

Research Article

Navigating the Borderlands of Language: Toward Inclusive Education for Emergent Bilingual Latine/x Students

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This conceptual paper explores how Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands framework can be applied to reimagine curriculum in ways that affirm the linguistic and cultural hybridity of emergent bilingual Latine/x students. While recent shifts in educational scholarship have advocated for culturally sustaining pedagogies and translanguaging practices, dominant monolingual ideologies continue to shape curriculum design, assessment, and language policy in U.S. schools. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from curriculum studies, bilingual education, and critical

language theory, this paper critiques the traditional curriculum's emphasis on assimilation and linguistic hierarchy. In response, it advances a Borderlands approach to curriculum, one that centers nepantla, or the liminal space of cultural and linguistic negotiation, as a foundation for pedagogical transformation. By positioning emergent bilingualism as a strength rather than a deficit and rejecting dichotomous language ideologies, this framework aims to cultivate equitable and affirming educational environments that honor the complex realities of Latine/x learners.

Keywords: Anzaldúa; bilingualism; borderlands; identity; language

1. INTRODUCTION

In first grade, I vividly recall sitting in my classroom, hesitant to raise my hand. At home, I spoke Spanish, my first language, with ease and confidence. I would tell stories to my family, ask questions, and express my emotions freely. However, in school, English felt unfamiliar and heavy on my tongue. I often knew the answers to the teacher's questions, yet I worried about mispronouncing words or being misunderstood. Rather than feeling liberated, learning in school transformed into a situation where I had to choose my words carefully, and the knowledge I had acquired at home often seemed irrelevant. Although I was born in the United States, my early years were spent speaking only Spanish. Once I started school, I was unable to practice English at home, which limited my opportunities to improve.

This early experience marked the beginning of my life in the borderlands, not as two opposing worlds of home and school, but as the shifting, often fraught space in between. Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) describes the borderlands as a site of hybridity, tension, and transformation, where individuals must constantly negotiate multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural, linguistic, and epistemological frameworks. Like many emergent

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bilingual Latine/x students, I inhabited this *nepantla*, a Nahuatl term Anzaldúa uses to describe the unsettled, transitional state of being, where meaning is made in the midst of contradiction. I learned to navigate these tensions, translate across boundaries, and adapt to environments that often failed to recognize the richness of bilingualism. This tension is not the result of bilingualism itself, but of a schooling system that often frames bilingual students through a deficit lens, treating their multilingualism as a problem to be fixed rather than a resource to be appreciated. This paper addresses that problem by drawing on Anzaldúa's Borderlands framework to reimagine educational spaces that affirm the complexity of emergent bilingual students' identities and experiences.

This conceptual paper engages Anzaldúa's Borderlands framework to reimagine curriculum in ways that validate linguistic hybridity and cultural complexity. Drawing from my lived experiences and informed by critical scholarship, I explore how writing can serve as a space for identity formation, healing, and transformation. The paper also incorporates research on translanguaging (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), and linguistic justice (Flores & Rosa, 2015) to argue for a more inclusive and empowering curricular approach. Drawing from my own experience, this paper began with a personal vignette that illustrates the tension involved in navigating multiple language worlds. I then continue this paper with the next section by critiquing conventional curricular models that reinforce linguistic hierarchies and deficit-based assumptions. Later, I present a literature review section designed to provide a rich foundation that supports and informs the conceptual framework. After, I present Anzaldúa's Borderlands as a conceptual lens for understanding the intersections of language, identity, and curriculum. Finally, I propose a reimagined approach to curriculum grounded in hybridity, linguistic diversity, and identity negotiation. In doing so, I aim to illuminate the transformative potential of curriculum when informed by the lived realities of students who exist between languages, cultures, and institutional spaces.

2. THE U.S. SCHOOLING OF LATINE/X CHILDREN

Before exploring how Anzaldúa's Borderlands framework can reimagine the curriculum for emergent bilingual Latine/x students, it is crucial to recognize the significant challenges and complex dynamics within today's U.S. education system. This section is divided into two main sub-sections. The first subsection is titled "Historical Context of Exclusion and Assimilation," which explores the historical factors behind educational exclusion and assimilation practices that have negatively affected Latine/x communities. The second subsection is titled "The Harmful Legacy of English-Only Policies," which examines the adverse effects of these policies on bilingual education and cultural identity. By exploring these important themes, we can enhance our understanding of how to effectively implement Anzaldúa's framework, promoting more inclusive and empowering educational practices for emergent bilingual Latine/x students.

2.1 A Historical Context of Exclusion and Assimilation

The educational experiences of Latine/x children in the United States cannot be understood without a critical examination of the systems of exclusion and assimilation that have shaped schooling for over a century. U.S. public education has long served as a mechanism for social control, reinforcing dominant norms through what Walter Mignolo (2007) refers to as the “coloniality of power,” a matrix that privileges Western ways of knowing, being, and languaging. Within this colonial matrix, Latine/x students have historically been viewed through a deficit lens, perceived as lacking the linguistic and cultural capital necessary to succeed in school. (Valencia, 1997; Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Throughout the 20th century, bilingualism was often pathologized. Instead of recognizing the richness of bilingual students’ linguistic repertoires, educational systems largely prioritized subtractive assimilation, encouraging the abandonment of students’ home languages in favor of English (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This assimilationist approach was institutionalized through policies such as California’s Proposition 227, enacted in 1998, which mandated a structured English immersion model and severely restricted bilingual education in public schools (Revilla & Asato, 2002). Although subsequent reforms have sought to reverse these limitations, the underlying ideology that devalues bilingualism continues to shape educational practice today. The aim of Proposition 227 was to enhance the proficiency of non-English-speaking students by immersing them in an all-English environment, rather than allowing for instruction in their native languages. This shift sparked considerable debate about the best practices for teaching English learners, as many educators and linguists argued that bilingual education could provide critical support in helping students transition to full English proficiency. The enduring impact of such policies reflects ongoing tensions in educational philosophy regarding language acquisition and the role of cultural heritage in the learning process (Revilla & Asato, 2002), illustrating how language ideologies and racism intersect in educational policymaking.

2.2 The Harmful Legacy of English-Only Policies

English-only ideologies and policies have significantly influenced the educational landscape in the United States, establishing English monolingualism not only as a standard but also as an ideal to pursue. This perspective often dismisses the rich linguistic diversity that students bring with them, particularly the valuable skills of bilingualism. Instead of recognizing and appreciating students’ full linguistic repertoires, schools often perceive bilingualism, particularly Spanish-English bilingualism, as a deficiency that requires remediation (Rojas et al., 2019).

This deficit framing does not merely affect language acquisition; it perpetuates broader systems of racial and cultural oppression, ultimately limiting the educational

opportunities and identity formation of emergent bilingual Latine/x students. Such practices can lead to feelings of inadequacy among students and hinder their academic success by limiting their ability to engage fully with both languages. By failing to value bilingualism, schools not only undermine the identities and cultural backgrounds of these students but also miss out on the cognitive and social benefits that bilingualism can provide in an increasingly interconnected world. It is crucial for educational policies to evolve towards a more inclusive approach that recognizes and celebrates linguistic diversity, fostering an environment where all students can thrive.

More recently, scholars have examined how the rhetoric of “language proficiency” continues to cloak assimilationist agendas in a veneer of progressive language. Flores and Rosa (2015) introduced the concept of the “white listening subject” to critique how, even when students speak English, they are often still perceived as deficient due to racialized assumptions about their speech. This creates a paradox where Latine/x students are both penalized for not knowing English “well enough” and not entirely accepted when they do, because their English is heard as accented, informal, or otherwise illegitimate.

These systemic dynamics have real consequences: they impact students’ access to academic content, their participation in classroom discourse, and their overall sense of belonging in educational spaces (Menken & Garcia, 2010). The curriculum often fails to represent the linguistic diversity of Latine/x communities, reinforcing the idea that academic legitimacy is tied to monolingual, standardized English (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016).

Education has historically served as a means of empowerment and liberation; however, traditional curriculum designs frequently perpetuate the marginalization and exclusion of various populations, particularly those who speak different languages at home. Many curricula do not adequately incorporate the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of bilingual students, such as those from Latine/Latinx backgrounds, which can hinder their academic success and sense of belonging. A critical examination of current educational approaches highlights several systemic issues related to language, identity, and the learning process, revealing the underlying issues surrounding language, identity, and learning. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive reevaluation of curricular frameworks and teaching methodologies to create a more equitable and responsive learning environment for all students, regardless of their language background.

Nonetheless, one of the most significant aspects of traditional curricula is the tendency to establish monolingual classrooms and policies, thereby creating and reinforcing monolingual environments through English-only policies.

One of the arguments that has been used by English-only advocates is that some linguistic minority groups, most notably Latine/x, are resistant to surrendering their native language usage following immigration to the United States, and that only a national language policy will ensure language shift to English. (Padilla et al., 1991)

According to Padilla et al., one of the most prominent arguments established by those opposed to bilingual support and education primarily focuses on the fear of losing English as the native language of the United States due to immigrants, such as those of Latine/x background. This perspective suggests that without a formal national language policy, it is unlikely that these groups will transition to English in their daily lives and interactions. Advocates argue that implementing such a policy is essential for promoting a shift toward English language usage among these populations. However, Padilla et al. (1991) recognize such a perspective founded on prejudice and racism.

Consequently, public discourse on bilingualism, alongside policies, educational ideologies, historical context, and language status, collectively shapes our understanding of its value and significance in society (Hruska, 2000). Therefore, the failure to acknowledge and appreciate the distinct experiences associated with bilingualism often perpetuates existing inequalities, biases, and a lack of adequate support for students navigating the complexities of bilingual borderlands as they navigate the educational system. For students who are proficient in multiple languages, this approach fosters a sense of linguistic hierarchy, wherein their primary language is perceived as inferior and subsequently devalued. The bilingual education policy in the United States has consistently lacked the objective of promoting bilingualism (Przymus & Huddleston, 2021). Rather, it has been formulated with the intention of imparting English language skills to individuals whose primary language is not English, ideally through replacement rather than addition (Przymus & Huddleston, 2021).

Additionally, traditional curriculum tends to overlook the cultural and personal identities of students. A curriculum lacking cultural and identity development does not adequately incorporate or support diverse students, their experiences, and languages. Offorma (2016) clearly illustrated, “Culture is an important factor in curriculum planning and drives the content of every curriculum. This is because the essence of education is to transmit the cultural heritage of a society to the younger generation of the society” (p. 1). The removal of the cultural heritage of language of minority students, particularly within the Latine/x community, can have significant consequences. This lack of cultural recognition diminishes their ability to foster a sense of belonging in the educational environment and can lead to broader academic achievement gaps.

Cooley (1902) introduced the concept of the “looking-glass self,” which posits that our sense of self is shaped through our interactions with others. He argued that our self-concept is shaped by the feedback we receive from those around us and that our sense of identity is a social construct. When students do not see their culture and language valued in schools, they may struggle to engage fully with the curriculum, which can result in lower academic performance. This disconnection can create social and emotional challenges, such as feelings of isolation or inadequacy, which further hinder their overall development and well-being (Edwards, 2010). Understanding and integrating these cultural elements are crucial in supporting the success of minority students and promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational experience.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational experiences for emergent bilingual Latine/x students in U.S. schools are shaped by deeply embedded language ideologies that elevate English as the singular legitimate language of instruction (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García & Kleyn, 2016). Policies enforcing English-only instruction and restricting the use of students' home languages reflect monoglossic ideologies that systematically devalue bilingualism and perpetuate linguistic marginalization. While these structures often constrain opportunities for bilingual students, many actively navigate, resist, and reshape these linguistic terrains.

Translanguaging, as conceptualized by García (2009) and further developed by García and Wei (2013), challenges the rigid separation of languages. It recognizes bilinguals' flexible use of their full linguistic repertoires, including English, Spanish, and hybrid forms such as Spanglish, not as a sign of confusion or deficiency, but as an asset that supports cognitive development, meaning making, and identity affirmation (Canagarajah, 2011; Velasco & García, 2014). These practices underscore the agency of bilingual students and their ability to adapt language fluidly in response to shifting social and academic contexts.

Scholars have further argued that dominant language ideologies are racialized and hierarchical, positioning “standard” English as both neutral and superior while devaluing other language practices (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Flores, 2021). These ideologies function as gatekeeping mechanisms, disproportionately impacting Latine/x students and other multilingual learners. In response, frameworks rooted in linguistic justice and critical language awareness call for dismantling these hierarchies and affirming the legitimacy of minoritized language practices (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Within curriculum studies, traditional monolingual curricula have been critiqued for reinforcing cultural assimilation and ignoring the linguistic and cultural knowledge of students (Paris, 2012). In contrast, culturally sustaining pedagogies seek to affirm and extend students' cultural and linguistic competencies as part of their academic development. This includes resisting the erasure of bilingualism and designing learning experiences that foreground students' identities, voices, and experiences.

To extend these insights, Anzaldúa's (2012) work on the Borderlands offer a powerful conceptual framework for understanding how bilingual students inhabit spaces of linguistic, cultural, and epistemological negotiation. Her articulation of the Borderlands as a metaphorical and material space, marked by hybridity, conflict, and creativity, provides a lens to view bilingual students not merely as situated between languages but as actively constructing meaning within spaces of tension. Scholars such as Pérez (1999) and Sterenberg (2017) expand on this framework to examine how identity, language, and power converge in educational contexts. These works suggest that schools must not only accommodate bilingualism but reimagine curriculum through frameworks that center hybridity, border-crossing, and resistance.

Together, this literature review informs the present paper's conceptual argument: that the curriculum must be reimagined through a Borderlands framework. This approach builds on and extends the principles of translanguaging and culturally sustaining pedagogy by foregrounding the affective, linguistic, and epistemic negotiations that emergent bilingual Latine/x students experience. By embracing the concept of the Borderlands as a guiding framework, educators can cultivate transformative learning environments that recognize bilingual students' cultural knowledge and linguistic creativity as sources of strength.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Building on this critical body of scholarship, Gloria Anzaldúa's (2012) concept of the Borderlands provides a dynamic lens for understanding the lived experiences of emergent bilingual Latine/x students as they navigate linguistic, cultural, and institutional tensions. Anzaldúa views the Borderlands as a complex, shifting space characterized by hybridity and struggle. It is a place of contact, conflict, and opportunity where dominant norms and marginalized knowledge intersect and coexist.

Her work emphasizes that language is not merely a means of communication, but is deeply tied to identity, cognition, and cultural belonging. In these linguistic borderlands, English and Spanish do not just oppose each other; they blend, overlap, and evolve, pushing against clear boundaries. Bilingual students navigate this space not from a position of deficit, but from one of creative negotiation, identity assertion, and linguistic agency.

Anzaldúa (2012) writes, "So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (p. 81). Her pride in her hybrid language is not a sign of confusion or deficiency but an act of resistance. She reclaims linguistic mixing as legitimate, creative, and central to her identity.

This view resists traditional understandings of code-switching as disorderly. Instead, scholars such as García (2009) and Canagarajah (2011) frame translanguaging as a strategic and empowering practice, where multilingual speakers mobilize their full linguistic repertoires fluidly across contexts. Anzaldúa's (2012) discomfort was not with her hybridity but with societal pressures to suppress it. As she noted, "Until I am free to write bilingually... my tongue will be illegitimate" (p. 81), not because it is inherently so, but because dominant systems delegitimize it. Thus, the linguistic borderlands are not the languages themselves, but the social space in which emergent bilinguals forge meaning between them. It is a space of contradiction, creativity, and identity negotiation where hybrid forms emerge that defy imposed binaries.

Anzaldúa (2012) illustrated the concept of the Borderlands as a non-static, ever-present space: "Borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and

forbidden are its inhabitants” (p. 25). This Borderlands space is not merely a geographical or linguistic boundary; it is a zone of in-betweenness where opposing forces meet, clash, and ultimately reshape each other. It is a space of contradiction and negotiation, where individuals live with multiplicity, often forced to reconcile cultural and linguistic differences under pressure from dominant ideologies.

For bilingual Latine/x students, the Borderlands represent a linguistic and cultural landscape where English and Spanish coexist, intertwine, and sometimes clash, producing hybrid expressions that mirror personal experiences. Instead of seeing this liminality as a shortcoming, Anzaldúa regards it as a wellspring of strength and creativity. Those living in the Borderlands experience its tensions while also forging innovative modes of expression, identity, and understanding. In this space, language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a weapon of resistance, a means of survival, and a form of self-definition.

U.S. education often supports monoglossic views favoring English-only instruction (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García & Kleyn, 2016), which marginalizes students’ linguistic identities and practices. This conceptual framework critiques what is referred to as the “conventional curriculum,” defined here as a standardized, English-centered approach based on assimilationist ideas, while advocating for culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). Utilizing Anzaldúa’s Borderlands framework, this paper highlights the knowledge, identities, and linguistic creativity of emerging bilingual Latine/x students. Language is viewed as more than just a communication tool; it serves as a vehicle for culture, identity, and power (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This perspective disputes deficit narratives and reimagines the curriculum as a transformative space that not only recognizes but also celebrates linguistic hybridity.

5. REDEFINING CURRICULUM THROUGH THE BORDERLANDS

As of July 1, 2023, the United States Census Bureau has reported a significant population of approximately 65.2 million individuals who self-identify as Latine/x or Latino (n.d.). This figure establishes the Latine/x community as the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the nation, accounting for an impressive 19.5% of the total U.S. population. This demographic shift is not merely statistical; it reflects a profound transformation in the country’s cultural and social landscape. In light of the growing Latine/x population, this section outlines the primary aim of the paper: to advocate for a reimagined curriculum rooted in the Borderlands framework that affirms the hybrid linguistic and cultural identities of emerging bilingual Latine/x students. This pursuit highlights the need to shift from monolingual and assimilationist educational models toward pedagogies that acknowledge and value the intricacies of identity and language.

The traditional curriculum in the United States has operated mainly within a Eurocentric and monolingual framework, privileging standardized English and dominant cultural narratives while excluding or marginalizing the experiences, languages, and ways of knowing of students from historically underrepresented communities (Sleeter, 2005). These systems often fail to cater to the diverse needs of students, especially those from bilingual or multicultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of bilingualism within the classroom.

Nonetheless, however convincing this argument may be, it remains true in many contexts that “separate is always unequal.” Separating languages on signs, in classroom instruction, and even in translation and interpreting exercises creates linguistic binaries, borders, and dichotomies such as big vs. small, good vs. bad, and important vs. less important. This leads to diglossia contexts where one language consistently dominates over the other (Przymus & Huddleston, 2021).

By employing Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2012) Borderlands framework, we can gain valuable insights into the complexities of navigating multiple cultures and languages, moving beyond merely incorporating Spanish into the classroom. This approach highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the systemic issues within education. It advocates for a more inclusive curriculum that honors the rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of Latine/x students. Such a shift is essential for creating an educational environment that is equitable and relevant for all learners, particularly allowing students who are bilingual the opportunity to flourish as they navigate through their academic journey. Padilla et al. (1991) highlighted the advantages of embracing bilingualism by noting that research on executive functions has revealed significant benefits for bilingual individuals in cognitive processing. These individuals usually excel compared to their monolingual peers in tasks that require suppressing irrelevant information, effectively switching between tasks, and resolving conflicts (Padilla et al., 1991).

A Borderlands curriculum goes beyond conventional teaching methods, incorporating cultural and linguistic diversity through purposeful inclusivity and thoughtful reflection. Therefore, this section aims to showcase instructional practices that help students navigate the transitional space between their homes and the complex environment of academia. At the core of Anzaldúa’s (2012) conceptualization of Borderlands lies the concept of *nepantla*, a deeply affective and temporal in-between space often characterized by discomfort, identity fragmentation, and the emotional labor of negotiating contradictions. While *nepantla* involves identity negotiation, it also entails navigating uncertainty, tension, and transformation. Traditional curricula, which often prioritize a singular, dominant cultural perspective, can alienate students living within *nepantla* by rendering their hybrid identities invisible or marginalizing them as deviant.

To address this issue, educators can create curricula that validate and incorporate diverse cultural narratives, texts, and perspectives. This might include comparative literary analysis, critical discussions of authors from multiple traditions, or student-

authored projects that reflect lived experience. For instance, one approach to *nepantla* within curriculum design might involve a comparative literary analysis of texts from various cultural traditions. In one redesigned 11th-grade English Language Arts unit, students read both Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and excerpts from canonical American literature, inviting them to explore themes of identity, language, and belonging. Students were encouraged to write their bilingual vignettes, code-switching freely, and reflecting on their linguistic choices. These practices affirm students' lived realities and foster a sense of belonging, while also building literacy skills in culturally sustaining ways (Paris & Alim, 2017).

In addition to curricular content, a Borderlands approach invites us to reconsider assessment practices. Standardized and monolingual assessments often fail to capture the complex knowledge systems and cultural ways of knowing that bilingual students bring into the classroom. In response, educators might implement performance-based assessments that invite students to express understanding across modalities through storytelling, visual art, bilingual presentations, or multimodal portfolios. For example, a final assessment in a bilingual social studies class might involve a digital storytelling project in which students narrate family migration histories using both English and Spanish, interwoven with historical analysis. This approach not only affirms bilingualism but positions students as knowledge producers and storytellers. Drawing on Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno's (2021) *Rooted in Strength*, these assessment models recognize the whole linguistic repertoire of emergent bilinguals as a powerful resource for meaning-making and demonstration of learning.

The conceptualization of the Borderlands advocates for the creation of inclusive educational environments that recognize and honor students' lived experiences. Traditional curricula often marginalize the voices of students who are linguistically and culturally diverse, perpetuating a sense of exclusion (Nieto, 2018). A curriculum informed by the conceptualization of the Borderlands prioritizes students' identities by incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices. Instructional strategies, such as autobiographical projects, oral histories, and storytelling, not only allow students to draw from their personal and familial knowledge systems but also support literacy development and social-emotional learning. These activities allow students to share their experiences within the classroom, promoting a sense of belonging and affirming their cultural and linguistic knowledge as vital components of the learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

6. CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper aimed to introduce and emphasize the significance of Anzaldúa's Borderlands framework as a powerful metaphor for understanding the internal conflicts that students experience while navigating their unique linguistic borderlands. These borderlands exist at the intersection of their home environments and school settings,

where they often grapple with differing cultural expectations, language use, and the formation of their identities. By delving into Anzaldúa's insights, the paper attempted to shed light on the consequences of traditional curriculum and the challenges students encounter as they strive to reconcile their diverse linguistic backgrounds with the demands of academic institutions, thereby illustrating the complex journey of navigating multiple identities and voices.

Ultimately, the purpose of this paper was to advocate for a reimagined curriculum that not only resists monolingual ideologies but also centers the hybrid, evolving identities of emergent bilingual Latine/x students. While the traditional curriculum often seeks to undermine bilingualism and the development of identity, this paper takes the opportunity to explore alternatives to the monolingual curriculum and classroom environment. It provides instructional strategies designed to better support and understand students during their educational journeys, especially by integrating culturally sustaining pedagogies, adopting translanguaging practices, and valuing students' lived experiences as important curricular resources.

For educators, this means embedding multilingual texts into lesson plans, honoring students' language practices without penalization, and establishing classroom norms that validate code-switching and identity exploration. In secondary classrooms, it may involve reflective writing that connects personal narratives to academic content. In higher education, instructors might incorporate critical autoethnography or oral history projects to validate student voice. Across various contexts, assessment must also evolve from standardized, monolingual benchmarks to performance-based, reflective, and multimodal evaluations that reflect students' diverse and hybrid identities.

By redefining curriculum through the lens of the Borderlands, educators are not just adapting pedagogy; they are participating in transformative justice by cultivating a sense of belonging, affirming differences, and equipping students to navigate and reshape the very institutions they move through.

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Cora Laydi Fernandez is an Instructional Designer and Instructor at Florida International University. Her research interests include curriculum design, sense of belonging in higher education, and the intersection of identity and pedagogy. Drawing on frameworks such as Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), her work explores how instructional design can support inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments, particularly for Latine/x students and other historically marginalized groups. She is committed to bridging theory and practice to promote equitable access, student engagement, and holistic success in both online and in-person learning spaces.

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