The prophets. So-called," he said. "Nathan. Samuel. Their so-called hope. Hah."

I knew despondence when I saw it, but this was a different brand. His eyes, gray and defiant, wouldn't allow me to dismiss him.

"A dream Nathan hears?" He bore into me as he quoted the passage: *I will fix a place for my people, Israel. I will plant them so they may dwell without further disturbance. Neither shall the wicked afflict them as they did of old.* "Hah!"

He stood silent, planted. Was he daring me to challenge him with some argument to his despair, or provide some flailing attempt at comfort? No yawning now.

He exploded again. "And the worst blasphemy. *I will give you rest from all your enemies.* Hah!" He grabbed his collar, then seemed to rethink the notion of ripping the heavy black shirt. He cried out, "No further disturbance? Six million destroyed is no *disturbance*? Preposterous. And from the very mouth of the Lord!" He tore at his salty beard. I was relieved, though relief was an absurdity, that his patchy facial hair was too short to grasp. His resolute jaw, though, remained cemented.

How could anyone answer him? Job? Jesus? Would Socrates dare toss one of his questions about ultimate concern to the air? No point in suggesting that the prophets probably had in mind

the fixed dwelling of heaven, that the man's ancestors and all of the six million surely enjoyed mansions there.

I scrambled for something to say, but I had absorbed his futility. I had no word of acknowledgment, no love, no compassion. A formless inkling floated around my brain. And at that instant, as if he could peer into my foggy head and interpret questions whole and complete, he spat out answers in a breathless torrent.

“My father was a boy, seven, when they took him to Auschwitz. He watched his father pushed into the oven, not by the capos but by the capos forcing Papa's three older brothers to do all the pushing. Boys younger than him tossed up, shot in the air, like target practice. He hid on frozen ground under a shed. Crawled into that tight little space because he was skin and bones.”

The man stopped for breath. I could take in no other features than his eyes. Windows to brokenness. They kept drilling into me as he railed on. I refused to look away. I owed that to him, to his father. Little good it did for either.

“One of those boys, practically a baby, fell from the sky a few feet from Papa's face. It was only half dead, bleeding, wailing in the snow. They stared at each other. Papa said he never forgot those eyes. Never talked of these things—till one day, stupid teenager I was, I complained about shoveling snow on our driveway. He let it all out. Hammered me right there as I shivered. Poured out what he never told anyone. Eight hundred forty-three days. He saw skeletons work as slaves in bitter cold, and eventually he had to work too. March in ice and snow, in rags, to build a railroad bridge.”

I had a hard time comprehending that he himself was not at Auschwitz, that it was his father instead. The horrors for the father hadn't ended on a spring day in 1945 but were present right here on a winter morning in central Texas. Would those horrors endure in this man's children? I wanted to look for a wedding band, but his eyes returned to me.

“Rest from enemies? Let me tell you. I was one day old when he left my mother. I grew up hating him. Mother only said it was something to do with ‘the camps.’ That was all she knew, that he'd been in camps. She hadn't. Her family got out before Kristallnacht. Fled to London, then New Jersey.”

He brought his hands to his head, and I thought he was about to pause, that maybe I could ask questions that were piling up in me. But the pause didn't last.

“Mother died when I was ten, and he finally came back. That day on the driveway he told me he couldn't stand me crying when I was born because he kept seeing that baby at Auschwitz. Sixteen years I hated him because he never told me. Always kept it inside.”

There was nothing to say to his lamentations. In the utter hopelessness of the now-silent moment, an element of farce slithered in, an old baseball image materializing in my head, a long-ago college teammate quoting a famous line: “Stargell said batting against Koufax was like drinking coffee with a fork.” But I couldn't shut my eyes to this poor fellow any more than I could shut the door on him.

I wondered; how did he end up in Austin? What was his livelihood? More childlike questions swirled in my head, but still I hesitated to speak them. I envisioned him as a seven-year-old asking, had his father been around, *Why do you have that number on your arm? Can I get one too?* Would his father have shushed him? Or merely ignored him?

Where did he live? When did he last eat? To him, was eating, to use his reference, a blasphemy considering the starvation his father had suffered? Did either of them ever take counsel from, with, others? Maybe at a synagogue? They must have gone to temple at some point. Otherwise, how did he know of Samuel and Nathan? Probably pointless to consider, since his faith seemed reduced to spewing the one-word prayer, *Hah*. I waited.

He gazed down. Gave an odd shake of his head and looked away. Across the street, the main drag, the line of interlocking live oaks of the university swayed, dull green in the winter wind. I tried to study him, his stringy graying hair, creviced forehead, dry-cracked lips. But again he was bearing in on me.

“Yeah, slaves in America had centuries of chains, whips, rape. But did God ever promise for them a dwelling place ‘without further disturbance’? Tell me, Father, how does a loving God, so-called, allow such? To blacks. To us, the Chosen People. So called. How, Father? How can you Christians speak of mercy to sinners? Does your Christ intend also to have mercy on—I've never said his name till now, Satan of all Satans—Hitler?”

He crumpled to his knees. His fierceness wouldn't allow me to touch his shoulder, what would've been a pitiful effort to ease his misery. My thoughts were as insubstantial as thin wafts from steaming coffee, more useless than Willie Stargell's fork. Just when I figured all I could do for him was let him tremble with silent weeping, I stumbled upon the idea of sitting on the stoop next to him. The Texas morning had an unusual bite, but I tried to imagine how much worse it had been in Germany.

"Would you like to come inside?" My first words to him. No response, no move of his scraggly head. "I have strong Cuban coffee." I hoped my motivation on this cold stoop was at least partially inspired from the seminary, where we studied ethics from the great philosophers. I hoped I was speaking from enlightened self-interest.

But no. He'd already had enough of theology, and anything related to philosophy would do no better. I almost asked his name. I could find no path of action but to sit with him.

No more tears or words came. Maybe he had none left. My sitting near must have muted him.

In the silence, my longing for coffee returned. I wanted breakfast. I was about to suggest Greenberg's, further down the Drag, perhaps for bagels. But no. That was only self-interest. Nothing of enlightenment.

My questions were bumbling, unspoken half-thoughts. Me, years in the seminary, inundated with insights to pour forth upon my congregation, wisdom from Aquinas, Augustine, Jesus himself. But I said nothing to the suffering right in front of me. And I had the temerity to long for coffee.

Why did this fellow come to me, a Gentile? Should I call Katz? Or maybe my parishioner who's the daughter of another rabbi?

I couldn't tell which was worse, his agonized eyes burrowing into me or his dead stare across our side parking lot to the live oaks. The oaks' most populous denizens, grackles, uttered endless chatter that every quarter-hour clashed with the carillon peals from the campus tower.

Off to the side I spied, as though summoned, Rabbi Katz on his way to Hillel, situated just beyond the next corner. My visitor followed the rabbi with his eyes, Katz's woolly white beard

bobbing at his chest as he walked, hands joined at his back. The rabbi kept walking. Why didn't the man go to him instead of sitting with me? Or had he already done so and been waved off? No, that wouldn't be Katz's way.

His father. Did he find any joy that day of the rescue in the camp? Or only continued misery? Realization of what they'd endured. Of what they'd lost? Of what losses, what further realizations loomed ahead? I didn't know what it was like: family, friends, and neighbors slaughtered, their ashes and vapors billowing from crematoria stacks.

What else? What more? Surely, these two questions burdened so many Jews throughout the last century. And now, in this one, would any of the remnants' children want to remember? Oh, remember! I say the sacred words at Mass: *Whenever you do this, remember Me*. Re-member. Put back together the broken Body of Christ, each of us a broken rib, a wounded rafter, a member who yearns for healing, understanding, comfort, lest we all fall to pieces. Why, why do we do such hateful things to each other? Isn't there brokenness enough in the world? Why? Why? Why? We are such idiots. And yet the Christ loves us. But what was Christ in this man's life, in his understanding? How could he find anything resembling comfort, any tiny thing to help dispel his fears?

Despair hung over both of us. Our gloom was punctuated by two squawking grackles arguing on my sidewalk over a piece of debris from the Drag, a hamburger bun. Half of a half of one. More bickering over more brokenness. And I'd rated these creatures smarter than us stupid humans. One of the birds tore away with the prize and took flight. He dumped a juicy dripping bomb on my head. A direct hit. This after I'd splurged the previous day on a stylish cut.

I assumed the man had been oblivious to the grackles' dispute, but now another "Hah!" came from him. No anguish in this one, though. He tried to squash his outburst, but the effort only made him release a stream of snickering, barely audible but rising in pitch and intensity. He couldn't stop. His apology was ineffectual, and he knew it. For a moment the delight was contagious only within him, growing, expanding. Then it rose similarly in me. "Ha-hah!" he bellowed, and louder chuckling erupted from both of us.

He reached in his dark coat pocket for a handkerchief, but I said I'd go inside to brew a pot of the Cuban while I cleaned myself. Now guffawing on the step, he managed a nod. "Sugar?" I

said. He nodded again. Minutes later, I squeezed through the door bearing a tray of cream, sugar, and two steaming mugs. The man was gone. The sidewalk disappeared around the corner to the right, so I couldn't see the source of the unmistakable cackling, trailing away fainter and fainter. At my left, the apparent loser of the battle for the hamburger bun emitted a single squawk and flapped up and away to the live oaks. I sat on the step, sipping from one mug.

In front of me appeared a wiry-haired native of the street, commonly known as a drag-worm, an epithet coined by students and others for those who called the Drag home. He mumbled by, stopped. I raised the other mug to him in offering. He brightened, sat next to me, took the mug, stirred in a touch of sugar, blew over it. "Very hot," he said. He poured in the cream and proceeded to sip, spoonful by eager spoonful.

Frank Kavanaugh is a retired high school teacher (26 years) who tutors half-time at Austin Community College. He is the author of *Sons of Shepherd*, a finalist for the 2017 Writers League of Texas Contest. He is working on a series of featuring the priest character in "Willie Stargell's Fork."

Book Reviews

Nepantla Familias: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature on Families in Between Worlds.

By Sergio Troncoso,

College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2021.

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\$26.72 hardcover

Review by Yon Hui Bell

Like most colleagues, I spend my summer months reading, writing, and reconnecting to the love spawned over decades of a long career in education. During these summer months, I daydream about my students and how to share this love with them. Although some enjoy reading and writing, most unfortunately do not read or write beyond the classroom. Many find reading and writing performed in our classrooms as dull and irrelevant. But I do not let that deter me. It is saddening because they do not know words' deep, personal beauty and power. Not do they inhabit the world of words: this shared human experience of contemplation, ideas, and emotions.

My task is to teach them academic literacy skills so they may become successful college students. But I desperately want to share with them the *Freirean* love of reading and writing that will help them learn to know themselves and the world—and be actively engaged in constructing both.

Over the years, I've added more low-stakes reading and writing assignments to bridge this estrangement. I've included more culturally relevant texts and mixed current events and personal reflections with academic research. I have been incorporating more living writers with fiction and poetry lately. The universe has been listening because, at this fall's *Ascender Foundational Seminar*, I was introduced to Sergio Troncoso and his *Nepantla Familias: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature on Families in Between Worlds*.

When educators say *culturally relevant material*, they refer to nuanced phrases that generally mean texts that reflect our students' lives. In the case of Troncoso's book, *culturally relevant* might mean culturally specific sites like the Mexican American borderland. The cultural specificity of *Nepantla Familia* resonates with most students in Hispanic-serving institutions like San Antonio College, where I teach. Our students will connect with stories about living in two cultures, immigration and diaspora, even navigating dual citizenship, languages, and identities.

So *culturally relevant* also means universally applicable ideas to the struggles, pains, and joys of life, love, and self, reflecting the human condition. For readers who might find the book too culturally specific, Troncoso explains that *nepantla*, a Nahuatl term, means *the middle ground* or *the middle space*, as discussed by Gloria E. Anzaldua as a universal experience. As he states, “[A]nyone who has forged a self from pieces of many worlds, to fit and not fit in a new home, who has balanced on many beams to understand different sides—yes, they should find themselves in these pages” (3).

Who cannot empathize with the struggle to respect and simultaneously leave our families—or to escape and survive them? Who among us cannot identify with the work of creating a healthy identity against abuse, addiction, and generational trauma? Who among us has not known the urgent task to be and do more than fulfill traditional gender roles, to exist and thrive beyond all the limitations imposed on us by others—family, friends, strangers, and racist institutions? Every one of the texts included in Troncoso’s anthology is honest, well-crafted, and powerfully relevant. Lorraine M. Lopez’s “Nobody’s Favorite” discusses the tribulations and freedom of being unnoticed, of existing on the sidelines. Jose Antonio Rodriguez’s “Letter to the Student Who Asks Me How I Managed to Do It” chronicles the collision of his journey to college and the professional occupation our students want with the emotional journey of reconciling the traumas of home and the building of self. Octavio Solis’s “Mundo Means World” examines the lure of the firearm in the formation of masculine identity. At the same time, Severo Perez’s “Melancholy Baby” questions a religious upbringing and life beyond the boundaries of home. Diana Lopez’s “Dutiful Daughter” narrates the ambition for achievement that sometimes is sabotaged by families and themselves. Troncoso’s anthology provides so many influential texts that students can engage.

Another distinguishing feature of *Nepantlas Familias* is that every writer cataloged is still living. 25 of the 30 works were first published in it. All authors have published substantially and received recognition for their results—including the prestigious Pushcart Prizes and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts—making the number of original works in the anthology quite impressive. Many authors remained or returned to teach in Texas, while some stayed in New York or California. All are living embodiments of the power of words to make sense of our lives and to make something of ourselves.

Living authors manifest the power of words with immediacy. Reading and writing become less mysterious less academic, yet not forced upon you by a higher power; the allure of reading is

something you traveled with as you journey this world. When students read these stories, they witness the alchemy of words to shape our histories and our understanding of them, ultimately impacting their futures and ours. All writers, especially those who share a specific culture, show students they can use words to understand and share their stories. This essential step in Freirean liberatory education moves students from passive, malleable recipients to active decision-making agents. The demands of teaching academic writing flow more fluidly when this foundational connection is made. It is easier to research a topic and learn academic research when the subject is culturally relevant and self-directed (ideally).

The writings in *Nepantla Familias* are a launchpad for numerous researchable topics: forced migration, immigration laws, foreign policy, detention centers, and for-profit prisons, the War on Drugs, teenage alcohol and drug use, peer pressure, gender roles, LGBTQ+ identity, familial units and relationships, generational trauma, bilingual education, psychology of guilt, miscarriage, guns, fast fashion, music, cultural appropriation, and many more. Troncoso himself offers a teacher's guide with discussion questions and thematic units. Joining the academic conversation about the larger social forces that affect our lives is much easier when we first explore our lives with the critical lens of literacy.

Some educators (and most administrators) measure success by the number of students who pass their course or by completion and graduation rates. Those measures are worthwhile and cannot be diminished, especially in a post-pandemic world where more students struggle with more challenges. I measure my success by the number of students who tell me they learned to understand themselves deeper and to ask more questions, who feel motivated to continue, and who, despite their reluctance, enjoyed the reading and writing we did in class. I want them to read and treasure books like *Nepantla Familias*, build their library, keep adding it, and one day author their own.

Yon Hui Bell is an Ascender faculty member at San Antonio College and a frequent contributor to *CTN: A Journal of Ideas and Pedagogy*.

Dostoevsky on Guadalupe Street
By Rafael C. Castillo
New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2023
ISBN: 9781433197888
140 pages
\$45.95

By L. Lennie Irvin

Virginia Woolf once said about the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his work.” The same could be said of Rafael Castillo in his highly readable and entertaining new essay collection, *Dostoevsky on Guadalupe Street: Writings from the Edge*. As a writer and academic who grew up in the poorest San Antonio neighborhood and has taught English at the premier community college in the country serving Hispanic students, Palo Alto College, Castillo is uniquely qualified to write from the edge. He displays a similar curiosity, empathy, and insight into the inner lives of the marginalized culture and peoples he chronicles as Dostoevsky was famous for.

Castillo is a popular writer for the *San Antonio Express-News*, and the essays in this collection were initially published as Op-Eds (opinion editorials). Still, each has been rewritten, and many have expanded significantly. Castillo describes his style as literary journalism, a brand of writing that combines narrative with commentary with freedom for expression and critique. While many pieces maintain a journalistic crispness, he takes these pieces much further and more profoundly. The essays in his first section, Formative Beginnings, are a perfect example, particularly the title essay, “Dostoevsky on Guadalupe Street.” In engaging and deeply personal prose resembling James Joyce’s *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, Castillo recounts his life as a young boy on the West Side of San Antonio who develops into a writer and critic. He writes, “Reading Dostoevsky as a young man gave me a sense of relief because I knew there were people elsewhere struggling against poverty.” He parallels Dostoevsky’s world of *The Brothers Karamazov* in his own family and neighborhood characters like “La Sucia Lucy” (Reeking Lucy). Indeed, Castillo’s literacy narrative of how this book opened his world is an entertaining model to inspire students to see how readers and language can also change their lives.

Dostoevsky on Guadalupe Street also provides us a ring-side seat on the blossoming of the Chicano Literature movement. From describing his revelation as a boy in the 1960s finding a story

by Chicano author Daniel Garza to commemorating the literary magazines *ViAztlan* and *Caracol*, where many emerging Chicano writers were published, to memorializing the neighborhood bookstore Penca Books that was so central to the literary history of the West Side, Castillo does not just chronicle this cultural and artistic movement but highlights its significance and sophisticated roots. In the section, *Profiles in Courage*, he also shares intimate profiles of Chicano writers, from well-known authors like Rudolfo Anaya or Ricardo Sanchez to San Antonio-based writers like Nephtali De Leon, Fernando Esteban Flores, or Julian Garcia. Castillo is personal and objective in these portraits, showing connections to deep cultural and artistic trends. He helps us recognize these writers as artists of the highest order. One excerpt displays the deep appreciation and links Castillo makes in these profiles: “Fernando Esteban Flores has captured the quintessence of humanity’s suffering, of kindred spirits struggling against the geography of destiny, echoing Friedrich Nietzsche’s eternal return. Birth. Death. Resurrection.”

But this book is more than just a record of the Chicano literary movement. From spine-chilling ghost stories to historical accounts from early Texas to a piercing reflection on the January 6th attack on the Capitol, Castillo always keeps us interested and gifts us with new things to learn. Throughout the book, Castillo also shows his love of words and language not only in his own playful, well-wrought language but in pieces like “Grammar World,” “Sesquipedians,” and “Writing Past 90.” Answering why he writes, Castillo replies that words are his refuge: “If you’re not a writer, you wouldn’t understand the thrill of seeing a string of words placed randomly by choice. It’s an irresistible urge like a star-struck noun running off with a verb while an enthusiastic adjective shouts, ‘Delightful!’ right behind them.” As readers, we can’t help but share in his enthusiasm for language and find inspiration for our writing in his prose. *Dostoevsky on Guadalupe Street* is a crowning achievement from a writer and scholar who writes from the edge but masterfully reveals how central that place really is.

L. Lennie Irvin, Ph.D., teaches English at San Antonio College and is the author of *Reflection Between the Drafts* (2020). He participates in Catch the Next initiatives as an Ascender faculty member and is the Lead Faculty Fellow for the *San Antonio College Writing & Thinking Institute*.

The Identity-Conscious Educator: Building Habits and Skills for a More Inclusive School

By Liza A. Talusan

Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2022

ISBN: 9781952812712

248 pages

\$40.95

Reviewed by Erin Doran

In 2020, amidst the upheaval of the pandemic and racial justice protests across the country in response to the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, I noticed an increase on social media of educators asking for or providing resources to help them become more inclusive teachers. Throughout that summer, book clubs and learning communities started reading books like Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, and Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Want to Talk About Race*. Essential conversations were occurring about allyship and how to provide inclusive and equitable experiences for all students in the classroom. It is unclear to what extent these conversations have continued in the last three years, though more critical texts on equity and inclusivity have since been published.

One of those texts is Talusan's (2021) *Identity-Conscious Educator*. Liza Talusan is a prolific education consultant who provides virtual and in-person workshops on diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational settings around the United States. She is also an Associate Lecturer at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her doctoral dissertation received the Dissertation of the Year Award from the Research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders particular interest group of the American Educational Research Association in 2017.

The Identity-Conscious Educator argues that becoming "identity-conscious" is an ongoing journey. By "identity-conscious," Talusan (2021) means an awareness and approach that acknowledges "that differences matter" (p. 17). This means moving in the world with a mindset that (1) [believes] differences, (2) [supports] groups to maintain their cultures and cultural practices, and (3) [values] difference" (p. 17). Throughout Part I of her book, Talusan sets the foundation for the rest of the text by defining terms, and she proactively makes recommendations for how to deal with moments of discomfort as the reader engages with the content. What is also incredibly useful is Talusan's recommendations for using this text in group settings like professional learning communities, especially in navigating conflict and promoting rich dialogue.

In Part II, Talusan dives deeper into five identity categories: race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. Throughout these chapters, Talusan blends personal anecdotes, definitions, and concrete classroom practices with activities that readers can complete to build awareness around such identities. For example, she asks readers to think about the first time they became aware of social class, what messages they received about class, and what they believe the impact of not openly discussing class (p. 60).

Finally, in Part III, Talusan discusses other aspects of the journey toward becoming identity-conscious, including how to deal with failure, steps toward becoming an ally, and tools for continuing the journey beyond this book. A critical component of this journey includes becoming a facilitator of conversations around equity and inclusion and how to navigate the difficult conversations that often come with the territory.

There is no better place to take an identity-conscious approach than the community college. Some of the data points provided by the American Association of Community Colleges (2023):

- Over half of community college students identify as racially minoritized.
- 30% of students identify as first-generation college students.
- 21% of students live with a disability.
- Nearly two-thirds of students apply for some financial aid.
- 16% of students are single parents.

To work in a community college is to engage with a uniquely diverse student population with myriad needs. Even if you consider yourself a seasoned educator who thinks a lot about inclusion within your classroom, Talusan will give you something new to think about.

Educators should acknowledge that Talusan's book is not the be-all-end-all text on inclusivity in education, nor does she present it as such (she clearly states this is a beginning, not an endpoint). There are plenty of identities we serve that are not discussed much, if at all, in this text, including students who are immigrants or undocumented students, translingual students, and religious minority students. There is also a growing body of research on other populations like body diversity (e.g., Fatness Studies) and neurodivergent students that may be useful for community college educators to develop an awareness about.

This book offers something for everyone regardless of where they are in the journey towards becoming identity-conscious. It is a wonderfully accessible text for anyone who wants to improve the learning experience for all students in their classroom.

Erin Doran is the Director of Research and Evaluation for Catch the Next.

Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of The Chicano Movement, 1966-1981

By David Montejano

Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010

ISBN-10: 0292722907

ISBN-13: 978-0292722903

344 pages

\$24.95

Reviewed by Julian S. Garcia

David Montejano's *Quixote's Soldiers*—a blend of sociology and history—is nothing less than a tour-de-force cutting through the historically myth-twisting romanticized versions of Texas propaganda. Despite the ironic connotative reference to the hapless knight fighting illusionary windmills of Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, the book gives readers a positive view of Chicano participating in San Antonio Raza politics.

Its structure and historical layout are juxtaposed with eye-opening facts and unedited photos of characters Antonio Gramsci would describe as organic community agents (i.e., *la Voz del pueblo*—early politics under the Democratic party). In addition, Montejano cites historical figures from other parts of Aztlan Southwest, namely Corky Gonzalez from Colorado and Reyes Tejerina from Nuevo Mexico (including seminal overlaps with Cesar Chavez, the farmworker crusader and boycott leader). The crux of his research is centered on factors leading up to the rise of the La Raza Unida party.

The narrative sets a *téatro* stage, focusing on community links, political agendas, and how leaders forged political ideology to persuade wayward youths into political enlightenment and engagement. Readers learn how organizers Ernie Cortez and Willie Velásquez ingeniously applied Saul Alinsky's organizing methods—an approach that led, and established, many young and middle-age Chicanas, giving them a platform centering them as role models of vocal leadership. Included in the narrative is also the birth and ethos of COPS (Communities Organize for Public Service). This organic, powerful political community organization was spearheaded by abuelas, tias, hermanas and Catholic-based family groups—oddly, something unheard of in the barrios. Through their political actions, Raza politics upset the political structure destabilizing at-large voting district into more democratically representative single-member district, which we have today.

Montejano's sociological and psychological analysis reminded me of Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, giving authenticity to San Antonio westside voices struggling to affect

change in a society riddled with systemic racism amid volatile conflict, which makes it originally current and authentically working-class history. It is a timeless book where new generations will read the historical contributions of community leaders, organic intellectuals, social and political figures. Readers will also see how grassroots politics—despite a hegemonic political machine working against them—can be enlightening and empowering, with example after example of Chicano youth protesting peacefully and coalescing political power in tandem with ‘60s Black power movement.

Although Raza Unida activists worked toward positive change, they were negatively opposed by an Anglo-supported, small business conservative Mexican American merchants and politicians co-opted and manipulated by the Good Government League and partisan politics. The old political guard established during late ‘40s through the early ‘60s held a stranglehold on West Side politics led by Good Ole Boy Democratic agenda, which allowed two or three token Mexican American leaders to represent San Antonio’s West Side and South Side communities.

In *Quixote’s Soldiers*, David Montejano goes beyond the long-standing anthropological-historical study of Mexican American classics like William Madsen’s book, *Mexican Americans of South Texas*. His narrative socio-historical voice takes leaps and bounds humanizing the researched sources into living organic existential prototypes. Perhaps unconsciously Montejano reconstructed a counter-narrative historically forgotten by mainstream historians and illuminated a thick layer of subterranean history of MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) including CASA, MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund), Wesley Community Center, MAUC (Mexican American Unity Council), and MANO, all who wanted change.

William Velásquez, late founder of the Southwest Voter Registration Movement, affected substantive revolutionary change through the ballot box. Through the efforts of Velasquez’s “Su Voto Es Su Voz” campaign slogan, the efforts struck a chord in disenfranchised communities in surrounding, segregated racist rural towns. The sleeping giant had awakened—albeit a negative stereotype.

The Edgewood High (Edgewood ISD) and Sidney Lanier High School (San Antonio ISD) walkouts broke down complacent minds, supercharging them into political action needed for educational change, school curricula, and college preparatory courses for management and salary equities and leadership positions.

David Montejano's *Quixote's Soldiers* gives readers a sociological and historical account of the transformative power of revolutionary politics between Texas and the Southwest from 1966-1981. College students, young women, and disgruntled youth challenged political and social hierarchies long entrenched in community political and social services. These young actors won respect and proved change was possible, even on a small-scale community effort.

Women in leadership roles proved critically positive in barrios and rural areas of South Texas. This is a must-read book, which should be in every college syllabus, every high school library, and required reading for no other reason than to ensure *pátronismo* in South Texas is never resurrected.

Julian S. Garcia, an independent research scholar, is the author of "La Fantásica Curandera" His scholarly contributions can be found in the Texas State Historical Association's *Handbook of Texas*.

Poetry

Section edited by Fernando Esteban Flores

The Healing Power of Poetry

"When politics corrupts, poetry cleanses." In October 1963 as we recently marked the 100th anniversary of President Kennedy's birthday, we remember his words as he dedicated a library at Amherst College to Robert Frost.

In these precarious times when politics seems to incessantly dominate the daily news, poetry becomes more than a necessary and required antidote.

In the latest issue of *CTN Journal of Ideas & Pedagogy*, we offer you poetry that seeks to bring its healing virtues to the forefront of our daily lives.

We introduce several important voices, some new others established in their respective literary communities from professors to emerging poets. No matter theme or form (traditional to surrealism/structured to experimental/monolingual to bilingual) there can be no doubt that poetry is essential. As the poet William Carlos Williams famously stated, "It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there."

You will find in this issue:

- The wit and verbal interplay in the euphonic mode of code-switching poetry of seasoned poet Jacinto Jesús Cardona.
- The deeply incisive and numinous poetry of Gerardo A. Carrasco, a young poet who hails from El Paso, TX.
- Jonathan Fletcher's clear and lucid voice will linger long after you've read his poems.
- The heart felt passion behind established poet Alicia Z. Galvan's graceful poems.
- The reflective poignancy of eco-poet Zan Green's lyricism calling out for our attention to the environment.
- The call for social justice and our human mortality in the words of the emerging poet Carlos Loera.
- The gentle interaction between poet-professor Laurence Musgrove, his students and the natural world we often pass by with indifference on the way to where we are going.
- The powerfully moving and at times playful poems of Rita L. Ortiz in the ever-searching quest to make peace with her indigenous roots including capturing the harrowing experience of suffering a stroke and the difficult way back to the land of health.
- Finally, the O, so cool, hip, intelligent, and engaging contemporary voice of fellow poet Alex Z. Salinas with poems clearly connected to our modern experience.

You will laugh, you will smile, you will dream, your feet might even do a little Snoop Dog dance, and you will know poetry touched your soul.

We hope that you find comfort, purpose, inspiration, & of course, that you draw pleasure from the poems we have included in our journal. Experience the poetic moments; enjoy the words.

Fernando Esteban Flores, CTN Poetry Editor

PALITO BANCO, TEXAS

Unbeknownst to me American poet
Theodore Roethke died on August 1st 1963
I ride with a friend who has borrowed his parents
'63 Chevrolet Impala Coupe
he's taking me to Palito Blanco out in the sticks
for a Saturday night dance
he claims the prettiest girls in South Texas live there
I know I don't stand a chance

I tell him the girls from nearby Falfurrias would object
they're famous for introducing themselves as we're from Fal
it's a foregone conclusion that when I return to my abode
I will fall into my usual seclusion
my friend's '63 Chevrolet Impala Coupe
will become a car classic

—Jacinto Jesús Cardona

LOS BATOS ROOFERS

Out in my porch I open up my laptop sip my morning brew
across the street a crew of bato rooferos arrive to throw
another roof no health insurance no 401K no pension
el 37ambie 37ambien like an early morning rooster balances
on his shoulders a 35-pound roll of black felt tar paper
just to impress los young bato rooferos eating breakfast tacos
spread out on the warm hood of the work truck one of them says
he got los tacos from Fina's tosses a taco to el 37ambien
singing to los éxitos 37ambien37s de Los Alegres de Teran
a neighbor takes offense at his loud playlist complains
to el 37ambie pneumatic nail guns zap zap
I tap tap on my laptop

—Jacinto Jesús Cardona

PELUSAS

Allow me to introduce you to an amazing world: el mundo
de las pelusas dustballs balls of dust.
Pelusas are not to be confused with pellucid.
Like the evil eye, pelusas possess a history of superstition.
Pelusas lurk under beds prefer dark corners.
Armed with the waft of burning copal in an antique black skillet,
Mother sought protection from pelusas full of envidia.
Pelusas avoid plazas. You will never see a pelusa plagued plaza.
Pelusas prefer the comfort of scabrous boards.

—Jacinto Jesús Cardona

Jacinto Jesús Cardona was born in Palacios, Texas, but grew up in Alice the Hub of South Texas. He is the author of *PAN DULCE* and *AMAPOLASONG*. His poetry is a tribute to his Tex-Mex experience, his chapulinguistics. Cardona is an English teacher at Incarnate Word High School. Jacinto is a longstanding member of Voces Cómicas.

Abduction

Your wound bleeds in another land
That is not yours.

How difficult it is for you to parade
Through neighborhoods in Paris
Your shy calves and moles
Your dad stamped on you in Sao Paulo.

You no longer know who you are.

High and alone,
With your head wrapped in opioid turbans,
You see your life dissolving
In embers of a stranger's cigarette (as he effs you).
Your red lips breathe pain.

You hardly live.
You've lost your dreams.
Dreams were for others, you said,
Nightmares for you.

Tomorrow spring will arrive in Ubatuba.
Cruise ships will take on the horns of Capricorn...
And for you, in a distant city,
The flowers of the Southern Hemisphere will be dead.

Close to the rains that fall in December in Paris
Your sorrows will roar
However, some will say there,
*'Hear how December's bolts of lightning
Thunder.'*

— Gerardo Arturo Carrasco

The *pencas*¹ cry blue

I wish I could see
My wife's naked back every night.
I am her consort and I know how to wrap her in my arms;
Lay on top of her c-section scars
In the same way that you put a flask of clay
On the firm knots of a table styled from cherry trees.

Is thirst quenched just by touching the lips?
Is it enough to see her only in video call?

I will not look for love in another woman – I tell her every time I go.
In this light I leave a smile dancing softly on her face.
As if she was made of malleable clay
And my almond hands could carve, at will,
Gestures on her body.

Inside four partitions
Plastered with cement, whitewashed by fire
I leave her. And when I go,
My thick figure of copper vanishes
And far, far away *en el gabacho*²
I have dreams that my wife sees herself naked in the mirror
With a headband of blackthorns embedded on her forehead.

— Gerardo Arturo Carrasco

¹ The succulent leaves with sharp marginal teeth of most Agave species.

² In Mexico *gabacho* is, *el* used to refer to the United States.

The Vegan Minotaur

Leafing through an old book of legends,
I came across the Minotaur of the Cretans.

There he was, attached to the nipples of a page
With the need to devour castaways
(of theater and poetry),
Feigning meekness in an obscure paragraph
Smiling, at whom with his or her reading,
Penetrates the maze of bad omens.

I invited him to come out of the page...
He told me that his island was in the blue sea
That remorse did not embrace him
And that he never bowed his head in shame.

I took him in a '68 beetle to Sandy Hook, to Uvalde.
He was baffled by what I told him, by what he saw,
By the insatiable thirst that does not flee
Nor is exhausted by the passing of centuries.

Since that day he eats cabbages
And prays for mortals' sad celebrity.
He lights a torch when he goes to the bathroom past midnight,
And he wears a hairshirt and chain cilice
To atone for the mistakes of his parents

— Gerardo Arturo Carrasco

Gerardo Arturo Carrasco Gándara was born in 1978 in San Antonio, Texas. He is a member of the Cd. Juarez, Mexico society of writers, a city where he has spent part of his life. At 17 he wrote poems, a play, and a short story for a high school anthology. His poem *November Leonids and Northern Taurids* was featured in San Antonio for the 2020 National Poetry Month-Poetry on the move. A collection of poems was self-published through the Cd. Juarez, Mexico society of writers. He is a new member Voces Cósmicas.

Weedkiller

Whenever applying Roundup to my foliage,
I take as much care as when around you, Uncle Mack.
Fearful of upsetting you,
I never ask
about the vegetation in Vietnam.
My weeds—lush, the color of grass—also grow, spread.

Things get lost inside:
flowers, dirt, lives.

Before I pump the sprayer,
aim the nozzle,

squeeze the trigger,
I gear up—
nitrile gloves for my hands,

plastic goggles for my eyes.

If not, my skin turns red, burns.

Is that what happened to yours?

Monsanto is to blame.

I then spray the invaders until they're soaked,
like the green canopies
you once beheld.

In a day or so,
the invaders will brown,

shrivel to their stalks.

Sometimes I'll itch, scratch.

Though clearly exposed,

poisoned like you,
like many of your buddies,

I heal rapidly, easily.

—Jonathan Fletcher

Killing Crockett

When still a child, John Wayne my idol,
I'd fight with you regularly,
would refuse to change
into my pajamas, insisted instead
on wearing to bed my Davy Crockett
outfit: a well-worn coonskin cap,
buckskin vest and pants.

One of us would eventually surrender.
Until I started first grade, I'd turn our den
into a fort: chairs, cushions, blankets
for limestone, wood, mud.

With my belly on carpet,
popgun in hand—cocked and aimed
at an imaginary,
particolored army—I'd cry
out, Remember the Alamo!

By the end of my first day, I was crying,
trying to forget recess: the line drawn
in pea gravel with a twig,
separating me from the other boys—
their sticks wielded
like Bowie knives, the entrance
to our playset blocked by their bodies:
Santa Anna's not allowed on the Alamo.

Your kind killed the King of the Wild Frontier!

Though our teacher tried to comfort me,
I refused to stop sobbing,
even when you came to pick me up.
The words of the other boys
as sharp as bayonets, my wounds
still fresh, slow to heal. My eyes
red and swollen, wide in realization:
my skin's darker than buckskin.

—Jonathan Fletcher

Originally from San Antonio, Texas, *Jonathan Fletcher*, a BIPOC writer, currently resides in New York City, where he is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing in Poetry at Columbia University's School of the Arts. He has been published in Arts Alive San Antonio, The BeZine, BigCityLit, Clips and Pages, Door is a Jar, DoubleSpeak, Flora Fiction, FlowerSong, fws: a journal of literature & art, Half Hour to Kill, LONE STARS, MONO., Moot Point, New Feathers, OneBlackBoyLikeThat Review, riverSedge, Otherwise Engaged Journal: Literature and Arts Journal, Spoonie Press, Synkroniciti, Tabula Rasa Review, The Thing itself, TEJASCOVIDO, Unlikely Stories Mark V, voicemail poems, Voices de la Luna, and Waco WordFest. Additionally, his work been featured by The League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area and at The Briscoe Western Art Museum.

Almas y Mariposas

Bajo el ala de la mariposa monarca
llegas suspendido en el aire
protegido por su generosa amplitud

Aterrizan juntos, conducidos y guiados
por la expansión de luz

Se quedarán aquí hasta que tengan de partir de nuevo
y regresaran cuando el universo lo dicte

¿Y si pudiera la monarca por piedad
quedarse en el jardín un día más?
¿Sería posible entonces vislumbrar tu figura
en un breve suspiro antes de tu partida?

Adiós,
hasta que regreses el año entrante
cobijado por las benevolentes alas de la mariposa

—Alicia Zavala Galván

Monarchs and Souls

Beneath the wing of a Monarch butterfly
you arrive suspended in air
protected by its generous amplitude

You both land led and guided
by the expansion of light

Both of you will remain until it is time
to leave again and return when the universe dictates

And if the Monarch could by mercy
remain in the garden one more day?
Would it then be possible to glimpse your figure
in a brief sigh before your departure?

Goodbye
until you return next year
sheltered by the benevolent wings of the butterfly

—Alicia Zavala Galván

You received me

You received me
My skin not yet healed from grief
and the absence of loving caresses

His life shortened by death
leaving pages unfinished

I lie motionless day and night
to let the new skin grow
because he said it would
challenging me to survive

You explore me with tenderness and love
Knowing you are not the first to touch me

Your hands read my skin with history
creating new chapters

—Alicia Zavala Galván

A bilingual poet, *Alicia Zavala Galván* has published six collections of poetry. Her literary and scholarly works as an independent scholar have centered on the seventeenth century Mexican poet nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and presented in both English and Spanish before popular and academic audiences in the United States and internationally. Alicia is a longstanding member of Voces Cósmicas.

Our World's Unfolding

You're not avoiding
when you've stood
at the edge—
eyes wide open

You've trusted
not knowing
no longer understanding
anything at all

except the truth of
your own
unraveling

And knowing the world
as a mirror

what do you do

—Suzanne “Zan” Green

This Kind of Love

Belonging...
Why just this morning
 Wind dancing in

Everyone shook—
 Live oaks
 Juniper

Daisies did a little dance
 Even dry-eyed lizard—

 Who blinked
 I'm sure of it

—Suzanne “Zan” Green

The Only Thing Given

Dawn's early light
brings singing in the trees
& warmth so delicious
little creatures
making shuffling sounds
& their breath—more easy
with an expectancy
only daylight brings

& all who've been born
continue with their dying...
Perhaps a curse—but cycles
have a certainty
no one can control
& what little power we have
is the speed in which it comes

Don't imagine yourself
without a purpose—
engraved in your heart
Earth has a song for you—
follow your longings
and all your desires—
in your surrendering
it will be your true name
that arrives

& be warned—
though you may cling

to your old life (*in hopes*
of softer landing)
truth isn't found
where comfort lives

Now is the time
for caretakers
& imaginers of
a whole new world

let your name
& purpose guide you

—Suzanne “Zan” Green

Zan Green came to Texas in the early 1990s. Not part of a plan, but down a path. Who knows the road we follow? Perhaps there is more to the path than we can see. Zan’s poetry explores the wonder and mystery of life. Zan is a longstanding member of Voces C3smicas.

To serve and protect

A culture of

Mistrust

Ego

Disregard

Anger

Bias

Racism

Abuse

Hate

Violence

A Culture of brutality

—Carlos Loera

Yesterdays

At seventeen I thought about

A lot of

Tomorrows

Sunrises

Friends

Staying up all night

Conquering the world

Excited about never knowing what

At 65

I think about

A lot of

Sunsets

Dead friends

Going to sleep early

Can't remember knowing what

How the world conquered me

And a lot of yesterdays

—Carlos Loera

Carlos Loera graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison with an MFA in Art. He teaches at San Antonio College and works at Bazan Library. He paints, draws, writes poetry, and produces *Voces Cóslicas*.

Instructional Content

Since class can be held anytime anywhere,
I shouldn't be surprised by today's lesson
When my dog rolled over and made herself
Available for a good petting no matter how cold
My hands are on this day in Dallas when even
Whole Foods had to apologize for frozen pipes,
And the most steadfast of the final leaves hang
On for what? The view? And though I've been
Wearing a hat all day and my wooliest sweater,
My fingers are so cold, I wouldn't want them
On me (let alone rubbing my belly), but she's
Here on her back saying, Slow down, Pal —
Let's learn how trading touches can warm us all.

—Laurence Musgrove

Field Notes from Campus, October 19

The midmorning sun in San Angelo
Is happy to warm us through the blue
As it can, and I stand on the sidewalk
Outside my building eating an apple
And watching a squirrel jump from
Oak to oak, climbing to the end
Of a branch where the top acorns
Remain, and the small Monarchs
Who are slow to warm and awaken,
Shake themselves off, and head
Where the gravity of their fellows
Is calling them. Hey! The squirrel
Is now on the ground picking up
What's fallen, and I say Hey! To
A colleague walking to her office
And soon to her classroom where
The gravity of her students awaits
Their lifting and warming into light.

—Laurence Musgrove

Laurence Musgrove was born in Houston, Texas. His previous books include *LOCAL BIRD* – a poetry collection, *ONE KIND OF RECORDING* – a volume of aphorisms, and *THE BLUEBONNET SUTRAS* – Buddhist dialogues in verse. Professor of English at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas, Laurence is also the editor of *TEXAS POETRY ASSIGNMENT*, an online journal dedicated to championing Texas verse, community, and hunger relief.

My Mestiza

I argued with my Colonizer blood today
after I complained about unground coffee beans.
He forgets that he no one owes him anything and
he didn't warn me about my entitlement hiding behind
my Basque tint.

I keep apologizing to my Native blood
for having used his own hand to steal from him,
and then I do it again.

Even though I've stepped inside him, Red Feather,
in my dreams, I still don't know how to speak to him.

I remind my Mestiza, claiming forty percent of my DNA,
that I can hear her, even if I don't understand.

Her song and my verse twine my blood,
chime my dual tongue and trace my land,
leading me to the hands and faces gone
before me to find Her

—Rita L. Ortiz

Chopped n' screwed

A foggy September brought a stroke
that stroked the quietest dreamless sleep,
cutting me off the FM into mute static
What a finale it would have been, but God said, Sike!
So candy apple cranium cradling lightning Is My Head
and somewhere in the core is the milky sap
where all the fissures converge
the understanding of understanding
the <m> in the Meta of all cognition
the once beloved dream plane on suspension
And I keep bleeding the air for an answer
I'm watching from the inside of the inside
but Subconscious trapped me in a snow globe
playing Swan Lake on loop
Chopped n' screwed
because it knows I know how it ends
How it ends is all I remember
How it ends is all I remember
How I t
En d S
I s a l L
I Re
M
M
mEMm. M
B e R

—Rita L. Ortiz

A Good Set

Dreaming through blind hot wandering summers
in elementary school,
I used to stand on top of one of the short brick
pillars in front of my aunt's porch next door
to conduct Fantasia with my orchestra of dry grass
I earned a standing ovation every time
even though no one showed Three decades later, not much has changed

Some say it's about a having a good opener
Others say it's about a good closing number
Three decades formed a pretty good set,
even though no one shows—
unless you count the bartender
and the sound guy

—Rita L. Ortiz

El Nopal En La Frente

Don't let the smooth porcelain fool you
My canela freckles spice more than empanadas
on a Sunday merienda
Probably more Mestiza than any raza you know
My Spanish rolls of easy before they can ask, "you speak Spanish?"
Faster than you can cut your aguacates
Y si todavia dudas, si aun no es obvio,
60ambien te puedo cantar una Ranchera
One that shows you con mucho orgullo
que traigo el nopal en la frente
And then I'll order nopalitos
Pero por favor, no yellow cheese

—Rita L. Ortiz

Rita L. Ortiz is a songwriter, writer, and musician based in San Antonio, Texas. Also known as “La Golondrina”, she fronts the independent band, The Velvet Hues. Ortiz’s music is on all platforms and her poetry is featured in Voices de la Luna magazine, and the Puro Chicax Writers of 21st Century and Asina is How We Talk anthologies. She produced, wrote, directed, scored, and starred in her Cinemoem/experimental short film, Aldebaran, in 2018. Ortiz is currently an English professor in Palo Alto College. Rita has also performed at various Voces C6smicas events throughout the years.

Hispanic sonnet, or Tongue-tied

John of Patmos meant
Poetry is the tongue of God.
Kierkegaard meant
Poetry is soaring over the world.
I am no less unshackled nor
Heavenlier despite these words—
Enticing symbols
Despite their flaws.
Love yourself & asylum what is
Weak—bodies' fragile
Collapsing.
University taught me to
Talk smack about universities.
God handed me vocabulary to

Tongue-tie my soul.

—Alex Z. Salinas

The coin

after Fernando Esteban Flores

Love is a coin in my jeans

Washed & nightstand-stalking

Like a star I forget

Like the back of my hand.

—Alex Z. Salinas

Alex Z. Salinas is the author of three full-length collections of both poetry and prose, *WARBLES* (2019) and *DREAMT, or The Lingering Phantoms of Equinox* (2020), and *City Lights From the Upside Down* (2021) and has two forthcoming books in 2023 – *Trash Poems* and *Hispanic Sonnets*. Salinas has received starred reviews in Kirkus Reviews and has been included in the National Book Critics Circle’s Critical Notes for *City Lights From the Upside Down*. Salinas has been featured at various venues across Texas. He received his M.A. in English Literature and Language as a Distinguished Graduate from St. Mary’s University. He was born in Corpus Christi but has long called San Antonio his home.

Call for Submissions

Catch the Next's *Journal of Ideas and Creativity* is an interdisciplinary scholarly journal currently seeking articles regarding best practices in higher education as well as creative work representing engagement with ideas that color and/or impact the landscape of higher education in the 21st century. The editors invite submission of scholarly, pedagogical, and theoretical manuscripts that promote the journal's mission to give voice to faculty, researchers, and administrators who cross disciplines yet maintain a core pedagogical focus on the underserved in higher education. We seek previously unpublished work with a special focus on program data, best practices in pedagogy, best teaching moments, and/or ongoing dialogue related to issues in education of national significance. In addition, we invite submissions of book reviews, interviews, poetry, short fiction, and visual art.

Full Author Guidelines, including word limits and formatting guidelines, can be found at <https://www.catchthenext.org/publications/submissions-guidelines>. We accept submissions on a rolling basis and are happy to provide mentoring to any first-time authors.

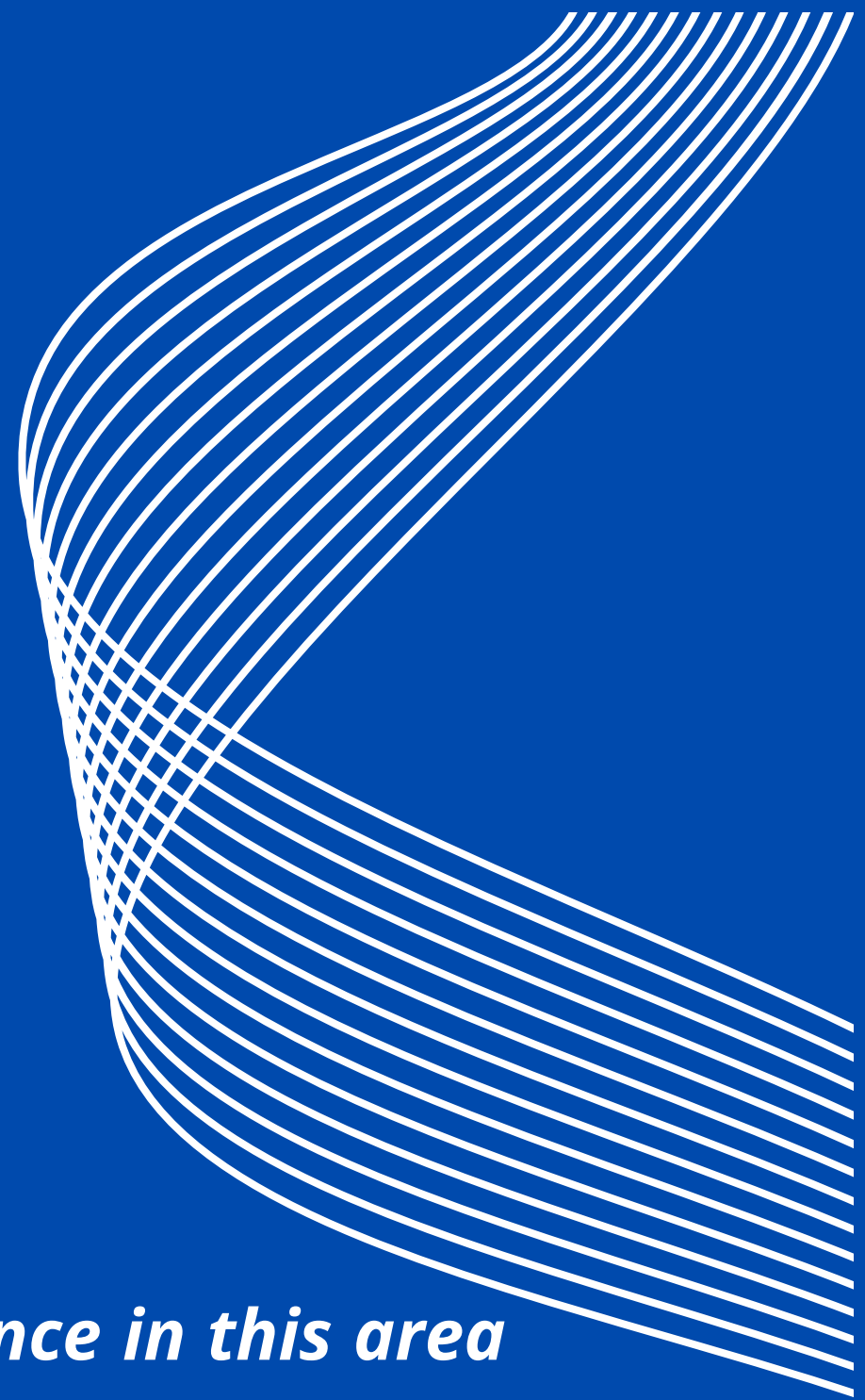
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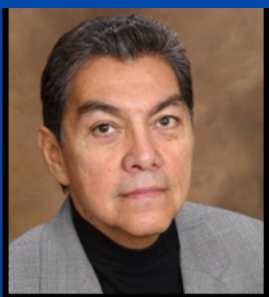


CTN celebrates ten years of consultancy experience in this area of pedagogy and we strive to achieve the following: develop empower, enable, and maintain.



Dr. Maria Martha Chavez is Chief Executive Officer for Catch the Next, Inc. Dr. Chavez Brumell is a sociologist with a history of researching, implementing, and evaluating social policy.

Editors



Dr. Rafael Castillo serves as Director of Publications and Special Projects for Catch the Next, Inc. and the Ascender program. Currently, Rafael Castillo is a tenured professor of English at Palo Alto College in San Antonio, Texas and has taught CTN Integrated Reading and Writing and English Composition for two years. His "Chicano Literature" bibliographic essay was recently published by Oxford University Press.



Dr. Erin Doran is Catch the Next's Director of Research and Evaluation.



Mr. Fernando Esteban Flores is a native son of Tejas, a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, published three books of poetry: *Ragged Borders*, *Red Accordion Blues*, *BloodSongs* available through Hijo del Sol Publishing, published in multiple journals, reviews, newspapers, and online sites, selected in 2018-19 by the Department of Arts & Culture of the City of San Antonio, with support from Gemini Ink for his poem *Song for America V (Yo Soy San Antonio)* as one of 30 poems/poets to commemorate the City's Tricentennial anniversary. Fernando received an ELLA award and an Arts & Letters award from the San Antonio Public Library System and Friends of the San Antonio Library for his outstanding contributions to the artistic and literary community of San Antonio. He was named poetry editor of the *Catch the Next Journal of Pedagogy & Creativity*, and is also the founder of an eclectic group of poets, *Voces C3smicas*, who promote literacy, poetry, and art.



Catch the Next, Inc.

