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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

________________________________
Deron Boyles, Ph.D.
Committee Member

________________________________
Kristen Buras, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

________________________________
Jennifer Esposito, Ph.D.
Committee Member

________________________________
Chara Bohan, Ph.D.
Committee Member

________________________________
Date

________________________________
William L. Curlette, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Educational Policy Studies

________________________________
Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education & Human Development

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Department of Educational Policy Studies

College of Education

Georgia State University

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Kristen Buras

Department of Educational Policy Studies

College of Education

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA 30303

UNHEARD VOICES: COUNTERSTORIES OF LATINX
IMMIGRANT PARENTS' EXPERIENCES
NAVIGATING METRO ATLANTA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

MICHELLE S. YRIGOLLEN-ROBBINS

Under the Direction of Dr. Kristen Buras

ABSTRACT

Schools in the Atlanta area are experiencing a significant influx of Latinx populations (Odem & Browne, 2011). Even though educators and school systems are aware of this movement and provide services in an attempt to increase Latinx parental involvement in their schools, few studies have been conducted that explore the perspectives of Latinx parents on metro Atlanta schools and little effort has been put into understanding the nuances of the Latinx parents' culture (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). The lack of Latinx parents' participation in school programs has led to a common misconception that Latinx families do not place a high value on education and therefore do not want to get involved in their children's academic experience (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). As communities of Latinx families - a group constantly misunderstood

by school officials - grow and develop in the metro Atlanta area, in this study I explore the value Latinx place on education. More specifically, I presented in-depth interviews with Latinx immigrant parents of metro Atlanta public school students. Special attention was paid to their navigation of the educational system and the negotiation of their culture in the process, including the challenges rooted in language barriers, cultural differences, and immigration status.

I explored such characteristics through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Yosso (2006) described cultural wealth in Latinx communities as the sum of different forms of capital, or "the total extent of an individual's accumulated assets and resources" (p. 50). She identified such resources as aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital. This study revealed these forms of capital through Latinx parents' counterstories, which are narratives centered on the experiential knowledge of people of color. This study provides a unique contribution to the limited educational research on Latinx immigrants in metro Atlanta's public schools by highlighting educational tensions as well as identifying the kinds of cultural wealth that assist Latinx parents in navigating them. Findings are useful because the Latinx' counterstories help educators develop more successful school programs by considering the Latinx families' needs and taking into account their contributions to education.

INDEX WORDS: Latinx parental involvement, counterstories, critical race theory, Atlanta.

# UNHEARD VOICES: COUNTERSTORIES OF LATINX IMMIGRANT PARENTS' EXPERIENCES NAVIGATING METRO ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

MICHELLE S. YRIGOLLEN-ROBBINS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of Philosophy

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

Social Foundations of Education

in

the College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA

2018

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my father, Dr. J.J. Santa-Pinter, a person who always advocated for justice and taught me the importance of educating ourselves and others.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my husband, Richard Robbins, for his love, support, motivation, and encouragement over the years. I couldn't have done this without you. This work is also dedicated to my children, who I hope are inspired by their own accomplishments and who I thank every day for being in my life. I am grateful for my friends, especially Michael Bartone, who has supported me beyond words; and Fred Sipes, for believing in my potential before, during, and after this journey. I want to acknowledge the committee members for their guidance, support, and inspiration and mainly Kristen Buras, for believing in me and in my study. Finally, I want to especially thank my mother-in-law Patricia A. Robbins, who I never met, but has given me the most amazing gift of love: this is for us.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to focus on how Latinx immigrant parents navigate U.S. schools by bringing their personal experiences to the forefront of educational research that addresses contemporary practices in education. Based on Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) definition of counterstorytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 26), this study presents the experiences of five Latinx immigrants and how they navigated an educational system that is unfamiliar to them. These counterstories give way to a broader sense of Latinx cultural values (focused on education) that informs researchers and educators who may otherwise be unaware of such values. In light of the most recent anti-immigration policy and political turmoil in the United States (Herold, 2017), which strongly affects the Latinx population, this study is more relevant than ever. Education and the well-being of all children should remain the focus of the government regardless of the parents' immigration status because in many instances, these children are born in the United States and therefore are entitled to their birth given rights. In order to provide Latinx children with an effective educational experience, the education of Latinx children should be studied through the pragmatic understanding of what Yosso (2006) refers to as *community cultural wealth* Latinxs bring in to our society, regardless of their immigration status. In this study, I share my lived experiences as a Latina immigrant in the United States and as a teacher in U.S. schools.

"When people ask me what it's like for refugees living in the South, I ask them what it would feel like for them to be on the moon" (in Mofford & Zieger, 1996). This quote by Xuan Nguyen Sutter (volunteer at Sisters of Good Shepperd, a refugee program in the metro Atlanta area) in the PBS documentary "*Displaced in the New South,"* is a clear depiction of immigrants'

feelings who reside in the United States. Think about how you would feel if you moved to a foreign country where the language spoken is different from your own; or if you are expected to enter into a school system that is different from the one you are familiar with; or if your future in this country is more uncertain now than it was prior to your arrival. The cultural background, the language spoken, and the stereotypes that racially marginalized immigrants face are characteristics that I have experienced firsthand. Placing myself in the narrative, gives readers an understanding of how I relate to this study, how the research questions are formed, and why Latina/o Critical Race is the theoretical framework that guides the study.

**A Personal Interest: Placing Self in Research**

I would not be who I am today without the encouragement from my parents who placed an incredible value on education. My parents were immigrants from South America. The first time they came to the United States was in the early 1960s. During that time, my parents were victims of forms of oppression that were not uncommon to other minorities living in the United States and who were also victimized due to their race, nationality, and/or immigration status. Although both of my parents spoke English and were highly educated, they suffered forms of oppression that resulted from their cultural differences, racial backgrounds, and immigration status. Although my father was a respected professor at the University of San Diego in California (the city and state where I was born), my parents were subjected to discrimination and were unable to adjust to the racial tensions that were common during those decades. Consequently, my family returned to South America. Almost three decades later, in the late 1980s, I returned to the United States to live permanently. I had friends living in the Monterey Peninsula, California, thus my first stop was in Monterey. At that time, I was a young woman who enjoyed the White privileges that Yosso (2006) described as "being served pleasantly at a restaurant, talking my

way out of traffic citations, and traveling internationally without border patrol harassment" (p. 5). I enjoyed these privileges because of the color of my skin and perhaps my education and socioeconomic status, characteristics of White privilege as described by Harris (in Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Leonardo (2006) described White privilege as the "unearned advantages that Whites, by virtue of their race, have over people of color" (as quoted in Taylor, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 262). I lived in an area that was inhabited by a predominantly White affluent population and I enjoyed the benefits of the socioeconomic status of the upper class. However, juxtaposed to my White privilege and socioeconomic status, I faced forms of discrimination rooted in my accent, due to Spanish being my mother tongue, learning English as a second language, and my Latinx culture (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Specifically, my peers thought that I, like most Latinx immigrants they knew, must have entered this country illegally since they assumed that I must have been born somewhere in Latin America. Therefore, they wrongly concluded that I was not a U.S. citizen with the legal rights to reside in this country. These stereotypes led them to marginalize me from the mainstream White society. Consequently, there were societal, cultural, and racial circumstances that separated me from my neighbors.

Both my parents were not only highly educated, but they were also well established educators, who legally came to the United States through my father's professional employment opportunities. My parents instilled in my brothers and me a high value on education which continues to resonate with us today. I will always remember my father's words: "You must go to school and graduate." My father often reminded me that I was born in the United States and therefore enjoyed the benefits of being a U.S. citizen. He emphasized that I was given the birth right to be in this country and the importance of an education. He always reminded me that

attending higher education was not an option, but a privilege. He used to say: “Jobs may come and go; money may come and go, but your education stays with you wherever you go.” In addition to his encouragement, my mother would tell us: “*El bilingüe vale por dos*” (a Bilingual person is worth twice as much).

As I continue to suffer the loss of my father (who, sadly, passed away the day before my scheduled interview for admission into the PhD program) I look back and remain inspired by his words. Due to my emotional condition, I considered calling that morning to reschedule the interview, but I knew my father would have never approved. This scenario is an example of the kind of long lasting impact Latinx parents can have on their children due to the value they place on education and citizenship.

My background gives me a unique view on education in general because I have experienced it from multiple perspectives: through my parents’ encouragement, attending schools in different countries, and as a Latina, immigrant, student, parent, and educator. Because of my personal interests and professional experiences (both as an educator and an interpreter), I look back and am able to understand some of the misconceptions that exist due to different cultural and linguistic values placed on education. My personal experiences with education are stratified within three paradigms: I lived and attended school in a Central American country where the population was predominantly Latinx; I also lived and attended school in South America, where the school population consisted of a variety of Latinx ethnic groups that cohabitated together; and finally, I moved to the United States where Latinx constitute a minority that coexists with other minorities in conjunction with a predominantly White population. I became a teacher in California public schools at a time when gangs and gang activities were more evident on school grounds. The gang activity was obvious. In fact, a few “leaders” of the

*norteños'* gang attended my classes. They were students of 14-15 years of age at the time, and during initiations, I always feared for my safety because I learned that one of their initiation requirements was to rape a "White" woman. Due to my physical characteristics, I have always passed as "White," and so I took the opportunity to discuss race with the students, as they truly liked me and knew that I was not a "White" person per their definition for initiation purposes.

During those years as a middle school teacher, I became close to my students and attended many of their funerals (due to gang violence) I visited them in the hospital, went to their *quinceañeras* , and have stayed in touch with some of them. A few years later I learned that two former students and gang members became police officers in Fresno, California. Although, I cannot attribute their decision to become police officers to my influence on them, perhaps having discussions with them about how society misconstrues the concepts of race and ethnicity, or just having conversations that gave them the opportunity to understand how society has being racially formed, had a positive impact on their development.

Currently, I work as a court interpreter in the Atlanta area and as a linguist for the Federal government. Through my interactions with Latinx in the courtroom and dealing with some legal matters where I render services as an interpreter, I have been able to understand the legal and familial struggles that many are currently experiencing due to the threat of potential deportation. The status of the undocumented Latinx is at a high risk of deportation and many parents fear getting separated from their children, who have been born in the United States (Odem & Lacy, 2009).

Through the support of my Latinx parents, our proud Latinx heritage, my mobility through different cultures, my decades as an educator in U.S. public schools, and my relationship

with Latinx families, I continue to understand the importance in recognizing the value of Latinx families' community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006). However, I am also cognizant of the struggles Latinx families encounter as immigrants and I remain sensitive towards the oppression and discrimination Latinx immigrants face in the United States, many of whom may not enjoy the parenting and resources I had. Although I am not of Mexican descent, I embrace *Chicanismo*- a social movement that recognizes the struggles of Latinx in the United States and embraces the Latinx community's cultural wealth. For these reasons, I admire the ability Latinx have to navigate the challenges they experience in U.S. schools and therefore am motivated to present their counterstories.

## ***Educación:*** **Cultural Discrepancy and Linguistic Need for Understanding**

When I returned to the United States as an adult, I realized that there were different cultural perspectives placed on education. The meaning of the word "education" itself is an example of the misunderstandings I experienced between culturally different groups of people. Specifically, the word "education" in Spanish relates primarily to the moral upbringing of a person. *Educación* is a word that in Spanish means far more than mere academics. As Valdés (1996) explained, for Latinx, to be *educado* means to be well mannered and of good moral values. The *educación* of Latinx children is a parents' responsibility because it reflects on their parenting. Often times I noticed that Latinx parents (regardless of whether or not they have received any level of schooling in their country of origin) did not understand what it is that U.S. schools expect from them when they are invited to participate in their child's education.

Valdés (1996) also argued that Latinx families believe that educators are responsible for a child's academic upbringing and that Latinx parents do not consider that they are expected to

collaborate in the "education" of their children outside of their home. The discrepancy that Latinx immigrant parents experience when they are invited to participate in the *educación* of their children can be explained. I remember while I attended schools in Latin America, the only times our parents were asked to come to school was when they were going to be notified that we were receiving some kind of disciplinary or behavioral reprimand. From my experience in Latin American schools, the reasons why parents were asked to come to school was to discuss school behavior, not academic performance.

Latinx parents feel that they are already assuming the responsibility of *educación* (education) of their children at home. Therefore, when school personnel conveys that parents are expected to participate in the *educación* of their children can be confusing to Latinx parents. The following is an excerpt from a conversation during a parent-teacher conference in which I served as an interpreter. This parent teacher conference took place in 2008 at a local public intermediate school in Atlanta. The actual names have been changed:

> Teacher: *Mrs. Rodríguez, thank you for being here today.*
>
> Interpreter: *Sra. Rodríguez, gracias por estar aquí hoy.*
>
> Mrs. Rodríguez: *¿Mi hijo se está portando mal en la clase?* [Is my son misbehaving in class?]
>
> Teacher: *No, Mrs. Rodríguez, we need to talk to you about his education.*
>
> Mrs. Rodríguez: *¿Pero, es que mi hijo se está portando mal?* [But, is my son misbehaving?]
>
> Teacher: *No, but his grades are not so good, and he is falling behind in some of his work.*
>
> Mrs. Rodríguez: *¿Es que él le ha faltado el respeto a usted o a alguna maestra?* [Has he disrespected you, or any of the teachers?]

The parent continued to ask the same question several times. It was evident to me that the teacher was getting frustrated. She asked me whether I was accurately interpreting what she was

saying. I was. However, what I had failed to communicate was the linguistic and cultural difference of the word “education,” which, as I explained earlier, for most Latinx families (as represented in this parent) relates to behavior. As I mentioned, *tener buena educación* (to have good education) reflects on the parents’ ability to raise well-mannered children. As Valdés (1996) explained, educating Latinx children “included teaching [them] how to behave, how to act around others, and also what was good, and what was moral” (p. 125). For Latinxs, to be concerned with one’s education does not always translate to schooling.

Thus, it is understandable that, when schools’ staff ask parents to meet to discuss their children’s education, it is often misinterpreted by the Latinx immigrant parents, who are unfamiliar with U.S. schools. For Latinxs, being *educado* is the equivalent of being well behaved, respectful, and ultimately also educated (Durand & Pérez, 2013). When parents are asked to interact with teachers, most Latinx immigrant parents are not expecting to discuss academics, but behavior (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The Latinx students’ behavior is perceived as a reflection on the parents’ influence in their upbringing, thus the responsibility is primarily the parents’ burden. Valdés (1996) also found that despite the fact that Latinx parents expect the academic responsibility to be on the teacher, they also expect the school to help them raise “well-educated” (in other words: behaved) children.

I can attest to the aforementioned concept. When I was a student in Latin American schools, the staff never asked my parents to participate in my education, nor were they expected to collaborate in my academic upbringing. Often, my parents were unaware of what was being taught at my school. Teachers’ professionalism and qualifications were never questioned by parents. It was not customary for Latinx parents to get involved in their children’s academic formation. I believe my parents, as well as many Latinx immigrant parents who come to this

country, did not understand the concept of being involved within our education when they moved to the United States. In fact, I remember that it was my older brothers who told me about taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for college admission, suggested that I find out what my Intelligence Quotient (IQ) was, and mentioned the availability of advanced placement (AP) courses if I wanted to get ahead when I was ready to attend college.

Furthermore, the teachers I had at that time were oblivious to the fact that my parents were unaware of how the U. S. school system worked. Consequently, they inadvertently presumed that we were familiar with higher education, and everything that getting admitted entails (from tests, applications, financial aid, etc.). Fortunately, my parents' influence on us regarding the importance of our academic success and my brothers' guidance led to my own quest for the opportunities available to me through U.S. higher education, but my experience is unfortunately not the case for most Latinx families.

**Statement of the Problem**

In the United States, schools are expected to assimilate children into national life and culture (Graham, 2005). This philosophy on "assimilation" drove school policies for centuries. In the United States, race had been a part of the nation's formation throughout its entire history (Omi & Winant, 1994). William Torrey Harris, U.S. commissioner of education in 1877, (as quoted in Graham, 2005) believed that "[i]f we do not 'Americanize' our immigrants by luring them to participate in our best civilization…they will contribute to the degeneration of our political body and thus de-Americanize and destroy our national life" (p. 11).

I perceived this nationalistic approach when I attended school in the United States, where I was seldom asked about my knowledge on historical issues and/or how they were explained to

me when I attended school in Latin America. As a Latina who received an education outside of the United States, I was taught a different perspective on historical issues that deal primarily with Latinxs and the development of Latin American countries. My views are therefore influenced by my cultural and international experiences as well as my present interactions with Latinxs in Atlanta.

During the early stages of my educational experience in the United States, I noticed the different views on history. During the early 1980s, I began to understand what is referred to as the "Eurocentric" perspective on U.S. history and what I believe is bias in overlooking the history of minorities in this country (MacDonald, 2004). Regardless of the immigrant groups that arrived in the United States over the years, I often critique the Eurocentric historical perspective that is taught in U.S. schools because it obverts facts of colonization and the long history Latinxs have in U. S. schools. I will elaborate more on the historical background of Latinxs in U.S. schools in Chapter 2.

The influx of Latinx families in the United States, and hence Latinx children in U.S. school systems, is growing at an almost exponential rate. Therefore, it is critical that school programs adapt to this increasing population for the sake of the students, the schools, and society as a whole. The recent influx of Latinx families in the state of Georgia offers a unique opportunity to explore Latinx parents' perceptions of U.S. schools in the U.S. New South (Odem & Lacy, 2009). For Latinx families and their children, the school environment presents many challenges. "The children of undocumented migrants in the United States are trapped at the intersection of two systems in crisis: the public educational system and the immigration law system" (Pabón López & López, 2010, p. 1). In her book *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child*, Igoa (1995) explained that immigrant Latinx students tend to isolate themselves from the

mainstream school environment due to their cultural differences. In addition to this isolation, the marginalization is accentuated when language becomes an additional barrier. For example, Valenzuela (2016) explained that bilingualism (as well as biculturalism) is not explored in schools, yet children often bring values that have been learned at home, to discover that some teachers may find them inappropriate in the classrooms (i.e. looking away when talked to directly, looking down when addressed by an adult, physical contact vs. personal space, etc.). The difference in these values can be examined through parents' and students' counterstories. Educators who try their best to aide Latinx families will fail if they are unaware of these differences. And, even though increasing Latinx parental involvement is often attempted in schools, research shows very little evidence of the Latinx immigrant parents' perspectives on U.S. education.

Research suggests that parental involvement in a child's education is critical for a successful academic experience (Igoa, 1995; Odem & Lacy, 2009; Pabón López & López, 2010). Many schools and communities have tried to engage Latinx parents in their children's educational experience (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Flores Carmona, 2008). Programs such as "*Adelante*: A College Awareness and Preparatory Partnership" was formed in 2005 in Salt Lake City, Utah. *Adelante* was developed to promote higher education among the Latinx population in Salt Lake City. Another example is Latino Parent and Family Advocacy Support Training (LPFAST), which is a program designed to support Latinx families and increase their school involvement in North Carolina (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). In Minneapolis, Minnesota, Pacer's national project "Families and Schools Together" (FAST) is an intervention program for families with disabled children that also provides assistance to Latinx families (McDonald, et al., 2006). In Dalton, Georgia, the "Georgia Project" was developed in the 1990s as a collaborative effort

between community members, leaders, and school personnel with the purpose of providing bilingual teachers to the increased Latinx population the city was experiencing (Hamann, 2003). Other local programs are currently helping Latinx families in metro Atlanta such as a community group in Sandy Springs. The community group is unique because it serves the Latinx parents as well as the students.

Researchers have also identified Latinx families' language and immigration status as prime barriers for their participation in their children's education (Pabón López & López, 2010). Valdés (1996) also explained that many Latinx parents do not have a good academic foundation of their own, seeing themselves as inadequate or unable to contribute to their children's educational experience. It is important to mention that a significant amount of research shows that when schools develop a relationship with the parents of the children who attend their schools, the benefits are long-lasting (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004).

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education mandated that "[e]very school will promote partnership that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (p. 1). Title I federal funds were assigned to schools that made parental involvement a priority, particularly if "parents are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Welch and Sheridan (1995) argued that schools must understand the social contexts in which families and communities evolve in order to meet the students' needs. Although research shows that schools make efforts to increase parental involvement, Latinx parents remain perceived as uninterested in their children's academic success because they seldom attend Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, Open Houses, or school activities (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Flores-González, 2002;

Urrieta, 2009; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999 and 2016). Other research shows, however, that Latinx parents express high educational aspirations for their children (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Flores-González, 2002; Hill & Torres, 2010; Urrieta, 2009; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999), but Latinx parents mentioned a number of barriers that prevent them from engaging in school. These barriers were identified as demanding job schedules, inaccessible transportation, a lack of English language fluency, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system (Ceballo, Huerta, & Epstein Ngo, 2010; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010). An essential component for increasing Latinx parental involvement in the Atlanta area schools is for school personnel to view Latinx parents as assets in the education of Latinx children and understand their unique circumstances. The importance of Latinx parental involvement in their children's education cannot be overstated. Research has shown that when Latinx parental involvement is high, Latinx students demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). In 2004, Delgado-Gaitán argued that school personnel should reach out to Latinx parents differently than other populations because Latinx families exhibit unique cultural factors that are a critical component in the school-home relationship of Latinx families (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006).

There is research that has recorded the experiences of Latinx families with U.S. schools (Delgado Bernal, 1998; García, 2014; García & Castro, 2011; Pabón López & López, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999, 2016). This research shows evidence of misconceptions that often occur between Latinx families and schools specifically in California, Chicago, Texas, and Arizona (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Flores-González, 2002; Igoa, 1995; Urrieta, 2009; Valdés, 1996). However, there is little research that shows how Latinx parents are navigating schools in the state of Georgia. Since the 1990s, the South has been experiencing an influx of Latinxs. "By 1990,

tens of thousands of Latin Americans had migrated to Atlanta to work in its thriving construction and service industries and in the nearby carpet and poultry processing plants" (Odem & Lacy, 2009). This study focuses on describing the perceptions of Latinx parents on U.S. education in the Atlanta area schools. Quantz (2011, p. 161) explained that "culture is constantly under construction by members of groups working to maintain solidarity against forces functioning to dissipate their power." The purpose of this research is to document the counterstories of Latinx parents in order to demonstrate how these parents navigate educational environments that often reflect values and cultural practices different from their own. The research provides evidence of values, struggles, perceptions, and characteristics of Latinx families for those educators who wish to look deeper into the culture of the children they serve. Most of all, in this study, I describe cultural tendencies with the main purpose to clarify misconceptions that still exist about the value placed on education by Latinx parents in Atlanta.

Another significant barrier for Latinx is the inability for Latinx parents to communicate with school personnel in the English language (Durand & Perez, 2013). The limited parental involvement of Latinxs in schools should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in their children's education. Indeed, studies show that Latinx parents do in fact actively participate in their children's education, but typically in a home setting, and that they place emphasis on respect, proper behavior, and highly value education despite common misconceptions (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). Other studies show that when Latinx parents are involved in their children's education, Latinx children are more likely than other minorities to succeed in school (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). Such engagement is imperative as statistics reveal that Latinxs comprised the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States (Yosso, 2006).

However, the engagement of parental involvement among Latinxs, the largest minority group in the United States "has often been misunderstood and framed within a deficit perspective that categorizes this group as 'uninvolved' or 'unwilling,' carrying with it the implication that Latino parents do not actively invest in their children's educational outcomes" (Durand & Perez, 2013, p.50). The growth of the Latinx population has been reflected in schools across the country resulting in school districts developing programs to better serve the Latinx populations (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). As in many other states, urban and rural communities in Georgia have reflected a demographic growth of the Latinx populations (Odem & Browne, 2011). The growth of the Latinx population in the U. S. South, and consequently the increased enrollment of Latinxs in schools, warrants a focus on Latinx issues in Atlanta, an area that is rarely the focus of Latinx studies.

Educational researchers have increasingly used Critical Race Theory (CRT) in qualitative research as a methodology (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Latinx critical race theorists have documented the counterstories of many Latinxs with the objective to bring to life the struggles for equal education that this minority group endures (Yosso, 2006). This study draws from a qualitative approach and specifically from a Latina/o Critical Race (LatCrit) theoretical framework to describe the Latinx parents' perceptions of U.S. schools as well as how they negotiate their identities and concerns in the metro Atlanta area. Using counterstories as a method to collect data, the participants' narratives refute misconceptions that Latinx parents do not value their children's education (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; García, 2014; and Valdés, 1996) and help educators understand how families navigate the cultural tensions in Atlanta's schools. The theoretical framework will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2 and the method in Chapter 3.

More immediately, CRT, and specifically LatCrit research studies, serve as a reminder of the importance of studying the cultural anthropology and the counterstories of the Latinx families who are being served in U.S. schools (Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017). The cultural disparity Latinx families experience from their children's schools is a product of the lack of information, confusion, and a sense of discomfort around school personnel and/or educators (Levine & White, 1986). Latinx immigrants often continue to be regarded as uninterested in their children's education (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). I intend to refute this perception by giving Latinx parents the opportunity through this study to voice their views and personal experiences.

**Research Questions**

The majority of Latinx immigrants keep close ties with their families, their values, and roots with their countries of origin (Valdés, 1996). In these instances, Mesch (2003) explained that many Latinxs "strive to acquire the cultural capital necessary to maneuver across national spaces that connect United States to their homelands" (p. 149), thereby developing a transnational sense of belonging to both countries. Parents of Latinx students often shared that one of the most valuable characteristics of successful teachers is that they showed an interest in helping their students maintain their cultural identity while attending school (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Valdés, 1996). Local educators must understand that, for Latinx families, learning the dominant U.S. culture while retaining their own is of significant importance. That is, they aspire to be bicultural and not to assimilate to their own demise.

This transnational concept of education is often affected by the Latinx families' unfamiliarity with the U.S. school system. "The most frequently recurring comment among key informants was that immigrant Latinx families rarely fully understand the Georgia school system

or U.S. educational culture" (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles 2005, p. 49). While parental involvement is encouraged in U.S. schools, the issue of how disparate schools engage parents in education has not been thoroughly explored in Atlanta. Bohon, et al. (2005) explained that Latinx children begin school with a limited knowledge of official expectations and that Latinx parents lack the skills to navigate Atlanta schools. Latinx parents' absence from school involvement results in their *cultural capital* being overlooked.

Delgado Bernal (1998) argued that "a Chicana epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas" (p. 556). Inspired by Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemology, I drew from her argument and designed the questions to expand the epistemology beyond gender to all Latinxs. I expect that the findings in this study will help researchers understand the role Latinx cultural values play in metro Atlanta's public schools. Within that same premise, I argue that a Latinx epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Latinxs and therefore there are three key characteristics that guide my research questions. The characteristics are that (1) questions must reveal the essence of the Latinx' experience in U.S. schools; (2) questions must reveal a qualitative behavior (not quantify it); and (3) questions understand experiences, not "causes and effects." Understanding how the participants react to their experiences navigating public schools in Atlanta can influence the perceptions of how the cultural differences of Latinx families adapt to U.S. schools.

The main issues this dissertation reveals are: 1) how Latinx parents describe the educational systems in their country of origin; 2) how Latinx parents experienced culture, race, language, and immigration status in public schools in metro Atlanta; and 3) what Latinx parents identify as challenges they or their children face in public schools related to their ethnicity? These issues are analyzed in detail through the research questions discussed in Chapter 2.

**Clarifying Terminology**

Before I move to the review of the literature in Chapter 2, I need to clarify a few terms that I will use throughout the research. As Novick (1988) explained, the objectivity of research may be affected by one's own subjectivity resulting from personal lived experiences in education. Although I do not intend to make this study about myself, I cannot isolate my subjectivity when it relates to historical events and cultural challenges Latinxs face in the United States.

I found myself "racially" challenged upon my arrival in the United States when I was required to categorize myself under a race and ethnic group- a concept that I had never had to ponder until I came to live here. As a result, this experience was the first time I had ever looked at myself from an ethnic perspective. Due to my strong cultural affiliation to Latin American language, cultural factors, and ancestry, I identified myself as a "Latina." In doing so, I soon realized that I had become part of a racial and ethnic group that has been considered inferior and sometimes classified as "animals" in this country (Graham, 2005).

I concur with Omi and Winant (1994) that the study of race (Latinxs) should be conducted with the purpose of understanding the politics that have led to racial categorization. Therefore, I must clarify terminologies that have been used by policymakers, researchers, historians, etc. that will be referred to in this research. It is not my intention to offend any group by using these terms.

As defined by Menchaca (2001), "Latinx" will be used to identify a person of Latin American origin, which includes, but is not limited to *mestizo* (a person of Indigenous and European descent). Furthermore, Menchaca (2001) defined mulattos as individuals with mixed

race of Black and White, *afromestizo* a person of Black and mestizo descent, *criollo* (like me) a person born in Latin America, but of European descent, and White a person of European origins, i.e. Spanish conquerors. These terms were used by the Spanish during the conquest of Latin America to stratify the social classes that were being created through their interaction with Natives and African people. In that stratification, a Spanish (or "White" person) was considered to be at the top of the stratified society (Poma, 2005). In their book, *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology* (2006), Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas, referred to "Chicana" as a U.S.-born woman of Mexican or Latin American descent or a Mexican woman who resides in the United States characterized by their struggle to fight oppression. It is this definition that will be observed when using the term "Chicana/o" in this study. These terms will be revisited in Chapter 2, the review of the literature section of this study.

Also, the terms "Native American," "Indian," and "indigenous" will not be used interchangeably. I am aware that the term "Native American" is frequently used when referring to indigenous groups in the United States, but I find it difficult to limit the term exclusively to the indigenous groups that inhabit the United States, excluding Latin American indigenous peoples, as these groups should also be considered "Native Americans." Therefore, I refuse to assume the geocentric mindset that limits the term "American" to U.S. inhabitants. Consequently, I will not refer to "Native Americans," but will use the term "indigenous" when addressing these groups and differentiate between their countries of origin or geographical location. Finally, the term "Hispanic" will be used to identify anything or anyone of Spanish origin.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explains the theoretical framework and the historical background of the racial formation of U.S. schools that are relevant to my research. In doing so, I provide an overview of the progression of segregation in U.S. schools as it relates to Latinxs. The review of the literature presents the historical and legal milieu of the racial formation of castes and the presence of Latinxs during the development of schooling in the United States. Next, I describe Latinx grassroots groups that emerged in response to school segregation and that led to the development of current organizations struggling for cultural respect and equity. The focus is on the history of Latinxs in Atlanta schools, which allows me to contextualize the lived experiences of Latinx parents and the study.

## Theoretical Framework

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described a theory as a paradigm of "related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (p. 24). A theoretical framework is the structure that supports my theory and is important because it justifies the research method to be used. The previous chapter explained my cultural background and how my experiences as a Latina intertwined with the assimilation of U.S. culture as well as the importance of Latinx partnership in the educational process. I used Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) as my theoretical framework because it helps explain the role the participants' race, language, culture, and immigration status play in navigating schools.

Epistemological assumptions are often based on majoritarian narratives. However, CRT has been identified as a challenge to research because CRT defines oppressive acts of society with the purpose to generate the narratives of the individuals who are members of oppressed

groups. Drawing from CRT, the stories presented in this study run counter to dominant narratives by focusing on the participants' experiences. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) explained the *centrality of experiential knowledge* through CRT and LatCrit as

> a framework [that] recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Students of Color are legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. In fact, CRT and LatCrit educational studies view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of students of color by including methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *testimonios, cuentos, consejos,* chronicles and narratives (p. 314).

Furthermore, LatCrit specifically addresses issues that are characteristics of Latinxs, such as immigration, language, ethnicity, race, and phenotype ignored by critical race theorists (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Yosso (2006) explained that counterstories humanize the realities Latinxs experience in schools. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argued that "[c]ritical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (p. 26). This study is intended to describe Latinx perspectives and document the participants' counterstories so that researchers can understand how their experiences have intertwined with their children's academic experience in metro Atlanta public schools. Epistemologically, I situate myself as a social constructivist and will demonstrate "that everyone has his or her own account of the world" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 227). From this stance, I document the counterstories of the participants' daily concerns and experiences, their cultural contributions to U.S. schools, and

their views on how their Latinx identities have been negotiated in their children's education. This process is supported by a critical race theoretical framework.

Whites must recognize not only the privileges granted by their race, but also their Eurocentric perspective on educational matters, specifically those involving Latinx children. More than twenty years ago, Omi and Winant (1994) explained that U.S. society is "racially more diverse and more complex today than any previous time in its history" (p. 152). They also explained the racial formation of Eurocentricity and cultural diversity that are still present today. Thus, policies must address the diversity found in U.S. schools. However, it is my belief that without the counterstories from the subjects who are primarily affected by these policies, studies will perpetuate the Eurocentric viewpoint on education while overlooking the cultural capital of Latinxs in U.S. schools (Yosso, 2006).

**Critical Race Theory**

CRT originated at Harvard Law School and grew out of the critical legal studies movement in the 1980s under the guiding principles defined by Derrick Bell, who argued that CRT places race as the central element for understanding the link between minorities, history, and the struggle for equality. (Crenshaw, et al., 1995). Later, CRT was incorporated into the field of education in the 1990s (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Matsuda (1991) defined CRT as "the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331).

Educational researchers use CRT to describe how members of these oppressed groups have been victimized by documenting their lived experiences and thus giving them a voice.

Delgado and Stefancic defined CRT as: “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (2012, p. 3). Critical race theorists assume that racial differences exist in institutions and practices that interfere with the outcome of students who are members of minority groups (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

In the United States, researchers have studied the relationships between members of minority groups and the historical racism that has dominated in U.S. schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that race is not categorized as a biological, but as a socio-historical concept that allows researchers to analyze what the sources are for the racial identity and forms of subordination. Critical race theorists use elements of CRT to understand the consequences of the shifting stereotypes that result from the intersection of race, power, gender, class, and ethnicity. Yosso (2006) suggested that researchers acknowledge the lives of people of color who are often the focus of research, but whose voices are frequently excluded from the discourse. Current educational research that focuses on the metro Atlanta area would not be truthful without the inclusion of the Latinx parents’ counterstories, and especially if researchers continue to rely exclusively on the dominant White discourse.

Yosso argued that “CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly affect social structures, practices and discourses” (2006, p. 168). In examining the assets Latinxs bring into society, Yosso (2006) offers an alternate concept which she calls *community cultural wealth*. Yosso’s concept of cultural wealth highlights the phenomenon of Latinx parents’ lived experiences with U.S. schools and the effect Latinxs have on U.S. schools through the cultural wealth that is rooted in their race, cultural values, language spoken, and country of origin. I collected the counterstories of Latinx parents and reveal how they navigate their local school systems, how their culture is

negotiated in schools, and how they contribute to their children's education by leveraging some of these and other forms of community cultural wealth.

Research on Latinx/Chicano education in the United States has increased considerably since the 1980s (Fernandez, 2002). However, there are still many stereotypes Latinx parents face daily. García (2014) mentioned four predominant stereotypes that characterize Latinxs: 1. Latinxs are the last of the immigrant groups arriving to the United States; 2. Latinx immigrants have no desire to become American citizens; 3. Latinx immigrants are either undocumented or illegal in this country; and 4. Latinx immigrants want to live in their communities, speak their own language, and share their own culture. Another misconception is that Latinx parents are not interested in their children's educational success (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Salinas, Fránquiz, & Rodríguez, 2016; Valdés, 1996). These are the premises I intend to dispute through the counterstories of Latinx parents. In this study, I described how Latinx immigrant parents negotiate their assets and contribute with a cultural wealth that is often overlooked by educators in the United States.

Scholars have referred to Latinx education as an educational crisis (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Decades of research have tended to focus on Latinxs' academic deficiencies: quantitative research showing statistical dropout rates, low scores, poor attendance, lack of parental involvement, etc., demonstrating that the educational pipeline of Latinx students remains critical. Although I am not underestimating the value of quantitative research, I believe that the constant portrayal of Latinxs in U.S. education as in crisis fuels negative approaches to research, while masking the real assets they might contribute to schools. Research that focuses on Latinx parents' perspectives about their children's schooling will serve as evidence of such capital and aide Latinxs and school communities far more.

**Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit)**

Valdés (1996) described LatCrit as "the emerging field of legal scholarship that examines critically the social and legal positioning of Latinos within the United States to help rectify the shortcoming of existing social and legal conditions" (p. 3). Policies are needed in schools to help resolve the contradictions and complexities Latinx immigrant families find in U.S. schools. Yosso (2006) defined the dilemmas faced by Latinxs as layers of racialized subordination that make up Latinx experiences. She suggested that Latinxs are subjected to forms of racism that go beyond the gender or Black/White dichotomy, including immigration status, surnames, language, nationality, culture, and accents. The number of levels of intersectionality for Latinxs is, therefore, quite extensive (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

LatCrit is a theoretical framework that derives from CRT but that addresses the specific intersecting characteristics of nationality, language, immigration status, and culture concerning Latinxs. LatCrit focuses on the forms of oppression that result from being a member of this group. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that through LatCrit theory, researchers have been raising issues such as immigration, bilingualism, language rights, etc. that affect Latinxs directly. Exploring participants' narratives from their perspectives allows for a deeper comprehension of the struggles and experiences embedded in all these issues. Research that addresses Latinx issues in U.S. education cannot be a substantial recourse without the stories told by Latinx participants themselves. School programs that are designed to increase the lines of communication with Latinx immigrant families must take into consideration the counterstories of Latinxs. Without an overview of the ramifications of local and national policies that affect instructional practices, and without the stories of the people who are affected by these policies,

there will continue to be a misunderstanding of Latinx students and their families: their culture and their capital.

From a methodological perspective, LatCrit places the counterstories of the Latinxs at the center of the study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The relevant aspect of LatCrit is that it recognizes and addresses the lives and experiences of Latinxs, who are the object of research, but often absent from the discourse (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). My intention is to place the counterstories of Latinx parents at the center of this research. From this perspective, LatCrit interprets race as a socio-historical concept that allows the researchers to analyze the sources of ethnic identity in society, the role language and cultural differences play, and the diverse forms of subordination (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The children of Latinx immigrants have been struggling with obstacles rooted in class (socio-economic status), gender, ethnicity, country of origin, and language background. Not a single one of these issues is selected by the students' free will. However, Latinx students are often the target of language discrimination and racial profiling that affects their learning (Valenzuela, 2016). LatCrit researchers have documented the counterstories of many Latinxs. Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2012) documented Latinx students' counterstories about the obstacles they encountered in U.S. schools. Their research showed that Latinx children often find themselves in a racial dichotomy trapped at a social intersection while struggling to exercise their rights and be accepted by both groups: the dominant race (White) and their own. I turn my focus on Latinx parents whose children attend (or attended) schools in the United States with the purpose of centering their voices. I now will review the literature on the presence of Latinx parents in U.S. schools.

**Historical and Legal Landscape of Latinxs in the Americas**

When examining the historical and legal landscape that has shaped Latinxs' experience in schools in the United States, research can be traced back to the 1500s, during the Spanish colonization era. Upon the arrival of Spanish *conquistadores* (conquistadors), a process of clashing cultures began in the Americas that continues to resonate today, centuries later.

Although most of the conquest initially took place in Central America, the Caribbean, and Florida, Spaniards gravitated towards the south and western part of what is now the United States in the early 1500s in search for gold. Settlers' schools in Florida, for example, began during the early conquest in the 1500s and ended in the 1700s (MacDonald, 2004). By then, it was customary for the Spanish *conquistadores* to impose their language and religion upon the civilizations they conquered.

Education of the masses was reduced to the Catholic Church's indoctrination and principles. Education from an academic and social perspective was often not offered to "inferior" castes and was limited to the wealthy and high ranked *mestizos* (the children of the unions between Spanish and indigenous who had light skin). Therefore, the indigenous Latin American peoples did not receive a formal academic education other than Christianization and the teaching of the Spanish language. The long-lasting effect of the concept of education that resulted from the indoctrination into Christianity as part of their educative formation was explained earlier in Chapter 1.

The Spanish government provided financial support for the conversion of indigenous, which resulted in the imposition of the Spanish language and culture (MacDonald, 2004). By the 1520s, many explorations in the areas that are today California, Texas, Arizona, and New

Mexico, were accompanied by missionaries and Spanish priests. From the early arrival of the Spaniards, the abuse that these indigenous groups of people suffered under the hands of the *conquistadores* was recorded by many clergymen. Among them, Bartolomé de las Casas is one of the most recognized authors. His letters to the King (of Spain) described the conditions in which the indigenous were treated and his fight for their human rights (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Leonardo (2006) defined domination as "a relation of power that subjects enter into and is forged in the historical process" (p. 263). Throughout the early history of Latin America, Latinxs have been perceived as inferior to their White counterparts. In the United States, Whites have been considered members of the dominating race and Latinxs have been considered inferior beneath Jews and Asians (Valdés, 1996). Freire (1973) argued that the oppressed can internalize the values of the oppressor to the point where they can despise their own race. Being a Latinx has been negatively shaped by hundreds of years of Spanish colonialism, during which stereotypes resulted from ignorance and what conquistadores perceived as justified discrimination. Latinx families (mainly Mexicans and Chicanos) believe that the *sangre de indio* (indigenous blood) is physically a strong trait and therefore the family must work hard, cooperate, and be dignified through honorable work. However, many Latinxs have failed to acknowledge this concept and instead, have internalized the forms of oppression Whites have inflicted on them by not recognizing physical traits of an indigenous person as good features or physical characteristics (Urrieta, 2009).

Due to racial perceptions, Spaniards believed that the natives were an inferior race and constructed social castes in order to control their subjects. At the top of the hierarchy were the Spaniards; in the middle were Latinxs; at the bottom were the Africans and Indians (Haas, 1995). The concept of the racial superiority of Whiteness (the Spaniards) has been embedded in Latin

American cultures since the arrival of the Spaniards in the fifteenth century. Affected by this notion, during the 1600s and 1700s settlers moved northward from Mexico into areas that are now the United States, and established schools exclusively for those who were considered high ranked *mestizos* and the *criollos.* Indigenous Mexicans were the first Latinx group to inhabit the western and southern areas of what today constitutes the United States. Unlike other Latinx groups, many of the Mexicans living in the United States did not migrate because their ancestors already inhabited these geographical areas. Under the Naturalization Law of 1790, the United States qualified free White immigrants for citizenship (Omi &Winant, 1994). At the time, and since Mexicans were not considered Black, many were able to acquire U.S. citizenship that resulted in legal and social privileges.

Not long after, the social and political changes that Mexico experienced after its independence from Spain in 1821 had a profound effect on national schooling (MacDonald, 2004). “The Catholic Church continued to organize most schooling, since it was not until 1921 that a constitutional amendment permitted the federal government to provide public education for all citizens” (Sánchez, 1993, p. 28) of Mexico. The amendment marked the end of an education that had been mostly defined by religion during the Spanish invasion. However, Mexico was affected by a gender gap caused by the separation of the north and southern parts of Mexico impacted by the economy. Thus, the migration increased dramatically in the 1900s (Sánchez, 1993).

With the new border separating Mexico from the United States in 1848, racial stratifications became more prominent and were determined by the color of people’s skin and accents (Acuña, 2011). After the war, Mexicans who resided in U.S. territory were allowed to enroll their children in U.S. schools. In the nineteenth century, racism dominated the mindset of

the period, and "[racism] increased in the United States" (Novick, 1988, p. 74). Between 1900 and 1930 approximately one and a half million Mexicans migrated to the southwestern part of the United States (Sánchez, 1993). The cultural adaptations Mexican families experienced "played a role in defining the outlook of Mexican immigrants" (Sánchez, 1993, p. 18). Schools became racial battlegrounds as White parents sought to segregate Mexican students. The segregation led to poor facilities and detrimental learning conditions for the Mexican children. School intelligence exams were administered, and Mexican children did poorly. Consequently, Mexican students were placed in remedial classes, thus perpetuating the segregation (García & Castro, 2011).

Following the Mexican-American war, further issues of racialization emerged, where Blacks and indigenous would be excluded from citizenship rights, including public education (Menchaca, 2001). The exclusion did not include Latinxs at the time. For instance, 1849, California granted the right to vote to every White male citizen of Mexico, who had become a U.S. citizen (MacDonald, 2004). Then, in 1874, California passed a compulsory education law and the enrollment of Mexican students increased from 8 percent to 22 percent in comparison to a reduced percentage of Mexican children enrolled in states such as Texas (Acuña, 2011).

Sánchez (1993) argued the difference between Mexican and European immigrants was that Mexican immigrants were "circular" because they were constantly migrating between Mexico and the United States. This phenomenon was largely due to the Free Trade Zone laws that allowed Mexican workers to enter the United States while residing in Mexican border towns. In the late 1920s many immigration inspectors who were patrolling the border in El Paso, Texas were members of the Ku Klux Klan. "The inspectors would consistently denigrate those who crossed at the bridge, even if their papers were perfectly legal" (Sánchez, 1993, p. 59). The early

twentieth century atmosphere permeated through decades of White superiority and control over Mexicans. The racial tensions resurfaced in legal battles of school desegregation in the 1930s.

### Legal Efforts towards the Advancement of Latinxs in Education: The Founding of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Following decades of racism, segregation, and discrimination, Latinxs throughout the United States responded to protect their children's education and formed grassroots groups to defend Latinx rights. One of the oldest organized groups is the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (San Miguel, 1987). Outraged by the way Mexican children were segregated and placed in remedial programs, LULAC was soon involved in legal battles in the United States' court system.

LULAC was founded in Corpus Christi, Texas, in February of 1929. The formation of LULAC was the result of middle class Mexican Americans' frustrations due to the continuing discrimination against Latinxs in the Southwest (MacDonald, 2004). Although U.S. historians frequently recognize *Brown v. Board of Education* as the landmark case in school desegregation, one of the earliest race-based cases that precedes the Brown case took place in 1930, shortly after the foundation of LULAC. The 1930 case is the *Del Rio Independent School District (ISD) v. Salvatierra*. With the aid of LULAC, a group of Mexican parents led by Salvatierra, sued the Del Río Independent School District in Texas because their children (of Mexican origin) were not allowed to use facilities designated to other White races (MacDonald, 2004). Children of Mexican descent were not considered of color, but in the Del Rio Independent School District, Mexican children were not considered White either. Therefore, the schools did not identify what facilities (if any) were designated for the use of Latinx children. The judge ruled in favor of

Salvatierra, but the injunction was later overruled in the Court of Appeals. Unfortunately, the plaintiffs lost because the Court of Appeals found that Mexican children were not separated by race, but by their special language needs.

Just one year after the Del Río case, in 1931, the first successful desegregation lawsuit involving Mexican families was recorded in San Diego, California. This case was *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District* where a school principal barred Mexican children from his school because allegedly they caused health and sanitation problems due to the families' level of poverty. The court ruled in favor of the Mexican Americans whose argument was that schools could not segregate children based on their Mexican look or Hispanic surnames. The judge ruled in their favor, but on the premise that Mexicans were White (Donato, 1997).

Two other landmark cases of desegregation followed. The first one, in 1946 (ruled in 1947), *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County* (California) and in 1948, the *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* (Texas). In the Mendez case, parents claimed that their children were being segregated unconstitutionally as the California Law of 1860 protected separate schools for Negro, Mongolian, and Indian children. The Mexican American parents successfully demonstrated that their children were none of the above (MacDonald, 2004). Another important fact in this case is that the judge recognized that Spanish speaking children delayed their English language learning as a result of school segregation. In doing so, the judge (perhaps inadvertently or perhaps intentionally) recognized that segregation was detrimental to the education of minorities and to English language acquisition.

In Texas, the Delgado case of 1948, was the first desegregation case won in that state. After Salvatierra's case of 1930, with the support of LULAC, and joined by the American G.I.

Forum (AGIF), Mexican parents successfully challenged the race-based inequities of the Texas public school system. The case came to be known as *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* (ISD). Mexican parents argued that they were White, not Black, and therefore were illegally segregated. In September 1949, the judge agreed and ordered the end of segregation in Texas' schools.

Although school desegregation promised an equal opportunity to education, school desegregation presented another challenge for Latinx students: to confront face to face antagonistic ethnic groups and racist hostility. Even if the rulings in the aforementioned cases may have been decided in favor of Latinxs in an attempt to end segregation in school settings, the results did not solve the social tensions that existed between ethnic groups. The following decades were a period of time in the history of the United States that will mostly be remembered for its Civil Rights Movements and social activism. During this time, the milestone case of *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled in 1954 school segregation unconstitutional as separate is inherently unequal but did not end segregation nationally.

Omi and Winant (1994) argued that oppressed groups organized themselves to contest racial discrimination and the social segregation of minorities. Latinxs continued to face exclusion and prejudice in schools, and were still perceived as second-class citizens, inferior to the dominant White race. Latinxs then organized in political lobbying groups.

As a result of school desegregation, Mexican American teachers were hired to teach in schools with a large enrollment of non-English speaking students. There were generations of children who attended what Urrieta (2009) calls Mexican schools. These schools were

characterized by their structural inferiority, lack of materials, inept teachers, and a culturally challenging environment (Urrieta, 2009; and García, 2014).

Even after successfully defending that Latinxs could not be legally marginalized in public schools, the conditions of their educational environments remained the same, and thus continued to be detrimental to the morale of Latinxs in general. To that effect, and as a result of the frustration due to the number of unsuccessful attempts to improve Latinxs' educational system, the most recognized key moment in the history of Latinx students is what came to be known as the East Los Angeles Blowouts (LA Blowouts) in 1968.

**Los Angeles Blowouts**

In March 1968, more than ten thousand students walked out of the highly populated Chicano schools in East Los Angeles as a protest to the inferior quality of their education (Delgado Bernal, in Apple & Buras, 2006). The key character in this event was the late Sal Castro who was a major figure in the Chicano struggle for educational justice. He identified several of the problems that affected Mexican students in California (low expectations, vocational rather than academic focus, high dropout rates, insensitive teachers and school staff, low test scores, a lack of cultural acceptance) and organized students into protesting these conditions (García & Castro, 2011).

As a child, and long before he was able to identify the problems that affected the education of Mexican Americans, Castro witnessed the Zoot-Suit Riots in 1943, and observed the attacks on Mexican American young men wearing the so called zoot-suits (Acuña, 2011). Although Castro was ten at the time, and was not physically affected by the riots, the emotional effect had long lasting implications for him. Years later, he was drafted into the U.S. Army; and

during the two years he spent in the armed forces, Castro experienced further exposure to racism, particularly in Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, and Virginia (García & Castro, 2011). Inspired by events that had a significant impact in his life as a Mexican American, and after he enrolled in college, Castro wanted to make a difference in the lives of other Mexican Americans like himself, and he became a high school history teacher in California.

In order to understand what caused the walkout that took place at Lincoln High School in 1968, the walkout must be analyzed in the context of the experience Chicanos lived in U.S. schools. California established Mexican Schools in response to the mass immigration of Mexicans (García & Castro, 2011). In the early twentieth century, southwestern states welcomed Mexicans as a source of cheap labor on the premise of racial inferiority. By categorizing Mexicans as racially inferior, society played an important role in defining what Omi and Winant (1994) described as racial formation. Based on the presumed racial inferiority of Mexicans, Mexican schools were established with the intention of keeping Mexicans segregated and to ensure a continued pool of cheap labor due to limited education (García & Castro, 2011). Students were therefore encouraged to take shop classes rather than academic courses. Unlike other segregated schools in the United States, the Mexican Schools were segregated by local school boards, not state laws. Even after the *Méndez v. Westminster* case, schools in California (particularly in Los Angeles) continued to segregate Mexicans in schools or in classrooms within schools, long into the 1960s (MacDonald, 2004).

While Castro was a teacher, he became an active participant in the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conferences (Castro was involved in the formation and organization of these conferences that are now known as Chicano Youth Leadership Conferences). In addition to these conferences, Chicano groups were rapidly forming in California's colleges and universities.

Through the distribution of Chicano newspapers at these institutions and through other means, the plan for the walkout was spread (García, 2014). The initial walkout took place on March 1, 1968, at Wilson High.

As described earlier, during the Chicano Youth Leadership Conferences, Castro met students of several high schools in East Los Angeles. One of those high schools was Wilson High School. During his involvement in these conferences, Castro came across several students who complained about their schools' conditions (which Castro was already familiar with) and therefore took the opportunity to show students how to empower themselves (Delgado Bernal in Apple & Buras, 2006). He taught them that, first and foremost, the process to empower themselves began by being proud of their ethnicity and their cultural backgrounds (García & Castro, 2011). Copying the tactics used by Vietnam War activists, Castro concluded that a walkout of the Chicano students was the most viable mean to demand justice in public schools (García, 2014). Even though the students from Wilson High had helped Castro organize the walkout at Lincoln High, they did not initially plan to be a part of the demonstrations. However, the unexpected cancellation of a school play (in which the cast was comprised of Chicano students entirely) infuriated the students leading to the first walkout.

Once the walkout was known in other schools, Wilson High walkout was immediately followed by Garfield Roosevelt High School and Lincoln High School. It is estimated that more than 15,000 students (males and females) walked out of schools in East Los Angeles (MacDonald, 2004). College organizations such as the newly formed United Mexican American Students (UMAS), the Brown Berets youth organization, and the later formed Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC), supported the student walkouts of 1968. Unlike previous organizations, the EICC was exclusively formed by adult supporters who met with school board

members to negotiate the students' demands for better quality education. Delgado Bernal (in Apple & Buras, 2006) explained their demands to include Chicano history, culture, and Spanish language in the curriculum. Castro was a key person in this committee and, as a result, he was arrested on conspiracy charges along with other 12 members (Rosales, 1996). These arrests were later known as the East LA Thirteen (ELA13). Castro was fired from his job at Lincoln High School and after two years of legal battles, the charges on the ELA13 were dismissed (López, 1976). Although Sal Castro is considered to have played one of the key roles in the walkouts, it is important to remember that the leadership was comprised entirely of students, both males and females (Montoya, 2016).

**Chicanas' Involvement in the LA Blowouts**

The events and mass demonstrations by Chicano students in the walkouts have been studied under a myriad of angles: from a historical perspective, as an expansion of the Chicano movement, political analysis, and educational injustice of minorities. However, these perspectives do not include a gender analysis or the depiction of women's activism (García & Castro, 2011). In her research, Delgado Bernal (1998) analyzed the involvement of Chicanas and described five key elements in which Chicanas' leadership was identified in the walkouts. She identified these elements as the planning, networking, the development of consciousness, holding office, and acting as a spokesperson for the organization (Delgado Bernal, 1998). She argued that the Chicana involvement in grassroots leadership was triggered by Chicana students being "segregated and stigmatized with their perceived language deficiency used as justification" (1998, p. 562) and attributed gender and class oppression to the working class conditions amongst Chicana students.

From a feminist epistemological standpoint, it is arguable that an analysis of a historical event of the magnitude of the LA Blowouts must be based on the examination of the intersectionalities of gender, race, and class (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that the voiced stories of participants provide a complete analysis of an event. Delgado Bernal (in Apple and Buras, 2006) provided an alternate narrative to the discourse of the 1968 walkouts by presenting the oral histories of eight Chicana participants in the LA Blowouts. Their contributions were consistent with all the five aspects that she described as key elements in grassroots leadership. The Chicana students implemented and participated in the organization of meetings, worked actively to develop consciousness of the poor school conditions Latinx students were assigned, and educated other students on the demands for better facilities, better (non-racist) teachers, bilingual education, the incorporation of Chicano history and cultural aspects in the curriculum, and the social inequities Chicanas/os were being subjected to that affected the school curriculum. Chicanas were strongly involved in the element of networking and expand the consciousness outside of the school sites through churches, other communities (*barrios*), and political figures like Bobby Kennedy (García & Castro, 2011). Although Delgado Bernal's (1998) work focused primarily on eight female participants, numerous females were involved in the LA Blowouts making their participation in the walkouts a good example of intersections of gender, class, race, national origin, culture, and language in social activism.

**The Ramifications of the LA Blowouts in Other States**

Schools in the United States were undergoing turmoil in the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights movement, the walkouts, and other grassroots groups led to legislative changes that impacted Latinxs' education. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act and the U.S. Supreme Court

rulings in *Lau v. Nichols* reaffirmed the rights of English Language Learners. However, anti-immigration laws were being enacted (i.e. Propositions 187, 209, 227 in California) denying welfare benefits, schooling, health, and other social services to illegal immigrants.

Texas schools had also witnessed Latinx students' demonstrations that impacted the Latinx community in a similar manner the LA Blowouts did. During the 1970s, ethnic battles resurfaced in Texas courtrooms. In the case *Ross v. Eckels*, Judge Connally ruled (in order to comply with *Brown v. Board of Education*) that Black and Mexican students would be integrated throughout Houston Independent School District (HISD) (MacDonald, 2004). The Court of Appeals in Texas allowed the school district to consider Mexicans as White for desegregation purposes. The ruling allowed HISD to combine Black and Mexican students in their schools as part of the district's desegregation policies. Valenzuela (1999) described the court's assumption that Mexicans were White as an absolute denial of the Latinx ethnicity. The decision led students in HISD to boycott schools for the first three weeks of school in August of 1970 (De León, 1989).

In 1975, a school district in Tyler, Texas approved a law that denied state funding to schools that permitted undocumented students into their classrooms (MacDonald, 2004). Under the new stipulation, undocumented students were required to pay tuition. MALDEF immediately filed suit on behalf of the undocumented students. This case became the landmark case *Plyler v. Doe* of 1982. Pabón López and López (2010) described *Plyler v. Doe* as "the leading case regarding the education of undocumented Latinos in the United States" (p. 20). The Court found that it was unconstitutional for the school district to deny public education based on citizenship status. The school appealed the injunction and lost again in the U.S. Supreme Court.

However, the legal issues that were fought regarding desegregation remained unresolved. For the next decades, parents and members of the community criticized the HISD for the students' poor academic achievement and the district's tolerance of high dropout rates, among other issues. More specifically, the district's continued lack of efforts to accommodate the needs of Latinx students (i.e. insufficient number of Spanish speaking staff at the schools, inadequate teachers for the English Language Learners, lack of resources, etc.) triggered another demonstration: the Seguín walkouts of 1989. Seguín High School, an inner city school located in Houston, was the ground for the walkouts in Texas.

Seguín High School was built in 1936 in a predominantly White community. However, over the years, the school and community demographics changed dramatically. Eventually, by the 1990s, Latinxs (mostly Mexicans and Salvadorians) comprised 95 percent of the student population (Valenzuela, 1999). What prompted the walkout at Seguín was a community's frustration as a result of a lack of support and recognition of the needs of Latinx students. In fact, it was in the late 1990s that 15 percent of the staff was Mexican American at the school even though the enrollment of Latinx students was higher than 90 percent (Valenzuela, 1999). The lack of Latinxs' representation as role models resulted in a disconnection between the students and teachers. Furthermore, problems with issues of lack of caring and cultural indifference, which Valdés (1996) described as a determining factor in Latinxs' ability to identify with their school environment, contributed to the walkout. Valenzuela (1999) mentioned other events that prompted the walkout: course scheduling after six weeks into the school year was inadequate, poor bathroom conditions, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate or simply a lack of resources, as well as poor food services in the school's cafeteria.

In the four days prior to the planned walkout, students who led the demonstration informed others (mostly by word of mouth and flyers) when the walkout would take place. The day prior to the scheduled demonstration, the school principal learned of the plan and announced there would be disciplinary consequences for anyone involved in the walkout. Regardless of the announcement, which ultimately instigated the students further, the next morning students walked out of their classrooms when they heard others scream "Walkout!" (Valenzuela, 1999).

Most of the students who led the walkout were identified for their high academic performance as the honor students. Many other students as well as school teachers acknowledged that seeing the honor students involved in the walkout gave legitimacy to the demonstration (Valenzuela, 1999). Through a combination of parental and community support, meetings were held in which the demands were discussed. Consequently, there was a thorough investigation of the conditions of Seguín High School. As a result of the findings, the HISD  replaced Seguín's principal, assigned a counselor exclusively to deal with dropout issues, three bilingual teachers were hired to respond to the bilingual students' needs, and Communities in Schools (CIS), a social service organization, was organized. Despite the solutions to most of the material demands of the students at Seguín High School, the HISD failed the students by not being able to nurture a feeling of belonging, caring, and cultural sensitivity that Latinx students and their families struggle to achieve in order to succeed in the White mainstream society in which they lived.

Since then, many researchers around the United States have focused on Chicano studies, i.e., the social, cultural, and ethnic group comprised of persons of Mexican descent and who either advocate or have struggled as a result of their Hispanic background. However, the struggles Chicanos endure are not exclusive to people of Mexican origin but spread to other Latinx cultures in the United States. Although the Civil Rights movements that characterized the

1960s focused on African Americans, and the Chicano Movement focused on persons of Mexican descent, the Latinx population had increased dramatically, especially in California and Texas. In recognizing so, Gustavo García, the attorney in the landmark Texan case *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District,* amended LULAC's constitution allowing membership to individuals of non-Mexican American origins. Nonetheless, Mexican Americans continue to represent the largest group of Latinxs in the United States (Acuña, 2011).

Influenced by the Civil Rights movement and following the example of the LA Blowouts, Mexican American students organized themselves and became active participants in further demonstrations, boycotts, walkouts, and sit downs throughout the state. Perhaps one of the most significant impacts of the LA Blowouts, was that up until the walkouts, Mexican students were considered docile and passive (Valenzuela, 1999). These demonstrations led to *El Movimiento* (The Movement) which is perhaps Chicanos most recognized movement, known today as the Chicano Movement (Urrieta, 2009). MacDonald (2004) described the Chicano Movement as a result of "[d]iscriminatory labor practices, persistent oppression and denial of rights guaranteed under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, political disenfranchisement, and other issues sparked the Latinx community into forming a Mexican American *Chicano* movement…and symbolized a shift in civil rights strategy from assimilation to cultural nationalism" (pp. 215-216).

**Latinx Population in United States: Focus on Georgia**

In 2010 the U.S. Bureau of the Census predicted that, by 2050, Latinxs will comprise 25 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). As of 2013, the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2013) showed that there were approximately 53 million Latinxs (documented and

undocumented) living in the United States (García, 2014). Latinxs are a heterogeneous group of immigrants who come to the United States under different circumstances (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Regardless of the reasons, the phenomenon of Latinxs adaptation to a new environment can be challenging. Local research shows a diversity on the countries of origin of the Latinx participants that currently inhabit in the Atlanta area (Goździak & Bump, 2008; Hamann 2003; Odem & Browne, 2011).

In terms of geography, there are Latinxs currently residing in every state, with the largest concentrations in nine: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). The growth of the Latinx population has been reflected in schools across the country resulting in school districts developing programs to better serve the Latinx populations (Lucas, et al., 1990). In recognition of the demands of these demographic changes, the U.S. Department of Education has developed programs and initiatives under Title III to grant professional development activities intended to improve instruction of the limited English proficient (LEP) student and minorities (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The U.S. South has also been experiencing dramatic demographic changes in the past decades. "All of the southern states, except for Louisiana, saw significant increases in the resident Latinx population. This is especially true in states like North Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia, which saw at least a 300% increase in their Latinx populations while in Tennessee, South Carolina, and Alabama, Latinxs increased by more than 200%" (Gallagher & Lippard, 2011). Valdés (1996) explored significant aspects of the culture of the Latinx immigrant families. He explored the reasons for entering the United States, the circumstances in which the families migrated, the illegal period, the job search, the enrollment of children in schools, and the

role of Latinx parents in the education of their children. In order to bridge the potential cultural distances that may exist, this research presents the counterstories of Latinxs' experiences and perceptions of their navigation of metro Atlanta public schools.

In the last two decades, the South has become a major new immigrant destination in the United States (Odem & Lacy, 2009), and Latinxs are considered the largest group of newcomers in the South. By 2012, Latinxs comprised 9.2 percent of the total population in Georgia (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). The demographics reflected a Latinx population growth of 118 percent between 2000 and 2015.

In the 1980s, Georgia passed legislation to establish and fund a statewide educational program for k-12 students who were identified as non-English speakers. By 1990, thousands of Latinxs had moved to Atlanta to work in construction, the carpet industry, and poultry (Hamann, 2003; Odem & Lacy, 2009; Smith & Furuseth, 2006). Between 1990 and 1995, the Latinx population in Georgia had increased by more than 130 percent, becoming one of the largest populations served under these programs (Dameron & Murphy, 1997). "It is estimated that the Atlanta population of Latinxs grew from 25,000 in 1980 to 57,000 in 1990 to nearly 270,000 in the year 2000, a growth rate of 370 percent" (Odem & Lacy, 2009, p. 113).

Yarbrough (2010) identified the 1960s as the decade when Atlanta began to experience a substantial increase in the diversity of its population and concluded that by the 1990s, Atlanta welcomed a significant number of foreign born migrants from Texas and California in addition to southeastern Asian countries' refugees and immigrants from Mexico, and Central and South America. With the exception of cities in Florida, Atlanta has the largest population of Latinxs than any other southeastern U.S. city (Yarbrough, 2010). Walcott and Murphy (in Smith &

Furuseth, 2006) explained that “Atlanta experienced 118 percent growth in its Latino population, continuing a trend begun in the mid-1980s that endures into the first decade of the new century” (p.153).

**Educational Efforts towards Latinx in Georgia**

Wainer (2006) summarizes the challenge Latinx populations presented to Georgia schools:

> But if the crisis in Latino education in the South is widely recognized by scholars and educators alike, what is being done about it? There is significant research on immigrant integration (Grey, 2001; Mace-Matluck et al., 1998; Walqui, 2000) but typically, it does not focus on education (Grey, 2001) nor does it take into account the particular social, political, and economical circumstances of new immigrant communities (Mace-Matluck et al., 1998; Olson et al., 1999; Spaulding et al., 2004; Walqui, 2000). Although some southern educators and administrators are open to new ideas and strategies on how to educate Latino immigrants, there has been little research on innovative immigrant educational strategies in the region (p. 143).

The National Council of Education Statistics (2010) showed initiatives developed by local school districts in Georgia. However, the exclusion of Latinx issues remains evident in school districts’ agendas. In Gwinnett County Public Schools (2013), “The Educator Preparation Division” of the County’s Board of Education has described the school district’s mission as follows: “The mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.” Even though the Latinx population in Gwinnett

County schools has more than doubled (155%), there is little evidence of Gwinnett County Board of Education's inclusion of Latinx's expected academic outcome in the mission statement. Furthermore, there is no evidence of teacher training programs that prepare educators on addressing Latinx cultural differences or increasing Latinx parental school involvement specifically.

Another example is Newton County, Georgia. The local school district reflected the largest growth in Latinx population in 2013. The "Newton County Board of Education Legislative Priorities" do not reflect the school district's efforts towards training for their staff on Latinx immigrants' issues. The main focus remains on providing personnel with training "associated with implementation of state mandated instructional initiatives" (Newton County School District, 2013).

Similarly, school board's agendas in Bartow County School District (2013) do not reflect the discussion of the topic on schools' new demographics. Under the school board's Staff Development Department, there are links to information about migrant students and English for Students of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, geared towards the parents of these students, but not towards the schools' staff. There is little evidence of districtwide staff development programs that specifically address teacher trainings to deal with the increased number of Latinxs in their schools and the changing demographics.

In Cherokee County, the objectives for the professional development programs are focused on teacher training in technology, mathematics, science, and engineering, the use of technology in the classrooms, the implementation of Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, the disaggregation of student data, research based strategies to meet students' needs,

etc. (Cherokee County School District, 2013). None of the programs mentioned in the district's "Five Year Strategic Plan" noted the implementation of teachers' awareness on Latinx student populations.

There were some exceptions to the agnostic attitude towards Latinx immigrants in Georgia schools. Dalton Public Schools in Whitfield County was one of those exceptions. The carpet industry in Dalton was booming and attracted Latinx labor from all over the country. The Latinx population in Dalton increased by 6.5 percent, and by the year 2000, it had increased by 40 percent, largely due to the availability of manufacturing jobs (Hamann, 2003). School district officials and the Dalton community recognized the need to integrate Latinx immigrant students into their schools.

The community in Dalton reflected a blend of cultures and a need for understanding regarding what Latinxs needed, how they could be educated, and how they would fit within a multiethnic community (Hamann, 1999). As a result, in the late 1990s, the "Georgia Project" was developed in Dalton. The Georgia Project was a combined effort between two countries (Mexico and the United States), local governments, institutions of higher education, and local schools with the purpose to train their teachers in Latinx culture and Spanish language.

Hamann (1999) explained how, in 1998, the Georgia Project partnership between the school district, the university in Monterrey, Mexico, and a community group attorney began their negotiations with the Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE). In spite of their efforts, the Georgia Project attorney, three educational leaders, and members of the community were also faced with the challenge to meet the pressures for improved test scores, state mandated instructional strategies, and hostility from state administrative officers in addition to the new

demographic challenges. After the first developmental stages were accomplished, the need for Spanish speaking educators was recognized as a priority. Dalton's superintendent met with officials in Monterrey and formed a partnership with the "*Universidad de Monterrey*" to establish an exchange program of bilingual teachers.

Another priority was to dispel misconceptions about Latinx culture, i.e., that Latinx parents do not care about education (Pabón López & López, 2010), or that a disproportionate number of Latinxs engage in criminal activities (Flores-González, 2002). In order to overcome the sense of White privilege and racist attitudes, it was important to welcome Latinxs in the community. To that effect, school representatives had to organize meetings that included Latinx families and other members of the community.

The city of Dalton became known for its efforts in welcoming Latinxs. In 2011, CNN journalists Nick Valencia and Leslie Tripp referred to Dalton as a place where "prejudices disappear and acceptance increases" and as a town "where Latinos and non-Latinos agree they've worked and lived together seamlessly for decades." Other members of the community started "*Centro Latino*" to help Latinxs learn English, obtain "green cards" (authorization to legally reside and be employed in the U.S.A.), and/or offer life skills instructions on financial planning. "When people become familiar with each other on a one-to-one basis, a lot of the prejudices disappear and acceptance increases" (Valencia & Tripp, 2011). While such statements are gross simplifications, they do underscore a real need to address cultural and political shifts in Georgia.

In the 1990s, the Atlanta metropolitan area mirrored a similar growth. Most of the Latinx immigrants who came to Atlanta moved from California, Texas, Mexico, and Central

American countries, mainly El Salvador and Guatemala. As a result of this influx, the Atlanta metropolitan area became one of the fastest growing Latinx destinations in the country (Odem & Browne, 2011). Inevitably, the Latinx school population showed a significant increase. Many educators lacked the ability and confidence to relate to the Latinx children and their families (Hobbs, 2004). As school districts and leaders continued to strive to provide excellence in education to all the students they serve, educators were faced with the challenges of cultural proficiency in working with the new demographics.

In Sandy Springs, Georgia (north Fulton county), a community group was formed approximately 17 years ago with the intention of providing Latinx elementary school aged children with basic academic skills (taught through music and arts) as well as to help the students develop English language skills prior to entering school. Consequently, the community group's administration and staff noticed that the parents of these children similarly needed support and added a component to its curriculum. The component consisted of a program that would specifically address the parents' needs, i.e., English language skills, self-advocacy workshops, public speaking techniques, introduction to the U. S. school system, familiarity with the use of computers, etc., as well as providing an environment where parents felt free to share their frustrations and support each other through mentoring and camaraderie. An example of how the community group has impacted Latinx parents can be summarized in this anonymous statement from a parent involved in the community group: "When I go to my children's school, I no longer have to look down at people's shoes anymore. I now can look at people straight into their eyes" (2014).

When the statement was shared by the community group's director, it made a tremendous and long-lasting impact on me. The empowerment from attending these workshops is evident

through this statement. It is that kind of empowerment that led to my interest in this study. In addition to the efforts school districts' staff, administrators, and educators put towards the education of Latinx children in Georgia, describing the phenomenon of being a Latinx immigrant parent in the South will provide a level of cultural knowledge unprecedented in previous research about Latinxs in Atlanta schools.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Critical Race Theory and Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss counterstorytelling as the method I selected for this study qualitative study. Parker (1998) argued that placing race at the center of qualitative research "can serve as a major link between fully understanding the historical vestiges of the past discrimination and the present-day racial manifestations of that discrimination" (p. 46). Therefore, I use Latina/o critical race theory as the methodology to examine and disrupt existing racial structures and to promote social change in public schools in the metro Atlanta area. In order to conduct this qualitative study, the methodology used in this research focuses on critical race theory and specifically counterstorytelling as the method to collect data.

Researchers who place racism at the center of an investigation and aim to demonstrate the disproportionate relationships between power, race, and class have been influenced by critical race theories. Furthermore, critical race theorists explain the racial hierarchies that comprise U.S. history (Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Delgado Bernal and Alemán (2017) described critical race theory as a methodology to study the oppressed groups that have been disenfranchised by power and stratified by race. By using critical race methodology in this study, I focus on the voices of a small sample of Latinx immigrant parents, who would otherwise go unheard. A qualitative study from a Latina/o critical race framework allows me to study the phenomenon of how Latinx immigrant parents navigate local schools in the metro Atlanta area and how their race, language, culture and immigration status intertwine with U.S. schooling experience.

Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) argued that intersectionalities can be an analytical tool when used to handle complex issues dealing with marginalized groups. “Intersectionality often finds a welcome home in fields that already see theory and practice interconnected.” (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). This study combined participants’ intersections rooted in race, language spoken, culture, and immigration status, with critical race theory to provide an understanding of Latinx immigrant parents’ experiences. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined critical race theory as

> [a] theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identified critical race research studies as the gender, class, and racial analysis of the lived experiences of students of color. In this study, I extend their definition to the immigrant parents of Latinx students with the purpose to aid research by presenting the experiences and knowledge Latinx parents offer through their counterstories. In the words of Bogdan and Biklen (2007), “it all depends on where you are sitting, how things look to you” (p. 25) and it is from this premise that I justify counterstorytelling as the research method for collecting data. Anzaldúa (1990) explained that developing new theories can help attain better understanding of those who are members of oppressed groups. I hereby document

the counterstories of my participants as they described how they experienced public schools in the United States as Latinx immigrants in metro Atlanta.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that a narrative is “a telling of what an individual believes occurred” (p. 97) and researchers explore the experiences lived by the participants (whether a single individual or a small group of persons). Thus, a critical race study describes the lived experiences narrated by a single or a group of oppressed individuals. These experiences are described through the participants’ counterstories. In this study, the participants are Latinx immigrant parents who reside in the metro Atlanta area. The intersectionalities of race, language, culture, , and immigration status, as well as cultural barriers that the participants experienced in their children’s schools are the lived experience addressed in this study. Following Matsuda’s (1991) definition of critical race theory as “the work of legal scholars of color who placed race and racism at the center in American law” (p. 1331), Solórzano and Yosso (2002) expand on Matsuda’s (1991) definition and identify the role race and racism play in U.S. education.

Furthermore, critical race theorists seek to challenge racism and work toward social justice. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identified five elements that form the basis for critical race theory in education: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. A critical race methodology allows me to explain the layers of subordination experienced by the Latinx participants. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described using counterstories in critical race theory as

> a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing,

> and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse in race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Yet, counter-stories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories. (p.32)

I have chosen critical race methodology because I recognize the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of oppression (nationality and language spoken) that affect my participants. This study reflects my attempt to seek social justice for the Latinx parents whose resistance is often juxtaposed with the multiple levels of discrimination they experience. By documenting their counterstories, the Latinx parents' voices will challenge the "White-centric" epistemological perspectives and provide instead a detailed account of their reality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Specifically, this study will provide the counterstories of a small group of Latinx immigrant parents in metro Atlanta on how they face the layers of subordination they experience because of their intersecting identities in local schools.

**LatCrit Counterstories**

I argue that counterstories are powerful because they can deconstruct the current Euro-centric reality and provide Latinxs with the opportunity to incorporate their lived experiences into the narratives. Research shows that counterstories often refute the majoritarian narrative as presented by Whites (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described storytelling as one of the oldest art forms performed by humans. Through storytelling, African Americans and other minorities transferred and communicated the cultural values for generations (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling and counterstories are important because this type of data provides the means to present the discourse of these oppressed groups, often left out of the

narratives. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined counterstories as “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that counterstorytelling helps us “understand what life is to others” (p. 41) presenting the readers with an unfamiliar world.

Matsuda (1991) argued that counterstorytelling is an essential tenet of CRT educational research. Counterstories debunk White narratives that perpetuate racial stereotypes. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined counterstories as a method that “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p.144). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) recognized that counterstorytelling can be found in different forms of narratives, i.e. personal stories, other people’s stories, and composite stories. By engaging in counterstorytelling, I analyze the Latinx immigrant parents/participants’ experiences with U.S. schools and examine how Latinx’s community cultural capital can have a positive effect on metro Atlanta public schools their children attend.

In her book entitled *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline,* Yosso (2006) uses counterstories to humanize the statistics that showed the educational discrepancies between the academic performances of Latinx students and their counterparts. “A counterstory, on the other hand, begins with an understanding that inadequate educational conditions limit equal access and opportunities in Chicana/o schooling” (Yosso, 2006, p. 4). She argued that CRT places race and racism at the center of education but expands to other forms of oppression characteristic of Latinxs. The intersectionalities Yosso (2006) revealed include gender, class, sexuality, phenotype, culture, language, immigration status, accent, and surnames. This study draws from CRT to challenge the ways racism has impacted Latinxs in metro Atlanta public schools. The counterstories in this study reflect the lived experiences of

Latinx immigrant parents in order to raise the critical conscious of school officials about social and racial injustice the Latinx populations are often subjected.

Additionally, in the book *Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City: Stories of Dispossession and Defiance from New Orleans*, Buras, Randels, and Ya Salaam (2010) draw on the narratives of veteran teachers and students to reveal the struggle to rebuild homes and schools and maintain the city's long-standing African American culture in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, in the face of attacks on Black neighborhoods and public schools, these stories enable readers to understand the systematic injustice that people of color are subjected to and the challenges educators continue to face. Through the teachers' and students' narratives, Buras, et al. (2010) show that race and racism continue to be present in today's educational practices in the United States. The counterstories in their book are a powerful method to reveal the perspectives of marginalized groups long silenced. This study presents the counterstories of Latinx immigrant parents and their experiences as they navigate the educational pipeline of public schools in metro Atlanta.

**Research Questions**

There is a growing literature on Latinx parents' school involvement, but a scarce number of research studies on Latinx parents' perceptions on how they experienced the school environments in metro Atlanta or the U.S. South (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; McDonald, et al. 2006). There are myriad research studies on Latinx immigrants and their experience in the United States as members of this minority group (Babbie, 1995; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999, 2016; Yosso, 2006). Oftentimes, this type of research on parental involvement

uses quantitative data to show a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. However, there is very little qualitative research on Latinxs' counterstories on navigating schools, or how they perceive their identities are construed in Atlanta schools.

The purpose of this study was to place Latinx immigrant parents at the forefront of the research in order to provide the readers with a better understanding of the realities, the struggles, and the cultural wealth Latinx families contribute to the educational experience of their children. Especially under the current political challenges these families are facing, it is imperative to present their counterstories. The guiding questions that were used as the method to gather the counterstories of the participants on the phenomenon of Latinx immigrants' experiences navigating metro Atlanta schools are the following:

- How do Latinx immigrant parents describe their family's educational experiences in Latin America, specifically their country of origin?
- How do Latinx immigrant parents describe their lived experiences within metro Atlanta public schools, particularly any linguistic, cultural, and educational tensions or challenges with their child's school?
- How do they navigate those challenges and to what degree do they think their efforts are successful?
- What do Latinx immigrant parents believe are the cultural assets they bring to their child's school?
- What do Latinx immigrant parents think Atlanta public schools can do to improve communication between school and Latinx parents and to understand what the cultural relevance of education means to Latinx immigrant families?

**Participants**

I opted to interview five participants based on the parameters that participants must be Latinx immigrants, who have not attended school in the United States, but whose children attend public schools in the metro Atlanta area. All the participants who volunteered for this study are females of Mexican origin; thus I refer to them as Latinas. The participants spoke Spanish as their primary language and had moderate to little knowledge of the English language. Each participant had at least one child enrolled in a public school at either the elementary, middle, or high school levels in the metro Atlanta area.

I chose five participants because I conducted three interviews: first an introductory interview (where I introduced myself, the study, and explained the relevance of their experiences for this research) followed by two in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews allowed the participants to examine their lived experiences and share their experiences in two tiers: their experience prior to and upon their arrival in Georgia, and the second interview consisted of their experience in U.S. schools. Their willingness to share their counterstories about navigating metro Atlanta public schools provided a greater understanding of their struggles as well as their cultural capital and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined counterstory as a method of "telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). I used this premise to explain how the information revealed through my participants (the Latinx immigrant parents' counterstories) about their experiences with metro Atlanta public schools was used as data. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained the analytical process of the researcher as a process to "gather narratives, descriptions, and interpretations from an array of conversational partners and put them together

in a reasoned way that re-creates a culture or describes a process or sets of events in a way that participants would recognize as real" (p. 7). The thematic analysis of the participants' counterstories was conducted through what Roulston (2013) described as *data reduction*. Data reduction calls for a systematic coding by categorizing, grouping, and finally reorganizing the data "through a series of assertions and interpretations" (Roulston, 2013, p. 151). Saldaña (2009) explained that a word or phrase is often used as a code for thematic organization of data. Seidman (2013) suggested that research done in education should involve the perspectives of parents (along with other stakeholders) "whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling" (p. 9). Furthermore, he argued that "if the researcher's goal is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (p. 10). In this particular study, the data consisted of interview transcripts collected from the three stages of the research. Thus, three strategic methods, (1) developing transcriptions of the interviews; (2) simultaneous analysis of thematic units and transcribing; and (3) maintaining a reflective journal, was used. In the analysis of thematic units, LatCrit informed the organization of data, with an emphasis on issues that exhibited characteristics of Yosso's community cultural wealth along with racial struggle and forms of capital that emerged in the counterstories.

Seidman (2013) explained that interviewing is conducted when the researcher "explored complex issues in the subject area by examining the concrete experience of people in that area and the meaning their experience had for them" (p. 15). Qualitative research can be best accomplished through interviews when there is a well-established relationship between researcher and subjects. Seidman (2013) suggested that when interviewing, researchers should establish a good relationship with the participants by maintaining sensitivity, exhibiting good

manners, respect, and an interest in their stories. Each participant who volunteered for the study was a female immigrant from Mexico willing to share how she navigated public schools in the metro Atlanta area. After a brief introductory interview, I reassured the participants that anonymity was going to be implemented throughout the research. Furthermore, the first formal interview was conducted at the conference room where they usually met with the gatekeeper for parent leadership trainings. During that interview, four participants invited me to continue the second interview at their homes. Thus, I visited those parents at their homes; and one participant was interviewed at a public park near her home, where her children were playing during the time we were interviewing. This ensured that participants were in an environment where they felt most comfortable. In doing so, participants openly shared their experiences from their immigration up until the present. With the exception of one participant, most of them had recent experiences navigating public schools in the Atlanta area. Therefore, their recollection of the lived experiences was very detailed. All of the participants' children were still attending (or attended) school within the last three to five years.

**Sampling**

The participants in this study were identified with the assistance of a gatekeeper. In qualitative research, a gatekeeper is the person identified to give the researcher the authority to conduct the study (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The gatekeeper for this study has been identified as the director of the community group (previously described in Chapter 1). The community group has a unique component for Latinx parents of school-age children. Therefore, the director's accessibility to this group of participants and her willingness to aide with this research were the main reasons why the gatekeeper was selected. I should clarify that I have a personal history of volunteering with and supporting this organization and have had the opportunity to get

to know many local Latinx families. My personal relationship with the community group and its director assisted in gaining access, establishing rapport, and earning the participants' trust.

The researcher and the gatekeeper had several conversations prior to the study in order to identify the possible participants. The gatekeeper contacted the parents who fit the criteria to participate in the study and scheduled a meeting to introduce me (the researcher), and the purpose of the study was explained to the potential participants. Participants were asked to voluntarily participate in the study and once the potential participants were identified, interviews (place and times) were determined. The gatekeeper, who is the coordinator of the parent leadership program where the participants were selected, was present during this meeting because the introduction took place during the parent leadership meeting. The researcher attended the meeting and was given the opportunity to address the parents at that time. During the introduction, informed agreements (consent forms) were distributed to all parents and contact information was collected from the parents who were interested in participating in this research. Prospective participants were contacted by telephone during the following week to arrange the first formal interview. During those telephone conversations, five participants confirmed their availability and the interviews were scheduled to be conducted at the end of the next parent leadership meeting the following month. Participants were given a copy of the informed agreements at the beginning of the first formal interview.

## Data Sources

### Stage One: Informal Interviews

Roulston (2013) defined qualitative interviews as a method used for eliciting data to examine a research problem. The purpose of this study is to document the voices of Latinx

immigrant parents and their experiences navigating metro Atlanta public schools. To accomplish this goal, I gathered data through a range of formal and informal interviews (from closed-ended and open-ended questions to in-depth interviews) conducted in three stages (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The initial stage consisted of informal interviews where I intended to establish a relationship of trust between self and participants; explained to the participants the purpose of this study; and finally, provided the participants with a comprehensive understanding of the benefits of their counterstorytelling. The next two stages consisted of two-tier formal interviews. All the initial interviews were conducted in the spring of 2018, while the last interview was conducted in the summer of the same year.

During the informal interviews (initial stage), I met with the participants and shared my experience as a Latina immigrant and explained to them how my intersectionalities of language, country of origin, and race have affected me and therefore influenced the purpose of this study. In doing so, I hoped to provide the participants with a deeper understanding of this study and established a relationship by building a rapport that welcomed an open and sincere conversation where participants were willing to share their counterstories.

During the informal interviews, participants were able to understand the significance of their personal counterstories that were documented in this study. I explained to the participants that the data for this study will consist of their shared lived experiences and mainly how race, language, cultural values, immigration status, and forms of oppression (Delgado Bernal, 1998) was experienced by them. The information was collected in two in-depth formal interviews that followed. During the initial stage, participants were informed that the formal interviews were going to be recorded and that they would be transcribed and translated into English (where necessary).

Drawing from Rubin's and Rubin's (2012) naturalistic approach, the in-depth interviews helped analyze how participants perceived the Atlanta area schools' environments and how they interpreted their navigating experiences. "In-depth interviewing is the tool of choice for exploring personal and sensitive issues or morally ambiguous choices people have made" (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 4). Using in-depth interviews,  participants provided details of their experiences, motives and opinions of others as well as demonstrated how they understand their navigation of schools.

**Stage Two: Tiers 1 and 2 Formal Interviews**

The participants were interviewed individually at two different times. During the prior informal interview, potential participants were provided with an informed agreement (consent form) and an interview protocol (in English and in Spanish). They were asked to sign and return at the tier 1 (first formal) interview. The information was clarified to those participants who had questions regarding the contents of the forms. Participants were notified that they could withdraw from the study at any point. The participants were informed that the interviews will be semi-structured and that tier 1 interviews were anticipated to last between 50 to 60 minutes; and that tier 2 interviews may be longer (60 to 90 minutes). The interviews were audio-recorded in order to ensure accuracy. The participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The format of the interviews are shown in Appendix A-tier 1, and Appendix B-tier 2.

First in-depth interview: Personal Background (50-60 minutes). The focus of this interview was to obtain participants' general demographic backgrounds, their sense of place and

culture, and their previous personal educational experiences in their country of origin. Questions focused on:

- Country of origin and culture (familial relationships, roles, and responsibilities), highest level of schooling (if any) the participant received in his/her country of origin, and structure of schools in their country of origin (grading system, age/grade, personal aspirations during school and/or interests)
- Events and experiences that led them to come to the United States, the circumstances under which they traveled, and the means, costs, and duration or time lapse between departing from their country and arriving to Atlanta, GA.
- Their family: relatives, marital status, and number of children.

Second in-depth interview: Participants experiences in U.S. schools as parents (60-90 minutes).

The beginning of this interview was used to clarify questions or answers from the tier 1 interview and then discussed the following issues:

- Participants discussed their early experiences with U.S. schools (first time they visited a school to enroll their child) and explained the results of that first encounter with U.S. schools.
- Events that connected them as a Latinx parent with their child's public schools in Atlanta.

- Questions about how their experiences changed over time, including schools did (or not) to welcome Latinxs' cultural wealth and/or how have they contributed (if this is the case) in a positive way to their children's experience in metro Atlanta public schools.

**Data Analysis**

Seidman (2013) explained that in qualitative research, the process of interpreting data involves several stages: managing the data, studying, reducing, and analyzing the text, sharing interview data, crafting profiles, making thematic connections from data, and interpreting the material. As I explained earlier in this chapter, the primary source of data for this study was collected from informal and formal interviews. Due to the participants' language preference (Spanish), interviews were transcribed in their totality. However, only data that addressed the specific research questions were translated. In order to preserve the objectivity of the analysis, an institution review board (IRB) approved professional translator and interpreter was used to translate the transcripts.

Furthermore, I kept a reflective journal for two main reasons: 1) for auto-analysis of my role as a researcher (Roulston, 2013); and 2) to revise narratives that were consistent with CCW and the forms of capital Yosso (2005, 2006) described. During my analytical process, data were not translated because as a Spanish speaker, I had the ability to analyze the interviews in Spanish prior to transcribing the data, although the interviews were subsequently translated by a third party mandated and approved by the IRB. For the transcription, the codes found in Appendix C were used. As the original Spanish transcripts were read, the forms of capital that emerged from the interviews were highlighted in the transcripts. The themes were then categorized under the

forms of capital identified by the Yosso's CCW components. This process allowed the researcher to document the narratives in the counterstories that are relevant to the CCW and organize them categorically by the forms of capital. Following the transcription, the process of analysis suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012) was used. The analysis involved organizing the excerpts into the themes that reflected Yosso's (2006) forms of capital: *aspirational*, *linguistic*, *navigational*, *social*, *familial*, and *resistant*. Finding evidence of these themes allowed me to contextualize the understanding of the participants' exhibited forms of capital and relate the findings to my theoretical framework.

**Ethical Concerns**

After securing the approval from the Institutional Review Board at the university, the participants (Latinx parents) who met inclusion criteria were approached and asked to participate. The first meeting was conducted with the gatekeeper at the most convenient site agreed between us. The meeting with the potential participants took place at the conference room that houses the community group (where the parents meet regularly during their participation in the community group) in Metro Atlanta, Georgia. Once the participants were selected, interviews were scheduled and the time was agreed. The first formal interview took place at the same conference room where the informal introduction took place. At the end of the first interview, second interviews were confirmed for times, dates, and location (which most participants chose to meet at their homes).

All of the participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidance of the American Psychological Association and the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although there were no predictable physical risks for conducting this study, certain

considerations were present when dealing with Latinx immigrant participants. The political turmoil immigrants are experiencing under the new government's anti-immigration laws (Herold, 2017), including the attack on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA), and the immigration status of the participants were discussed during the interviews only when applicable and at the discretion of the participants. The participants' compelling stories regarding their immigration status and struggles will be revisited in Chapter 4.

Participants were interviewed about their experience as a Latinx parent in the United States. Comparisons of cultural aspects of both U.S. and Latinx cultures were expected to surface while participants did not view the researcher as a person in a position of power or superiority. Instead, given the educational background of the researcher, and common forms of capital between the subjects and the researcher, some participants shared that the researcher had motivated them to learn English and one specifically shared with the gatekeeper that she was interested in getting her general education diploma (GED) in order to pursue a college education.

## Overall Limitations and Strengths of the Study

Limitations of this study derive from two extents: the methodology and the participants. A possible constraint in this study is the small number of participants selected for the study. I chose a small number of participants because I did not intend to generalize the findings in this study, but to gain trust from the participants. A smaller sample allowed me more time to visit with the participants and develop a bond of reciprocal trust. If I had used a larger sample size, I would have had to limit the time dedicated to completing this study and therefore jeopardized the possibility of developing a close relationship of trust and sincere description of the participants' actual experience. With a smaller sample, I was able to analyze the participants' counterstories in

depth and through a loyal reflection of their narratives. The counterstories in this study will provide other researchers a better understanding of the participants' experiences in schools in the metro Atlanta area.

Researchers argued that LatCrit is an indispensable tool in their qualitative studies (Delgado Bernal, et al., 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Richard Delgado (2012) defined CRT as a movement of researchers interested in studying the relationship between race, racism, and power. CRT parts from the premise that racism is an everyday life experience and that our society agrees with the subordination of people of color (or minorities). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also explained that critical race theorists argue that racism is difficult to address because it is not always blatant. Discrimination can occur without violence, under the law, and/or subconsciously. The counterstories from the participants in this study provide an inside view of cultural discrepancies that often occur between Latinxs and U.S. schools. The strength of this study is that it is localized to Atlanta, an area with a very significant growth of the Latinx population, but a city that is often overlooked by researchers.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that through LatCrit theory, researchers have been raising issues such as immigration, bilingualism, language rights, etc. that affect Latinxs directly. The participants' experiences gave us a deeper comprehension of the struggles embedded in issues related to their race, nationality, immigration status, education, and language spoken as localized to Atlanta. The findings in this study will help Atlanta educators understand how we live in a race conscious society and how Latinx parents experience education in this country.

When I first wanted to interview Latinx parents of students in the Atlanta-area public schools, I was emphasizing the growth of the Latinx population in the South. However, in my role as a legal interpreter in the court system throughout the state of Georgia, I recently noticed an increase in the number of deportations of Latinxs. Although there are organizations and movements at the national level that focus on the welfare of Latinxs in the United States (i.e. NCLR, LULAC, MALDEF), there is a need for Latinx parents' counterstories navigating metro Atlanta public schools because Latinx families are being affected by these deportations. This study will help integrate the counterstories of a culture that is dominating schools in the South: Latinxs. Through this study, I hoped to help provide an in-depth understanding of the ramifications local and national policies can have on our community; to present the stories of the people who are going to be affected by these; and to demonstrate the layers of community cultural wealth Latinxs bring into our city (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Yosso, 2005, 2006).

## Chapter 4: Findings

Pierre Bourdieu's (as cited in Yosso, 2005) defined cultural capital as follows:

> [A]n accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital (i.e., education, language), social capital (i.e., social networks, connections) and economic capital (i.e., money and other material possessions) can be acquired two ways, from one's family and/or through formal schooling (p. 76).

Nevertheless, Yosso (2005) argued that Bourdieu's and Passeron (1977) definition of cultural capital is limited to members of privileged groups who have access to those capitals (i.e. education, language, money, and other possessions). Since not all members of society belong to the "privileged" group Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) described, Yosso (2005) questioned Bourdieu's definition and explained that *community cultural wealth* (CCW) includes an individual's assets that are evident through other forms of intangible capitals. She argued that CCW is comprised of the following six forms of capital: aspirational, familial, linguistic, resistant, navigational, and social capital (see Table 1: Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth). These forms of capital will be discussed in this chapter with how they are evident in the participants' life experiences.

Expanding from Yosso's CCW theory, this chapter presents how Latina immigrant mothers used their *navigational capital*, which Yosso (2005, 2006) defined as the ability developed by Latinxs to navigate institutions that are not designed with them in mind (Yosso, 2005, 2006). Even though the participants were randomly asked to volunteer for this study, all the participants are female immigrants from Mexico, therefore a LatCrit approach that focuses

on the role of Latinx parents in educating children is justified. The participants' counterstories will show how their intersectionalities interweave with the forms of capital each exhibited. Furthermore, the *navigational capital* is evident in the way participants learned to navigate using their relationships (i.e. with strangers, friends, family members, and other relatives) in order to migrate from Mexico, adapt to their new communities in the United States, and raise children in metro Atlanta. Consequently, I explore how participants' other forms of capital are not mutually exclusive, but instead, they intertwine and come together to form a unique *navigational capital* that is distinctive to an underground network of Latina immigrant mothers whose children attend (or attended) public schools in the metro Atlanta area. I begin with a brief introduction to each participant followed by the definition of each capital. The participants' counterstories will demonstrate how all forms of capital are connected and lead to their *navigational capital*.

## Participants' Profiles

### *Lidia*

Lidia is from Oaxaca, Mexico and came to the United States approximately 18 years ago. Her parents separated when she was a teenager. She went to live with her father and two older sisters in Mexico City. At the age of 23, she married and had her son shortly after. He was 4 years old when Lidia and her husband decided to move to the United States.  They went straight to Atlanta, Georgia because Lidia's sister and brother-in law where living there.

### *Lola*

Lola is from Zacatecas, Mexico and came to the United States 16 years ago. She went to school in Mexico and studied to be an accountant assistant. She married and, with her husband, decided to move to the United States. Lola and her husband went straight to Atlanta, Georgia

because her husband had relatives living there. They have four children: all four of their children were born in Georgia.

*Claudia*

Claudia is from Monterrey, Mexico and came to the United States 16 years ago with her husband and two oldest daughters who were 5 and 1 year old at the time. They still own a house, a car, and a business in Mexico, but prefer to live in the United States. Claudia went straight to Atlanta, Georgia because her husband's sister was living there. Claudia and her husband have four children: the two oldest were born in Mexico, and their two youngest were born in Atlanta, Georgia.

*Costeña*

Costeña is from Guerrero, Mexico and came to the United States 14 years ago. She first moved in with her uncles in Los Angeles, California, where she met her husband. After approximately three years of marriage, they decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia because Costeña's sisters had moved there. Costeña and her husband have three children: all born in Georgia.

*Cati*

Cati is from Veracruz, Mexico and came to the United States 14 years ago. Cati met her husband in her hometown. They dated for five years and during their courtship, he had moved to Atlanta, Georgia for a year. When he returned to Veracruz, they got married and decided to move back to Atlanta together. All four of Cati's and her husband's children were born in Georgia.

## Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) defined *community cultural wealth* as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). These communities of people nurture 6 essential forms of capital that Yosso (2005, 2006) identified to be: aspirational, linguistic, resistant, social, familial, and navigational. These forms of capital will be discussed as they are evident in each participants' counterstory.

Yosso (2006) described *aspirational capital* as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers" (p. 41). All participants in this study exhibited some form of *aspirational capital* which began in their country of origin and was crushed somewhere along the way before their hopes and dreams came to fruition. Their *aspirational capital* was renewed when they decided to come to the United States, embarked on that journey, and remained and adapted within their new local communities (see Table 2: Participants' Educational Background).

*Linguistic capital* is the "intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso, 2006, p. 43). The participants admitted that they did not consider themselves bilingual, although some are able to speak English with limitations or continue to learn English.

Yosso (2005, 2006) argued that *resistant capital* is associated with a skill that is developed to withstand forms of oppression. The participants in this study developed a resilience that helped them resist forms of oppression and racism they experienced in the United States.

The skills and actions the participants exhibited through behaviors that challenged the oppressors is consistent with Yosso's (2005, 2006) definition of *resistant capital*.

Table 1.

*Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth*

| | |
|---|---|
| Aspirational Capital | "The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers." |
| Linguistic Capital | "Intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language." |
| Resistant Capital | "Draws on resistance to oppression…and refers to knowledges and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequalities." |
| Social Capital | "Networks of people and community resources." |
| Familial Capital | "Cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition." |
| Navigational Capital | "The ability to make [your] way through social institutions not created with Chicanas/os in mind." |

Yosso (2005) explained that "[s]*ocial capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79). Evidence of *social capital* is present in the relationships participants developed through their interactions with other individuals as they navigated their communities and institutions.

Another form of capital found amongst the participants is *familial capital*, which is defined as the way in which a family's nucleus develops relationships of encouragement, cooperation, emotional support, and cultural values that are transferred from adults to children within a broad kinship (Yosso, 2005, 2006). The familial relationships presented in this study

show evidence of strong support, cultural values, and cooperation transferred from parents to children.

Table 2.

*Participants' Educational Background*

| Participant | Elementary Education | Some/Completed Middle School Education | Some High School Education | Completed High School Education | Some/Completed College Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lidia | X | X | | | |
| Lola | X | X | X | X | |
| Claudia | X | X | X | X | X |
| Costeña | X | X | X | | |
| Cati | X | X | X | | |

Finally, *navigational capital* is defined by Yosso as a set of skills in maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to navigate institutions not created with people of color or minorities in mind. Scholars have examined individual, family, and community factors that support Latinx' successful navigation of educational systems (Yosso, 2006).

This study demonstrates how the participants' *navigational capital* was fundamental in their ability to navigate geographical borders; in adapting to social environments; and helped them deal with academic policies and educators.

## Lidia's Story

I begin with Lidia's story because, unlike the other participants who planned their migration, coming to the United States was not something Lidia ever imagined she would do. "*Y más que nada pues nosotros no teníamos opciones por mi hijo porque él necesitaba esa atención especial porque yo nunca en mi vida hubiera pensado que me iba a venir para acá*" [And more than anything because we didn't have options for my son because he needed that special attention because I never in my life would had imagined that I would come here] (Lidia, interview, 2018). Lidia was referring to her son's medical condition, which is explained in the following paragraphs.

Lidia came from a relatively large family and she is the fourth of eight siblings. She became very close to her father and older sisters, because her mother had left the children after she separated from her husband and moved to the United States. The rest of the family ended up moving from Oaxaca (their hometown) to Mexico City. Her two older sisters moved to Mexico City first, got settled, and the rest of the family followed afterwards. Lidia mentioned that her father provided the financial support for the family, but as the siblings got older they all were forced to get jobs to help financially. "*Para ayudar a la familia, y para ayudarme a mí misma porque ya no se podía comprar más*" [To help the family, and to help myself because we couldn't afford to buy anything else] (Lidia, interview, 2018). Lidia attended school until the eighth grade (although she does not remember attending kindergarten). She voluntarily dropped out of school at the age of sixteen to work and help her family financially.

Lidia explained that in Mexico, secondary education consists of grades seventh through ninth (the equivalent of middle school in the United States). Grades tenth to twelfth (or thirteenth, depending on the field) are called *preparatoria,* which consists of a "preparation" for future careers. During the *preparatoria* Mexican students receive training in the field of their

choice. This is the level of schooling where Lidia would have received the nursing training she wanted if she had been able to afford and remain in school. Lidia's dream was to become a nurse; she got emotional when she remembered that she disappointed her father when she dropped out of school: "*pero me causa sentimiento porque el día que fui a la secundaria mi papá pudo ir a inscribirme y yo tenía mucha ilusión de estudiar*" [it makes me very sad because the day we went to high school, my dad was able to go and register me and I was very much hoping I could study] (Lidia, interview, 2018). Lidia's decision was mainly driven by the family's lack of financial resources and the need to help support the family. Lidia's *familial capital* was influential in her decision to drop out of school because after Lidia's parents separated, her mother moved to the United States, hence Lidia had to help her sisters and father financially.

Lidia remained at home until she married her husband at the age of 23. They had their son shortly after. Lidia's *navigational capital* emerged years ago, because her son was born with Type 4 Microtia (a birth deformity of the ear) which affected his hearing and speech. Although Lidia never mentioned the illness by its name, she talked about her son being "a special child." "*Él es un niño especial, por eso nos vinimos para acá [a los Estados Unidos]. Porque mi hermana me dijo que aquí lo podían ayudar.*" [He is a special child, that's why we came here [to the United States] because my sister told me that they can help him here] (Lidia, interview, 2018). Lidia was motivated to come to the United States because here, she could provide her son with the resources she could not find in Mexico.

Lidia and her husband had an important decision to make; she explained that they had two options: "*Sí, y pues ahora sí que uno se viene con las dos opciones: o arriesgo la vida de, ahora sí que en nuestro caso la vida de nosotros y la de nuestro hijo o se queda uno aquí en México sin vida*" [Yes, well we do come now with two options: risk the life, well, now in our

case ours and our son's or we stay in Mexico with no life] (Lidia, interview, 2018). Lidia and her family were to either risk their lives to come here and have a better life or stay in Mexico and watch their son not fulfil his.

With the birth of their first (and only) child, the nature of his medical condition, its potential risks and consequences in their country of origin, Lidia's family was forced to make the decision to leave and come to the United States. Lidia admitted that finding help for her son's medical condition was the main reason why they (Lidia and her husband) decided to move to the United States. Lidia's *social capital* was fundamental for her arrival in the United States. For Lidia and her family, trusting strangers and developing relationships became a necessity. She attributed her son's medical condition as the force that drove them to trust and "*soltamos la confianza entregándose en manos a Dios*" [releasing the trust by putting ourselves in God's hands] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Lidia's sister and brother in law moved to Georgia when her son was approximately 4 years old. During the six months her sister lived in the Atlanta area, her sister shared with her co-workers her nephew's medical condition and found out that schools in this country would admit the child and make the necessary accommodations for him to attend school successfully.

> *Cuando ella ya tenía seis meses me llamó porque ella empezó a buscar entre el trabajo amigas y comentarles el problema que yo tenía con mi hijo, con mi niño, y ya le dijeron que me podía yo venir si yo quería y que aquí me podían ayudar. Entonces, yo, eso hizo que yo llegue a estos lados*. [When she had six months she called me because she had started to look in her job and inquired with friends and told them about the problem I had with my son, with my child, and that's when they told her that I could come if I wanted

> and that I could find help here. Then, I, that's what made me come to these sides] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

The decision to come to the United States was not an easy one for Lidia, but the welfare of her son was her priority. Lidia's sister used the *social capital* she found in a network of coworkers and neighbors, and in six months was able to send for Lidia and her family. After contemplating her options, Lidia was determined to migrate due to her sister's finding of accessible medical resources that could help Lidia's son.

Their trip lasted four days, which Lidia described as short because most people take longer to cross the border: "*tardamos, gracias a Dios, cuatro días en llegar aquí. No fue mucho porque otras personas habíamos escuchado que tardaban más*" [It took us four days to get here, thank God. It wasn't much because we've heard that other people took longer] (Lidia, interview, 2018). What is interesting about Lidia's story is that she was never scared during the time they spent hiding and running in the desert with their four-year old child. In fact, she never mentioned any incident of them being afraid at any point in her story. This courage displayed by Lidia is a testament to her *aspirational capital*.

The cost of the trip was more than $7000 US dollars (USD). "*El viaje total fue de, total, total con todo y los pasajes, saliendo desde el primer momento de México hasta Atlanta fueron como $7,000 dólares*" [The entire trip, was total, total with plane tickets, and everything, from the first time we left Mexico to Atlanta was about $7000 USD] (Lidia, interview, 2018) which was paid in two halves: the first half was paid before they left Mexico, and the second half was paid by her sister once she was informed that Lidia and her family were on a plane from Arizona to Georgia.

In addition to the $7000 USD there were other local expenses paid in Mexican pesos. When asked how they were able to raise the money, Lidia said that it was her sister, her brother in law, and some cousins (who lived in Mexico) who lent them the money for the trip: "*Bueno, esos $7000 dólares pues, mi hermana y mi cuñado que ya estaban aquí*" [Well those $7000 USD, well, my sister and my brother in law because they were already here] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

The relationship Lidia shared with her father and sisters is an example of *familial capital.* Initially, when the children were young, Lidia's father was the sole financial provider for the entire family. As Lidia got older, she felt she was becoming a financial burden to her family, she voluntarily dropped out of school and joined the workforce. Her family seems to share a responsibility to each other that is exemplified in the father's role and subsequently it is evident with other members of Lidia's family, i.e. Lidia's cousins. This is evidence of Yosso's *familial capital* and the understanding of a broader type of kinship that extends to Lidia's cousins. Furthermore, through the relationship Lidia and her sister had, Lidia was encouraged to move to the United States with her family and relocate to Atlanta. Lidia's sister's encouragement was fundamental in Lidia's decision to migrate.

From Michoacán, Lidia and her family took another bus to the border city of Cananea. Per Lidia's estimations, they spent 24 hours on buses, before they walked for four hours in the wilderness to reach the destination where a "*coyote*" (a human smuggler) was waiting for them in a truck. They got on the truck and rode to the Arizona border, where another *coyote* awaited. It took them four hours to cross the border in a desert area. Lidia (interview, 2018) described the experience as "*fue mas corriendo entre las montañas, entre la yerba, entre todo lo, lo que haya entre las montañas, escondiéndonos debajo de los árboles*" [it was more like running between

the mountains, the grass, between everything, everything there is between the mountains, hiding under the trees], where they ran from one tree to another to hide from potential sightings. After running and hiding in the desert for four hours, they finally arrived at the place where another man was waiting in another truck. This time, they rode the truck along with all other illegal immigrants, who were also waiting to be transported to Phoenix, Arizona.

> *De Cananea nos llevaron a un baldío, a un monte, a unas montañas…caminamos que serán como cuatro horas y de ahí volvimos a tomar otra camioneta que nos trajo de la cual nos trajo a Phoenix, Arizona. Eso fue dentro de la camioneta para cruzar la frontera de Cananea, ya que estábamos en un baldío, en una montaña escondidos, porque nos escondimos, caminos para llegar a esa carretera porque ahí está la división de los estados para cruzar a Estados Unidos. Caminamos durante cuatro horas más o menos. Después de allí, pasó una camioneta de la cual todos los que nos transportaban a escondidas, ahora sí nos tuvimos que meter a escondidas en la camioneta*. [From Cananea they took us to a vacant lot, to a mountain, to some mountains ... we walked like four hours and from there we went back to take another truck that brought us to Phoenix, Arizona. That was inside the truck to cross the border of Cananea, since we were in a wasteland, in a hidden mountain, because we hid, roads to get to that road because there is the division to cross to the United States. We walked for four hours or so. After that, a truck passed by which all those who were transporting us behind the scenes, now we had to sneak into the truck] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Once in Arizona, Lidia described the house where they stayed in Phoenix as a small three-bedroom house. About 50-70 people were staying in that house along with them. She remembered  that everyone had to sleep seated, because there was no room for people to lay on

the floor. At this point, they had befriended some of the people they met on the truck at the border. The next day, the *coyote* (who she described as the "main guy") told them that they were going to get on a plane to Atlanta, but they had to get in different flights in order not to raise suspicions. She was instructed to go the restroom where someone would give her a boarding pass. Lidia and her family boarded a domestic flight from Phoenix, Arizona, to Atlanta, Georgia. They showed their boarding passes and Mexican identification to get on a plane for the first time in their lives.

> *Cuando llegamos allí, pues ahí nos pasamos toda noche despiertos porque era una casa donde, pues habían como de cincuenta a setenta personas estaban en esa casa. Esa casa constaba como de tres cuartitos y una cocinita bien pequeña en la cual nos teníamos que, ahora sí que, acomodarnos. Ya no había espacio ni para dormir. Teníamos que dormir sentados, todos, porque no había espacio para acostarse, por lo menos en el piso; no había también este, camas. Era solamente en el piso. Y ya de ahí cuando estábamos en Phoenix, Arizona, nos compraron el boleto de avión…y es como nosotros fuimos llegando*. [When we got there, then we spent all night there awake because it was a house where, they had like, what will they be? About fifty, fifty to seventy people were in that house. That house consisted of three small rooms and a small kitchenette in which we had to, now, accommodate ourselves. There was no space to sleep. We had to sleep sitting, everyone, because there was no room to lie down, at least on the floor; there were also no beds either. It was only on the floor. And from there when we were in Phoenix, Arizona, they bought us the plane ticket…and that's how we arrived] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

For Lidia and her family, trusting all these strangers was not easy although it exemplifies her *aspirational capital*: "*sí es muy peligroso arriesgarse con cualquier persona*" [it is very

dangerous to risk with any person] (Lidia, interview, 2018). She continued to refer to her son's special condition as the force that drove them to trust "…*más que nada pues nosotros no teníamos, pues por lo de mi hijo porque él necesitaba esa atención especial*" [especially because, well we didn't have, well, because of my son, because he needed that special care] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Lidia became emotional when asked to describe their feelings upon the arrival. She remembered her son being very sad because he was very close to the relatives they had left behind. "*Había momentos en que mi hijo y yo nos poníamos a llorar*" [There were moments when my son and I would start crying] (Lidia, interview, 2018). She mentioned that at first, they used to cry together often. Furthermore, Lidia was disillusioned to arrive at a city so small. She was expecting large buildings, but instead she saw a lot of greenery and small houses which she attributed to a small town. She thought apartment buildings looked like schools and cried as she longed for Mexico City. Lidia still cries whenever she recounts the story. "*Fueron muy difíciles porque cuando llegué aquí a Atlanta fue muy triste para mí, porque fue un cambio muy diferente: totalmente diferente porque fue otro mundo*" [It was very difficult because when I arrived here in Atlanta, it was very sad, because, it was a very different change: it was a totally different world] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

There were seventeen people in her sister's one-bedroom apartment, but among them there were only three women. The other two women worked outside the house, so it was Lidia's responsibility to take care of the household. She cooked, cleaned, and did all other house chores to contribute to the household. The men in the apartment were either related to her brother in law or were his acquaintances. For Lidia, being around so many strangers was very difficult at first. She felt displaced in her sister's home.

> *Nunca me imaginé que yo iba a llegar a este lugar así tan extraño. Y fue triste porque llegamos con mi hermana y llegamos a estar en un apartamento chiquito y ahí estábamos éramos diecisiete personas y porque en ese tiempo no había casi nadie que, que lo podían a uno ayudar. No había mucha gente latino o hispano como ahora.* [I never thought that I was going to arrive to a place like this, so strange. And it was sad because we arrived at my sister's to stay in a small apartment and we were seventeen people, and because back then there were not that many people who could help you. There weren't many Hispanics or Latinxs like there are now] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Lidia soon befriended a neighbor, Olivia, with whom she became close and who was indispensable in aiding Lidia with navigating the school procedures for her son. Olivia had only been in Atlanta for three or four months, but she had already enrolled her two children in school. Olivia had a friend who showed her what school to go to and how to navigate through the registration process. Lidia shared:

> *La vecina de mi hermana que vivía en el siguiente apartamento, fue la persona que nos ayudó mucho una señora que se llama Olivia, se hizo muy amiga mía y yo le agradezco tanto a ella lo que hizo ella por mí porque ella tenía como tres, cuatro meses también de haber llegado y ahora sí que a ella la habían orientado como podían ir a la escuela, o a qué escuela podía llevar al niño a inscribir.* [My sister's neighbor, who lived next door, was the person who helped us a lot, a woman named Olivia, who became a good friend and I am very grateful to her for everything she did, because she had three maybe four months since she had been here and she had been told how they could go to school, what school to go to register the boy] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Consequently, Olivia became familiar with the school and its personnel. She explained to Lidia the paperwork they would need to bring to school and encouraged her to go as soon as possible since it was already May and the child needed to be enrolled for the upcoming year. Lidia admitted that she was scared because neither of them (Olivia nor Lidia) spoke English, but Olivia insisted that there would be people at the school who spoke Spanish and who would be able to help them. In Lidia's words:

> *Y entonces ella fue la que me dijo: 'sabes qué, tengo poco de haber llegado. A mí me llevaron a tal escuela y si quieres vamos para que apuntes a tu hijo como yo ya apunté a mi hijo. Para que lo registres así ya empiezan la escuela' porque ya íbamos por abril y en ese tiempo en mayo se acababa la escuela, que nos quedaba poquito tiempo. Entonces fui con mi amiga que a ella le dijeron qué trámites y papeles ella iba a necesitar y en ese tiempo le daban espacio para que ella recolectara los papeles que se necesitan para la inscripción del niño y ya estuviera listo y registrado para que el otro año ya pudiera ir a la escuela*. [And then, she was the one who told me: 'you know I haven't been here long. Someone took me to such and such school and if you want we can go so you can register your son just like I registered mine. That way you can register him because school is about to start' since we were already in April and at that time, school ended in May, we had little time left. Then, my friend went with me because they had told her what papers and process she was going to need and at that time they were letting her gather all the papers and documents she needed while they held her space for the registration and that way he would be enrolled for the next year when she came back with all the documents they needed] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Olivia was very optimistic about registration because of her own experience. Olivia told Lidia that when she went to enroll her children, she did not know what was required for the registration. So, the school personnel saved her children's places until she returned with the paperwork for each child's enrollment. Olivia's presence in Lidia's life is an example of Yosso's *social capital* and the first of many other forms of emotional support Lidia found in a network of people who helped her navigate through schools and hospitals.

Lidia was initially very nervous because she did not know what to expect. She was worried about the potential paperwork and immigration status verification that she would not have been able to provide. However, upon their arrival at the school, Lidia described her first encounter with the school staff as a positive experience. They were welcomed by school personnel who instructed them to wait for a Spanish speaking staff member. They were taken to a conference room where they met with the bilingual parent Liaison, who took care of them. She described this person as extremely caring, helpful, and sensitive towards her nervousness and her immigration status.

> *Mi amiga me dijo: llegamos allí y en la dirección, (nosotros le decimos dirección que aquí le dicen la oficina de información) cuando nosotras llegamos allí, preguntamos por la maestra' y nos metieron a un saloncito, como algo así como un cuartito y nos dijeron que espérense aquí que viene la maestra Mari y ella las va a atender. Ella es la que está aquí ayudando a los hispanos, traduciendo, y la que va a decirles lo que se necesita y lo que ustedes necesitan hacer*. [My Friend told me: 'we get there and at the direction office (direction office is what we call the information office) when we arrived there, we can ask for the teacher and they put us in a small classroom, like a small room and told us to wait for the teacher Mary that she was going to help us. She is the one who is helping the

Hispanics, translating, and the one who is going to tell you what you need and what you need to do] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Lidia described it as a beautiful experience because they were treated with respect and warmth. She was surprised by the cultural difference she had never experienced before. She clarified:

*Pero en Mexico, tristemente somos, no sé, como que si conoces a la persona te va a hablar, y si no conoces a la persona, no te va a hablar. No se dirigen mucho a uno. Cada cual tiene su vida independiente, pero allí no tenemos esa educación que tenemos aquí o que aprendemos a tener aquí*. [But in Mexico, sadly, we are , I don't know, it's like if you know a person, that person will speak to you, but if you don't know the person, that person is not going to greet you; each person is very independent, but there we don't have that type of education [manners] like they have here. We learn that here] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

At the school, Lidia was told that she needed her son's immunizations' records, which she did not have, thus Lidia had to take her son to a clinic to receive all the immunizations required by the school:

*Entonces yo fui a esa clínica y allí fue que otra vez desde abajo, ahora sí que desde que nació mi hijo, todas las vacunas, hasta el año que tenía mi hijo. Y así fue como me dieron la hoja de vacunación aquí en Atlanta*. [Then, I had to go to that clinic and that's where once again, from the bottom, from birth, all vaccinations until the age he had. And that's how I was given his immunization records here in Atlanta] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Another item Lidia remembered she needed was a proof of residence. Lidia was surprised about having to bring a bill to prove where they resided as she never had to provide proof of

address in Mexico. This was another unexpected requirement, but her sister provided her with the documents she needed to prove where they lived.

In many instances at the beginning of the school year, Lidia did not understand the forms of communication between the school and the home. She explained that it was not customary in Mexico to receive bulletins (or newsletters) from the schools. In fact, she remembered that another difference was that in Mexico, her parents were not expected to visit her school, send notes (when absent), or volunteer. She did not understand why, if her son was absent from school, he was expected to return with a written excuse (or note) from home.

> *En México no existe eso de mandar el recado, de una notita. En México uno tiene que ir con los papás a la escuela a presentarse, cuál es la excusa que nuestro hijo no fue a presentarse a la escuela.* [That doesn't exist in Mexico: to send notes, or messages. In Mexico, you have to come back with your parents to excuse you from an absence if you fail to go to school] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Lidia acknowledged that she could not presume what it would have been like if the bilingual person was not there to help; but she admitted that the entire school staff was very helpful in providing doctors' and hospitals' information. The school staff communicated with the medical staff, and notified Lidia of the appointments, exams, and results. The communication was facilitated by the bilingual person who was present for the entire process. Lidia described the bilingual parent liaison as an "angel" who helped her through the entire process, verified the documentation, suggested the clinic for the immunizations, and provided the information about people who would be able to assist her son's medical condition. "*Pero para mí la maestra Mari, se me hace que era un ángel porque ella fue también la que sacó los papeles para que mi hijo*

*pudiera empezar a ir al hospital para que lo chequen*" [But to me, teacher Mary was like an ángel because she was also the one who got us the papers so that my son could start going to the hospital to be seen] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Lidia's *social capital* was expanding: it began with her sister, followed by her neighbor, soon the bilingual teacher at the school, other school staff, and eventually the staff at the hospital where she took her son for the medical attention he needed. Every individual who formed a part of her social network became an important resource that helped Lidia identify and attain all the services she needed for her son.

Lidia's son underwent medical treatment and procedures to help him develop his speech, hearing, and ability to communicate, and he adapted well to school. Unfortunately, he was facing the possibility of not being able to attend college due to his family's immigration status. It was when Lidia's son was in high school that Lidia and her husband made the decision to secure his future by giving him up for adoption. A family friend adopted him while he was in the eleventh grade, which resulted in him being able to acquire U.S. citizenship, and he applied to college. Furthermore, he went on to study architecture at a university in Georgia with a scholarship. He remained close to his family, as he was aware of the circumstances regarding why he was being adopted.

Lidia's *navigational capital* intertwined with her *social capital* and became evident in the network she developed through her relatives in the United States, her friend, her employer, the school staff, and the hospital staff who helped her navigate through society's academic, medical, and professional institutions. Lidia described her boss as a very nice person who allowed her to arrange her work schedule with a weekly day off that she would use for school visits or doctors'

appointments: "*Era una persona muy buena, recuerdo que se llamaba…le decían Ricardo, un americano que fue muy, muy buena persona que fue con nosotros*" [He was a very good person, I remember his name was, they called him Ricardo, an American who was very, a very good person to us] (Lidia, interview, 2018). Lidia admitted that she had been very fortunate because she always ran into people who were willing to help her. The support Lidia received from her *social capital* was essential to her *navigational capital*.

## Lola's Story

Lola, another one of the participants, was attending *la preparatoria* which is the equivalent of a vocational school that she enrolled post-middle school. During the time she was in school at the age of fifteen, Lola was working as an accountant assistant as part of her training. Lola wanted to become an accountant one day and was doing everything she could to achieve that dream: "*en la misma preparatoria tuvimos carreras cortas, y yo saqué auxiliar en contaduría. Yo empecé a trabajar desde los 15 años. Y, que cuando yo iba a la prepa, yo trabajaba, después de salir, yo trabajaba*" [at the *preparatoria* we had short careers and I got mine in accounting assistant. I started working when I was 15 years old. When I was in school, I worked, when I was done with school, I worked] (Lola, interview, 2018). She worked and continued to receive training for almost four years, but she described the job market in Zacatecas as very difficult and "dead end" without possibilities to advance and make a decent living: "*en México no había mucho futuro, y uno no sale de lo mismo*" [there was no future in Mexico and it is always the same for anyone] (Lola, interview, 2018).

Lola had been dating her now husband during that time. The lack of employment or schooling along with Lola's and her husband's hope to one day have children, caused them to

want to secure their children's future with a lifestyle that would be better than the one they thought they would receive in their country:

> *Nos… nosotros sí conversamos antes de casarnos. Con mi esposo duré de noviazgo 3 años. Nosotros en verdad en México no había mucho futuro, y uno no sale de lo mismo…Yo pensé en el futuro y yo dije: 'No. No quiero que mis hijas se queden aquí…y sigan la misma historia que uno.'* [We…we talked about it before we got married. I dated my husband for three years before we got married. We, well, the truth is that in Mexico there was not a lot for the future. You're stuck in the same…I thought about the future and I said: 'No. I don't want my daughters to be here, reliving the same story as ours'] (Lola, interview, 2018).

It was during their courtship that Lola and her husband discussed leaving Mexico for the United States because, if they were to have kids, they wanted to give their children the opportunity to have a better education and consequently better jobs. Thus, they decided to migrate.

Their journey began in the summer of 2002, when they left Veracruz and arrived in Arizona. They drove for two days from Arizona to Georgia: "*subimos y luego cruzamos por arriba, Kentucky, Mississippi. Yo conozco por el camino que veníanos. Hicimos 2 días en el camino*" [we went up and then we went across Kentucky, Mississippi. I know the road we took. It took us two days] (Lola, interview, 2018). Once they settled in Georgia, Lola and her husband had their four children: two twin girls, one boy, and another girl. Their four children were born in Atlanta.

Lola's *navigational capital* is unquestionable. When Lola's oldest daughter turned four, she realized that she had to enroll her in prekindergarten. Lola shared that it was the network of friends she had developed in her apartment complex who showed her what school she needed to

enroll her daughter. Lola mentioned that several of her neighbors also provided her with the information about the school bus, the hours, the route, and everything else she needed to do to enroll her child.

> *Bueno, es que yo vivía en, en un complejo de apartamentos. Entonces, ahí como que uno más se conoce, los vecinos están cercas de uno, y ahí empieza uno a con las vecinas: "Oiga y, ¿cuándo es el tiempo de, de que los niños se inscriben aquí a la escuela?" Porque de donde yo soy, o sea, si quiere meterlo a pre-k, lo mete, pero, no es obligación.* [Well, it is because I lived in an apartment complex. Therefore, you meet your neighbors and develop a close relationship and you start with them: 'So, when do we have to start registering kids in school here?' Because where I come from, you enroll them in pre-k if you want, it is not mandatory] (Lola, interview, 2018).

Lola and her husband went together to the school the neighbors had told them about. Once there, her husband was able to speak with a school official. Lola remembered that day as a positive experience. The school's receptionist spoke to them in both English and Spanish and gave them a checklist of the paperwork they needed to enroll their daughter: "*Una experiencia positiva, porque nos dijo qué era lo que necesitábanos, cuándo teníanos que entregárselo, para que la niña estuviera ya inscrita, para el año venidero*" [It was a positive experience, because she told us what we needed, and to bring everything back once we had it, so that she could be enrolled in the upcoming school year] (Lola, interview, 2018). She sent them off with a checklist and told them to return once they had everything on the list.

Lola mentioned that the first day of school was difficult for their daughter as she was never away from her mother and also could not speak English. The parents had purchased all the

school supplies the school had requested from each child, and Lola remembered that her daughter's backpack was so heavy, they decided that on the first day, they would take her to school themselves. This way, they helped her carry all the items while accompanying her on her first day. Lola laughed when she remembered having to buy a blanket and a mat for their naps. She recalled:

> *O sea, muchos útiles. Usted sabe, cuando es pre-k, hasta la cobi… La cobija con que se tienen que dormir una hora. Que eso también, eso fue nuevo para mí, que se durmieran en la escuela, ¿no? En nuestros países no, levántense y se levanta.* [That was new to me. In our countries, [there is] no such thing: they tell you to get up and you get up] (Lola, interview, 2018).

Lola and her husband had told their daughter about riding the school bus, i.e where to get on and off the bus, but she was scared. They took her to the bus stop where they met the other neighbors and her daughter's friends. Lola said that, although her daughter was initially scared, once she saw her friends getting on the bus, she happily followed them: "*Pero, como le digo, como vivíamos en un complejo de apartamentos, entonces no iba sola, si no que con más amiguitos que, que vivían ahí en el mismo complejo de departamentos que ella ya conocía. Ella iba feliz*" [As I said, because we lived in an apartment complex, she wasn't by herself. She was with other friends who also lived in the same apartment complex and that she already knew. She went happily] (Lola, interview, 2018). In this way, Lola's *social capital* was also an asset for her daughter.

The first time Lola received a notice from the school inviting her to participate was approximately six months into the school year. Her daughter brought home a flier from school.

In the note the teacher was asking parents to “participate.” Lola admitted that she did not understand what the teacher meant. She reached out to one of her neighbors and asked her to explain what it was to “participate” in her daughter’s education. She recalled:

> *Llamé con otra vecina que también tenía, y no, pues, teníanos el – los niños en el mismo salón. ‘Ah no, este – es que dice que tenemos que hacer esto.’ Que, ¿sí me entiende? Entonces, ya nos ayudábanos. A veces yo entendía, a veces ellas entendían, y así nos fuimos ayudando. Entonces, de ahí hicimos amistad y hasta la fecha de hoy, todavía. So… somos 3, 3 las que nos, nos juntábanos y no, pues, la tarea es esto. Y…también en eso nos ayudábamos*. [I called another neighbor that I had, and, well, we had the, the children in the same classroom. We helped each other: ‘this says that we have to do this.’ You know what I mean? Then, we were already helping each other. Sometimes I understood, sometimes they understood. That’s how we were helping each other. From that we became friends up until today, we…we are still friends. All three of us, we are three who got together to do homework. And…we helped each other with that too] (Lola, interview, 2018).

Lola mentioned that they all helped each other to understand the messages that were sent home. She also remembered that both mothers had to help each other with their children’s homework before they could help their kids. Lola fondly affirmed that they became very close. Through their social network, Lola and her neighbors navigated their children’s school even though they had language limitations and unfamiliarity with the school’s communications and procedures. Lola’s social network is evidence of Yosso’s (2006) argument that *navigational capital* shows that individuals “have agency even though their decisions and actions take place within constraints” (p. 44).

Lola and her family recently moved away from the county and their children no longer attend schools in the metro Atlanta area. According to her, the school district where they reside now is not as welcoming as their previous one. In fact, she mentioned that her children are often told to go back to Mexico by other students. Her daughters have had several encounters where they have had to defend themselves and confront the students regarding their citizenship, even though they are U.S. citizens. Lola encouraged her children to resist these forms of oppression and defend themselves by reminding them that they have something the other students do not have: they are bilingual. In doing so, Lola has taught her children to use their *linguistic* and *resistant capital* through teaching them to assert themselves as intelligent, bilingual, citizens of this country (Yosso, 2005, 2006).

Lola's behavior is motivated by her social consciousness and desire for social justice for her children. Despite the disparity between the two schools' and the challenges, Lola felt that being in a different school district forced her to work on her English skills and made her children become more resilient. Lola's motivations continue to serve as evidence of her *aspirational capital*.

## Claudia's Story

Claudia came to the United States from Monterrey, Mexico with her husband and their two oldest daughters. They own a business in Mexico, a house in a gated community in Monterrey and a car that they keep in their home. Claudia is an engineer (*ingeniero industrial administrador*) and worked at a U.S. company in Monterrey. She worked there for two years as a production supervisor and during that time, she got married and had her first child. After the birth of their first daughter, Claudia stayed home until their daughter was older.

Claudia went back to work at the university in Nuevo León (*Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León*) where she taught mathematics for a few years. The financial situation along with safety concerns in the area became a problem for the family. Crime was quickly becoming part of their daily lives. Even though they lived in an affluent community, Claudia and her husband were concerned about the family's safety. "*Allá como quiera tenemos casa, carro, tenemos el negocio, pero no se puede trabajar allá. No se puede con la droga. Tenemos casa y carro. Cerrado, o sea es que no se puede, no se puede vivir allá*" [There, regardless, we have a house, a car, and the business, but you can't work there. You can't with drugs. We have a house and a car. Closed, because, you can't, you can't live there] (Lola, interview, 2018). Hence, they decided to move and relocated in Atlanta.

When Claudia and her husband moved to the United States, their oldest daughter was five years old and their second child was one year old. Claudia and her family took a thirty-six-hour bus ride from Monterrey, Mexico to Atlanta, Georgia. They came to Atlanta and stayed with Claudia's sister in law who was already living there. After they arrived, it took them just a few weeks to find work and to move in to their own apartment: "*Uno se demora como unos quince días, veinte días. O sea, se tarda en acomodar, en sacar, en todo eso*" [It takes you about fifteen to twenty days. Because it takes time to get organized, get, everything] (Claudia, interview, 2018).

Claudia felt it was the parents' responsibility to look after their children. Therefore, Claudia and her husband took turns looking after the girls: she worked in the mornings, and her husband worked nights. Claudia's and her husband's decision to find alternating work schedules shows the value they placed in *familial capital* in a conscious effort that was sustained within close family ties (Yosso, 2005).

Initially, it was Claudia's sister in-law who helped her navigate the community. She told Claudia the school where she needed to enroll her oldest daughter, who was five at the time they arrived: "*Mi cuñada es la que me dijo todo esto*" [My sister in law is the one who told me all this] (Claudia, interview, 2018). Claudia's sister in law had a six year old child and was already familiarized with the school and the staff. Claudia's sister in law also explained to Claudia about the school bus transportation: i.e. the route, schedule, and availability. Through Claudia's *familial capital* she was able to find out the initial steps she needed to enroll her daughter in school. Following her sister in law's advice, Claudia and her husband (who spoke English) went to the school on the day her sister in law told them. Claudia added that both of them (Claudia and her husband) always attended any school related activity or diligence together: "s*í, sí, siempre. Siempre andamos*" [Yes, yes, always. We always go together] (Claudia, interview, 2018).

Claudia was unable to remember in detail her first experience with the school, but she recalled that it was a positive experience because her husband spoke English and the staff seemed young and very cooperative. Claudia explained regarding her visits to the school: "p*ero, desde que llegamos, ella te atendía muy bien, todo lo que tú ocupabas, todo lo que necesitabas, todo, todo*" [But, ever since we arrived, she would take good care of you, anything you needed, everything, everything] (interview, 2018).

When asked if she thought her inability to speak English was an obstacle, Claudia explained that she downloaded phone apps that she used to translate the texts and messages she exchanged with teachers. She attributed her ability to use resources such as the internet and cell phone apps to her own schooling. Claudia acknowledged that her academic background gave her an advantage that other immigrants may not have. "S*í, porque yo soy ingeniera, entonces es bien fácil a alguien que nunca fue a la escuela, que no estudió, que no habla inglés. O sea, mucha*

*diferencia sí, y que no maneja el Internet también*" [Yes, because I am an engineer therefore it is very easy, rather than someone who never went to school, who didn't study, or who also doesn't know how to use the Internet] (Claudia, interview, 2018). Claudia's experience is evidence of Yosso's (2005) definition of *navigational capital* because Claudia used her skills and background to find phone apps that she used to communicate with her daughter's teachers.

When Claudia was asked how she found out about the schools to enroll her other children, she responded that she relied on neighbors and friends who live in the same community. "*Bueno, yo, yo casi siempre lo, lo platico con las vecinas, con las amigas de los departamentos, y me dicen: 'Ah, la escuela que le toca es ésta. Porque aquí hay varias escuelas, pero, la que les toca en ese departamento…*' [Well, I usually discuss it with the neighbors, the friends from the apartments, and they tell me 'this is the school you're supposed to go. There are many schools here, but because we live in these apartments, they have to go to this school'] (Claudia, interview, 2018). She shared that all the neighbors would go out and wait for their children at the bus stop every day: "*todas las vecinas salimos y es una sola parada*" [all of us neighbors come out and it is the one bus stop] (Claudia, interview, 2018).

Claudia connected with neighbors and developed a community network that helped her navigate common issues regarding schools for her children. Although Claudia mentioned that her husband always accompanied her to school related activities, it is Claudia's relationship with her friends and neighbors that she relies on to find ways to navigate the school. Claudia explained that if she found herself in the position to have to help another Spanish speaking immigrant navigate the school system, she would suggest to them to seek out the social networks found in neighbors and in friends who live in the same community. Claudia's reference to the social network is evidence of Yosso's (2005) *social capital*.

Before Claudia's two youngest daughters were born, Claudia's family traveled frequently between Atlanta and Monterrey. On occasions, the family remained long enough in Mexico that her daughters had to be enrolled in school in Monterrey. "*Sí, regresamos a allá a Monterrey y se me hace que terminó sexto. Que aquí sería quinto*" [Yes, we went back there to Monterey and I think she went to sixth grade. Which here would be fifth] (Claudia, interview, 2018). As a result, Claudia's daughters developed a strong *linguistic capital* which is reflected in their bilingualism.

Claudia explained that she actively participated in her daughter's school when asked to collaborate in fundraisers. Claudia and other Latinx parents would donate food, set up the kiosks, sell the food, and donate the money raised for the school. "*Bueno, en esta escuela, hacían una kermés, donde todos los latinos, todos los hispanos dábamos la co…. Donábamos la comida*" [Well, at his school, they used to do a fundraiser, where all Latinxs, all Hispanics would give the f…would donate the food] (Claudia, interview, 2018). She remembered this event was a very productive one where the entire Latinx community was involved. During the event (which happened every year) the community would help by distributing the responsibilities: the older children helped at the fair by monitoring the rides for the younger children, while the parents attended the food kiosks, sold the food, and collected the money. Claudia spent many years participating in these fundraisers and shared her experience in a positive tone.

> *Y, todo ese dinero que se recaudaba era para la escuela, para la escuela. Nosotros preparábamos la comida de nuestro dinero, hacíamos todo: ayudábamos a vender, y todos los niños ayudaban – los mayores ayudaban para los juegos para los niños chiquitos*. [And, all the money that was collected was for the school, for the school. We prepared the food with our money, we did everything: we helped with the sales, and all

the kids helped- the older ones helped with the rides for the little kids] (Claudia, interview, 2018).

Despite Claudia's involvement in her daughters' school, she mentioned that her oldest has suffered from discrimination.

> *A mis niños sí les ha tocado eso, de que, de que la gente es muy racista. A la mayor, sí. Que la gente es muy racista, muy racista. No sé si a la, a la de 19 y a la de 15 también, todas.* [My kids have experienced that, that people are very racist. The oldest, yes. That people are very racist, very racist. I don't know if the 19 year old, and the 15 year old too, all of them] (Claudia, interview, 2018).

Claudia showed evidence of her *navigational capital*, but her oldest daughters (now 22 and 19 years old) seemed to have had a difficult time adapting to the environment they experienced in U.S. schools. Claudia's two oldest daughters never finished high school, but the two younger ones are still in school and Claudia is hopeful that they will not follow the same path as the older siblings. When asked why she believed her youngest' experiences in school would be different, Claudia attributed it to their birth rights as U.S. citizens:

> *Ella tiene otro carácter que puede hacer sus cosas. Bueno, y otra cosa: ella es ciudadana americana. Entonces, es muy diferente ella que sabe que no le pueden hacer nada, no le pueden reclamar, a la otra que no es nacida aquí.* [She has a different temperament. Well, and another thing: she is a U.S. citizen. Therefore, it is very different for her because she knows that they can't do anything to her; they can't question her, like the other who was not born here] (Claudia, interview, 2018).

The story of Claudia's two oldest daughters reveals the larger racial structure that Latinx families

continue to navigate.

## Costeña's Story

Another participant is Costeña, who is originally from Guerrero, Mexico. Costeña's immigration is unique in the sense that she is the only participant who came to the United States by herself. Once she made the decision to move to the United States, her journey began on a bus from Michoacán to Mexico City. In Mexico City she took a plane to Mexicali. Although her initial plans were to cross the border on her own, she met "a family" (a man and his wife) who told her that they knew someone who could help her get across the border (Mexicali is on the border). The husband and wife took her to a Mexican town on the border near Yuma, Arizona. In Yuma, she was told to simply walk across the border, which she did.

> *Pero, ellos me dijeron: 'Pasas caminando' dice, 'este, vas a llegar a un parque, ahí vas a ver una camioneta, tú vas a subir.' Me enseñaron la camioneta antes, yo después creía que, pues está bien, subo, dice y te llevo a ahí a 10, 15 minutos de aquí. Y de ahí, vamos a sacar un tique para que vueles a Los Ángeles. Ellos me sacaron un ticket para que viniera en avión a Los Ángeles*. [But they told me: "walk across," they said, uhm, "you're going to get to a park, you'll see a truck there, and you get on it." They showed me the truck, and then I thought that I would get on it and it would be fine. They took me somewhere 10, 15 minutes from there, and then they got me a ticket to fly to Los Angeles. They got me a ticket, so I could come on a plane to Los Angeles] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Costeña did what she was told, and arrived in Los Angeles, California where she had an uncle. While in Los Angeles, Costeña immediately looked for work, met a young Mexican man, married him, and three years later, they moved to Atlanta.

When Costeña was a teenager, she moved to Michoacan to live with her sisters. Their mother was a widow, and the financial situation forced Costeña to move to Michoacan with her two older sisters. Her sisters suggested Costeña could study there. Costeña wanted to go to school and she finished middle school while she lived with her sisters.

> *Me fui con mis hermanas las mayores a vivir a Michoacán, porque mi mamá era viuda, no había recursos para seguir estudiando. Y, me dijeron mis hermanas: 'Vámonos para Michoacán,' dice, 'allá estudias la secundaria.' En Michoacán estudié una – solo acabé – estudié la secundaria.*" [I went with my older sisters to live in Michoacan because my mother was a widow; there were no financial resources to continue studying. And, my sisters told me: 'let's go to Michoacan,' they said, 'you can go to middle school there'. In Michoacan I only finished….I studied in middle school] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Following middle school, Costeña attended a technological institute for a year, when she realized that she wanted to become a teacher. She returned home to her mother's house in her hometown to take the admissions' exam but found out the tests had been administered the day before. In her disillusionment, she moved back to Michoacan with her sisters. Costeña remained out of school for a year before she decided to move to the United States. "*Así que me desilusioné ahí, regresé a Michoacán. De ahí, este, ya me quedé un año sin estudiar, y decidí después venirme para acá*" [Therefore, I was disillusioned, so I returned to Michaocan. There, uhm, I was out of school for a year and then decided to come here] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Costeña's social network is evidence of Yosso's (2005, 2006) description that *social capital* can be "understood as networks of people and community resources…[that] can provide emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79). Costeña's *social capital*

evolved from a network of family members to a network of strangers. Without Costeña's trust in (and without the help of) the social network involved, Costeña would not have been able to complete middle school and cross the border. Costeña's actions are an example of Yosso's *social capital* because Costeña's social network helped her navigate and provided her with emotional support throughout the entire endeavor.

Costeña also showed evidence of *aspirational capital.* Her desire to be in the United States was greater that her fears. In fact, Costeña stated that she was never afraid. All her travels took place in daylight, because the one thing she was afraid of was traveling at night. When asked what she brought with her she responded: "*Yo traía las ganas de estar en Los Angeles*" [I brought with me the desire to be in Los Angeles] (Costeña, interview, 2018). She admitted that the only time she felt uneasy, was at the airport when she was unable to differentiate different uniforms. She did not know whether the officers were guards, policemen, or Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. "*El miedo que me dio, ya fue en el aeropuerto, en Los Ángeles. Sí. Ahí sí ya tuve miedo. Porque yo no sabía cómo lucían los oficiales de, de migra…No sabía si era ICE o era…*" [I was afraid once at the airport, in Los Angeles. Yes, that's when I felt fear. Because I didn't know how the immigration officers would look, what they looked like, I didn't know if they were ICE or if…] (Costeña, interview, 2018). She shared a laugh when she described that every time she saw someone in uniform at the airport, she would turn around and walked in a different direction: "*Así que cuando yo miraba algo que fueran – alguna persona que fuera policía yo decía: 'Por aquí no le doy. Le doy por otro lado.' Y este, ahí fue donde yo sentí un poquito de miedo*" [When I saw someone who looked like-someone who was a policeman, I would tell myself: 'I'm not going this way. I'm going another way.' And, uhm,

that's when I was a little bit afraid] (Costeña, interview, 2018). Her entire journey lasted twenty-five days.

During the time Costeña was living in Los Angeles, her two older sisters had moved from Mexico to Atlanta. As a result, Costeña and her husband decided to move closer to her sisters and relocated to Atlanta. After they moved to Georgia, Costeña and her husband had four children: three girls and a boy. They were all born in Atlanta.

When her oldest daughter was four, her sisters told Costeña she should enroll her daughter in prekindergarten. Costeña relied on her sisters to learn about the school system. They explained to her about when to enroll, what school was designated to her family, and transportation. She recalled that when she went to the school assigned to her zone, the prekindergarten was already filled, and she was turned away. Costeña did not speak English, but she remembered that there was a person at the school who assisted them in Spanish. The person told Costeña to complete the application, but that there was no guarantee that her daughter would get an admission into the prekindergarten. Surprisingly, Costeña was not anxious with the uncertainty. In her own words:

> *De la primera niña, me dijeron que quedaba en lista de espera y alguien no llegaba, me podían llamar. Pero, como me dijo otra de mis hermanas: 'Buscas o – busca otra escuela al mismo tiempo, porque la niña,' dice, 'son muchos los que quedan en lista de espera, y este, a tu niña no te la van a llamar*. [With my first daughter, they told me that she would go on a waitlist and if someone didn't show, they could call her. But, one of my sisters said: 'look for another school in the meantime, because the girl' she said, 'there are a lot of kids on the waitlist, they'll never call your daughter'] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Costeña argued that the problem was that the school had assigned one day to register, and families who had older children attending the school would learn about that date before all other families:

> *Porque al mismo tiempo van muchas mamás. Porque ponen una fecha en la que pueden ir. Entonces, este, como las demás tienen hijos ya yendo ahí, les mandan la información, y ellas se enteran mucho antes que la que no tiene hijos ahí*. [Because a lot of other mothers go at the same time. Because they assign a date when they can go. Then, uhm, since the others already have children attending school, they get the information, and they find out a lot sooner than the ones who don't have children there] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Costeña argued that by the time parents like Costeña (whose child is the first in the family to attend school) went to enroll their children, there were no vacancies left.

Costeña and her sisters agreed to use her sisters' address to enroll her daughter at the school zoned for them. The act of using someone else's address to enroll a child in a school zone that the child is not zoned for may be considered fraud. However, for Costeña, using her sister's address was just a tool to navigate the registration dilemma and overcome the waitlist. Initially she was told (like at the other school) the class was full and her daughter was placed on another waitlist. However, shortly thereafter, Costeña received a phone call from someone at the school who told her that her daughter had made the cut. Costeña explained: "*Fue bien rápido. La escuela, este, ya ahí empezaba el lunes a clases ahí, y me llamaron [viernes], y me dijeron que la niña había quedado allá, que pasara con los papeles*." [It was very sudden. School, uhm, started on Monday, and they called me the Friday before. They told me to go ahead and bring the registration that they were going to be able to put her in pre-k, and so we went] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

At the beginning, Costeña and her husband used to drive their daughter to school every morning and picked her up afterwards. Over time, the family moved to the zone designated to the school and their daughter took the bus to school. Costeña mentioned that she and her daughter would wait at the bus stop along with other mothers. When asked if her daughter was nervous to get on the bus, she replied that her daughter was excited, because other kids from her class were also getting on the bus with her.

> *[L]a llevábamos todos los días. De regreso me la ponían en el autobús, y venía yo a, a Sierra Play a un fraccionamiento donde vivía mi hermana, ahí a la parada del bus a esperarla. Así hasta que me cambié de departamento.* [We would take her every day. On her way back, they would get her on the bus and I would go to Sierra Play, to a subdivision where my sister lived, there to the bus stop to wait for her. I did that until we moved apartments] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

For Costeña, it was important that her daughter attended the school her sisters recommended (and were zoned). The impact her sisters' advice had on her decision to forge her address is an example of the *familial capital* Yosso (2005) described as a kinship that carries a sense of commitment to the wellbeing of the family, and that displays "lessons of caring, coping, and providing." (p. 79).

Costeña's *navigational capital* is evident in the behavior she exhibited through the enrollment experience. Costeña's experience with her daughter's school differed slightly from the other participants in this study. The first day Costeña, her daughter, and her husband went to visit the school, they were not allowed inside the property. Costeña described that day as follows:

*Mi experiencia con la niña en ---Elementary, este, la primera vez que fui a conocer la escuela, sí me tocó una persona que no nos dejó entrar, porque dijo que habíamos llegado en un horario que había… y que, este, teníamos que esperar afuera. Y como, este, la niña ya andaba irritada, no esperamos, nos venimos. Y sí, yo sentí como que fue media racista.* [My experience in ---Elementary, well, the first time we went to get familiar with the school, I ran into a person who wouldn't let us in the school. She told us we had to wait outside because we had arrived during a schedule…and that, uhm, that we had to wait outside. And since my daughter was already irritable, we didn't wait. We left. And yes, I felt she was a bit racist] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

When Costeña, her daughter, and her husband returned the next day, there was a different person who allowed them inside the school's office. Once inside the office, they saw the woman whom they encountered the day before. Costeña showed evidence of *resistant capital* when she did not hesitate to share with the school administrator what had transpired the day before:

*Fue que yo le dije a la otra persona que yo había estado antes, y que la, la señora me había dicho que esperara afuera. Dice: '¿Por qué la hizo esperar afuera, si afuera hace calor? Y, con la niña.' Entonces, este, ya el trato fue diferente y voy seguido, y me tratan diferente*. [That's when I told the other person that I had been there before, and that the, the woman had told me to wait outside. She said: 'Why did she make you wait outside, it it's so hot outside? And with the girl.' From then on the treatment was different and I go often and they treat me different] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Since that day, whenever Costeña visited the school, she received better treatment. Costeña attributed this to the fact that the school staff has gotten to know her. However, Costeña feels

that it is a matter of personality and temperament: if a person is unfriendly, that person will be unfriendly to anyone: "*Porque, si la persona es descortés, lo va a ser con todos*" [Because, if the person is rude, that person will be rude to everyone] (Costeña, interview, 2018). Regardless of how Costeña views personality traits, she was eager to collaborate in fairs and school activities. She also recalled that parents provided input and suggestions on how to celebrate their culture. On one occasion, a teacher had a workshop for all parents. Costeña explained:

> *Ellos dicen que el taller es para, para todo el que quiera tomarlo. Me tocó estar en un taller donde nos enseñaron a elaborar catrinas. Y, ahí en ese salón estaba una hindú, entre nosotros, y este, se me hizo curioso que ella se emocionó tanto con aprender a elaborar catrinas, que su catrina la elaboró, pero, una catrina hindú*. [They say the workshop is for everyone who wants to attend. I had to go to a workshop where they were teaching us how to make *catrinas* (the Day of the Dead traditional skulls). And there was a Hindi woman in the classroom with us, and uhm, I thought it was cute that she made her *catrina* Hindi] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

During these workshops, Costeña shared her cultural knowledge with non-Latinx parents, expanding on communal values nurtured through her *familial capital.*

## Cati's Story

Cati, a participant from Veracruz, Mexico, has been in Atlanta for fourteen years. Cati's and her husband's journey began in a small town in Veracruz, where they met at a neighborhood dance. She explained that the town being so small, the customary way to socialize was through local dances: "*Y, lo conocí en un baile, bailando, y es lo único más común que hay allá*" [I met him at a dance, dancing, it's the only most common way there is] (Cati, interview, 2018). People

from neighboring towns would attend these dances which were the most common way men and women would meet. Cati found herself slightly attracted to her husband at first but shared that he admitted that he was immediately attracted to her: "*dice de que se enamoró a primera vista, yo no. Yo no, soy mujer, creo que no, no utilizo eso. Yo utilizo siempre el conocimiento*" [he says it was love at first sight, but not me. I am a woman, I believe, I don't do that. I always rely on knowledge] (Cati, interview, 2018). After meeting her husband, Cati found out that he had never attended school. His family, she described, was extremely poor. They lacked basic needs, and her husband had to work most of his life. In her own words:

> *Para mí es muy triste, porque mi esposo realmente es…viene de familia demasiado carente, este, no tienen recursos, pero, una de las opciones que, que yo me pude fijar, una de las opciones que yo me pude fijar en él, y percaté, era su trabajo. Para mí era importante, un hombre muy trabajador, y claro que yo me enamoré de él de eso, y para mí fue suficiente*. [It was my husband the first who suffered a lot. He, definitely. It is very sad for me because my husband is really…he comes from a very poor family, uhm, they didn't have recourses, but, one of the options, that I noticed, one option I noticed in him, was his work ethic, To me it was very important, a hardworking man, and of course, I fell in love with him because of that, and that was enough for me] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Cati said that it was her husband who suggested that they should move to Atlanta because he had been in Atlanta for a year during the five years they were dating. "*Teníamos cinco años de novios, entonces vino en el transcurso de un, de un año acá el otro año de casados, llegó a México, nos casamos, un año duramos de casados en México y nos venimos a Estados Unidos*" [We had been dating for five years, then during that time he came here for a year, came back to

Mexico and we got married, we stayed for a year in Mexico after we got married and then we came to the United States] (Cati, interview, 2018).

During their courtship, Cati was attending school. At that time, Cati's *linguistic capital* emerged through her self-determination to learn English: "*Yo fui a la preparatoria a estudiar; hablaba un poco de inglés. Lo sabía leer*" [I went to the *preparatoria* (high school equivalent) to study; I spoke a little bit of English. I could read it] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati also explained that once she arrived in the United States, in an effort to teach herself English, she would read all signs she saw on the street and try to translate them: "*leía todo siempre, estaba leyendo para ir traduciendo*" [I was always reading everything, I was reading and translating] (interview, 2018).

Cati's *linguistic capital* began with the English language she learned at school and was reaffirmed through her own style of self-teaching as a way to navigate the new community in the United States. Cati described that translating what she saw helped her adapt to the new society to which she now belonged: "*Estaba leyendo para irme adaptando a este lugar*" [I was reading to adapt to this place] (personal interview, 2018). Cati's development of her *linguistic capital* proved useful once she and her husband moved to the United States.

Upon their arrival, Cati described that her husband struggled with the adaptation. "*Mi esposo fue el que primero sufrió mucho. Él, definitivamente*" [My husband was the first one to suffer a lot. He, definitely] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati got emotional when she talked about her husband because she admitted that sometimes she struggles with him because "*porque esas carencias él se las quiere transmitir a los niños*" [he tries to teach the children how to be poor] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati's husband is trying to nurture his *familial capital* by carrying out what Yosso (2005) described as sense of memory, cultural intuition, and means of survival.

Opposite to her husband's *familial capital* is Cati's *resistant capital.* She described herself as the family's administrator "*a veces hay que administrar, y ese soy yo*" [sometimes we have to administer, and that's me] (Cati, interview, 2018) because she had to control her husband's obsession with poverty. Cati, who graduated from high school and learned English, admitted that her husband's work ethic had always complemented his lack of schooling. According to her, what her husband had in physical strength, she had in knowledge. "*Y, nos amamos, porque él tiene lo que yo no tengo. Él tiene más fuerza, más, este, traer sustento al hogar, él no sé cómo lo hace*" [And we love each other, because he has what I don't have. He is stronger, he is more, uhm, he's the bread winner, I don't know how he does it] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati explained: "*Entonces, pues, por eso somos pareja, porque él es una parte de mí que se complementa; los dos nos unimos*" [Therefore, well, that's why we are a couple, because he is a part of me that complements mine; we both come together] (Cati, interview, 2018). They complement each other through their own strengths.

Cati admitted that she doesn't like to move around. She prefers to adapt to the situation, rather than change. Cati described herself as a person who had always been willing to ask questions and find the answers she needs to adapt to a situation or surrounding. She called herself a "sedentary" person, referring to her unwillingness to move around. Cati described herself: "*soy muy sedentaria. No me gusta moverme*" [I am very sedentary, I don't like to move] (Cati, interview, 2018). Ironically, she moved from her small town in Veracruz to a foreign country, which she described as a good decision: "*Un año duramos de casados en México, y nos venimos a Estados Unidos, que fue una buena opción*" [We had been married for a year in Mexico, and then we came to the United States, which was a good option] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Another form of *familial capital* is exhibited through Cati's and her husband's very close relationships with their parents, which made the decision to leave their small town a very painful and difficult one for both. However, in retrospect, Cati admitted that had they stayed in their hometown, their families would have interfered with their relationship as they will be expected to invest more time to care for their parents. Such a situation would have strained their relationship:

> *[S]i hubiéramos estado en nuestro lugar de origen, nuestros papás iban a estar entorpeciendo nuestra relación. Y, y está – porque mi papá sufre de una enfermedad, claro que a él le iba a molestar que yo todo el tiempo quisiera estar en casa*. [If we had stayed in our place of origin, our parents would have been interfering with our relationship. And, it is, because my father suffers of an illness, and of course it would have bothered him if I wanted to stay home all the time] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Both Cati's and her husband's parents are sick. According to Cati, being in the United States has allowed them to provide financially for their parents, which they would not had been able to do if they stayed. Cati talked about her husband's *familial capital* as follows:

> *[T]ratamos de ayudar a nuestros papás. Por eso es que ha sido una buena opción, porque nuestras familias han podido tener una mejor calidad de vida. Eso que careció mi esposo, eso que no carezcan nuestros papás. No es la lujosa, pero lo esencial.* [We try to help our parents. That's why this was a good option, because our families have a better quality of life. What my husband lacked as a child, our parents have as adults. It is not a luxurious lifestyle, but the essential] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Cati explained that being so far away from her parents has been beneficial because it has forced her to focus on her husband and children. Cati deviates from Yosso's (2005, 2006) *familial capital* because Cati's view of the familial composition is limited to children and spouses, unlike Yosso's which she expands to kinship. In Cati's words: "*O sea, para mí familia es, es esposo y esposa, y los hijos*" [That's why, family to me is, is husband and wife and the children] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati's concept seemingly excludes the extended family, although Cati's actions towards their parents prove otherwise, demonstrating that her *familial capital* is more extensive than she recognizes at times.

Cati acknowledges that her husband's lack of *linguistic capital* (he does not speak English) has caused him to overcompensate with his *social capital*: "*Pues, definitivamente él tuvo mejor adaptación social que yo. Tenía más fuerza. Aunque no tenía el conocimiento.*" [Well, he definitively had a better social adaptation than mine. He was stronger. Even if he didn't have the knowledge] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati referred to her husband's stubbornness to work as his ability to navigate employment opportunities. Cati (interview, 2018) explained what she admired most about her husband was his motivation for *superarse* [to do better] which was often rooted on his *aspirational* and *familial capital*. He was a big support to her and their children.

In additional to the *linguistic* and *familial* capital Cati exhibited, Cati showed strong *navigational capital* as she explained that she has always been a person who would ask questions without hesitation. When her oldest son turned four, Cati had to enroll him in pre-kindergarten:

> [É]*l tenía cuatro años en agosto, y en esa misma fecha yo sabía que ya el niño tenía que empezar a ir a la escuela. Entonces, tenía que irlo a inscribir, y ir a preguntar cómo podía hacerlo. Entonces, ellos me informaron dentro de la escuela. Es por mi cultura de*

> *educación, que dentro de mi familia, mis papás me dieron. Por eso es que yo tenía que ir a buscar. Pero, si hubiera sido una persona que nunca fui a la escuela, ni que terminé la escuela también, no supiera la importancia que es la escuela*. [He was four years old in August, and at around the same time I knew he had to start school. Then, I had to register him, and went to ask how I could do it. Then, they told me at the school. It is due to my own education culture, that within my family, my parents gave me. That's why I had to go and find out. But, if I was a person who had never gone to school, or that didn't finish school either, I wouldn't know how important school is] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Cati asked neighbors in her apartment complex regarding what school was zoned for them and where the school was located: "*'Oiga, ¿usted no sabe dónde queda la escuela, la escuela para los niños? ¿Dónde queda la escuela?'*" [Hey, do you know where is the school, where the children's school is located? Where is the school?] (Cati, interview, 2018). In combination with the *navigational capital* she exhibited, Cati's *linguistic capital* gave her the confidence to personally go to school to inquire about the requirements for the enrollment of her child. She recalled that all the staff members (except for the teachers) at that school spoke Spanish, making it easy to navigate through the enrollment process. At the school, she was given a "checklist" and was told to return with all the information and documentation required on that checklist. "*Me dieron una hoja: "Mire, lea la hoja, tráigame esto, y esto, y esto que dice aquí. Y, cuando usted lo tenga listo, me lo trae para esta fecha.*" [They gave me a sheet: 'Look, read this sheet, bring back this, this, and this that says here. When you have everything ready, you bring it to me by this date'] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati's unparalleled *navigational capital* was exhibited when Cati reached out to her social network of neighbors to inquire about school; when she went to the school by herself; and when she struggled with the checklist.

Cati remembered that a lot of the items on that list were things unfamiliar to her. "*Documentación que ni sabía qué era, ¿eh?*" [Documentation I didn't even know what it was, huh?] (Cati, interview, 2018). For instance, not only she did not know what "immunizations" meant, she also did not understand the word "residence." Cati admitted that being an inquisitive person, she did not hesitate to ask her neighbors what those things meant. Cati's inquisitive nature enhances her *navigational capital* in aiding her maneuver through the paperwork process she experienced. Using her *linguistic* and *navigational capital*, she was able to provide the school with her son's social security number, immunizations records, proof of residence, and all the items that were required. Cati's ability to maneuver through this process is also an example of Yosso's (2005) argument that "*navigational capital* thus acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation in places and spaces including schools" (p. 80).

The school staff gave Cati the bus information and she admitted that she was nervous and worried about her son riding the bus. She copied down the information (bus stops, schedule, and number): "*En la escuela te dan un, este, dónde tú vives; entonces, lo anotaba, lo guardaba y tenía que cumplir con los horarios*" [At school they give you a, uhm, where you live; then, you write it down, kept it, and I had to abide by the schedule] (Cati, interview, 2018). She accompanied her son to the bus stop and recalled her son did not want to get on the bus. She was also worried about him going to the correct school: "*Es… espero que llegue mi hijo a la escuela, con esa preocupación*" [I was worried, hop, hoping that my son would make it to school] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati remembered that her son cried often because he did not want to ride the bus to school. She described it as a struggle: "*Él tenía pavor y, y batallamos muchas veces para que se subiera al bus*" [He had dread and, and we struggled many times with him getting on the

bus] (Cati, interview, 2018). Eventually, the routine and consistency helped him cope with the bus ride.

Cati argued that, although she felt welcomed by the school personnel, unlike the other participants in this study, she did not see any evidence of representation of the Latinx culture at the school. "*Entonces, no estaba reflejada mi cultura ahí*" [Back then, my culture wasn't represented there] (Cati, interview, 2018). Cati had no recollection of the school's staff welcoming the Latinx culture or asking the parents to contribute with cultural realia represented in food, traditional costumes, music, etc. According to her, even if parents were asked to participate, her understanding was that the school needed her attendance in workshops. Cati explained: "*'O sea, que usted nos ayude.' Si es participar, es estar ahí. Entonces, ellos tenían programas que nos ayudaran a nosotros, y yo tenía que, pues, asistir. Si ellos me iban a enseñar, y cómo iba a hacerlo, pues, yo tenía que ir*" ['That you help us.' If it is to participate, it means to be there. Then, they had programs that helped us and I, therefore had to attend. If they were going to teach me, and show me how to do something, then I had to go] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Cati felt in the beginning that the school staff had an indifferent attitude towards her and her son because they were Latinxs. She described the teachers' perceptions as follows: "*'Son hispanos, no aprenden, no entienden, el – este, el sistema, no pueden conectarse, tienen mucha distracción, su mente no está enfocada'. Eso era la conversación de ellos, y eso a mí no me ayudaba en nada. Dígame estrategias*" ['They are Hispanic, they don't learn, they don't understand, it is the system, they can't connect, there are too many distractions, their mind is not focused.' That was the conversation with them, and that didn't help me in any way. Give me strategies] (Cati, interview, 2018). Regardless of Cati's perceptions, her *navigational capital* is undisputable. Cati's school involvement was also exemplary. She recalled one occasion when

she noticed the school grounds dirty and undesirable. She took it upon herself and asked the school principal if he would allow her to clean the school. She mentioned that she was afraid of getting arrested for trespassing, so she wanted to make sure the school administrators would allow her to volunteer to come and clean the school grounds.  Cati explained:

> *Ni mi casa, pues, la mantengo así, cómo voy a permitir que mi hijo vaya a una escuela donde se vea por fuera sucia, con basura en la entrada, menos. Se ve horrible. No somos, no somos- mis hijos tienen que tener siempre una escuela digna de ellos, que se vea la limpieza siempre por fuera, y también por dentro.* [I don't even keep my house like that, how am I going to allow my son to go to a school that one can see it dirty from the outside with trash by the entrance, even less. It looks horrible. We are not, we are not-my children must always have a school worthy of them, where one can see cleanliness on the outside and also on the inside] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Cati was grateful that the principal allowed her to clean the school. Furthermore, Cati mentioned that the principal was very open to her suggestions and has incorporated many of them. One thing Cati suggested was to translate the text messages into Spanish before it is sent to the parents. She remembered that within weeks, the school started to send text messages in Spanish.

Cati mentioned that she did not see a lot of involvement from other Latinx parents. When asked about the lack of other Latinx parents' involvement, Cati said that she established a good relationship with the principal and that she was eager to discuss the issue with him:

> *Se lo voy a decir al director, a ver qué le parece a él. Él se ve muy accesible. Yo estuve con él, este, en una conversación y, y, hizo un cambio, me tomó en cuenta. Me gustó mucho el año pasado, este, él vio mi actitud de la participación que tuve.* [I'm going to tell the

principal, to see what he thinks. He seems very accessible. I was with him, uhm, in conversation, and, and, he made the change, he took me into consideration. I liked last year, uhm, he saw my attitude in the way I participated] (Cati, interview, 2018).

Another example of Cati's *navigational capital* is through her use of text messaging. Cati, who speaks English with some reservations, uses cell phone apps that allow her to translate the text messages she exchanges with her children's teachers. All are examples of how she navigates the language barrier she may experience. In addition, she is developing her *linguistic capital* as she has been taking English classes. "*Estuve estudiando en la escuela en México y una – y, tomando clases aquí también*" [I was studying in school in Mexico and taking classes here too] (Cati, interview, 2018).

The participants in this study showed evidence of a cultural wealth that embodies all forms of capital as identified in Yosso's CCW. Understanding the context of each participants' experience is critical in order to comprehend the ways in which they utilized their forms of capital to navigate schools. The participants in this study shared a resilience that must be acknowledged. Their lived experiences from the moment they decided to embark in a transnational journey, from crossing the border, spending nights in the desert, exposing themselves and their families to life threatening risks, and the sacrifices they made, shaped identities of unparalleled strength and determination.

The participants' stories serve as evidence of acts of courage and learning. They formed a group of parents who came together in a micro-network that is part of the ethnic, cultural, and social landscape that embodies metro Atlanta. The Latinx parents in this study are challenging decades of racism. Furthermore, the participants are powerful immigrants who are aware of the

importance of the economic and political sustainability of their families and are determined to provide their children with the educational opportunity that they believe is key to their children's success despite of the risks. For school officials, understanding the complexities and the effects that current policies have on these families is a necessary step towards reconstructing our communities along more socially just lines.

## Chapter 5: Implications and Recommendations

### Legal and Social Actions

On any given morning throughout metro Atlanta, children and parents walk the streets in their neighborhoods on their way to school. Many of these families are undocumented and one, or both, of these parents could get picked up by law enforcement and be deported under the anti-immigration laws that are currently in effect under President Donald Trump's administration. The disarray occurs because many Latinx undocumented immigrants are parents of underage children who are either U.S. citizens, or protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Herold, 2017; Newman, Shah, & Collingwood, 2018). Therefore, it is easy to see how enforcing the deportation of undocumented adult immigrants has placed a tremendous burden on citizen children.

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children have the right to free public education. In 2001, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was enacted, allowing immigrant minors to apply for residency if certain conditions are met. Among those conditions, the completion of a two-year community college education, or two years towards a four-year college, is required. In recent years, former President Barack Obama signed the DACA policy under which some undocumented children who entered the country as minors are granted a two-year renewable deferment from deportation and are able to work in the United States. DACA did not guarantee U.S. citizenship, but it allowed undocumented immigrants (with clean criminal records) to remain in the United States and renew their eligibility every two years (Mahatmya & Gring-Pemble, 2014).

More recently, the undocumented families' dream to remain in this country and pursue higher education became a nightmare. At the start of his presidency, Donald Trump became obsessed with the deportation of noncitizens as a matter of national security (Herold, 2017). The devastating consequences of the President's policies on the families of undocumented immigrants have been recognized by many scholars (Dreby, 2012; Gulbas & Zayas, 2017; and Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). Incited by Trump's promise to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, the families of the participants in this study are facing this new challenge. The undocumented parents of U.S.-born children have to confront the harsh reality of their potential involuntary separation from their children due to deportation. Dreby (2012) argued that "[d]eportation policies have had a widespread impact on U.S. Latino immigrant communities" (p. 833) and therefore the biggest fear expressed by parents is that they could lose custody of their U.S.-born children. The apprehension and potential deportation of the participants in this study is a reality that they shared with their children and have discussed with their families and friends. As they fear the inevitable, the participants have taken measures in case they get separated from their children.

An example of a very unusual strategy to preserve their non-U.S. citizen son's residence in this country can be seen in Lidia's family. Lidia and her husband agreed to give their son up for adoption when he was 17 years old. The issue came into question because the family did not know if their son was going to be able to attend college. During that year, their son had taken the SAT and received a very high score, which encouraged him to apply to college. The family contemplated their options and decided that in order to guarantee him a future in this country without fearing deportation, they needed to give him up for adoption. A close family friend adopted him and he currently attends college. Lidia explained it this way:

> *Un amigo nos dijo que si él podía, pues que él lo adoptaba y así nosotros dijimos que "sí" y así fue como (name) fue adoptado. Él está ahora en la universidad de Georgia estudiando algo como arquitectura, pero yo no sé bien qué es.* [A friend of ours told us that if he was allowed, he would adopt him and that's why we said "yes" and that's how (name) was adopted. He goes to [college and is] now studying something like architecture] (Lidia, interview, 2018).

Regardless of the immigration status Lidia's son now has, his parents remain in this country undocumented and are at risk of being deported.

The fear of parents getting deported is also expressed by their children. Cati explained that she has noticed a change in the behavior of her children and blames it on the current political turmoil the country is undergoing. In her words:

> *Pues,* [the political atmosphere] *nos está afectando, porque ellos empiezan a pelear en la escuela, a sentirse como molestos. ¿Cómo va un niño a estar en un lugar separado, si es – si él nació aquí? Y, y les – y lo peor de todo, que cargan en la frente, el color que es nuestra raza. Un padre tiene que preparar a sus hijos, para las cuestiones más difícil. Pero, nunca pensé que tenía que prepararlos para decir: "Hijo, si un día tu papá y yo somos arrestados, quiero decirte qué es lo que tienes que hacer".* [Well, it is affecting us because they are starting to fight in school, they seem upset. How can a child be at a place separated if, if he was born here? And the worst thing is that they carry on their foreheads, the color that identifies our race. A parent has to prepare their children for the most difficult issues, but I never thought that I would have to tell them: "If your father

and I are arrested one day, I'm going to tell you what you have to do"] (Cati, interview, 2018

Cati shared that she had taken measures with a close friend who has agreed to look after her children if Cati and her husband are detained and deported. She explicitly instructed her son not show any signs of distress if this friend suddenly appears at school to pick him up, so as to not raise any suspicions among school officials.

Many Latinx families blame the current administration for what they describe is the worst situation in which they have lived since their arrival in the United States. Participants in this study give testament to this assertion. When asked about her perception of the impact on society of the President's views, Claudia explained: "*También hay mucho más racismo.* [There is also a lot more racism]" (interview, 2018) and shared her plans to move to a foreign country if the situation worsens. Costeña, on the other hand, demonstrated a stronger resilience: *El riesgo está, pero, uno no puede vivir con miedo, puesto que el miedo no lleva a nada bueno, solo lleva a la desesperación.* [The risk is there, but we can't live in fear, because fear gets you nowhere, but can only lead to desperation] (Costeña, interview, 2018).

Lola likewise reflected on struggles in the current policy climate:

> *Somos familias unidas que nos importa la educación de nuestros hijos, y que trabajamos en este país día a día, para sacar a nuestros hijos adelante. Pero también ayudamos al país a crecer porque nuestros hijos son americanos, que van a ser el futuro del mañana. Personas que vienen desde más abajo saben lo que es la pobreza y que ha salido adelante. Mucha gente que no tiene nada en nuestros países aquí están bien económicamente, pero porque ha trabajado duro, porque nadie le ha dado nada. No*

*todos somos violadores, ni todos somos criminales. Desafortunadamente, lo que no tenemos es documentos. Eso nos hace ilegales en este país, pero todos vinimos por una ilusión, y más que todo por trabajo. Yo pienso que no importa el color de la persona o el físico, si no, los sentimientos de cada persona y la forma de expresarse. ¿Sí me entiende?* [We are close families, who care about our children's education, and who work in this country day after day, because we want our children to get ahead in life. We are also helping this country grow, because our children are American, and they will be the future of this country. Some of us know very well what poverty is, and we have gotten ahead. Just because we didn't have money in our countries, but here we are working very hard, because no one has given us anything freely. We are not all rapists or criminals. Unfortunately, what we don't have is papers, and yes, that makes us illegal in this country, but we all came here searching for a dream, and most of all, we came here searching for work. I don't think that the color of a person's skin matters, or the physical appearance; what matters are people's feelings, the way people express them. You understand me?] (Lola, interview, 2018).

Here, Lola refers to Trump's reference to Mexicans as "criminals" and "rapists" (Newman, et al., 2018). Nonetheless, Lola's statement supports Yosso's theory on community cultural wealth that Latinx families exhibit through forms of *aspirational*, *navigational*, *social*, *linguistic*, *resistant*, and *familial capital*. Lola's description of the cultural wealth Latinx parents bring to metro Atlanta schools is a powerful lesson not only on motivation and values, but on citizenship as well. Lola's statement summarizes the culture of the large Latinx population that resides in metro Atlanta. In an article published by the Pew Hispanic Research Center (2018), Jeffrey S. Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and John Gramlich estimated that 5 million U.S. citizen children

live in households where one or both parents are undocumented. All the families in this study have children born in the United States, and consequently are U.S. citizens. Thus, deportation policies directly affect these families.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2017), Georgia's Latinx population has more than doubled since 2000. In 2015, Georgia had the fastest growth among the ten states identified with the largest Latinx populations in the United States. Despite the growth of Latinx populations in Georgia, Latinxs' community cultural wealth remains scarcely recognized in educational institutions in metro Atlanta area. Concurrently, while educators and school administrators attempt to increase Latinx parental involvement in their schools, many Latinx parents have little to no knowledge of the culture of U.S. schools. The findings in this study show that without the support found mainly in their *familial*, *social*, and *navigational capital*, the participants would have not been able to navigate the metro Atlanta schools. Thus, I focus on these three forms of capital to guide my recommendations. Nonetheless, all forms of capital will surface in the narrative on relevance.

Claudia had discussed in detail the different adapting experiences her daughters had endured based on their race and immigration status. Her daughters, regardless of their immigration, had been victims of bullying and racism. Consequently, Claudia had to teach her daughters to resist the abuse by defending themselves with their capitals (i.e. linguistic and their academic as well as familial education). Lola also shared that her children had been victims of racism and are often told by classmates to "go back to Mexico." Lola has taught her children that they are citizens of this country, and therefore they should resist the insults because they belong here, in the United States. Lola also reminds her children that they are worth twice as much as their classmates because they are bilingual (*linguistic capital*).

Costeña shared her experience with racism at one of the elementary schools where she was not allowed to enter. She described the staff member as rude and someone who exhibited racist behavior. However, Costeña's resistance to the "unwelcoming" by this person was later expressed by her returning to the school the next day. She asked to speak directly to the principal (through an interpreter) and later referred to the visit as a positive encounter (*resistance capital*). Her resistance to being abused (verbally) by that particular school personnel later paid off with a positive relationship with the entire staff.

Cati has taught her children to resist not only discrimination, but all types of circumstances that could deteriorate their mindset. She strongly encourages her children to maintain a healthy attitude towards adversity because she believes that a positive attitude will bring positive results (*navigational capital*). Lidia is also very positive about her experiences and has learned to resist her fears of potential deportation by finding comfort in her son's wellbeing. Neither Cati nor Lidia expressed that they had experienced racism at their children's schools.

**Latinxs in Leadership**

Individual experiences of discrimination and fear of deportations notwithstanding, this study found that the participants overwhelmingly have no regrets of their decision to come to the United States and continue to see the United States as a land of better opportunities granted in the education of their children. School officials must understand the ripple effects of the enforcement of anti-immigration policies on parents and their children and take measures to protect the safety of the families.

The recommended actions follow along the line of Soo Hong's (2011) findings on Latinx parental involvement in a leadership mentoring program in Chicago called the Logan Square

Neighborhood Association (LSNA). Hong (2011) summarized three guidelines on how the LSNA's holistic plan was initially structured: 1) the plan was geared towards the development of schools as community centers; 2) it focused on training parents to work in the classrooms; and 3) focused on developing a quality education to support a healthy community. Her findings showed the community would benefit from a Latinx parent mentoring program at the core of increasing Latinx parental school involvement.

The LSNA initiative uncovered three challenges when developing Latinx mentoring programs: first, bringing parents into the unfamiliar school environment; second: integrating them into the school community; and third, helping the parents become leaders. Drawing from Hong's (2011) findings and incorporating my participants' CCW, I suggest that school officials should establish Latinx parent mentoring programs that focus on two main goals: improving relationships between schools and Latinx communities and training Latinx parents to become leaders in their schools. I refer to the recommended goals as the *Juntos Podemos*/Together We Can (JPTWC) initiative. The JPTWC initiative I suggest connects to the findings in this dissertation because it will help school officials understand how Latinx parents' CCW intertwines with the school environment. Recognizing the assets Latinx parents bring into the school environment leads to an exchange of cultural values through bilateral active engagement. Building strong relationships between schools and Latinx families helps close the culture gap that may still prevail in metro Atlanta schools. The recommendations not only will debunk myths that Latinx parents do not place a high value on education but will aid in providing a cultural connection between metro Atlanta schools and the Latinx communities they serve. At the same time, by debunking misconceptions that school officials construed about Latinx culture, educators and administrators will benefit from the knowledge of the Latinx culture that

dominates their schools. It is my belief that my recommendations will aid in diminishing the culture mismatch that causes a disparity between Latinxs' cultural values and schools' expectations.

In light of the CCW that I documented in the previous chapter, I first address improving relationships through CCW and explore examples on how it can enrich school culture and help transform Latinx parents into leaders. Drawing upon the experiences of national programs, I then recommend how to develop leaders from within local schools. The last portion of this segment focuses on my proposed JPTWC initiative as part of a larger transformative vision for metro Atlanta schools.

## Improving Relationships Through CCW

### *Navigational Capital*

I begin with *navigational capital* for the recommendation on how to improve relationships because through their *navigational capital*, participants revealed how their forms of capital intersected as they navigated metro Atlanta schools and institutions. Through their navigational experiences, I was able to identify key factors that need to be addressed in order to improve the relationships between metro Atlanta schools and Latinx families.

Yosso (2006) argued that the deficit in understanding cultural values tends to overlook the importance placed on education by Latinx families. That is to say that Latinx parents' seeming lack of involvement in schools is often misunderstood by school officials. The participants' counterstories challenge these assumptions because they demonstrated multiple attempts to engage in school functions. In fact, participants in this study demonstrated that they can be critical of educational policies if they are familiar with them. Participants were also very

proactive when school personnel suggested anything that would benefit their children. However, one issue the participants argued was that they cannot get involved with policies because they do not have a clear understanding on how policies can affect them. Thus, school officials should provide Latinx parents with information that explains legal issues and policies that may directly affect their children. The participants' eagerness to successfully navigate their children's schools led me to conclude that their motivation must be fomented and developed into leadership.

Latinx parents are strong advocates for their children's education. In the parents' descriptions about their interactions with schools, all parents described it mainly as a positive experience. However, the concept of having a strong relationship with the schools was not evident. When asked about how they were invited to participate in their children's educational experience, one parent was able to recollect a workshop where parents were taught how to make *catrinas* (traditional Day of the Dead skeletons). However, all the participants shared that "food" was the main source that school officials sought from them as an element to connect them to their children's schools. Scarce opportunities were given for Latinx parents to build a relationship with the schools outside of donating food for school fundraisers or functions. Due to this disconnect, I recommend that improving relationships with parents should not be confined to culinary contributions. Many Latinx parents expressed their willingness to inform other parents and school staff about their culture (i.e. history, geography, traditions, etc.) if they were given the opportunity. When I asked the participants how their CCW could contribute to the school's environment they suggested the following: "*Yo haría un tipo de historia, con una muralla, las raíces de México, sus tradiciones, algo pequeño pero informativo*." [I would do some sort of history mural, with Mexico's roots, its traditions, something small but informative] (Lola, interview, 2018). Another participant shared: "*Se podrían dar muchas pláticas; las*

*personas de un estado podrían juntarse y hacer un power point. Explicar todo lo que hay, lo que se exporta, para que la gente nos conociera más*." [We could give presentations; people from the same state could get together and prepare a power point. Explain what they have, what it is exported, so people could get to know us better] (Claudia, interview, 2018). These statements are demonstrative of potential leadership from which I build upon for the JPTWC initiative.

Hong (2011) suggests that one of the best ways to bring parents into the schools is through opportunities that promote Latinx parents as leaders and role models in the classrooms. For instance, Latinx parents' presence in the classroom (in a capacity as teacher assistants) benefits the school environment from two angles: Latinx parents develop a sense of familiarity with the school culture while the teacher learns about the Latinx family. Classroom visits are an important component in the process of improving relationships. However, Latinx parents should be integrated in other school functions not only as participants, but as developers and organizers. For instance, I suggest inviting Latinx parents to be part of an organizational committee in order to give the school personnel an opportunity to find out more about the parents' skills, resources, and needs. In addition, parents who are given an active role by participating in committees are more likely to develop strong leadership skills. Delgado Bernal and Alemán (2017) argued that when schools see Latinx parents as a source of knowledge, the school community becomes more familiarized with the Latinx families they serve. Many of the Latinx parents in this study have careers from their country of origin (accountant, educator/engineer), while others have acquired technical skills in the United States. All the participants expressed a willingness to share their skills, experiences, and/or knowledge as they relate to them. I recommend that school officials give Latinx parents the opportunity to integrate their background and experiences into the school's culture by providing them with a space where they can share these skills. However,

Latinx parents' involvement should not be limited to participating in their children's classrooms. Instead, I recommend that parents' visits should be extended to other aspects of the school environment. In order to build parents' confidence into leadership, schools should broaden the opportunities for parental involvement in all aspects that entail the school. Thus, parental involvement should extend to participation in clerical roles in the office, assisting staff in the cafeteria, active membership in committees, planning fieldtrips, and such.

*Familial* and *Social Capital*

Another recommendation I make is based on findings participants exhibited through their strong combination of *familial* and *social capital*. I will elaborate on how I perceive these two forms of capital because the merger can extend to the schools' environment. First, strong relations the participants developed through their *familial capital* crossed geographical borders from their country of origin to metro Atlanta. Since every one of the participants had a connection to metro Atlanta through a relative, their *familial capital* designated Atlanta as their destination: Lidia had a sister who had been living in metro Atlanta for six months; Lola had a brother in law who had been working in the Atlanta metropolitan area; Claudia had a sister in-law who encouraged them to move in with her; Costeña's two sisters had moved to Atlanta while she was living in California; and Cati's sister in law had already been living in Atlanta for almost a year. After the participants arrived, they further developed a very rich underground network outside of their families, that added to their *familial capital*. Their networks consisted of neighbors within the apartment complexes in which all participants resided. The participants heavily relied on these networks that evolved from *familial* and *social capital*. I refer to these networks as "micro-networks."

Fostering the sense of community reflected in their micro-networks, I recommend that school officials welcome Latinx parents as a group and not as a single family. Their sense of belonging to these micro-networks can translate into a sense of belonging to the school community; that is, provided Latinx parents have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships in their schools. Thus, I suggest that Latinx parents should be encouraged to participate in school functions as a group because the presence of Latinx parents throughout the school as an active community, not only benefits Latinx parents by giving them the opportunity to experience the schools' dynamics, but school personnel benefit from gaining a better acquittance with the Latinx families as they work alongside.

**Developing Leaders: Building from Within**

Parent involvement has been identified as a significant contributor in students' academic achievement, though research shows that Latinx parental involvement can be challenging in some school districts, especially in areas where the influx of Latinxs is relatively new (Goździak & Bump, 2008) or where funding is compromised, as was the case with the Georgia Project (which will be revisited later in this chapter). Although the Latinx parents in this study demonstrated an interest in participating in their children's schools, it was unclear to them to what extent they were expected to get involved. Thus, the uncertainty discouraged their presence in schools. Bohon, et al. (2005) found evidence that low parental involvement in the Georgia school system is caused by a lack of infrastructure when dealing with Latinx immigrants. Based on the participants' CCW highlighted in this study, and drawing from school reform models, I hereby revisit national initiatives that I mentioned in chapter one; though, I have chosen to emphasize only the characteristics that I will address to justify the JPTWC initiative I recommend for metro Atlanta schools (see Table 3). I conclude this segment with a description

of Chicago's LSNA parent mentoring initiatives because this allows related initiatives to inform my final recommendations for the JPTWC initiative.

Table 3.
*JPTWC Suggested Thematic Units*

| | |
|---|---|
| Increasing Involvement | • Develop rapport with facilitators and parents<br>• Identify parents' skills |
| Parent's Expectations | • Elaborate on parents' skills<br>• Establish understanding of parent advocacy<br>• Outline parents' expectations |
| Bilateral Communications | • Assist in understanding school structure and role of school staff<br>• Identify strategies to engage in bilateral communications between schools and parents |
| Understanding Community's Needs | • Identify networks of people and community resources<br>• Determine strategies to gain skills to effectively communicate needs |
| Understanding U.S. Schools | • Clarify policies (state and national)<br>• Identify resources and programs |
| Becoming Leaders | • Develop personal plan of action<br>• Identify personal and collective goals<br>• Connect personal and community expectations |

According to Behnke and Kelly (2011) two programs were designed in North Carolina with a "family approach" that have been successful in increasing Latinx parental involvement in North Carolina: LPFAST (which serves the families of children in grades K through 8th) and *Juntos* Program (which serves students in grades 6th through 12th and their families). LPFAST consists of an integration of parents, family members, and adults who are involved with the students, with an emphasis on placing the expertise on the parents and allowing the parents' input to determine the topics for the trainings. I focus on LPFAST specifically, because the

program's structure aligns with some of the thematic units I delineated for the JPTWC initiative based on Latinx parents as "experts" (see Table 3 for suggestions).

In Utah, *Adelante* was developed in conjunction with elementary schools, college students, university campuses, community members, teachers, parents, and school staff proving that a combined effort (inclusive of a large number of community representatives and Latinx parents) increases Latinx parental involvement in local schools. The program effectively promoted the Latinx pipeline from elementary school through college (Delgado Bernal, et al., 2008). Closer to the Atlanta area, schools in Dalton developed a program in the 1990s called the Georgia Project, as a response to the influx of Latinx students in their local schools. The Georgia Project was a community effort initiative that included a key element: a foreign staff exchange program (with Mexico) that provided Spanish language immersion and cultural experiences for Dalton teachers with their partner schools in Mexico, which proved effective in increasing bilateral communication between teachers and the parents.

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) was founded in the 1960s in response to the growing deindustrialization the metro Chicago area was experiencing. Initially, LSNA was a community grassroot group focused on economic and business-related matters. As the demographics changed, so did the focus of the LSNA expanding to education issues. In the 1980s the Chicago legislature established local school councils (LSCs) with elected parents and community members that "created educational mechanisms for community organizations to become involved in the city's schools" (Hong, 2011, p. 171). Although I am not suggesting that the metro Atlanta community should engage grassroots organizations, the dynamics of the partnerships between families and communities exemplified in LSNA and the LSCs prove that

schools are sites that can bring groups together to successfully affect policies and develop community leaders.

The Latinx parents in this study showed evidence of their ability to navigate schools and institutions in metro Atlanta by combining their CCW and their micro-networks. This gritty underground micro-network (primarily comprised of family members and friendships) served as evidence of Latinx communities' ongoing *navigational capital*. Drawing from the adaptability Latinx parents demonstrate, I recommend that the JPTWC initiative maintains an "open enrollment" throughout its inception and remains flexible to adapt to new issues that may arise from changes in policies, especially those affecting Latinx families.

Another significant finding is that the participants' counterstories provide an important contribution to the body of literature that addresses Latinx families by gaining an in-depth understanding of the Latinx parents' perceptions of school administrators. Most of the participants shared that they met with administrators only on one occasion. The reason for that single encounter is that administrators quickly diverted the parents to a bilingual staff member or a bilingual parent liaison. In doing so, administrators conveyed an attitude of indifference (sometimes perceived as racism) that single handedly discouraged Latinx parents from engaging in any school activity without the presence of a bilingual staff member. The participants' interactions with school personnel became exclusive to interactions with the bilingual parent liaison. Hong (2011) argued when "[i]nteractions between parents and teachers [are] infrequent" (p. 176) the prevalence of sporadic exchanges can lead to negative relationships between teachers and parents. Drawing from Hong's (2011) argument, the participants' counterstories led to the following recommendation: that school officials (emphatically principals and vice principals) develop a personal relationship with Latinx parents by joining meetings where Latinx

parents are present in the company of bilingual staff members. Another alternative I suggest for school administrators to avoid being perceived as indifferent is to simultaneously be present in functions that Latinx parents attend.

## *Juntos Podemos*/Together We Can Initiative

The final recommendation I have for school officials is what I named the "*Juntos Podemos*/Together We Can" (JPTWC) initiative. Though this phrase may reminisce of the *Sí se puede* (Yes, we can) motto that resonates from César Chávez's fight for Chicano farm workers' rights, I view the JPTWC initiative in schools differently: this initiative is centralized and geared to aid all Latinx families in metro Atlanta. Hong (2011) suggests the primary goal of a Latinx parent mentoring program should be to help parents develop leadership skills, personal goals, and assertiveness. Drawing from Hong's (2011) suggestions, I recommend that the main objective of the proposed JPTWC initiative should be to provide Latinx parents with a fundamental knowledge of the U.S. school system so they can develop the confidence to lead in their schools. First, the initiative requires goals that emphasize Latinx parental involvement in schools and communities. The initiative entails an examination of the community resources that are available to develop a more dynamic sense of bilateral partnerships that rely on Latinx's CCW. Second, this initiative should be used to evaluate in-depth examples of other programs that have successfully created a path from parental involvement, to parent mentors, to community leaders. Third, this initiative aids school officials in bringing together all minority groups who are concerned with navigating schools and institutions, becoming a liaison that connects ethnic groups that typically would not. Finally, the initiative helps advocate for school officials and Latinx parents rendering a sense of trust that leads to the success drawn from a collective effort. Therefore, JPTWC initiative provides a chance for social change and draws

from other programs that have shown evidence of successfully increasing Latinx parental school involvement and improving community relationships.

When given the opportunity, Latinx parents in this study demonstrated an eagerness to challenge the apparent cultural deficit perception by shifting from a non-participatory parent to a culturally relevant family. Therefore, I draw from LPFAST's initiative to acknowledge Latinx parents as the source of expert input on Latinx families. The JPTWC initiative requires a commitment from the stakeholders to improve relationships between Latinx families and metro Atlanta schools. Consequently, the JPTWC initiative will lead to a new set of racial perspectives that promote cultural aspects of Latinx families and humanize their experiences.

Although the Georgia Project serves as a general model of a community collaboration initiative, one of the components I draw from is the bilingual focus on teachers. LeFevre and Shaw (2012) argued that a reason why Latinx parents are not formally involved in their children's schools is due to their limited English proficiency, which is evident by the participants' own admissions of their lack of *linguistic capital*. In 1962, Vygotsky identified language as the primary tool used to communicate ideas and experiences. Building on Vygotsky's (1962) language theory, findings in this study revealed an implication for "bilingualism" as a focus. I do not suggest that all teachers in metro Atlanta learn Spanish, but I do recommend that the JPTWC initiative explore the resources to provide English classes for Latinx parents and Spanish for school staff.

Furthermore, I draw from the *resistant capital* inspired by the participants' struggle with human and legal rights and use Delgado Bernal's, et al. (2008) findings in *Adelante*'s families' cultural citizenship to recommend that the JPTWC initiative separates human rights from legal

rights. The findings in this study showed that cultural citizenship provides a foundation that can reframe the debates on immigration and can contribute to a reform in educational policies that redefines citizenship concepts.

## Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings in this study have direct implications for a multidimensional construct of Latinx parent mentoring programs. The implications underline the need for an initiative or a plan of action that will increase Latinx participation in metro Atlanta schools.

School officials should seek a budget for initiatives that relate to Latinx families and to cover the expenditures they may incur. I present a list of suggested materials that school staff and parents may benefit from to eliminate potential obstacles that may interfere in the improvement of parental involvement initiatives (see Appendix F). It is imperative that school boards, lawmakers, and stakeholders be reminded that Latinxs remain the largest minority population in the United States (Araque, Wietstock, & Zepeda, 2017) and that regardless of their citizenship status, they are entitled to the benefits that comprise U.S. schools.

## Conclusion

This study was designed to understand how Latinx parents navigate schools in the metro Atlanta area and how they perceive U.S. schools. For cultural, linguistic, and practical reasons, many Latinx parents are unable to successfully become involved in their children's education. Through Latinx parent mentoring programs school officials can assist in the transformation of their communities, debunk myths and fallacies concerning Latinxs' values placed on their children's education, and prepare Latinx to become potential leaders within their communities. Thus, I hope that implementing the initiative I laid out will aid in the transformation of

communities by empowering Latinx parents. This empowerment is granted through collaborative efforts drawn from the needs expressed by the Latinx community.

Furthermore, future research on Latinx immigrant families and the effects of separations under the anti-immigration laws should continue to take a humanitarian approach to examining the cultural wealth Latinx communities exhibit while their families have to face daily struggles and uncertainties. I take the liberty to call on activists and researchers and suggest that they seek initiatives to re-evaluate the national policies that affect innocent U.S.-citizen children in order to ensure the welfare of this country's children.

Facilitating an environment that integrates Latinx culture contributes to an exchange of cultural knowledge that translates into benefits. This study is a call to our society to view the Latinx community as a source of wealth and assets that benefit the entire community. The Latinx immigrant parents' counterstories reflect a strong commitment to the welfare of their children from enrolling them, getting them to school, helping them complete homework, and communicating with school administrators and teachers even when they faced language, racial, and cultural barriers. This study is a testament to previous studies that showed how Latinxs value education and are in pursuit of a better life for their children: this goal can be achieved through education. In addition, I stress that by placing Latinxs' counterstories at the center of educational research, the community gains from a better understanding of the challenges Theme 1 Increasing Involvement Latinx families face. Therefore, it is essential that school officials invest in initiatives such as the one hereby proposed.

Finally, getting to know the Latinx parents is critical for a schools' positive environment. Latinx families can contribute with an array of different experiences and opportunities to

enhance the diverse culture that is evident in their schools. Educators must embrace how Latinx parents maintain their cultural values at home. Furthermore, they must begin to see Latinxs as an asset to the school and one that should be nurtured by it and within it. In order for school administrators and educators to better understand the Latinx families their schools serve, they must recognize where Latinx children come from and to whom they return.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix a

## Tier 1 Questions

## Semi-Structured Interviews

Preliminary Demographic Data:

Country of Origin.

Primary language spoken growing up. Can you read and write in that language?

Highest level of schooling in country of origin/age when last attended school.

Age upon arrival in the United States.

1. Tell me about yourself:

    - What is your nationality?
    - How do you identify yourself culturally (e.g., Hispanic, Latinx)?
    - Where did you first come when you arrived in the United States?
    - How long have you been in Georgia?
    - In what part of Atlanta do you live?
    - How long have you been in the Atlanta area?
    - What language/s do you speak at home?

2. Tell me about the cultural relationships between families and schools.

- What moment/moments do you specifically remember were special in your country and how did you celebrate them (e.g., holidays, birthdays, family reunions, etc.)?
- How were (if any) these events celebrated at your school?
- Who were the people most involved in your upbringing? Describe how.
- Reflect on your school experience in your country of origin. How do you remember your schooling experience growing up? Was it positive, were your parents involved at your school? Explain and give some examples.
- Describe the relationship between parents and schools. Is there a specific story you can share that captures this?
- Describe the relationship you had with your teachers. How did you address them (first name, last name, sir, ma'am…)? Please, share a memory that illustrates your experience.

# Appendix B

## Tier 2 Questions

## Semi-Structured Interviews

In your previous interview, we discussed the cultural relationships between families and schools. Thinking back to the first time you went to your child's school in the United States, describe your lived experience with Atlanta schools and how you navigated through the school system during that first visit. Think of examples where you experienced differences between your child's education in the United States and your education in … (name of country).

Tell me about your child/children.

- How many kids do you have? What are their ages and what grades do they attend? What school do they attend?
- When was the first time you visited their school?
- What grade was your child attending the very first time you visited a public school in Atlanta?
- Do you believe your culture clashed with U.S. culture? If so, how? What were the challenges and how did you overcome them?
- How are you involved in your child's school (i.e. in the classroom, after school programs, meetings, etc.)? Describe your role and experience during that involvement. Share any specific examples that come to mind.
- What accommodations, if any, have been made at the school level to serve the Latinx population?
- How do you think Latinx families are perceived by the school personnel? What has given you that impression?

- Describe if/how are Latinx students treated differently from the general population at the school your child attends.

Think about the time you found out that you had to visit your child's school. As a Latinx immigrant parent: how did you feel about having to visit the school?

- Describe who you met with or what was the reason you visited the school; what language was spoken to you; who welcomed you to the school; how did you know your way around the building, etc.
- What is the most significant memory you have of the first time you visited that school? Are there memories of later visits that speak to the cultural fit (or lack of) between your family and the school?

Thinking about your experience with public schools in Atlanta:

- Explain how the school is/is not welcoming the Latinx cultures represented through the students who attend the school and their families. If you encountered challenges, how were they handled them?
- What do you think are the strengths you (and/or your family) bring into your child's school? Were they appreciated? Explain why or why not.
- What do you think educators can do to enhance the communications and cultural fit between Latinx parents and school community?

# Appendix C

## Transcription Conventions (Roulston, 2013, p. 185)

| Interviewer : | IR |
|---|---|
| Interviewee : | IE |
| (really) | unclear words spoken, best guess |
| () | unclear words spoken, inaudible |
| (()) | transcriber's description |
| [ | two speakers' talk overlaps at this point |
| [ | |
| = | no interval between turns ('latching') |
| ? | interrogative intonation |
| (2.0) | pause timed in seconds |
| (.) | small untimed pause |
| we::ll | prolonged syllable or sound |
| why | emphasis or stressed word or syllable |
| REALLY | word spoken noticeably louder than surrounding talk |
| °yes° | words spoken noticeably softer than surrounding talk |
| ≤I have to go≥ | words spoken noticeably faster than surrounding talk |
| heh | laughter syllables |
| fun(h)ny | words spoken laughingly |
| .hhh | in-breath |
| hhh. | out-breath |
| ↑ | upward rise in intonation |
| ↓ | downward fall in intonation |

# Appendix D

## Informed Agreement

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Informed Agreement

Title: Unheard Voices: Counterstories of Latino Immigrant Parents Navigating Through Public Schools in Atlanta
Principal Investigator: Kristen L. Buras
Student Principal Investigator: Michelle S. Yrigollen-Robbins

Purpose
The purpose of the study is to learn how you experienced public schools in Atlanta. You are invited to participate because you are a Latino immigrant parent with a kid in a public school in Atlanta. A total of 10 participants will be interviewed for this study. Participation will need 3 hours of your time over two talks (first talk will be 60 minutes; second talk will be 120 minutes).

Procedures

- If you want to take part, we will meet two times.
- We will meet at a place in Sandy Springs where you come on Saturdays
- Each time will be audio recorded.
- You will be talking only to me.
- During the first talk, we will spend 60 minutes talking about you before you came to the United States.
- During the second talk, we will clarify answers if needed. I will ask you questions about your experiences in U.S. schools. The second talk will be less than 120 minutes
- You may quit the study at any time during the talks.

Future Research
Researchers will remove information that may identify you and may use the data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for another consent from you.

Risks
It is possible that this study may cause worry to illegal residents. To protect you, privacy will be carried out in the study. An alias will be used instead of your name.

Benefits
This study is not going to benefit you. We hope to get information about how you have experienced public schools in the Atlanta area. Your story will reveal the assets Latino families contribute to schools.

It will suggest potential efforts to increase the participation of Latino families in schools in the Atlanta area.

Alternatives
The alternative is not to participate in this study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
You do not have to be in this study. If you participate but change your mind, you have the right to leave the study at any time. You can skip questions or stop participating. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty.

Confidentiality
We will keep your records private. Only my advisor, the members of my committee and members of the study team at Georgia State University will have access to the information you give us. Information could be read by people who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection, OHRP). We will use an alias instead of your name on study records. Your information will be kept in a password protected computer. I will be using a key (code sheet) to classify you by your alias. It will be kept separately from the talks to protect your privacy. Your name and information that could point to you will not be revealed when we present this study. The key (code sheet) will be destroyed after the study is completed. The tape recording will be kept in coded cassettes. Cassettes will be kept in a locked cabinet. The cassettes will be destroyed with the code sheet.

Contact Information
Call Dr. Kristen L. Buras at 404-413-8030 or kburas@gsu.edu and Michelle S. Yrigollen-Robbins at 404-791-4742 or myrigollen1@student.gsu.edu if you have questions about this study.
Call Georgia State University Office of Human Research Protections at 404-413-3513 or irb@gsu.edu if you have questions about your rights or if you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study.

Consent
We will give you a copy of this form to keep.
If you want to volunteer for this study, please sign below.

_____________________________________________
Name of Participant

_____________________________________________ ____________________
Participant's Signature Date

_____________________________________________ ____________________
Michelle S. Yrigollen/Student Principal Investigator Date

## Appendix E

## List of National and Local Organizations for Latinxs

Hispanic Health Coalition of Georgia
2320 Perimeter Park Dr. 2nd Floor
Atlanta, (Chamblee) GA 30341
contact@hhcga.org

Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
99 West Paces Ferry Rd NW
Atlanta, GA 30305
404-929-9998

Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR)
7 Dunwoody Park #110
Atlanta, GA 30341
770- 457-5232

Latin American Association
2750 Buford Hwy NE
Atlanta, GA 30324
404- 638-1800

Latinos for Education
info@latinosforeducation.org

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Atlanta Council 950
Jorge Christancho
President
padrejorge1@gmail.com
678-541-4281

Mexican American Legal and Education Fund (MALDEF)
34 Peachtree Street # 2500
Atlanta, GA 30303
678-559-1071

National Hispanic Scholarship Fund
960 Holcomb Bridge Rd # 5
Roswell, GA 30076
770-992-8841

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
Developing Family With School Partnerships:
www.ncpie.org

UnidosUS (Former National Council of La Raza)
1126 16th St. NW Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036
202-785-1670
info@unidosus.org

# Appendix F

## Participants' Suggestions for School Staff

1. A critical part of establishing communication is for Latinx parents to be able to communicate with the school personnel. Latinx parents expressed that they feel the most comfortable when someone speaks Spanish. Therefore, it is imperative to be able to reach out to them in their language. Schools that reflect a large population of Latinx parents should be staffed with bilingual liaisons. The school staff should learn how literacy exists in the households (i.e. who speaks English, who uses cell phones, who can access the internet) and design a plan to communicate with the parents based on their home setting.
2. School personnel must find a way to communicate the school culture Latinx parents need to know. For instance, if the school sends notes home with children frequently, that must be communicated to the parents.
3. Latinx parents need to be familiarized with the school's "lingo." This includes pointing out acronyms. Latinxs are not accustomed to acronyms and therefore do not understand things like PTA, IEP, ADD, that are common in educational jargon. Providing the parents with a list of  most used acronyms and what they mean in English and in Spanish is essential for good communications.
4. It is the school's responsibility to communicate the procedures to the parents so that the parents know what to expect. For instance, concepts such as "open house," "back to school night," "parent/teacher conference" should be explained to Latinx parents if they are expected to attend. Also, the grading system, state mandated exams, funding, and state policies must not be overlooked.

5. Another suggestion to overcome potential communication barriers is for teachers to provide parents with a handbook of names and contact information of bilingual staff at their school that parents can contact when needed.