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The Not-So-Silent Period: Testimonios of Recently Arrived Latinx Students

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore and amplify the experiences of recently arrived Latinx¹ students as interpreted through their *testimonios* in educational borderlands. Through increasingly xenophobic discourses around immigrants and their children (Pérez Huber, 2015), U.S. public schools have become entrenched borderland spaces wherein the humanity of recently arrived students is voided through silencing them with labels of linguistic deficiency and cramming them into one-size-fits-all educational programming (Fine et al., 2007; Flores & Rosa, 2015). There is demand for research that explores the experiences of these children, especially in light of their continued marginalization through neoliberal programming that negates their individual strengths; devalues their embodied, chained ways of knowing; and discredits their collective cultural wealth (The APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Gándara, 2015). This study revealed how recently arrived Latinx middle school students expressed their belonging in strange places, their shifting understanding of identity, and their learning processes in several different contexts. In the same moment, the *testimonios* of these youth exemplified how they enacted their hope and strength to become agents in their own lives, now and in the future (Saavedra, 2011). Educators interested in social transformation and educational justice will become witness to the events and emotions of these children and develop critically hopeful pedagogical actions to better support and advocate for them. Guided by the complexity of borderlands identity and through the lens of Latino critical race theory, wholistic portraits of students are presented as counterevidence to prevailing myths and misconceptions that inform policies of language assimilation and cultural erasure in U.S. public schools.

[1] To encapsulate the entirety of a group of people in a single term is problematic, especially in my position as an outsider. I use the term Latinx to refer to the general heritage of Spanish-speaking people from South America, the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico. To honor the LGBTQIA+ community of which I am a member, I employ the suffix "X" to nullify gender binaries.

El propósito de este estudio fue explorar y amplificar las experiencias de los estudiantes latinos recién llegados¹ interpretadas a través de sus testimonios en tierras fronterizas educativas. A través de discursos cada vez más xenófobos en torno a los inmigrantes y sus hijos (Pérez Huber, 2015), las escuelas públicas de los Estados Unidos se han convertido en espacios fronterizos arraigados en los que la humanidad de los estudiantes recién llegados se anula al silenciarlos con etiquetas de deficiencia lingüística y amontonarlos en una programación educativa única para todos (Fine et al., 2007; Flores y Rosa, 2015). Hay demanda de investigación que explore las experiencias de estos niños, especialmente a la luz de su continua marginación a través de la programación neoliberal que niega sus fortalezas individuales; devalúa sus formas encarnadas y encadenadas de conocimiento; y desacredita su riqueza cultural colectiva (The APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Gándara, 2015). Este estudio reveló cómo los estudiantes de secundaria latinos recién llegados expresaron su pertenencia en lugares extraños, su comprensión cambiante de la identidad y sus procesos de aprendizaje en varios contextos diferentes. En el mismo momento, los testimonios de estos jóvenes ejemplificaron cómo promulgaron su esperanza y fuerza para convertirse en agentes en sus propias vidas, ahora y en el futuro (Saavedra, 2011). Los educadores interesados en la transformación social y la justicia educativa serán testigos de los eventos y emociones de estos niños y desarrollarán acciones pedagógicas críticamente esperanzadoras para apoyarlos y abogar mejor por ellos. Guiados por la complejidad de la identidad fronteriza y a través de la lente de la teoría crítica racial latina, los retratos holísticos de los estudiantes se presentan como contraevidencia a los mitos y conceptos erróneos prevalecientes que informan las políticas de asimilación del idioma y la eliminación cultural en las escuelas públicas de los Estados Unidos.

[1] Encapsular la totalidad de un grupo de personas en un solo término es problemático, especialmente en mi posición como un extraño. Utilizo el término Latinx para referirme a la herencia general de las personas de habla hispana de América del Sur, el Caribe, América Central y México. Para honrar a la comunidad LGBTQIA + de la que soy miembro, empleo el sufijo "X" para anular los binarios de género.

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The Not-So-Silent Period: *Testimonios* of Recently Arrived Latinx Students

A Dissertation in Practice

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Teri M. Hutchinson

June 2023

Advisor: Dr. Kimberly Schmidt

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The purpose of this study was to explore and amplify the experiences of recently arrived Latinx¹ students as interpreted through their *testimonios* in educational borderlands. Through increasingly xenophobic discourses around immigrants and their children (Pérez Huber, 2015), U.S. public schools have become entrenched borderland spaces wherein the humanity of recently arrived students is voided through silencing them with labels of linguistic deficiency and cramming them into one-size-fits-all educational programming (Fine et al., 2007; Flores & Rosa, 2015). There is demand for research that explores the experiences of these children, especially in light of their continued marginalization through neoliberal programming that negates their individual strengths; devalues their embodied, chained ways of knowing; and discredits their collective cultural wealth (The APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Gándara, 2015). This study revealed how recently arrived Latinx middle school students expressed their belonging in strange places, their shifting understanding of identity, and their learning processes in several different contexts. In the same moment, the *testimonios* of these youth exemplified how they enacted their hope and strength to become agents in their own lives, now and in the future (Saavedra, 2011). Educators interested in social transformation and educational justice will become witness

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To my mother, Helen, I acknowledge your strength and ever-present love that has saved me more times than I can count. Your story needs to be told. Your life has inspired mine as I achieve this doctorate. From one woman to another, I thank you.

To the educators I have had the great privilege of working alongside throughout the years, I acknowledge the joys and sadness we have persevered in the last quarter century. We work within systems that inhibit our true intentions and yet the creativity within your daily practice shows your compassion and brilliance.

Finally, to my committee, I applaud and thank you for accompanying me as I explored ways to express the greatest passion of my life: education. Dr. Michalec, your consistent reminders to follow my heart enriched my experience and my own teaching practice. Dr. Cutforth, your embodiment of commitment to community inspired me from the first day I met you. Dr. Schmidt, you helped me tremendously with bringing my projects to fruition. You opened doors for me to explore my professional practice and I thank you. Most of all, thank you for encouraging my writing. Thanks to all of you. You humanized my participants by showing me how much I loved them.

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Chapter One: Introduction

A Vignette

I never met Citlali without a mask—literally and metaphorically. Perhaps this was just part of her seventh-grade nature. The other day during lunch, her mask was down under her chin, and I was taken aback by her beautiful face and purposeful makeup. She, like many other Latinas in school these days, was completely infatuated and attuned to Korean and K-Pop culture. She wore a new pair of large, ocular-shaped, black-rimmed glasses that strikingly accented her made-up face. She had chosen a light, almost white, foundation and gloppy black mascara for her natural eyelashes. She did not wear the glue-on kind. Two round, red blobs blushed the top of each cheek and when she laughed, they bounced. Rosy, red lip gloss completed her look. Citlali did not sport a Korean school-girl fashion skirt and knee-high socks; rather, she wore baggy mom jeans, torn and frayed just to the edge of acceptable dress codes. Her clothes usually had words painted on them, and most days I could not see her mock turtleneck tops because she scooped herself in a large, zippered hoodie.

Citlali and her older brother were new to our school, but not the United States. Her family was *de los dos lados* (from both sides), or a transnational family (Kasun, 2015). During the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020 and 2021 and for 2 years prior, Citlali was in Mexico. During the quarantine and subsequent school year, she and her brother

were enrolled in school, however, their mother lamented the lack of consistent school *preseccencial* (school in person) and the overall loss of learning. Citali learned some English in her primary school years, both in the affluent schools of urban Mexico and during the few times she lived in *el norte* (the United States). She went to tuition schools, but not religious ones, she insisted. It was clear from the first day that she had strong academic skills in math and a substantial amount of receptive English comprehension. Unlike her brother, who also was enrolled at our school, Citlali was painfully shy. She clung to any friend she could make. She was nervous, anxious, and never wanted to be alone. Within 3 weeks of being in school, she was asking to stay with me all day. She complained of headaches, feeling *como ataca de nervios* (panic attacks) and *mareos* (dizziness). She started to ditch one class in particular. She explained to me no one spoke Spanish in class, the girls were mean to her (even the one who had been assigned to help), and she just felt like she was *tonta*. This last part especially broke my heart. *Tonta* means idiot. I hugged her and explained, unfortunately, these feelings were normal, and she would be okay.

Speaking with her father that evening, I explained Citlali was experiencing physiologic symptoms related to the stress of being in this unfamiliar environment. Although her English language skills were fairly strong and her academics were stellar, I worried she may not be ready to leave the school's Newcomer Program, wherein her day consisted of sheltered core classes focused on language development and acculturation skills. Her brother, on the other hand, had tested in the 95th percentile on the district's math assessment and was being looked at for gifted and talented (GT) programming. He was melding into his classes and peer group. Ultimately, the family made the decision to

mainstream their daughter with the understanding that she would have one language acquisition class.

Illustrated in this vignette was a common experience many recently arrived students of this age traverse, especially those who are *buen educados* (well-prepared students) in their homelands. Schooling is familiar to these students and they have skill sets that enable them to be successful. Then, when they move to the United States, everything is different. Their peers, their teachers, the subjects, the school day—all of it is completely foreign. Some experience a *choque* (crash) as they navigate through the unfamiliar social and academic contexts. School is now different and, for many, home is different, too. Roles, routines, and rules change dramatically for an immigrant family and for myriad reasons. Some young people are very adept at moving between cultures and contexts, such as Citlali's brother. Others are not. The aim of this study was to deeply explore the voices of youth as they interpret their experiences in U.S. schooling contexts within the first 2 years of enrollment.

This study employed Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) to analyze the *testimonios* of recently arrived Latinx middle school students as they challenged conventional beliefs and attitudes about immigrant experiences in schools. The decontextualization of Latinx communities in educational research is a well-documented and persistent problem of practice (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010; San Miguel & Donato, 2010; Spring, 2010). Traditional education research has ignored contexts such as the socio-political environment of the community receiving immigrants, the availability of resources for immigrant families, and the assets of home-based ways of knowing. Latinx education issues have been systematically dehistoricized in prevailing ideologies of linguistic appropriateness (Flores

& Rosa, 2015; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010) and colorblind multiculturalism (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), thereby perpetuating deficit notions of their language and culture and further positioning these communities as racialized Others. This marginalization subsequently renders them invisible and silent in policy efforts. This study, in an attempt to address the historically chronic and presently persistent problem of dehumanizing and silencing of Latinx language and culture in public schools, amplified the voices of eight recently arrived Latinx students in the *testimonios* of their experiences in U.S. schools. In this chapter, I introduce myself in relation to the participants and this topic, the current and local context of the study, the persistent problem of practice, the research question, and the methodology enacted.

Researcher Positionality

Kendi (2019) wrote, “Being antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination” (p. 22). In this study and in my own personal and professional life, I am acutely aware of my privileged status as a White, English-speaking, elite bilingual, U.S. citizen who teaches English at the site of this project, which is very important to reconcile with the participants and the audience of this study. I give this information explicitly to signal that I understand and accept how the privileges of my race, linguistic heritage, and birthplace have enabled me to be in the position I am in now. As a White, middle-class youth, I was expected to concentrate on school and sports in a place that was demographically very similar to me. College was the minimum expectation and there were plenty of supports in place to make higher education rather easy to accomplish. I had the privileged choice to learn Spanish in schools and contexts I

chose, much as I have had the privilege to learn about racism from books and scholars rather than experiencing it firsthand.

My own complicity within the institutions that socialize the values of White, English-speaking, meritocratic privilege that perpetuate cultural and ethnic racism (Kendi, 2019) cannot be understated, and I reflected upon these notions as data collection and analysis proceeded. Much harm has been perpetrated upon oppressed individuals and communities by well-meaning White people in positions of power (Anzaldúa, 1987; Yamato, 1990). Speaking directly to White individuals who desire to be allies with oppressed communities, Yamato (1990) called for us to “work on racism for your sake, not ‘their’ sake” (p. 24). In the context of this work, I applied this reflection in my positionality as both a White, English-speaking, U.S. citizen, and as the participants’ teacher. Through my own liberation from racist standpoints, I humanized myself and the participants in this study.

As much as it mattered who the participants of this study were, it also mattered who I was when entering their space. Through 26 years working in public education, I have held various roles. My main job has been educating recently arrived² students and their teachers. I believe first and foremost education is a human right, not a political or private privilege. I practice antiracist stances such as valuing the differences among people as being equal, not privileging some over others (Kendi, 2019), and critiquing programs and policies with an eye to making our community aware of inequities hidden in neoliberal discourses of sameness and culture-blindness (Picower, 2011). Furthermore, I enact

² A recently arrived student in the context of this study is one who has been enrolled in school in the United States for less than 2 years and is either foreign born or the child of foreign born parents.

principles of multicultural democratic education scholars who have articulated thriving learning communities are those that understand cultural diversity as a strength and asset to the socio-cultural context of schools (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Malsbary, 2013). I recognize cultural groups share traits, but as individual members, each person is representative only of themselves and their interpretations of collective experiences.

In the third chapter of this work, I detail the limitations of the study around my positionality as a racial outsider, a linguistic visitor, and as a teacher within the school working with participants for whom I am in a position of trust and power. Knowing how my position interplays with the participants of this research, I carefully chose to enact a *testimonio* methodology and keep my role as interlocutor throughout the research process. Drawing on critical ethnographic research strengthened my lens toward portraying wholistic subjects in thickly complex situations and roles. As a White, elite bilingual, U.S. citizen, I do not claim any cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998); I leaned into strong, proven theoretical constructs to elevate the youth in their own words to the audience. I approached this work with a sense of urgency and hope that consumers of this study will come to know these youth as I have known them: powerfully hopeful, legitimately valuable, and infinitely capable human beings navigating the world.

In the fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation, I present first the participants as individuals through their words, weaving themes that emerged from their lived experiences. Using interpretations of their own lived experiences firmly grounded the study in their world, their reality. From their worlds and through their words, I extrapolated constructs using LatCrit and borderlands theoretical understandings as

excavation tools. I now turn to contextualizing this study, bringing forth those characteristics that center racializing forces affecting Latinx immigrant students.

Context of Study

Political Context

In the same year that Donato's (2007) history of Mexican and Hispanos in Colorado schools was published, the National Council of La Raza reported 2.9 million Latinx high school students were less likely than their non-Latinx peers to complete a degree, and recently arrived students were the most likely to drop out of school entirely (Kholer & Lazarin, 2007). In the closing chapter of his book, Donato (2007) wrote that perhaps his historical arguments "do not extend to contemporary schools" (p. 126). I would heartily disagree, because the historically chronic and presently persistent deficit narrative that feeds the dominant ideology is evidenced all over current piece-meal, one-size-fit-all, neoliberal educational reform efforts (Flores & Garcia, 2017; Portes et al., 2010).

Differential education outcomes do exist along racial lines, but as Portes et al. (2010) noticed, "What is remarkable . . . is that such differences have been routinely singled out as the problem, not as a variable within the larger and dynamic layers of K–12 activity" (p. 439). Flores and Garcia (2017) explained by using tests normed to White, middle-class, monolingual students to judge the efficiency of dynamic language programming for multilingual students, educators fail to "address the underlying racialization processes that relegate Latinx and other minoritized communities to second class status in U.S. society" (p. 16). Therefore, educators are seeing symptoms—poor test scores and stunted achievement—as the actual disease. The real disease, however, hides in racialized political rhetoric that promotes English-only instruction and high-stakes testing as the

way to solve deep, systemic inequities that have been present in the education of Latinx students for at least 100 years.

The political rhetoric around standard English and English-only instruction centers on the myth of monolingualism as a natural human state (Rosa, 2016). When a nation subscribes to a one language—one nation—one people construct (Baumann & Briggs, 2003, as cited in Rosa, 2016), any deviation from the dominant ideal of standard language becomes a racializing factor for that individual and the group they purportedly represent. Seeing difference as deviance is racializing in this lens because the difference is seen and heard as problematic, or in need of fixing. The notion of difference as deviance is reflected in educational programming for Latinx immigrants and the children of Latinx immigrants as they are blamed for failing on standardized exams, are disqualified in debate competitions, are labeled and punished for being long-term English language learners, or are divested of their home language in transitional bilingual programs. Moreover, Flores and Rosa (2015) argued because some language forms are stigmatized and others are privileged:

The ideological construction and value of standardized language practices are anchored in *racio-linguistic ideologies* that conflate certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practices. (p. 150)

In the context of this study, immigrant youth are marked in the United States as deficient or deviant by their cultural and ethnic heritage and are therefore racialized from the start of their academic careers.

As of 2022, the United States is experiencing an exponential population growth pattern of foreign-born immigrants. Colorado has experienced enough population growth to garner a new Congressional district. The U.S. Census (2020) reported of the

approximately 1.5 million people who migrated to Colorado in the last decade, more than 632,000 were from foreign countries. Pew Hispanic Research Center (2020) reported in 1970, the foreign-born population in the United States was 9.6 million. This number has quadrupled to 44.8 million foreign-born people living in the United States. Fifty percent of the current documented immigrant population in the United States is from Latin American countries. The fastest growing region of origin is by far Mexico, but immigrants from Central American countries have increased rapidly as well. Although there are no completely reliable numbers on the population of undocumented immigrants in the United States, a generally agreed upon number is around 11 million (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Martinez & Ortega, 2019; Pérez Huber, 2015).

Local Context

As Colorado's population of Hispanics—a Census term—enrolled in K–12 education catches up to states like Texas, Florida, and California, educators need to look at building capacity within our immigrant students and students who are children of immigrants to change the course of their educational outcomes. Speaking generally, Malsbary (2013) asserted:

Transnational flows of social media, policies, and economic goods are celebrated as harbingers of 21st century progressivity while transnational flows of people, on the other hand, often absorb the resentment of local communities. (p. 1)

According to Pew Hispanic Research Center (2020), of the 1,136,000 Hispanics living in Colorado, 73% are Mexican origin and 24% of them are foreign born. These numbers are staggeringly high and yet were predicted at the turn of the century 22 years ago.

Hopefully, educators can prioritize the educational outcomes for the fastest growing segment of the population. According to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE),

in 2021, Colorado graduated 81.7% of its students in 4 years. Hispanic students graduated at a rate of 75.4%, whereas White students graduated at a rate of 86%. Limited English proficient students graduated at a rate of 70.2% and dropped out at a rate of 3.4%, almost triple the rate of White students. Clearly, race, language, and community context play an influential role in the variable outcomes of students in Colorado.

The American Psychological Association (APA) Presidential Task Force on Immigration (2013) published a special report focused on equitable treatment and research for immigrant communities. The report called for, among other directives, special attention to be paid to the local context in which immigrants are received (The APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013). These local contexts, or microsystems, are described as small communities, neighborhoods, and schools. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2013) reiterated the local receiving context of immigrants mediates the trajectories of educational and psychological outcomes of recently arrived immigrants. To this end, I present a brief portrait of the community in which this study takes place.

The Northwest Public School District (NWPSD) is situated as a large suburban school district along an urban corridor in Colorado, and draws students from approximately 15 square miles of territory (U.S. Census, 2020). The median age of persons living in the attendance boundary is 34.5 years old, with 64% of the population between the ages of 18 and 44. Per capita income hovers around 28,000 dollars annually, with 11% of households living in poverty. Taking a closer look into U.S. Census tracts in the heart of the district, all but one neighborhood is defined as low to moderate income at rates close to 82% (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, n.d.). The most recent Census

data show of the almost 26,000 households in the NWPSD boundary, 65% are considered family households; however, the family size averages 2.47 (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, n.d.). This metric means the NWPSD is shrinking in student population. In this district, 16.1% of the population is foreign born and 33% of the children ages 5–17 speak another language besides English. Thirty-one percent of the adults 18 and older speak another language besides English, and 93% of the individuals in this statistic claim Spanish to be that other language (U.S. Census, 2020).

In 2018, the voters in this school district approved a Mill Levy override and increased its share of Mills from 8% to 18%, according to the district’s website. This shift marked a significant show of support from the community for its schools. NWPSD currently stands at the 24th largest school district in the state, enrolling around 9,000 students in Early Learning Centers, traditional elementary schools, an equal number of PK–8 Innovation schools and PK–8 comprehensive schools, one traditional middle school (the site of this study), two comprehensive high schools, and one Virtual Academy. Of the almost 9,000 students enrolled, 75% of them are Hispanic, 15.9% are White, 3.4% are Asian, and the remaining 5.7% are Black (not Hispanic), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, or claim two or more racial/ethnic identities. Special care should be taken here when interpreting these data, as racial categories are self-selected; critical theorists have hotly debated the representation of ethnic communities’ conceptions of their heritage from these data (López & Hogan, 2021). Matching the demographics of the surrounding community, 30% of the students in PK–12 receive program services for English language development (CDE, 2022). Absent from these statistics are specific numbers of recently arrived students and children of immigrants. No data are officially

collected on the numbers of recently arrived students; the district registrar estimated the number in 2021 to be between 135 and 150.

A statistic of concern for educators in this district is the 4-year graduation rate. In 2018, NWPSD graduated 67.9% of its students, 69.3% in 2019, 72.5% in 2020, and then fell to 68.2% in 2021. Table 1.1 offers a comparison of neighboring districts to illustrate the context of these numbers in surrounding districts. This quantitative reporting is necessary to see macro-level trends but admittedly does not tell the whole story. However, Census data show school districts around NWPSD are less impacted by poverty, and although NWPSD is blessed with a diverse cultural and linguistic population, these resources are not being leveraged for the achievement of a basic right of passage: the high school diploma. As a step in the right direction for linguistic equity (García & Kleifgen, 2018), NWPSD offers the Seal of Biliteracy to its graduates, but I have yet to find a significant instance of bilingual education. There is one innovation school at the southern boundary of the district that promotes itself as an academy for international studies. For students who are accepted into this school, there are classes offered in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, but it is unclear if these are foreign language classes or actual content oriented bilingual classes. The mission of this K–8 school is to offer cultural studies that promote an appreciation of many global communities and perspectives.

Table 1.1: 2021 Comparative Data for Neighboring Districts

District	Graduation rate	Free and reduced lunch rate	Students in English language development programming	Immigrant and migrant students
NWPSD	68.2%		2,324	133
	465 of 628	79.2%	28%	1.6%
District 41	67%		2,740	194
	347 of 518	84.2%	44.8%	3.2%
District 42	80.5%		5577	589
	2,397 of 2,976	37.4%	15.5%	1.6%
District 72	88%		2,979	56
	1,110 of 1258	34.2%	14.7%	.27%
Olson County	85.8%		4,974	432
Public Schools	5,425 of 6,325	30.9%	6.3%	.55%
Capital District	74%		16,349	2796
	4,804 of 6,493	64.9%	18.4%	3.1%

Note. District 41 recently won a contentious battle against being shut down and reorganized by the State Board of Education. The district closest to District 41 in statistical categories in this region is NWPSD. Data come from Colorado Department of Education, 2022.

Overview of the Research Topic

It never, ever gets old. The first snow angels they make, the first crush they have, the first group picture taken, or the first time they ask me to say *playa* (beach) or *durazno* (peach) in English and giggle like they got away with something. There are other firsts, too, that are not so fun. The first time they ask me, “¿Como se dice ‘deja me en paz’ en inglés, Miss?” (How do you say “leave me alone” in English, Miss?). There is the first intragroup fight among the recently arrived students as they compete for resources such as school supplies or friendships that might build their social capital, the first interracial slur in the cafeteria as they become aware of their place as immigrants, or the first trip to the office for talking Spanish when the teacher is talking. Perhaps the hardest first event for me to rationalize is when a general education teacher contacts me to lament about all the Spanish-speakers in their class being hard to handle or disengaged. All of these

troublesome firsts can be filtered through a racializing paradigm. The competition for resources could be linked to the students being segregated into monolithic groups that must travel together all day, or perhaps not travel at all. Their group dynamic becomes complicated in this way in that they sense a stigma attached to their group identity. The slurs in the cafeteria or in other classrooms is a form of lateral violence (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1990) which, for these recently arrived students, is very hurtful and poignantly related to their status as immigrants and their particular dialects of Spanish. Being sent to the office because they are trying to negotiate meaning in a classroom where only English is used is a blatant tactic of oppression. Finally, marking students by calling out their language is equal to marking students by their skin color (Kendi, 2019). Language is an immutable characteristic; besides, it is not just the recently arrived students who are Spanish speaking. There is a whole cadre of bilingual students in the NWPSD district.

Recently arrived students of all backgrounds are an under-researched and therefore misinterpreted group of students (Kasun, 2015). Much of what educators observe in the quirky and awkward behavior of these students has been framed in a traditional narrative as part of a process called acculturation. Berry (2005) described *acculturation* as the “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more culture groups and their individual members” (p. 698).

Acculturation is an important concept in the educational achievement of immigrants (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019). Acculturation is thought to be a key process in the academic success or failure of immigrant students and includes such descriptors as the familiarity of U.S. culture, the learner’s attitude toward using English to communicate in various contexts, the heterogeneity of the immigrant students’ peer groups, and the

amount of participation in curricular and extracurricular activities (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019).

There indeed exists a rich amount of research on the process of acculturation in many contexts (Schwartz & Unger, 2017). What remains lacking is a similar amount of theory on the discriminate phases of acculturation as applied to specific subgroups of immigrant populations (Rudmin et al., 2017). For example, Rudmin et al. (2017) explained that multiple layers of factors, including country of origin, closeness to community, and time in the new country complicate linear and dichotomous understandings of immigrant experiences. Valenzuela (1999) attempted to unbraid the complex existence of multiple Latinx student identities as it related to their familial immigration, citizenship, and generational status that also complicate the immigrant experience beyond traditional acculturation models. Moreover, current scholarship and application of acculturation theory has decentered the experiences of the individual and family by lumping experiences of all immigrants, regardless of their historical, linguistic, or regional backgrounds, into discrete strategies (Berry, 2005). In so doing, it has become a hegemonic body of literature. When a theory such as acculturation proposes to make equal the experiences of all, it creates a blindness and deafness toward the experiences of individuals; this reduction could be seen as a racializing process. The entire ideological basis of acculturation, especially in education, needs to be critically examined, disrupted, and dislodged.

Problem of Practice

Midway through Day 6 of the new school year, Manuel, a 14-year-old eighth grader, was going to be sent home. In my experience, it takes 6 weeks or so before recently

arrived students start rejecting the compliance mindset of U.S. schooling that perpetuates social stratification and persists in making students understand their proper place (Sosa-Provencio, 2016). Overtly defying rules, Manuel resisted schooling practices that functioned to constrain him and to denigrate him simply by not acknowledging him as a human being, a 14-year-old boy. But here we were, Manuel, me, the dean of students, and a discourse fast taking hold of all our tongues in 2021: safety, social distance, cross-contamination, compliance, super-spreading, and zero-tolerance. We were witnessing evidence of what Suzanne Goldberg, the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office for Civil Rights, declared in June of 2021: “A deepening divide in educational opportunity across our nation’s classrooms” that were disproportionately impacting students “who went into the pandemic with the greatest educational needs and fewest opportunities—many of them from historically marginalized and underserved groups” (p. ii). Manuel was refusing to comply in wearing a mask outside at recess, to maintain distance from students in his cohort, to fill in the daily health questionnaire, to not throw milk and oranges at or with students in another cohort, and to not listen to recess supervisors when called to come inside. He was headed for a 3-day, out-of-school suspension because, in the words of the dean of students, “He had been warned a few times already.”

One can only imagine processing the stifling protocols of COVID-19-related reopening in schools through the mind, heart, and gut of a 14-year-old who, 11 months ago, had fled, escaping with his mom and sister, from his father’s severe abuse and the extreme poverty of a borderland community. Here, in this school official’s office in the absence of family or friends, emerged the historically chronic and presently persistent problem of practice I have noticed and advocated against for 25 years. The lack of

attention to the lived experiences of our recently arrived students has resulted in silencing and marginalizing their existence. Our recently arrived students and their families are excluded from equitable education via language, disciplinary practices, and access to content and instruction (Donato & Hanson, 2012; Foley, 1990; Gonzalez, 1990; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Portes et al., 2010). Without concerted effort to center their ways of knowing, their unique creativity and intelligence will not be leveraged toward their success.

The Office for Civil Rights' (2021) report on the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on educational outcomes reported on the exacerbation of historic problems, such as (a) limited access to grade-level content, (b) demoralizing social stigmas resulting in bullying, (c) limited use of home languages in schooling practices, (d) teachers not being properly equipped or supported to work with immigrant students, and (e) parents and families of immigrants being isolated and blamed in the "return-to-normal" school after the lockdowns of 2020. Despite much discussion on trauma-informed care, school personnel blamed and punished students for the psychological and physiologic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Hausman-Stabile, et al. (2017). There was an insistence upon building relationships, but teachers and administrators blamed students' home lives, languages, and cultures as barriers to success and as mechanisms of failure (Gallo & Link, 2016; Gonzalez, et al., 2017; Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Schools promoted reaching out to families, yet lamented disconnected phones and "obviously" uncaring attitudes of Latinx families (Gándara, 2015; Villenas, 2001). Schools spent thousands of hours and dollars to make content instruction comprehensible yet ignored the actual content of students' lived

experiences (Martinez & Ortega, 2019; Osorio, 2018). These paradoxes are heartbreaking and frustrating. This study attempts to make sense of these issues and begin to address the failure of the school environment to humanize our most vulnerable students and families in their most considerable time of need.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research was to amplify the experiences of eight recently arrived Latinx students as they interact with schooling contexts in the United States. This counter-narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) is presented as *testimonios* (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Saavedra, 2011). The utilization of *testimonio* methodology was intentional. I implemented this methodology with middle school-aged students with hopes of adding to the burgeoning scholarship that desires to harness youth epistemology in the voices of participants in the cocreation of knowledge that is practical, useful, and relevant to community.

Research Questions

Critical activist scholarship pushes beyond the accepted norms of research in education (Milner, 2007). As researchers, we must begin with the reality of the people with whom we work (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017). As a recognition of the fundamental importance of grounding research in lived experience, one broad research question guided the initial inquiry into the broader challenge of dismantling deficit narratives around language and culture that plague the educational experiences of recently arrived students:

1. How do recently arrived Latinx middle school students interpret their experiences within the first 2 years of their arrival in the United States and enrollment in school?

Methods

Eleven participants were purposefully selected from a convenience sample of recently arrived students enrolled at the site of study, Crystal Lakes Middle School. Due to limitations in the study, I adapted criteria for “telling cases” (Andrews, 2017) that eliminated three participants and kept eight. I compiled the counter-narratives in this study through individual *testimonio* interviews, observations, and a field journal. As a naturalistic researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I not only kept a field journal, but also assembled an audit trail to include reflexivity in my positionality, decisions of methodological import, participant profiles, and the development of analytical interpretations. This study took place between September and December 2022 during regular school day hours. I conducted three *testimonio* interviews and numerous observations in a variety of school contexts, including general education classrooms, elective classrooms, and my own classroom with the participants. The iterative data analysis began with attribute coding participant demographics and open coding the data. Themes from each data collection cycle informed the creation of instruments (e.g., the questions asked of participants) and focused my subsequent implementation of classroom observations.

I made every effort to position the participants in this study hopeful agents in the construction of their *testimonios*. A primary outcome of *testimonio* research and production is to produce a catalytic effect for the teller and the listener toward changing

social conditions. I sought to contribute to the growing call for borderlands research that “investigates immigrant student experiences in their own right rather than through a lens of linguistic difference” (Gallo & Link, 2016, p. 182). The methodology chapter provides a detailed look into critical methodologies and how these choices of data collection and analysis serve LatCrit scholarship by directly challenging and disrupting commonly held beliefs that support racist ideologies of Latinx language and cultural deficiency. This study incorporated humanizing elements such as participant voice, authentic collaboration, capacity building of community members, and democratic participatory knowledge discovery and dissemination.

Conclusion

LatCrit scholarship, for several decades, has attempted to excavate cultural strengths, celebrate resiliency and hope, and challenge the objectification of Latinx students and their families. In this chapter, I held that the lack of attention to the lived experiences of recently arrived Latinx students has resulted in silencing and marginalizing their existence. Without concerted effort to center their ways of knowing, their unique creativity and intelligence will not be leveraged toward their success. In the next chapter, I present a solid exploration and rationale for the theoretical approaches to this study and highlight studies that have applied these understandings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the previous chapter, I introduced the context and purpose of the study. In an effort to dismantle deficit narratives, I propose to elevate the experiences of recently arrived Latinx middle school students as they interpret themselves within the first 2 years of their enrollment in U.S. schools. I seek to understand a persistent problem of practice wherein the lack of attention to the lived experiences of our recently arrived students has resulted in silencing and marginalizing their existence. Without concerted effort to center their ways of knowing, educators will not leverage students' unique creativity and intelligence toward academic success (García & Kleifgen, 2018). To this end, I portray “telling cases” (Andrews, 2017) in borderland spaces where students talk back to oppressive systems and in turn where actors in these systems develop a moral imagination (Minkler, 2005). The purpose of this research was to amplify the voices of eight recently arrived Latinx students as they interacted with schooling contexts in the United States. The following question guided the work:

1. How do recently arrived Latinx middle school students interpret their experiences within the first 2 years of their arrival in the U.S. and enrollment in school?

In this chapter, I review the historical deculturizing of Spanish-speaking, looking, and working peoples in U.S. schools. Next, I present the theoretical frameworks that wove

together this work: critical race theory (CRT), Latino critical race theory (LatCrit), and borderlands theory (BT). I review studies that employed LatCrit and BT to establish a territory for my research with recently arrived, middle-school aged Latinx students. Then, because *testimonio* methodology is implemented in this study, I present its origins and relevance to the participants of this study. I also review studies that have implemented this method in educational settings with the hopes of finding a definite niche for my current work to reside.

Historical Context of Study

Educational equity work that centers the lived experiences of students presently and historically elevates their voice within a sociopolitical and historical context (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). Therefore, understanding the historical context of Latinx education research and issues in the United States was foundational to this study, beginning in the Progressive Era, into the Civil Rights Era, and finally to the final decades of the 20th century. I narrowed the current national and regional contexts for this study, illustrating the continuing and problematic issues in Latinx education by presenting regional and local statistics. This narrowed focus demonstrated the historically chronic and presently persistent inequities that Latinx immigrant children and the children of Latinx immigrants confront.

A principal goal of LatCrit scholarship is to humanize Latinx students by making them visible in historical scenes and movements (Donato & Hanson, 2012; Garcia & Yosso, 2020; Gonzalez, 1990; Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). Centering racial ambiguity as a way in which Latinx students are made invisible, Romero (2007) argued:

Nowhere . . . is this process more perceptible than in the interaction of the nation's courts with its Latina/o student population . . . in which the judiciary has designed desegregation orders, evaluated bilingual programs, and appraised the constitutionality of affirmative action admissions plans. (p. 245)

Despite 60 years of political, social, and legal activism by the Latinx community, little has changed for the increasingly diverse, pan-ethnic Latinx student body in the United States (Bender & Valdez, 2011; Romero, 2007; San Miguel & Donato, 2010). The historically chronic issues of anti-bilingualism, segregation, forceful assimilation, tracking, soft attendance enforcement, and disproportionate dropout (push-out) rates persist in society.

Progressive Era

In the first 3 decades of the 20th century, the Progressive movement in the United States was the political face of the economic evolution of capitalism (Gonzalez, 1990). Progressive ideology was undergirded by notions of social efficiency and social stability. Progressives were not interested in challenging the social order that kept laborers in their place; rather, this order was ingrained and reproduced in social and political institutions under the premise of the “greater good” (Donato, 2007). Hence, Americanization became the unity message for the Progressive movement. *Americanization* meant speaking English; working in one's proper place; and imitating the values prescribed by White, European colonizers (San Miguel & Donato, 2010; Spring, 2010). The Progressive era was one place to begin analyzing the bridge between Whiteness, English, and citizenship. For example, Flores (2005) wrote because of the rise of psychological testing that was normed to White, English-speaking youth, Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest were deemed “retarded” because of their “language difficulty.” Testing bias in

the form of language and culture is a prime example of Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of the linguistic terrorism inflicted upon borderlands people.

Regardless of the actual origin, ethnicity, or legal status of Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest, the "Mexican problem" became common fodder that fed researchers and school administrators interested in maintaining the status quo (Donato, 2007; Foley, 1990; Gonzalez, 1990; Villenas & Foley, 2010). Spanish-speaking, looking, and working children were, from the White, imperialist gaze, lumped into a racialized category as simply "Mexicans." Social and political institutions hammered hegemonic discourses for learning English and *only* in English. For example, as early as 1919, a superintendent of a large California school district praised the state's attorney general for upholding the segregation of Spanish-speaking children so their "special needs" could be met (Gonzalez, 1990). The decision of the California Attorney General became precedence for segregating students based on assumed language and cultural deficiencies, tracking students into vocational programs based on assumed intelligence traits, and reserving advanced coursework for students who showed correct aptitudes (Donato, 2007; Gonzalez, 1990). Hence, Americanizing Latinx students (i.e., making them White English speakers who labored) occurred by excluding them from content representation and instruction, tracking them into low-level classes, and narrowing their postsecondary trajectories into unskilled labor careers. Kendi (2019) argued taking away a cultural group's self-determination via institutionalized policies is a fundamental harbinger of cultural racism.

Undeniably, the growth of Latinx population in the state of Colorado from the turn of the 20th century through the post-WWII era was interlaced with the need for labor. After

WWI, sugar beet towns of the eastern plains, governed by the big agricultural companies and their substantive farmers, along with mining towns north and west of Denver, fostered the necessity for a low-skilled laboring class (McIntosh, 2016). Americanization programs in schooling segregation policies informed by White colonial narratives furthered exclusionary practices that perpetuated the oppression of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and people who talked like, looked like, or worked like them. For example, the Great Western Sugar Company built *colonias* (small towns) for laborers that were segregated from White communities. In fact, the Great Western Sugar Company erected the Gipson School in Greeley next to the *colonias* to separately educate the children of laborers (Donato, 2007). When an entire structure was not available to school Spanish-speaking, Spanish-looking, or Spanish-working children, it was common to have “opportunity rooms” in public schools wherein students with surnames hinting at Spanish ancestry could learn the English language and imitate White culture necessary to assimilate (Gonzalez, 1990). Rarely did integration occur, however, because by 1930, 85% of students who had Spanish language influence in their homes or in their names were in segregated educational spaces in the Southwest (Donato, 2007).

The Great Depression

The 1930s was an extraordinarily harsh decade for the Mexican migrant family and one of the most unjust eras for Mexican Americans, or people who talked like, looked like, or worked like them in Colorado. McIntosh (2016), in a brilliant (re)written social history of Boulder and Weld counties, documented the daily existence of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during this time. Although it was technically not legal to segregate social spaces, customary policy (i.e., de facto segregation) dictated separation in public

spaces, like swimming pools, churches, and businesses (Romero, 2007). In educational spaces, bilingualism came to be the root of problematic separations because educators and the public believed it was a barrier to reading English (Flores, 2005). Hence, language became a reason to institutionally segregate children.

Challenged in the courts by Latinx activists at the time, cases brought against these racializing forces were either thrown out on technicalities or refused to even be adjudicated. The complicated nature of racial categories being delineated in U.S. courts of the time was one reason for these legal stalemates; as Romero (2007) explained, race in jurisprudence is a multifaceted concept and is a “social and historical construct based in ideas, attitudes, consciousness, identity, ideology, and, most importantly, power” (p. 250). Scholars have more recently pointed out the presence of Ku Klux Klan members in local governing bodies as potential sources for the technicalities and dismissals (Donato, 2007; McIntosh, 2016). Vicious deportation policies as of 2023 could be traced back to 1932, when the Boulder City Council approved an \$8 per person fund for repatriation of Mexicans, regardless of their birthplace. This fund was part of unwarranted anti-Mexican hysteria that led to forced deportation of over 1 million Mexican workers, Mexican American workers, and their children to the Mexican border (Donato, 1997; McIntosh, 2016).

San Miguel and Donato (2010) argued even within a history of oppression and deculturation, Latinx people “did not passively accept their educational fates and either resisted, subverted, or accommodated the marginalization and conformist intentions of [their] education” (p. 27). In 1929, for example, a small Mexican community in Del Rio, Texas, formed their own school district, funded it, and held considerable control and

power until the late 1970s. In 1930, the first Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregation based on racialized characteristics (i.e., language) came down in the Texas supreme court case, *Salvatierra v. ISD*. In 1941, after a decade of arduous work in southwestern Colorado, a university partnership and a generous real estate donation made the first public high school available to Mexican, Mexican American, and Hispano students (Donato, 2007). In academia, George I. Sanchez, a leading education scholar of that time, admonished schools and districts for using IQ test results to judge the worth and aptitude of students whose first language was not English (Donato, 1997; Flores, 2005).

As Mexican migrants became more visible through the Bracero program in the 1940s and 1950s, activists such as Thomas Mahoney lobbied for enforcing compulsory attendance in agricultural migrant communities and mobilized agribusiness leaders to advocate for better conditions and schooling for migrant youth (Donato, 2007). For all his good intentions, however, Mahoney was fueled by a belief that education could “fix” Mexican under-achievement. The racialization process was subtle because well-intentioned activists still centered the problem with the person, not the system. The prevailing ideology of Mahoney’s time was one of schools having complete control over language instruction and segregating the Spanish language problem (Foley, 1990). Schools implemented policies that circumvented legal (i.e., de jure) segregation therefore systematically reinforcing the ideology of language and cultural deficiency in Spanish-speaking, looking, and working families.

Revisiting the importance of resistance and resilience in the history of Latinx education history, Romero (2004) reported soon after the end of WWII—as part of a two-phase response plan to address the increasingly ethnic and racially diverse student body

in Denver—teachers in the largest school district began writing curriculum to recognize the varied citizenry of Colorado. This shift led to a textbook that focused on the “trials and tribulations” (Romero, 2004, p. 78) of Mexican American experiences in Colorado’s history. The cultural pluralism germinated in the hallways of Denver’s secondary schools would grow the fruit of revolt in the decades that followed. The second phase of the response plan, the City-School Project, “attempted to address the high delinquency, truancy, and drop-out rates among the city’s Spanish American youth” (Romero, 2004, p. 78). Problematic in this project, however, was the framing of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Spanish speakers in general as having the problem, not the system within which they operated. Romero (2004) explained although some programs resulted in serious and fruitful engagement among stakeholders³, “some programs produced and sponsored by the City-Project educators tended to focus on Mexican Americans in negative ways” (p. 79).

A key component to the maintenance of White supremacy is the positioning of blame for failure into the individual and community being oppressed. Instead of examining the very definitions of success and failure, the individual or community is tasked with being the culprit of their own failure. Stigmatizing and problematizing cultural and ethnic traits that do not meet an arbitrary standard leads to being judged as inferior. When societies view differences among cultural groups as superior and inferior, this is what it means to be racialized by those traits (Kendi, 2019). The sleeping giant would awaken in the

³ These stakeholders included representatives from Denver schools with high concentrations of Spanish-speaking people, the Mayor’s Commission on Human Relations, the Department of Health and Hospitals, Recreation, Housing and Public Welfare and the Juvenile Bureau of the Denver Police Department (Romero, 2004).

second half of the century as large-scale social movements spurred contentious legal battles that began to openly critique and confront the White supremacy of U.S. institutions.

Civil Rights Era

As Donato (1997) asserted, “Conflict is the best word to describe . . . the 1960s” (p. 57). People from divergent backgrounds enacted cultural revolutions and inspired generations of Mexican Americans to challenge politics, assumptions, and ideologies that fueled the status quo entrenched in American Progressivism. Unfortunately, the plight of Latinx students, as Romero (2004) stated, “was seemingly lost in [the] integration debates” (p. 90). During this time, in the Southwest and California, scholars placed Latinx students outnumbering Black students by 2 to 1 (Rowan, 1967, as cited in Donato, 1997). Schools became contentious sites, especially in a legal sense, for Latinx activism; such activism was evidenced by the student walkouts, or blowouts as they were called by Chicax⁴ activists, led by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez in Colorado’s largest public school district. Addressing the issue of race and ethnicity in the courts, Romero (2007) argued “‘La Raza Latina’ has proven to be a troubling concept for the U.S. legal system to embrace” (p. 255) because courts have failed to “come to grips” (p. 254) with Latinx people as a distinctly racialized, non-White group. Judge Doyle, a Colorado Justice, insisted lumping together all minorities into one monolithic non-White group oversimplified the complexity of discrimination and remedies for it (Romero, 2007). In

⁴ Chicax differs from Latinx in that it denotes a specific cultural and political heritage of activism in the Southwestern United States (Delgado, 2002). I use Chicax to nullify gender binaries and also recognize the difference between this term and Chicana to refer to specific ideological standpoints.

segregation and desegregation litigation, the color line blurred and splintered in Southwestern courts ironically because these courts sought to precisely “define the boundaries of race, color, and ethnicity in constitutional law” (Romero, 2007, p. 256). Foley (1990) argued that the courts’ remedies for Latinx education inequities were to force even more control and compliance into the hands of public education institutions. The unfortunate consequences of this compliance mindset further stigmatized Spanish language as a barrier to “commanding and English vocabulary” (Flores, 2005, p. 92).

Donato and Hanson (2012) wrote extensively on how de facto segregation (i.e., segregating out of custom) of Mexican and Mexican American students in schooling policy and practices turned into de jure (i.e., legally binding) segregation. Long before the oft-cited 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, a fully developed historical context for segregationist ideologies existed in the Southwest (Romero, 2007). The racialization of Mexican Americans in some ways paralleled the rise of anti-integration suits in the U.S. South during the Civil Rights Era. For example, the 1969 case *Keyes v. School District 1* in Denver, the U.S. Supreme Court (in 1973) addressed the historically subversive ways that schools and communities segregated Spanish-speaking people and the people who looked like them and worked like them. Flores (2005) pointed out in the 1970s, public discourse became entrenched in isolating languages and warned of the dangers of mixing languages in children, arguing they would become semi-lingual at best and non-lingual at worst. Although Romero (2007) adroitly presented the failure of jurisprudence to fully recognize and alleviate Latinx segregation and discrimination, a case can be made that the concept of “tri-ethnic” schools and communities had a lasting impact upon legal and political discourse. The

fight for representation in legal discourse in Denver took constitutional principles of equal education and desegregation from the regional to the national level (Romero, 2004).

Because Colorado and most other western states did not have any constitutional (i.e., racial) provisions for segregation, it became difficult to litigate on the *intent* of an institution to segregate communities based on race (Donato & Hanson, 2012). The conversation had to be expanded to include other insidious ways in which schools and educators enacted discrimination (Donato, 1997; Gonzalez, 1990; Romero, 2004; Spring 2010). The Latinx community in Colorado raised the stage for other groups on a national scale to claim a protected status in law. This is to say that Chicanx, Mexican, and Mexican American communities were major players in the national Civil Rights Movement with regard to educational equity. Spurred by critical theorists in academia throughout the 1980s and 1990s, study after study illuminated the educational inequities that racialized Latinx students and their families faced, including no native language instruction, de facto segregation, exclusion from positions of power in local communities, and especially disturbing non-attendance and dropout rates (Donato, 1997; Donato & Hanson, 2012; McIntosh, 2016). On the legal front, organizations such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund were very active. These organizations lobbied, wrote briefs, and petitioned the courts to recognize the complex ways that Spanish-speaking people had been differentially racialized in U.S. society, especially in schools, and to remedy the issue in sustaining, creative ways (Romero, 2007).

In this historical context, the roots of educational themes that have continued to plague Latinx families for generations becomes evident. First, the anti-immigrant fervor typical of U.S. politics in economically tough times created the precedent for “legal” immigration with the passing of the bracero program in the early 1940s (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). This program was a binational agreement to monitor the movement of Mexican men who worked both sides of the border. The fact that bracero permits, which granted permission for border crossing by Mexicans, were granted to limited numbers of individual men but not families foreshadowed the unparalleled separation of families seen in immigration enforcement in the 21st century (Gallo & Link, Martinez & Ortega, 2019).

Second, the push-out of Mexican and Mexican American students began as early as sixth grade and was in full force by the time they reached eighth grade. Justified by majoritarian myths of Latinx families not caring about education and instead preferring their children to work, this trickling out of the education pipeline from kindergarten to 8th grade was evidenced by declining rates of Latinx student enrollment in secondary schools, even while their population exploded throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Donato, 2007; Spring, 2010).

Third, segregation was ingrained and perpetuated by redlined neighborhoods, manipulated school attendance boundaries, consequential IQ testing in English, restrictive language instruction programs, and presumed appropriate vocational tracking (Donato, 2007; Donato & Hanson, 2012; Romero, 2004; San Miguel & Donato, 2010). The hypocrisy of Americanizing students by completely excluding them is frustrating and deeply hidden in the narrative of socially efficient public education for the greater good.

Theoretical Frameworks

All theory is grounded in human experience. I understood the recently arrived Latinx students in this study to be a marginalized group whose experiences had been historically and presently misinterpreted by theoretical understandings that have no basis in their lived experiences. Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) asserted:

Rather than detach and compartmentalize theory and practice, many scholars of color and feminist scholars of color have called for theory to be informed by the lives of those it presumes to explain and understand. (p. 63)

I applied this sentiment by intentionally seeking out theoretical constructs built from and for immigrant, Latinx, and middle school students. Any number of theories presented themselves as potential guides for this work; however, as a White, elite bilingual, U.S. citizen with a deep understanding of racial underpinnings in education policy, I sought out frameworks that would illuminate the differential racialization processes Spanish speakers in the Southwest have experienced. In this search, I was fortunate to also find an approach to knowledge that rang true with a large range of Latinx experiences in borderland communities. This section details the critical theories I chose to guide this research process.

Critical Race Theory

A reconceptualization of critical theory, as explained by Kincheloe and McLaren (2002), brought about dynamic ideas such as (a) *critical enlightenment*, whereby theory could analyze competing interests between individuals and power groups in a society, and (b) *critical emancipation*, in which those who seek self-determination found a lens to challenge structuralism in the shaping of cultural and social norms. Collins (1990), for example, critiqued the objectification of Black women's lives and confronted ideologies

of domination that negated and made the powerful spheres of influence wherein Black women had choice and agency in the production of social and cultural forms invisible. Legal scholars coined and developed critical race theory (CRT) to reenergize the advancements made by Civil Rights activists in the 1960s. CRT helped interpret and bring to light subtler forms of racism codified into law under the guise of universality and conventional wisdom. For example, in the Southwest, Spanish speakers were differentially racialized by their cultural heritage and language and not by skin color; they were not considered a protected class (Romero, 2007). Not having a clear legal definition of race allowed local education agencies to legally segregate Spanish-speaking students into spaces outside the mainstream curriculum based on racist ideologies that deemed their language and culture a problem to be fixed (Donato, 1997; Gonzalez, 1990; Romero, 2007). Whenever systematic policies and programs are built around beliefs that differences among people are problems, there are racist ideologies in play (Kendi, 2019).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) defined CRT as the collected writings and scholarship “of activists and scholars engaged in studying the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) demonstrated racism was deeply embedded in U.S. social institutions. These foundational scholars codified Whiteness as a property that could be transferred; enjoyed only by Whites (whether they knew it or not); and as exclusionary to any form of contamination, be those language or national origin in nature. Romero (2007) demonstrated this latter point as he concluded even after 60 years of litigation, the U.S. Supreme Court still had not seized the “opportunity to critically examine . . . the linguistic netherworld to which Latinas/os and other non-White, non-Black groups have been assigned in understanding racial classification schemes” (p. 304).

This point was acutely relevant to Mexican Americans and immigrants whose citizenship and Whiteness had been intentionally manipulated throughout history to maintain White supremacy. Manipulating Whiteness and the privileges of Whiteness by people in power is known as interest convergence. When it is in the interest of Whites in power to maintain or further their power, subordinated groups are granted temporary and restricted access to this property either legally, politically, or socially. This concept met with Elenes and Delgado Bernal's (2010) assertion of CRT as a mother theory, which created a discourse of liberation explaining how race and racism impact the lives of disenfranchised, dispossessed people. In sum, CRT acts to critique structuralism with subjectivity, disrupt cultural reproduction theories with human agency, uncover interest convergence in political and economic institutions, and expose complex differential racialization processes imposed to maintain White supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

LatCrit

In a critique of CRT, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) implied that definitive splinter theories emerged within a decade of its establishment as scholars' purpose focused on the technical what-to and how-to of critical challenges that only diluted the problematic ways real people experienced oppression in different communities. Romero (2007) deftly explained, "[I]ndeed, a distinct Latino critical race theory arose out of [an] intellectual synergy and claimed a position for Latinas/os in discussions of race and the operation of the color line" (p. 299). In psychometrics, when a set of symptoms co-occur and become distinct enough from a boarder category, a new category must be developed to implement appropriate diagnostics, analyses, and interventions for the participant. Thus, LatCrit

branched off from CRT to better understand the lived experiences and racialization of Latinx persons.

Bender and Valdez (2011) asserted LatCrit functions to broadly produce critical knowledge, to anchor itself in community relevance, to expand and connect anti-subordination struggles, to cultivate community, and encourages individuals to self-critique. Because of the open resolve to practice self-critique, LatCrit has become significantly responsible for “rebellious knowledge construction” (Bender & Valdez, 2011, p. 196). As Cuban scholar Hernandez-Truyol (1994) recognized 25 years ago, the nonessentialist nature of LatCrit is liberating when it can “incorporate an internationalist, globalized, feminist, multi/cross-cultural perspective” (p. 921). Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) stated radical feminists were instrumental in forging new theoretical discourses to explain the intersections of race, class, gender, sexism, and heterosexism in the realm of critical studies in the United States. Moreover, LatCrit attempts to “connect with collective experiences, ways of knowing . . . especially in relation to the struggle for equity in the schools” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 68). These collective experiences are segregation, citizenship, immigration, labor, and the richness of home and familial values (Donato, 1997; Foley, 1990; Spring, 2010; Yosso, 2005; Zarate & Conchas, 2010). Figure 2.1 graphically displays the critical lenses LatCrit applies to educational research that differ from CRT.

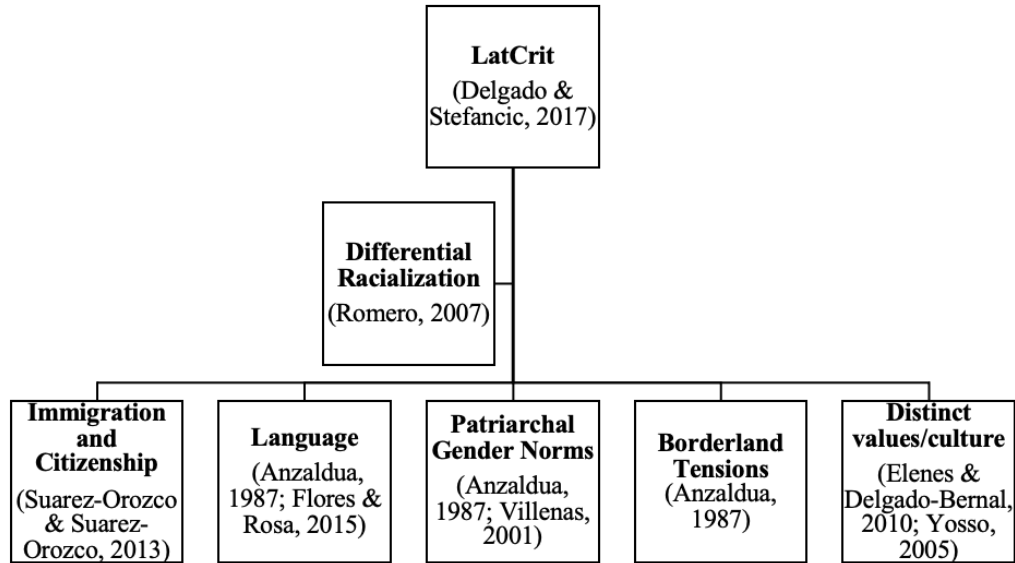


Figure 2.1 LatCrit Model

Note. This model has been adapted primarily from the authors cited with each tenet. By no means are these the only authors who deliver the messages of LatCrit scholarship, but these scholars were foundational to my understanding of the theory.

There are six areas that LatCrit brings to analysis of the pan-ethnic Latinx experience. First, the peculiarities of differential racialization that the Mexican American and Chicax communities have endured is not fully addressed in the Black/White binary of CRT (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Romero, 2007). Second, the impact of national and local immigration policies and liminal legality within the Latinx community is important, given immigrants in the community have often been the central, named target of restrictive immigration enforcement (Gallo & Link, 2016; Martinez & Ortega, 2019; San Miguel & Donato, 2010). Third, racio-linguistics⁵ play out in very precise ways, especially in the sociocultural landscapes of southern Colorado, northern New Mexico,

⁵ Racio-linguistic ideologies are those that use language to mark racialized bodies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). By setting an arbitrary standard of language, those who do not meet or produce the standard according to the dominant ear are seen as lacking and inferior.

Arizona, and Texas border communities (Donato, 2007; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Zarate & Conchas, 2010). Fourth, radical feminists of color have brought to bear the issues of patriarchal, heterosexual norms that oppress women differently, especially when complicated with their race (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1990). Fifth, the geopolitical and metaphorical borderlands in the new Latinx diaspora create their own set of tensions that CRT has not been able to approach for Latinx communities (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). Finally, the unique stances Latinx families have toward the realities of schooling in the United States are worthy of an intricate analysis when battling deficit narratives that push for Americanization, standardization, anti-bilingualism, and anti-immigrant policies in education (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010; Yosso, 2005).

Applications of LatCrit

As an analytical lens, LatCrit disrupts conventional understanding of what it means to be successful in school. Activist scholars have employed LatCrit as a lens to examine personal and professional identity in educational settings (Hernandez-Truyol, 1994; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Sosa-Provencio, 2016), identify familial values (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1996; Zarate & Conchas, 2010), and analyze how differential racialization appears in the deservingness of some immigrants and not others (Pérez Huber, 2015). Studies concerning pedagogy informed by LatCrit have examined notions of transformative educational experiences and empowering intergroup relations (Gutierrez, 2008; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rodriguez, 2011). Donato (2007) applied LatCrit in his history of the Colorado education system as he weeded out deficit narratives from the historical education of Latinx peoples in Colorado. Reclaiming the past through visibility is an essential tenet of LatCrit scholarship.

Another exemplary study that centered an anti-subordination narrative was Sosa-Provencio's (2016) work with Chicana teachers as the embodiment of *las Revolucionistas*. In response to marginalized students who "[cried] out for a healing, resistant, and historicized critical ethic of care" (Sosa-Provencio, 2016, p. 304), the author collected *testimonios* of Mexicana teachers' pedagogies rooted in intergenerational stories of struggle and resistance. Portrayed in this study and many others (Ek, 2009; Rosa, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999) was the heavy toll cultural and linguistic suppression bears upon the bodies, minds, and hearts of Latinx students and families. Through a critical feminist ethic of care, this *testimonialista* coconstructed stories that positioned schools as potential sites of hope for Latinx students in the healing nature of the battle for dignity and academic success waged by teachers with a *mestizaje* consciousness. Sosa-Provencio (2016) inspired hope and urgency in me as a White educator when they insisted the *mestizaje* consciousness can "arm educators of all gendered, cultural, racial, linguistic, and class backgrounds with the spirit of *la Revolucionista*" (p. 315).

Theorizing the Immigrant Experience

Before developing BT in the literature reviewed for this study, I argue why having a different lens to interpret the immigrant experience was necessary for this study. Acculturation theories have become so prevalent as to be assumed a singularly natural way to discuss and analyze the immigrant experience. Rudmin et al. (2017) stated despite thousands of studies that have shown conflicted findings and lack of utility, "academic's shared liberal ideology causes collective confirmation bias" (p. 1) that has led to poor social science. Acculturation theory began as a Eurocentric anthropological concept wherein a lesser culture would need to adopt a (new) host's superior culture to have

positive life outcomes (Berry, 2005; Rudmin et al., 2017). The genesis of the ideology can be traced to the Progressive Era when John Wesley Powell used acculturation as a descriptor for cultural imitation, thereby voiding human agency and complexity.

Acculturation as a research construct developed from studies done in Anglo-Saxon societies in a time of particular “ethnocentric arrogance” (Rudmin et al., 2017, p. 7).

Despite the highly questionable methods and racist assumptions that birthed acculturation, the concept has persisted as a bipolar continuum between dominant and nondominant cultures (Berry, 2005).

Acculturation scholarship is concerned with: (a) individual and group attribute changes, (b) the number of components that change, (c) existing precipitating conditions, and (d) outcomes for the individuals or group (Schwartz & Unger, 2017). However, the underlying assumptions upon which the entirety of the research was built remain intact. These assumptions include a binary nondominant and dominant group power relationship, the assumption that cultures are monolithic and have to change to fit into another monolithic culture’s standards, the complete absence of the contexts in which the cultures come into contact, and a stealthy presumption that someone can only have a certain amount of any given culture at any given time. Hausman-Stabile et al. (2017) confronted the notion of a monolithic U.S. culture in acculturation scholarship. The researchers lamented the lack of sociohistorical and political contexts within which cultural adaptations or rejections occurred in their study of Latina youth with suicidal ideations (Hausman-Stabile et al., 2017). Decontextualizing the Latina youth divested them from the complex realities of their daily lives and this serves to further stigmatize the person. Critical scholarship has suggested that acculturation is still widely researched

as resolving immigrant problems and conflicts, rather than as resolving systemic societal problems and conflicts. Critical activist scholarship, such as this study, must interrupt beliefs about acculturation and disrupt the unfortunate conceptual consequences that result from it. One such consequence in U.S. schools is the priority of learning English at the expense of the home language and culture. Another conclusion that acculturation theory leads educators to is that characteristics of Latinx immigrants are immutable and that all of them share common problems with assimilating.

In education and learning sciences, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) interrupted core assumptions “that characteristics of cultural groups are located *within* individuals as ‘carriers’ of culture—an assumption that creates problems, especially as research on cultural styles of ethnic (or racial) groups is applied in schools” (p. 19). The problem is that assuming there is a determined relationship between learning aptitudes and minority group membership perpetuates cultural racism (Kendi, 2019). For emergent bilinguals⁶ in U.S. schools, to essentialize their being based on a group label negates their humanity and nullifies the complexity of their historical, present, and future existence. Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) explained:

Approaches that accommodate instructional practice to group styles treat what is “known” about a group to all individuals in the group [and] makes it more likely that groups will be treated as homogenous, with fixed characteristics carried by the collection of individuals that comprise that group. (p. 20)

These approaches, such as one-size-fits-all language programming, scripted vocabulary texts, or prescribed standards for acceptable academic English, are tools of racialization

⁶ I adopt the definition of emergent bilingual from García and Kleifgen (2018) because it centered a critical idea that these students are neither limited nor non-proficient in language. Rather, students are capable and have potential to transgress binary, monolingual standards.

in classrooms (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García & Kleifgen, 2018). A solution proposed by many critical language scholars is to move away from and beyond reductive approaches such as those suggested above and toward a multicultural and pluralistic philosophy.

One such vein of critical scholarship in the arena of language acquisition theory has concerned itself with examining monoglossic and heteroglossic language ideologies. Generally speaking, monoglossic ideology holds that languages are separate, learned independently of one another, and have predictable application in a variety of educational settings. Flores and Rosa (2015) explained monoglossic beliefs as conceptualizing “standardized linguistic practices as an objective set of linguistic forms that are appropriate for an academic setting” (p. 149). García and Kleifgen (2018) furthered the explanation of monoglossic ideologies as those that compartmentalize language and even go so far as threatening to further stigmatize language-minoritized students because “the school language does not resemble their own bilingual practices” (p.76). In the monoglossic paradigm, there exists a standard version of a language that is privileged over others. This version in turn subjugates any other language or use of language as being lesser than and not important. García (2009) contended, “Monoglossic ideologies treat languages as bounded autonomous systems without regard to actual language practices of speakers” (p. 158). Understanding language acquisition processes through a lens of monoglossia perpetuates myths of superiority and inferiority that have complex racializing consequences for Latinx students in educational borderlands.

Heteroglossic ideology holds that language is dynamic and interdependent upon contexts, interactions, and actual practices of speakers (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Flores and Rosa (2015) called critical scholars to action around assimilationist approaches to

language diversity through implementing heteroglossic notions of the normalizing of multilingual global citizens. Heteroglossic language ideology moves forward with examining the truly dynamic ways people use and interpret languaging in their daily lives. It is a paradigm that centers human subjects' perception and production of language in multiple contexts and for diverse purposes. Heteroglossic language ideology feeds the strength of students' home language practices and strengths in various content areas via practices such as straddling (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016) and translanguaging (García, 2009). Most importantly, heteroglossic ideology removes stigma and hierarchical relationships in languaging for academic purposes. I argue heteroglossic language paradigms can remove obstructions and invite rather than reject “fully vested bilingualism and biculturalism at the individual and collective levels” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 180). Removing divisions among youth and their home/school language practices, as Valenzuela (1999) asserted, can be a liberatory or transformative educational experience, rather than the subtractive one that many experience as of 2023. Moreover, implementing heteroglossic ideologies in practical ways can validate internal contextual supports such as “shared experiences, interests, and motivations that people communicating might have” (García & Kleifgen, 2018, p. 54).

BT

It is evident even from the brief literature reviewed in this chapter that acculturation theory, and the learning programs based upon it, has been an enduring framework for analyzing the totality of immigrant experiences, trajectories, and psychosocial outcomes. LatCrit scholarship forces education researchers to approach the norms and conventions of all things; therefore, researchers must critically examine traditional notions of

acculturation to shift perspective. If, as Anzaldúa (1987) proposed, “ethnocentrism is the tyranny of Western aesthetics” (p. 90), then there must exist a counter aesthetic to combat the tyranny of taming tongues in U.S. schools. I hold there are alternatives to acculturation theories and language acquisition theories that could be used effectively and relationally with immigrants and children of immigrants in the education system. These alternatives could also help the education system acculturate toward Latinx immigrant communities by applying strategies and adopting structures that support culturally sustaining instead of culturally divesting policies, programs, and actions. One such alternative is understanding students and their families through the lens of BT.

Chicana feminists and Mexican American scholars who situated their experiences and therefore their theoretical understandings in the history of the U.S.–Mexico border region sought to explain the “conditions of Chicanas/os/Latinas/os living between worlds, cultures, and languages” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 72). Understanding Latinx education means explicitly integrating issues of race, class gender, culture, immigration and citizenship, and language politics as categories of analysis in the experiences of border crossing students. Anzaldúa, a founding mother of borderland concepts and discourse, galvanized scholars to uptake her insights of Mestiza consciousness to (re)envision ways of being, knowing, and (re)producing cultures. Although this review is not the place for a complete exploration of the profound impact of Anzaldúa’s passionate work, I highlight some of the resonating themes that became relevant in the analysis of experiences of recently arrived students beyond the stifling language of acculturation.

BT adopts border imagery and metaphors as language to critique the sociopolitical conditions in the United States surrounding Latinx people. The theory accounts for the

contradictions of straddling two or more worlds constantly—never being in one and then another, but rather all at the same time. BT centers the importance of a painful *herida abierta* (Anzaldúa, 1987), a political and psychological border between Mexico and the United States. BT is a decolonizing paradigm, as explained by Elenes and Delgado (2010):

[It] is a mode of thinking that emanates from Indigenous and Latinas/os multiple viewpoints. This paradigm, instead of accepting mainstream educational theories as the only acceptable mode of theorizing and producing scholarship, proposes to develop theories that honor and recognize the diversity and richness of knowledge produced by Latinas/os and other people of color from their perspectives and lived experiences. Borderland theories also speak to the experience of ethnoracial discrimination suffered by people of Mexican descent in the Southwest. (p. 73)

A key feature of this theory is the notion of active human agency in cultural production (Giroux, 2001). BT, because it highlights the internal psychology and the external forces that interplay within human experience, challenges racist notions of multicultural education emanating from neoliberal notions of sameness that seek to standardize culture and language. Although Giroux (2001) did not speak specifically of the Latinx conception of BT, he built on radical feminist works to clarify that radical education theory counters the neoliberal melting pot theories that relegate “the history, language, experiences, and narratives of the Other . . . to invisible zones of culture and borderlands where the dominant culture refuses to hear [them]” (p. 148). BT unmutes the voices of Latinx students through examining the specific realities of their lives in their own vernacular.

Anzaldúa (1987) explained that borderlands exist both physically and psychologically. When two or more cultures meet with their diverse language practices; racial and ethnic heritages; economic backgrounds; and, in the case of this study,

generational knowledge, there are multidimensional realities and borders to cross.

Schools are borderlands by this definition (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Fine et al., 2007).

I envision borderlands as physical spaces and psychological places within which humans reside. For the participants in this study, I honored their borderland existence by theorizing their interpretations via a border lens. I looked for and followed lines of inquiry introduced by Anzaldúa's (1987) conceptions of life in the margins and other scholars who based their work in a similar way. *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word that symbolizes a crossroads and straddling of realities, became both real and surreal as I began to understand the shifting nature of recently arrived students with whom I had crossed paths over the last 26 years. The depth of their courage and fragility of their lives found a platform in this study. Intrigued by notions of linguistic terrorism and taming wild tongues, I sought to employ BT with the youth I have for so long believed were silent and silenced in U.S. educational spaces. I wondered about the nature of *la facultad*, an ability to see through and sense dangers in both the physical and psychological world (Anzaldúa, 1987) and how these dangers might be expressed by youths in transition.

As analytic categories, BT informed a vernacular that encompassed myriad nuanced orientations to explore as students voiced their interpretations of reality. These orientations reflected ways of knowing, or *saberes*, and differed from Eurocentric conceptions of objective knowledge. *Saberes*, by extending beyond what occurs rationally in the mind, "help constellate an entire set of dispositions, including mental thought, and its interconnectedness to intuitively/spiritually understanding the world" (Kasun, 2015, p. 277). For example, Kasun (2015) explored *sobrevivencia*, a worldview

common in immigrant communities, in a 3-year, critical ethnographic study that aimed to help educators and researchers better understand teaching and learning with transnational Mexican-origin families and students. Kasun defined *sobrevivencia* as “the knowing embedded in how the individual, family, and community survive and thrive in their understandings of the world around them” (p. 283). Kasun observed and documented a spirit of *salir adelante*, meaning to persist, move forth, and succeed in the face of many obstacles in the underdog mentality that characterized the beliefs, motivations, and actions of the participants. Kasun specifically pointed to the underdog mentality as important in the way newcomer students and families understood their position in the United States, and concluded a dogged persistence was instrumental for both the families and the individual students in their skeptically hopeful pursuit of the *Sueño Americano*. Kasun admonished educators who do not take full advantage of the intelligence and grit that transnational students possess and furthermore need to embrace a deeper perspective of students’ lived realities to implement a culturally relevant pedagogy.

Applications of BT

Understanding BT means situating scholarship in a space, a physical location like a classroom, and in a place, a position, or identity that people occupy in a society in relation to their race, language, or role as a cultural worker (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Gallo & Link, 2016; Giroux, 2001). A compelling aspect of BT is the representation of Latinx culture and language in the design, data collection, and presentation of research. For example, Montoya (1994) used her *testimonio* to illustrate complex existences and the strategies Latinx people employ to survive and thrive in the physical and metaphorical borderlands. Cultural imagery such as *mascaras, trenzas, y*

greñas (masks, braids, and unruly hair) portray the shifting nature of the cultural landscapes under the feet and between the toes of Chicana/Latina communities in the *herida abierta* (Anzaldúa, 1987). A quarter century later, González Ybarra (2020) employed *trenzas* as a methodological framework that braids cultural intuition, humanizing methods of data collection, and Chicana/Latina/women of color (WoC) feminist theories together “to reveal intersectionality and *nudos* (nodes) wherein complex analyses can take place” (p. 237). An intentional use of language rigidly attaches BT within the local context and community. BT holds that critically approaching education norms, such as labeling students as deficient in language, unveils how these norms perpetuate mainstream ideas about race, class, gender, and language (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Giroux, 2001).

Unfortunately, BT has not gained much footing in K–12 education (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). When studying identities within borderland communities, education scholars would benefit from explicitly applying BT with students (Kasun, 2015) and the framework should be specifically elevated in the research agenda of PK–12 education (Fine et al., 2007). More student voice is needed in this literature. With this intuition, I conducted a systematic search of literature to discover the voices of students in both formal and informal borderland educational spaces. I searched for recent (15 years) peer-reviewed, scholarly articles in two databases, Education Database and ERIC, with parameters for elementary and secondary education that included these terms anywhere: borderlands theory or border identity or border intelligence or Anzaldúa AND Latino or Latina or Latinx AND middle school or Grade 6 or Grade 7 or Grade 8 AND immigrant or migrant. From the Education Database, these terms uncovered 75 articles.

Twenty-six articles were obtained from the ERIC database. I eliminated three duplicate articles. Next, I culled through 98 abstracts and eliminated articles that were essays, policy or program analyses, book reviews, annotated bibliographies, pedagogical in nature, dealt with teacher education, had adults as their focus, or had families/mothers as their focus.

This cut was significant, bringing the total number of articles to be reviewed to 25. After skimming these 25 articles, I removed those that did not have a school-based, student focus, such as Sánchez's (2009) exploration of Latinas' return trips to their homelands. Di Stefano and Camicia's (2018) study on transnational civic education reported actual conversations with young students, but was removed because the authors explained, "The primary goal of this study was to expand [their own] knowledge and understanding of policies and practices in Dual Language Immersion (DLI) elementary schools . . . where transnational civic identities [were] encouraged" (p. 17). Although fascinating, I also put aside literature that did not pertain to the Latinx experience exclusively, as in Teague's (2021) study of children's literature with students experiencing unfinished or forced migration in the African diaspora.

Recent educational studies that explored borderland tensions of Latinx immigrant students' experiences have been innovative in their design and have employed critical theories and methods to frame student participants as strong, hopeful, and agentic. The studies reviewed here honor the heterogeneity of the Latinx community, seek social justice, and promote educational equity. The studies reviewed for this dissertation were set in both formal and informal educational spaces, such as public middle schools and high schools (Ek, 2009; Fine et al., 2007; Martinez & Castellano, 2018; Mirra & Debate

Liberation League [DLL], 2020), an all-girls Catholic high school (García, 2017), an after-school tutoring program (Bussert-Webb et al., 2018), and community-based education programs (González Ybarra, 2018, 2020; Rodriguez Vega, 2018). Most took a critical ethnographic approach to capture the complexities and contradictions of borderland existence. There was an insistence on intergenerational collaboration between researchers and participants throughout the research sequence that deeply informed both the sources of data and subsequent analysis of the data (Fine et al., 2007; García, 2017; González Ybarra, 2020; Mirra & Debate Liberation League [DLL], 2020).

Examples of innovations by borderlands scholars were exemplified by employing critical ethnography data collection methods such as *testimonio*, *pláticas*, questionnaires, hobby essays, drawings, and art projects. The researchers became participant observers in multiple sites such as school, home, and church. Iterative data analysis and member checking were explicit, intentional methodological strategies, bringing the participants of research into partnership. Furthermore, the scholars reviewed here designed authentic ways for youth to participate in the coconstruction of findings, thereby “destabilizing rigid and distant approaches to data collection and analysis” (González Ybarra, 2020, p. 239).

In their intergenerational project to disrupt norms of debate competitions in middle school, Mirra and DLL (2020) leveraged the strength of youth epistemology to disrupt what counts as academic language. The group of 10 student participants named themselves collectively as the DLL and set out to use their own corporeal knowledge as evidence in immigration policy debates. This sort of power in student voice and youth epistemology (Mirra & DLL, 2020) was indicative of BT in research. Examining youth

epistemology, or how the young participants make sense of their world, increases the portrayal of agency within youth. In Ek's (2009) work with Amalia, a Guatemalan girl, the researcher discovered her resistance of Mexicanization of her language and Ladino culture at school, Americanization of her Spanish language at church, and pressures of imposed gender expectations at home. Amalia actively and fluidly "enact[ed] her agency and constructs her identity" (Ek, 2009, p. 405) in multiple socialization contexts. García (2017) discovered that the contradictions young Latinas face are not binary; through their use of pedagogies of the home, they navigate complexities and create a safe and empowering homeplace by and for themselves at school. Through their words, their actions, and even their art (Rodriguez Vega, 2018), Latinx immigrant youth expressed critical thought and hopeful outlooks in educational borderlands.

Honoring the heterogeneity of the Latinx community, Martinez and Castellano (2018) surfaced the gender tensions and differential treatment of Latinos/Chicanos and asserted this important lens because "as they mature, males experience a greater decline in their aspirations than females" (p. 380). Though not prioritizing one gender over others, there remains a lack of literature that deeply explores the cisgender male Latino experience. Although all reviewed studies treated the issue of language as important in socialization and racialization processes, Ek (2009) spotlighted the unique experience of a Guatemalan girl as she resisted both Mexicanization and Americanization in her language practices. Amalia lamented the encroachment of English instruction at her church and made metalinguistic choices in her Spanish usage at school with her peers.

Similarly, Rodriguez Vega (2018) took on delicate participants with children ages 9 through 17 by analyzing 150 drawings around the emotional and psychological impact of

Arizona's "show me your papers" law. The diversity of experiences with family members who live in liminal spaces or in communities where immigration policies have split or trapped families is under-researched and should be explored through the eyes and hearts of youth. González Ybarra (2020) pointed out that "there is little focus on the sociopolitical consciousness and literacies of Chicana/Latina youth" (p. 231). Through their *testimonios*, the participants in this study revealed their shared experiences of racialization at school and how they conceptualized their place in a larger sociopolitical context as the Black Lives Matter movement unfolded throughout Summer 2020. Youth voice has become more prevalent in educational borderlands, and more scholars have found exciting and complex realities play out in the middle grades (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Martinez & Castellano, 2018; Mirra & DLL, 2020; Rodriguez Vega, 2018).

As with all LatCrit scholarship, a strong agenda exists for social justice and educational equity in research outcomes. Fine et al. (2007) took up the call from the National Latino/a Education Research Agenda Project to trace sites of resistance and hope where "educators across the country are resisting and spawning radical possibilities in the borderlands" (p. 81). These international schools, which became the focus of Fine et al.'s article, are dedicated to the education of late-entry immigrants (the 1.75 generation) and directly combat the education industrial complex from becoming "border patrol agencies" in their denial of diplomas, delivery of oppressive curriculum, and testing that divests students of their linguistic repertoires. Like García's (2017) work with Latinas at an all-girls Catholic High School, schools can be transformed into homeplaces or "bubbles" by the power of student knowledge and action. These studies highlighted the

marginalized becoming centered as they find and create places to belong in foreign contexts.

Bussert-Webb et al. (2018), through exploring young children's beliefs about translanguaging, highlighted the internal strife created when schools push to learn English because of a high-stakes test. The authors demonstrated even when evidence of translanguaging exists all around students' environments and research has condemned subtractive language instruction, children are still treated inequitably and emotionally affected by this treatment. Mirra and DLL (2020) insisted academic language discourse is a racializing force in that it privileges certain language at the detriment of others; they argued if educators could recognize, respond to, and sustain cultural repertoires of practice, these efforts would contribute to a more equitable and compassionate public sphere. Negative messaging around cultural practices of immigrant students results in a *choque* (crash) which in turn leads to rejection and confusion (Bussert-Webb et al., 2018).

Still, language is not the only place where educational equity is contended. Ek (2009) explained, "Children have to struggle against the powerful institutional identities that schools impose on them" (p. 410). Amalia evidenced the idea of struggling against the imposition of an identity as she lamented how the school wanted her to be more competitive and louder, which directly contradicted her and her family's custom of *humilde* (being humble). Researching from a borderlands standpoint exposes overt and subtle inequities and furthermore, through exploring the agency and hope of youth, offers bridges and paths to social justice and educational equity.

The experiences of students, as they themselves interpret them, ought to be leveraged by educators interested in developing critical consciousness of their pupils. This dissertation, by engaging in the construction of *testimonios*, directly addressed experiences of recently arrived students in metaphorical borderlands. This scholarship is revolutionary because it involved the voice of marginalized youth in a setting some consider an under-researched void (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Cruz, 2012; Mirra & DLL, 2020; Salazar, et al., 2016). These young border-crossers have much to say; by amplifying their voices, educators may come to fully understand and appreciate the students' and in turn, their own humanity. In this manner, we become *emparejados* (empathetically matched).

Testimonio

Testimonio is the genre of revolution. Education research that concerns itself with imperatives (e.g., excavating cultural wealth, resources, and strengths of Latinx youth and families) is revolutionary in that scholars employ culturally familiar schema to Latinx communities. *Testimonios* present counterevidence of inadequate or inappropriate schooling by centering youth epistemology and experience as testimony for the prosecution of the dominant narrative. In what follows, I discuss *testimonio* in detail to present its origin and purpose, and describe the ways in which researchers have employed *testimonios* in various educational settings.

Testimonios are rooted in Indigenous cultures' oral traditions and are exemplified in the Latinx culture through traditions such as *corridos* (traditional storytelling songs popular in Northern Mexico) and written stories of resistance from revolutionary icons such as Che Guevarra, Simón Bolívar, and Rigoberta Menchu (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013).

Scholars have defined *testimonio* as an individual account of collective experiences (Beverly, 1989); a collective political act of resistance (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012); a tool of anti-subordination and praxis (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013); and a verbal journey, told with a sense of urgency, transforming past experiences to create a new present reality for the *testimonialista*, her community, and her audience (Pérez Huber, 2015). As a mode of counterintelligence, *testimonio* “offers the ability to critically historicize the body, mind, spirit and connect them to larger social structures and thus serve as a point of departure in the articulation . . . of border thinking” (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016, p. 291). As implemented in educational research, *testimonios* reveal oppressive structures, processes, and discourses and at the same time position students and families as powerful agents in resistance and transformation (Cortez, 2019; Lavín, 2020; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Above all, research engaging *testimonio* methodology has powerfully humanized the subjects of liberatory struggles and reclaimed the authority to narrate (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Latina Feminist Group [LFG], 2001; Randall, 1992).

Applications of Testimonio in Educational Settings

Educational spaces are borderlands within which Latinx students constantly navigate myriad identities and realities influencing their sense of place in the world (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016). Customarily, education begins in the home as literacy practices. These practices are culturally embedded and are often in discord with the traditional U.S. public schooling system (Valdes, 1996). After a brief overview of *testimonio* as a home literacy practice, I describe the explosive use of *testimonio* as knowledge reclamation and (re)creation among scholars of color in higher education and as pedagogy in a teacher education program. This section ends with an exploration of three studies that emerged

recently in K–12 education. The impact of youth voice elevated through *testimonio* in borderland spaces is highlighted in these studies. In exploring ways *testimonios* and research employing *testimonio* methodology has informed our educational practices, I found space for my research in K–12 public school communities.

Home Literacy Practices

Testimonios as methodology provide modes of analysis that are “collaborative and attentive to the myriad of ways of knowing and learning in our communities” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364). Cortez (2019) built upon this notion by framing *testimonios* as “bridges and connections created by collective learning” (p. 131). Cortez explored the intimate ways of learning and teaching that occur between *amas y abuelas* (mothers and grandmothers) and their children. Through *pláticas*, which are inter- and intra-generational chats, interviews, and participant observations, *papelitos guardados* (secrets unknown and untold) were made visible, reinscribed through relational storytelling (LFG, 2001). Cortez found relational storytelling to be knowledge creation and transmission in the home. Their study illustrated *testimonio* as a methodological tool that activist education scholars should use to reveal home literacy practices of Latinx families. Cortez explained how *testimonios* could be applied in structural approaches to parent education programs.

Another important counter-narrative study unveiling women’s knowledge and power in their sphere of educational influence was that of Villenas’s (2001) portrayal of Latina mothers’ resistance to the denigrating effects of benevolent racism. In this study, Villenas gathered bits of evidence from the community and school creating context for the mothers’ *testimonios*. Although the researcher’s voice was overly present in the analysis

of findings, the audience was witness to the impact of social attitudes that inform a benevolent racism typical in new Latinx diaspora communities. Witnessing is the outcome of good testimonial research. Villenas's research highlighted the home spaces and informal networks that became compelling ways of knowing, or *saberes*, for Latina mothers navigating and resisting oppressive systems such as health care, education, and parent education programs. *Testimonio* was, in this context, perfect for writing about "what we know best, *familia*, *barrio*, life experiences" (Rendón, 2009, as cited in Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367).

As an outsider who desires to understand and be a culturally sustaining practitioner, gathering and constructing *testimonios* with my students provided points of entry for relevant, relational practices in formal and informal educational settings. There is ever more need for the excavation of cultural wealth in the home-based experiences of students (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013; Yosso, 2005); this dissertation attempted to build that bridge by implementing *testimonios* as a methodological strategy.

Higher Education

A plethora of literature has addressed the experiences of Chicanx and Latinx experience in academia (Cantú, 2001; LFG, 2001; Montoya, 1994; Salazar, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This prevalence is indicative of differential treatment and subordination of the experiential knowledge worthy of influencing policy and practice at all levels of higher education.

Cortez (2019) made several interesting points about *testimonio* in higher education. First, she used her own example of revealing a *papelito guardado* (LFG, 2001) to exemplify how this knowledge spurred her to transform her own practice as an educator.

Second, despite the devaluation of *testimonio* in academia, she insisted *testimonios* bridged the disconnect between teacher and student by revealing, through the students' own words, the complex layered nature of *Nepantla* existence. Third, the *testimonio* of Latina scholars can foster community and cultural memories that enhance *sobrevivencia* in and from oppressive systems that divest the scholar from her roots.

Salazar's (2017) "Our *Testimonio*" demonstrated the power of individual testimony about collective experience because she used the collective pronouns (our, us, and we) throughout the first-ever published poem in an esteemed education journal that unveils persistent problems in anti-bilingual, English-only education policy. Cantú (2001) credited her survival as a writer and teacher equally to academic influences such as professors and feminist authors and to "my mother, grandmothers, sisters, cousins, teachers, *comadres*, *vecinas*, and all the women whose lives have touched mine" (p. 131). This passage echoed many other marginalized voices in academia in that their home community is the birthplace of their success. In addition, nesting knowledge derived from *testimonio* within the confines of academic discourse was powerful because it promoted the survival of marginalized communities in these spaces and encouraged critical self-reflection on the part of the author and reader. Again, educators and their students become *emparejados*.

Gonzalez et al. (2003) took a slightly different path in the education of future teachers, which proved to be a powerful example of *testimonio*. The researchers urged that *testimonios* be used as pedagogy to raise the consciousness of people who do not have sympathy for immigrants, "especially immigrant children, as they encounter an unfriendly often hostile educational system" (Gonzalez et al., 2003, p. 233). Recounting

their experience as a guest speaker in a teacher education math methods course, the authors stated, “the audience was not very receptive to [our] academic interpretation of the United States’ educational system” (Gonzalez et al., 2003, p. 234). However, when the panel of *testimonialistas* performed their *testimonios*, citing the bigotry endured as a result of their racialized, stigmatized, and stereotyped existence within middle and high school practices, the audience was affected. The students became embodied witnesses testifying to overt and covert discriminatory practices in the education system. They attested to racist nativism, colorism, misinterpreted reasons for educational “failure,” internalized shame for familial and cultural dissonance, inter-ethnic hatred, pattern of tracking into lower core classes because of “language problems,” and a lack of bilingual educational experiences. Gonzalez et al. (2003) concluded with a call to reach more audiences with the *testimonios* of immigrant children because “their words bear witness to that struggle for survival, and also to educational success not necessarily because of the system, but despite the system” (p. 242).

PK–12 Education

Pérez Huber (2015) described *testimonio* methodology as the bridge linking theory, method, and epistemology and noted the approach is instrumental toward helping communities “understand how social institutions mediate the educational experiences of undocumented and US-born . . . students” (p. 640). Although Pérez Huber specifically addressed the experiences she documented with Chicana college students, other scholars have heeded the message and applied *testimonio* methodology to the interpretation of educational, political, and social activism phenomenon.

One such study from University of Denver scholars, Drs. Maria del Carmen Salazar, Lisa M. Martinez, and Debora Ortega (2017), exemplified how qualitative data could be approached with a *testimonio* methodology to reveal to what extent in-school and out-of-school spaces supported or constrained civic participation of undocumented youths and their development along the continuum of traditional citizens to full-on critical citizens. Using access points from a larger study on Latinx youth, Salazar et al. presented the *testimonios* of six undocumented youths to evidence the development of critical multicultural citizenship. The authors explained, “we [used] *testimonios* in our analysis of the interview data to bring to light the wrongs experienced by undocumented students, to share their points of view, and *as a call to action*” (emphasis added, Salazar et al., 2017, p. 94).

Salazar et al.’s (2017) study revealed the invisible civic participation of undocumented youth, thereby interrupting how the master narrative of political participation is constructed through narrowly defining it as voter registration or party affiliation data. This work had strong connections to Cantú’s (2012) assertion that master narratives completely ignore “variant paths that Latinas have taken to achieve success” (p. 478). More importantly, these youths wielded power in by inscribing their own story into theories of consciousness development and the ways in which they learned to become critical citizens. Finally, Salazar et al. (2017) signaled another important tenet of *testimonio* methodology, arguing, “The findings are more than witnesses to narratives of injustice; they also provide lessons for those working with Latina/o youth in schools including teachers, administrators, and counselors along the P–16 pipeline” (pp. 101–102). Rather than just seeing students in a lens of linguistic deficiency, researchers must

understand them as whole, complex beings whose life experiences prior to being labeled as “non-English proficient” influence their present reality and how everything plays out in their everyday borderland existence.

Cruz (2012) recounted her numerous interactions with marginalized youth as an educator, community organizer, and researcher working with community-based organizations to empower youth in community “continuation schools.” She proposed *testimonios* are mediating tools to increase critical consciousness and thinking. As a teacher–researcher partnering with community-based organizations to implement *testimonio* practices as social justice curriculum, Cruz found this pedagogy created spaces where students could “talk back” to policies, structures, and systems that oppressed them. In this way, students became critically conscious by naming their oppression. She wrote, “to bear witness as a part of a community of young people thinking together is transgressing a stance of isolation” (Cruz, 2012, p. 4). It is a critical turning point toward full consciousness when an individual recognizes that their condition is the condition of their community, and that they can and should speak for their group. For example, Cruz’s own impetus for pursuing a terminal degree originated from her lived experience as “radical teacher, a street outreach worker with LGBTQ youth, an HIV educator, a community organizer, and an activist” (Cruz, 2012, p. 460). Speaking up and refusing to be isolated reflected the transgression Anzaldúa (1987) encapsulated in the concept of *la lengua de la serpiente*, or the *Wild Tongues*. I similarly sought to find seeds of critical consciousness in the *testimonios* of the middle school Latinx newcomer students, as this population has remained under-researched and therefore invisible. In my own practice as a teacher, I have witnessed the students’ power and was confident they can and should be

heard. The notion of spaces where youth can “talk back” is an interesting connection to exploring borderland spaces as being empowering for students.

Testimonios yielded powerful evidence to counter prevailing myths around the Latinx immigrant student. As such, youth voice should be lifted and amplified in educational research agendas.

Conclusion

This chapter articulated the historical context for this study, arguing that the silencing of Latinx students is a multifaceted problem that requires a complex approach by researchers interested in educational equity. This chapter detailed the origins, definitions, tenets, and applications of the theoretical frameworks that molded this study. I engaged in a systematic literature review for recent studies that used a similar orientation in BT, middle-school youth, to explore how other scholars have approached metaphorical borderlands in educational spaces. A literature review of *testimonios* in PK–12 spaces established a defined niche for my study. In the following chapter, an analysis of critical methodologies is offered as a starting point to clearly demonstrate my ethical commitment to the Latinx immigrant community. Within the analysis, I explicitly connect methodological choices to current LatCrit tenets of building connections and expanding knowledge base. The fundamental tenet of CRT, that experiential knowledge be lifted and honored as wisdom, was also evident in the methodological choices used in this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Dell’Angelo et al. (2014) stated, “The fine detail of individual experience must be understood as hugely significant to understanding any social phenomena” (p. x). The purpose of this research was to amplify the experiences and voices of eight recently arrived Latinx students as they interpreted their experiences in schooling contexts in the United States, thereby dismantling deficit narratives that have continued to constrain immigrant experiences. This counter-narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) was presented through *testimonios* (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Saavedra, 2011). The utilization of *testimonio* methodology was an intentional purpose of this research study. I explored the implementation of this methodology with middle school-aged students with hopes of adding to burgeoning scholarship that has deigned to harness the voices of participants in cocreation of knowledge that is practical, useful, and relevant to community. One overarching research question guided this work: How do recently arrived Latinx middle school students interpret their experiences within the first 2 years of their arrival in the United States and enrollment in school?

Because research was a moral and political endeavor, the choice of method was inherently an ethical one (Lahman, 2018). This study compiled *testimonios* of recently arrived Latinx middle school students as they navigated their lives in a public school located in a large suburban district (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2022) in the western United States. This qualitative, critical narrative study adhered to principles

of Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) scholarship with the imperative to dismantle deficit ideologies of immigrant students (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2013; Zarate & Conchas, 2010).

Table 3.1 aligns the research question with the aim of this study within the LatCrit and borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) theoretical frameworks. LatCrit surfaces issues specific to the Latinx community, including language, citizenship, and immigration, and calls for critical investigations of how these specific issues impact educational situations. Borderlands theory (BT) illuminates the physical and psychological tensions of border crossing in culturally and linguistically sustaining ways for participants. The previous chapter detailed the theoretical loom within which the various fibers of this work were woven to produce a tapestry representing the experiences of recently arrived students within U.S. schooling contexts. In this chapter, I present important hues of LatCrit and the aspirational ethics involved in the critical methodology of this study. This chapter contains three major sections: research design and methods, methodological limitations, and conclusion.

Table 3.1: Alignment of Research Questions to Aim and Theoretical Frameworks

Research question	Aim of study	Theoretical framework
How do recently arrived middle school Latinx students interpret their experiences within the first 2 years of their arrival in the U.S. and enrollment in school?	To amplify the voices of Latinx youth in challenging circumstances with humanizing testimony that destabilizes the audience's acceptance of conventional beliefs.	Interest convergence is crucial to the success of revolutionary movements and <i>testimonios</i> serve as a vehicle of communication between stakeholders (Aguilar-Valdez, 2013; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Research Design and Methods

In this section, I describe the research philosophy, the primary research strategy, sampling strategies, data sourcing and collection, and data analysis.

Research Philosophy

Critical Methodology

Critical methodologies examine assumptions undergirding the techniques and methods of traditional research paradigms, are innovative in their design, and explicitly disrupt hegemonic myths that perpetuate oppressive systems (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). As such, critical methodologies have “the potential to depict and contest the structural oppression often faced by Latinx students in schools” (Zarate & Conchas, 2010, p. 95). Historically and presently, research in the United States concerning Latinx immigrant students has presented them as being culturally and linguistically deficient (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Garcia & Yosso, 2020; Gonzalez, 1990; Flores & Garcia, 2017; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Zarate & Conchas, 2010). Therefore, critical methodologies are needed to advance wholistic portraits of participants that move forward the understanding of oppression and liberation in K–12 education in hopeful ways.

I chose a critical stance in methodological choices because Zarate and Conchas (2010) established that critical methodology is a response tactic “to contest dominant racist or discriminatory paradigms about Latinos” (p. 91). The Latina Feminist Group (LFG, 2001) wrote to explore the full complexity of Latinidad (their *testimonio*), an intentional methodological choice, was “a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy

of erasure” (p. 2). By not including the voices of students who are marginalized in U.S. education in real time, we as researchers are silencing their very existence. Cascio and Racine (2018) insisted ethical research in educational spaces with immigrant communities must respect their wholistic personhood through an explicit acknowledgement of their lived experience. This study provided a space for students to be heard and educators to listen.

One undeniable imperative in this study was to fight cultural deficit models that Whitesplain Latinx immigrant academic failure via parental noninvolvement, elitist notions of bilingualism, and Spanish accommodations in schools (Zarate & Conchas, 2010). Irizarry and Nieto (2010) described research agendas that challenge Whitesplaining Latinx immigrant experience in U.S. schools as a revolutionary act. Revolution requires empowering and situating the Latinx community as historically and presently significant in sociopolitical movements, thereby instilling agency in transformative events. This qualitative, counter-narrative study interpreted the lived experience of recently arrived, middle school-aged, Latinx students through their *testimonios* in borderland spaces and places. Because individuals’ lived experiences are valued as knowledge worthy of study (Beverly, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 1998), I served as an interlocuter pursuing each participant, or *testimonialista*, through various accounts of their life. This approach demonstrated an interpretive stance toward knowledge discovery and sharing. I further honored the *testimonialistas*’ unique realities by juxtaposing them within greater societal beliefs about immigrant students, thereby advocating in the role of interlocuter.

Research Strategy

This study sought to highlight a specific narrative style: *testimonio*. I begin by contrasting traditional narratives with critical narratives to highlight the imperatives of LatCrit scholarship in challenging accepted modes of research. Next, I explore diverse types of critical narratives to further validate the choice of *testimonio*. Finally, I present the origin and purpose of *testimonio* to aid in the justification of this technique over others in this study.

Narrative Versus Critical Narrative

Narrative methodology originated in the disciplines of literature, history, anthropology, sociology, and sociolinguistics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Riessman (2008) echoed the origins of narratology in ancient traditions while enhancing the original story with a critical perspective on how the “dominant Western narrative conventions for writing a personal narrative” (p. 1) privileges majoritarian perspectives of language structures at the expense of subaltern traditions. Irizarry and Nieto (2010) further critiqued traditional narrative research designs, arguing that these designs cheapen the language and culture of Latinx communities through restrictive language socialization practices. Critical approaches to narrative writing support the tenets of LatCrit scholarship through interrogating racio-linguistic endeavors in educational policy that set curriculum structures and discourses (Yosso, 2002).

A narrative methodology, according to Creswell and Poth (2018) “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (p. 66). However, narratives enacted as critical methodology engage the researcher, participant, and audience in searching for new findings about oppression and liberation through wholistic

portraits of human subjects. When audience and participant come together, the outcome is illustrative of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity refers to a shared understanding between human beings involved in social acts and acknowledges that meaning is based on a person's position and lived experience. Intersubjectivity is important because traditional education research about Latinx communities is objectifying and subjugates culturally sustaining epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). For my study, these were important points to consider, because research with the aim of educational justice must be grounded in community (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010); center the experience of individuals, families, and communities (Zarate & Conchas, 2010); and be validated within intersections of multiple identities and perceptions of identities (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Researchers organize narrative studies in several accepted formats (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One such format is chronological with an eye to temporal shifts and life phases, and another is thematic, with an emphasis on what was said or how it was said. Critical narratives emphasize the construction of turning points that reveal tensions; explicitly state interruptions; and present dynamic, complex relationships. The attention to revealing tensions and creating space for dynamic analysis creates “authentic, accurate research that privileges [the participant’s] way of knowing” (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010, p. 112). Critical narratives address key questions: “How do we bear witness to our own becoming? How do we define who we are? [and] What are some important turning points of consciousness?” (LFG, 2001, p. 12). Riessman (2008) adeptly described the plot twists of critical narratives as the lifeblood “that awaken emotions, such as fear and dread” (p. 3). Awakening the audience is an explicit aim for *testimonios* because LatCrit scholarship

seeks to catalyze change and raise consciousness (Bender & Valdez, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Collins (1990) described this stage of consciousness awakening as “getting shook up.” Anzaldúa (1987) also referred to a Coatlique state as a shifting of awareness in which bits of consciousness are slowly pieced together.

Types of Critical Narratives

Pérez Huber (2015) examined media narratives about undocumented immigrant students who are brought to the United States as young children and qualify for citizenship pathways via the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. These narratives were accounts written by journalists who selected a viewpoint and sourced data from intentional locations to portray a human experience. The intention of Pérez-Huber’s study was to expose how dominant ideologies constructed the deservingness of DREAMers. The author concluded no matter their grade point average, level of education, English proficiency, or status in the workplace, these children were never deemed completely worthy of the privileges of U.S. citizenship (Pérez Huber, 2015).

Garcia and Yosso (2020) constructed another kind of narrative through searching archival data and interviewing participants with lived experience in the realm of revolutionary educational movements. This critical historical narrative of early civil rights cases concerning the educational segregation of Latinx children examined official documents of the time for what was recorded and more importantly, not recorded. This (re)construction was deemed a revisionist narrative and involved weaving together bits of evidence obtained in court records, newspaper articles, photographs, oral history interviews, school board records, and historical accounts of shared experiences. In this

sense, the critical narrative served a purpose in reckoning and salvaging the past—rehistoricizing the Latinx community in U.S. history.

Counter-Narratives

In 1994, Montoya landed a solid blow to master narratives in the White feminist movement by using personal narratives to confront the insidious ways in which institutionalized power systems subordinated women of color and how “Outsider storytelling” was a “discursive technique for resisting cultural and linguistic domination” (p. 1). The Latina autobiography, for example, was used to reject patriarchal oppression and empower women to reclaim and reinvent themselves. Then, in 1997, Hernandez-Truyol used narrative to “compare and contrast normatives of race, ethnicity, nationhood, and language” (p. 885) by exposing the multiple linguistic, racial, and national spaces Latinx people in the United States navigate daily. Hernandez-Truyol called for a LatCrit theoretical model that did not subordinate their *frontera* (border-crossing) existence.

A few years later, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) differentiated between narratives and counter-narratives. Whereas traditional narratives support majoritarian ideologies as a bundle of myths, presuppositions, perceived norms, and “natural ways” of doing things, counter-narratives interrupt the collective imagination in specific places with specific realities of marginalized people. These interruptions poke holes in the dominant imagination, creating potential for new understandings. Riessman (2008) similarly attended to the idea that counter-narratives are constructed by the chronicler, strategically mapped onto master narratives to recover collective identities and correct shameful silences. Delgado (1989, as cited in Osorio, 2018) designated five functions of counter-narratives: (a) they build community by humanizing people at the margins of educational

practices; (b) they challenge the knowledge and perceived wisdom of people at the center; (c) they show possibilities for alternate ways of existing to people at the margins and imbue a critical hope for unification; (d) they demonstrate that by combining story and context realities, the sum is greater than the parts; and (e) they provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems.

Testimonio

Despite what Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) deemed an explosion of *testimonio* scholarship since 2000, the approach has received only cursory mentions in traditional qualitative methods texts. Perhaps, as Cortez (2019) asserted, this scarcity is because “creating scholarly research that uses certain types of methodologies, such as *testimonios*, has historically been scrutinized, challenged, and criticized from ‘privileged’ institutions” (p. 135). Creswell and Poth (2018) mentioned *testimonios* in the context of narratives as oral history, which they defined as a “gathering personal reflections of events and their causes and effect” (p. 70) and noted may be oriented in social justice interpretive frameworks. *Testimonio* only appeared in an appendix table for data collection in Creswell and Poth’s (2018) textbook. It took some digging outside of the prescribed university coursework to find *testimonio* as scholarship and methodology.

Ten years prior to Creswell and Poth’s (2018) textbook, Riessman (2008) discussed *testimonios* in the context of stories that mobilize others to act, lumping them in with oral history and autobiography. Twenty years earlier than Reissman’s text, Randall’s (1985) *Testimonio* guidebook insisted on *testimonios* as a method for collecting oral histories that specifically connect groups of people across various contexts, including industry and healthcare; older and younger generation, and most importantly, global revolutionary

movements. But it was Beverly in 1989 who first narrowed the focus of *testimonio* construction into a new research genre, saying, “One of these new forms in embryo . . . [was] the kind of narrative text that in Latin American Spanish has come to be called *testimonio*” (p. 12). For almost 4 decades, *testimonios* have appeared in higher education and yet this approach is still but a side note in methods courses teaching novice researchers.

As a methodology, *testimonios* document the survival and resistance of marginalized folks to oppressive conditions (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). To differentiate *testimonios* from traditional narrative and even counter-narratives, Pérez Huber (2015) summarized the important points of departure from narrative paradigms. Primarily, *testimonios* are first-person accounts of greater societal problems. Next, the narrator intends to speak directly with the audience and awaken the listener to their lived experiences within greater society. Herein the audience is transformed into being a witness. Finally, different from the outcomes proposed in counternarratives, the audience should be troubled and unstable in their certainties after experiencing the *testimonio* and motivated to action. In this definition, *testimonio* is a catalyst for interest convergence and a powerful, distinct type of counter-narrative.

Within this subsection, I have demonstrated the necessity of counter-narratives as the vehicle to achieve the aims of this study. I implemented *testimonios* as a special type of counter-narrative because of my passionate belief in student voice and student-centered knowledge creation. What follows in this section is the process and logistics of this study.

Sampling Strategy

Participants

Initial Participants

In cooperation with the community partner for this study, Northwest Public School District (NWPSD), I originally invited a purposeful convenience sample of 17 students to participate in this study. The inclusion criteria for participation were students who: (a) were enrolled at the site of the study; (b) had recently arrived (within 24 months) to the United States from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, or South America; and (c) spoke Spanish as their first language. The varied regional aspect was important because LatCrit explores differences between Latinx communities while not essentializing these communities (Bender & Valdez, 2011). Exploring *Latinidad* entails challenging a perceived homogeneity of Latinx students in educational settings and debunking myths of standardization and one-size-fits-all programing (Jones & Resnick, 2006).

A community engagement specialist employed by NWPSD presented the study on my behalf. As a trusted person in power, it was important that I was not perceived to be wielding undue influence over the students to garner their participation (Hernández et al., 2013). After the presentation, the community engagement specialist asked the students if they were interested in participating in the study. The students' answers were recorded as *yes*, *no*, or *maybe*. I approached the students who responded *yes* and *maybe* and clarified the study by answering their questions. In the following 2 days, I gained verbal assent from 14 students. I called the parent or guardian of each potential participant. The study design necessitated both participant assent and active parental permission. In this phone call, I identified myself as both a teacher at the school and a student at the university. I

informed the parent/guardian that an information sheet and parental permission form would be sent home with their child/student. Within 48 hours, I called each home again and reviewed the study’s information and the parental permission form in detail. Eleven participants began this study in late September 2022. Table 3.2 details the demographic attributes of the initial participants. All names are pseudonyms, dates of arrival are generalized, and regions of origin broadened to protect the confidentiality of the participants. A detailed narrative follows the table to enlighten the reader as to the significance of each attribute selected.

Table 3.2: Participant Demographic Attributes

Name	Gender	Age	Grade	Region of origin	Approximate time in United States (months)	English language proficiency level
Berto	Male	12	7	Mexico	3	1.0
Elizabeth	Female	12	7	Central America	12	1.8
Imelda	Female	13	8	Central America	3	1.0
José	Male	12	7	Mexico	12	1.6
Marco	Male	13	8	Mexico	9	1.8
Mario	Male	12	7	Central America	18	1.5
Mateo	Male	12	7	South America	3	1.0
Nivea	Female	13	8	Mexico	9	1.0
Nina	Female	14	8	Central America	9	1.0
Sam	Male	12	7	Mexico	3	2.5
Yadira	Female	13	8	Mexico	3	1.0

Note. Ages were rounded to the nearest full year at the start time of the study. Time in U.S. schools is given in approximately 3-month intervals.

Attribute coding is an important first step in critical methodology (Saldaña, 2016). The tenets of LatCrit scholarship expose the differential racialization processes for Latinx students including their immigration status, their gender, and their English language proficiency. Along with centering participants’ race, gender, immigration status, and language, an important aspect of LatCrit theory is representing and honoring the

differences in the increasing pan-ethnic diversity of *Latinidad* in U.S. schools. This study included a diverse representation of ages, regions of origin, length of residence in the United States, and English language proficiencies. The regions of origin trended with current statistics, given the number of migrants from Central America has increasingly kept pace with Mexican migration (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2020). Increasing the diverse perspectives in this study was the viewpoint of Mateo from South America.

There are no sixth-grade students in this sample although the sample pool included three sixth-grade students. One of them assented and their parent gave permission; however, the family later moved homes and withdrew their student from the school the day data collection officially began. The participants in this study all described *escuela secundaria* (middle school) in their home country as involving seventh-, eighth-, and sometimes ninth-grade students, as opposed to the current study setting, which included Grades 6 through 8. However, the dynamic of *escuela primaria* (elementary school) was still remembered by the younger participants in the study.

The participants self-selected their gender from the choices of male, female, or nonbinary. Without exception, each participant asked for clarification of the meaning of nonbinary. I explained for some people, their gender is more fluid and they do not find the binary categories of male and female sufficient to describe their experience. A similar experience happened when the participants were asked about the race or ethnicity of their parents and themselves. Only one participant used skin color to describe their race. Others interpreted nationality and regional origin as their racial category. For this reason, I did not code “race” in the participants’ demographics, rather their region of origin.

The English language proficiency level (E-LPL) for the students was determined either by the standardized, high-stakes exam called the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs), or by a shorter screener exam called the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (WAPT) upon enrollment in the school. There are six E-LPLs ranging from Level 1 to 6 and they are assessed in four domains: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Level 1 would be a beginning level, and Level 6 would be considered fluent in English to native-like proficiency (Wisconsin Center for Education Research [WCER], 2020).

Reducing the Participant Cases

At the end of the first interview cycle and after the first round of formal observations, it became necessary to reduce the participant cases I could effectively report. The time limits of the study and the resources available to me limited the breadth of cases that could be honorably presented, which meant I searched for a valid process to identify “telling cases” for further exploration. This process started after I considered the attributes of each participant, the weight of coded data for participants, and drafted narrative arcs for each participant. The narrative arcs included data from the first and second interviews, one round of member-checking nuances with the participants, at least one formal observation, and notes from the field journal.

Telling Case

Andrews (2017) conducted an exhaustive, systematic literature review of research that claimed Mitchell’s (1984) telling case concept to be a methodology employed in the research design. Andrews started from the premise that the “telling case” was a methodological myth. His research reviewed over 150 different studies and included an

in-depth exploration of the genesis of telling cases in ethnographic, case-study research. I concluded findings from Andrews's (2017) study were applicable to this study. First, telling cases were employed in education research and largely in language learning contexts. Second, Andrews found a pattern of visibility in the studies reviewed. The telling cases were chosen by ethnographers as those that made visible or illuminated theoretical connections previously unseen or not understood. Third, in Andrews's analysis of Mitchell's (1984) revelation of the telling case, he concluded the telling case relied on the quality of the analysis and the experience brought to bear by the researcher. Basically, any case means nothing unless it is competently analyzed. Andrews finished his discussion of Mitchell's groundbreaking work by summarizing criterion to determine if a case is indeed a telling case. I adapted Table 3.3 from enumerated elements offered by Andrews and then connected to this study's design.

Table 3.3: Criteria for Claiming Telling Case

Criteria for telling case	<i>Testimonios</i> of Latinx middle school students
More than illustrative	The informant has a unique and powerful voice that can be strategically applied as counterevidence to conventional beliefs about immigrants, immigrant youth, and educational policies/programs for immigrants.
Derived from data	Interviews, observations, member checks, field journal all triangulated.
Focused on a contemporary issue	The growing number of immigrant children and children of immigrants in our schools/communities necessitates an explicit connection to their lived reality.
Based on analytical induction	Based on the tenets of LatCrit and explores borderland identity.
Isolate circumstances for the manifestation of phenomenon	Classrooms and schools as Borderlands. Interviews specifically asked context questions.
Dependent on validity of the analysis	Researcher bias/lens explicitly addressed. Continual iterative nature of the coding process enriches validity.
Focused on making visible previously hidden or poorly understood theory	Youth voice illuminates complex nature and interplay of language, identity, learning, and belonging.
Neither typical nor atypical of the phenomenon under study	Constructivist epistemology refutes any sort of typical or generalizable case. Objectivity perpetuates ideologies of domination.

Note. Adapted from “Is the telling case a methodological myth?” by P. Andrews, (2017), *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(5), 455–467. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1198165>)

The first criterion for retaining a participant was good attendance. The participant needed to attend school regularly enough to be interviewed and observed at scheduled times to triangulate data. The telling case had to be derived from data and furthermore, there had to be enough data to conduct a rich analysis. This criterion eliminated Nivea, an eighth-grade female from Mexico. The next criterion for retaining a participant was an

ability to understand the questions being asked and give extended answers that could be richly coded. Without extended responses, the student voice would not illuminate the complex relationships between concepts. This criterion eliminated José, a seventh-grade male student from Mexico and potentially Imelda and Yadira, eighth-grade female students from Central America and Mexico, respectively. The third criterion for retaining a participant as a telling case was based upon the compelling nature of their insights and interpretations. This criterion was my attempt to make visible the poorly understood nature of theories such as the “silent period” in language acquisition and beliefs underpinning monolithic notions of Latinx cultural backgrounds. This criterion, combined with the previous two eliminated Yadira. I confirmed the elimination of Yadira, Nivea, and José from the individual *testimonio* case presentation; however, their voices appear in chorus with other participants through the findings of this study to honor their brave participation and vulnerability.

Data Collection

Three sources of data informed this study: interviews, formal observations, and a fieldwork journal. Figure 3.1 depicts the data sourcing for the *testimonio* construction. In addition, I created a timeline to document the data collection. These sourcing strategies were well-documented elements of ethnographic research and case study methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

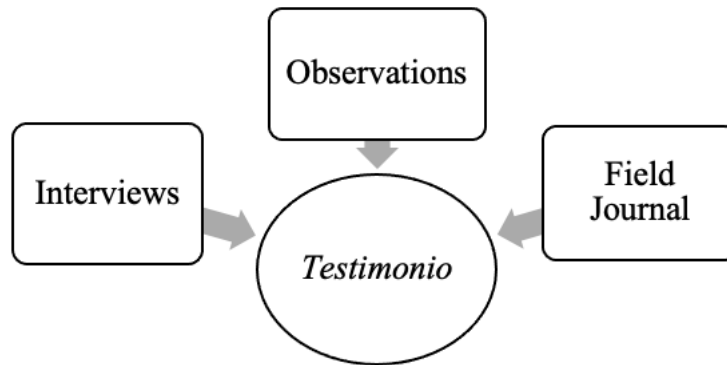


Figure 3.1 Testimonio Construction

I used Randall’s (1985) notion of pursuing the informant to construct the *testimonios* of the study participants. My theoretical intuition and professional experience enabled me to formulate questions and build trusting relationships with the participants. Once data collection began, my role as researcher transformed into that of an investigator compiling bits of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The transformation to investigator harkened to the notion that research is at times a mystery and through following leads and lines of inquiry, one encounters a story. The story then drives the research, not the other way around. Being an investigator kept me open to more possibilities for theoretical understandings and application.

Timeframe of Data Collection

Given the nature of school life and being a full-time teacher and researcher, it was important for me to have a structured schedule, yet remain flexible enough to accommodate unknown, albeit predictable events. These events included bad weather days, modified daily schedules, special events at the school, field trips, student absences, teacher absences, school safety drills, school-wide testing schedules, possible COVID-19

global pandemic quarantines, and any other number of professional duties that interfered with the business of being a researcher. Reflecting back on the calendar was critical to understand how the data analysis became iterative and informed and inspired nodes of analysis. Figure 3.2 shows the timing for two rounds of interviews, combined with the first-round observations.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
19 Recruitment Follow up	20 Recruitment Follow up	21	22 All Participants Confirmed	23 4 Interviews
26 2 Interviews	27 1 Interview	28 3 Observations 2 Interviews	29 3 Observations 2 Interviews	30
3 (October) 1 Observation	4 1 Observation	5	6 1 Observation	7
10 1 Observation	11	12	13	14
17 3 Interviews	18 1 Observation 2 Interviews	19	20 2 Interviews	21 2 Interviews

Figure 3.2 Calendar of Data Collection September 19 Through October 21

In the school calendar, there was a fall break from October 24–25, 2022. This 4-day weekend was one reason for the tight turnaround on the second round of interviews. Schedule changes and a variety of participant and teacher absences from school lit a sense of urgency in the collection process. Another reason for scheduling two interview cycles closely together was knowing the month of November would bring unpredictable weather and another week away from school because of Thanksgiving break. I surmised observations would be easier to complete than interviews given the predictable unknowns of November. Throughout the month of November, I completed 11 more formal observations. These observations took place in nine different classrooms spanning a

range of content areas including math, science, literacy, art, gym, and drama. Over the Thanksgiving break, the third interview protocol was developed. Member-checking and three more observations occurred through the first week of December. The third set of interviews took place from December 9 through December 15.

Testimonio Interviews

The first testimonio interview protocol (see Appendix A) drew on theoretical understandings of immigrant experiences, other scholarship using testimonios, and my knowledge working with immigrant students throughout my 26-year teaching career. The questions were informed by literature reviewed for borderlands theory (BT) implementation in PK–12 educational settings. In the second and third iteration, questions were generated from preceding interview data and observation data that present contentious sites for further exploration via the lens of LatCrit. Figure 3.3 models the interview protocol development cycle.

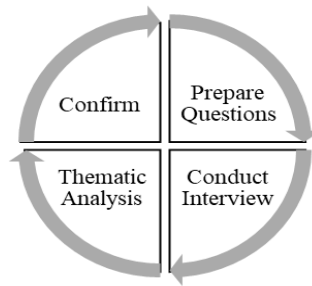


Figure 3.3 Testimonio Interview Cycle

Step 1 was the development of questions inspired by observations and reflections upon the theoretical frameworks for the study. Step 2 was the interview itself. The open-ended questions, guided by using provisional codes informed by the theoretical frameworks, created an opportunity for open yet structured dialogue. As interlocutors,

researchers have the responsibility to focus the questioning on themes critical to the creation of a counter-narrative, but at the same time must take care to avoid silencing the interests of the participants. During the interview, I made note of each participant's physical and emotional states—observing mannerisms, pauses and inflections, and outward expressions of emotional content. Coding these mannerisms within participants' stories added rich texture and depth to the *testimonios* and provided an opportunity to *embody* the codes (Saldaña, 2016). Step 3 involved the initial thematic analysis of each stage of the interview by webbing connections between data sources: participants, observations, and fieldwork journal. More detailed explanations follow in the data analysis section about how the second and third protocols were developed.

The interviews immediately became the catalyst in this methodological recipe. The participants' voices were instantly intuitive and illuminated many theoretical notions around the immigrant experience and the education of immigrants. The data revealed many themes pertinent to both LatCrit and BT. Chief among these were the importance of language in belonging, identity, and definitions of success. The contradictions between the participants' outward silence and boisterous internal agency became a central thread for the next iteration of interview questions.

In the second interview (see Appendix B), I pursued a line of questioning around how the participants interpreted their learning of English and content in different contexts. Table 3.4 paraphrases participants' responses. This table summarizes the immense amount of processing and agency on the part of the participants. In the next chapter, the individual *testimonios* unveil the complexity of each participant's experience with learning language and content. I include this information here because it is vital to

understanding how LatCrit informed the methodological decisions around the instruments (interview questions) that I generated for the subsequent data collections.

Table 3.4: Summary of English Language Learning in Different Contexts

Space	Learning English?
Math	<p>Watching the teacher, writing notes, listening to numbers Pronouncing numbers and words Focusing and listening, using translator app at home They talk in English, I listen, I copy. Math is harder in English, but the result is the same, English or Spanish I struggle with the math.</p>
Science	<p>Hearing English word and watching teacher then analyzing in Spanish I know about science so I change it to English Watching science videos and using subtitles Writing notes in English I learned science before and I translate in my head. Participating in labs The teacher uses more basic words and I understand.</p>
Literacy	<p>Asking other people what something means, friends translating Reading a lot and I talk pretty well. Writing stuff and then I memorize a word. Not much, gluing in our notebooks Listening and my friends translate or I translate. Learning verbs, grammar and writing in English I understand it, I can think about it Drawing pictures of words and telling what the word is in English</p>
Social Studies	<p>I know about history. We are working on computer and I use side by side the work and translator We are writing, watching videos, we talk English, you teach in Spanish IXL and we are playing games.</p>
Newcomer English class	<p>We practice a lot, talking and writing, like spelling Learning definitions, words, future tense You put us to watch videos, take notes, practice talking, take tests. We see you and we write in English but talking in Spanish. Well, it is English class and we practice English. It is <i>ingles primordial</i>.</p>
Elective class	<p>In art I pay attention and the teacher uses google translate In gym I translate in my head and focus myself on the teacher Talking English Watching others Drama class we read out loud and write sometimes, we memorize scripts.</p>

Space	Learning English?
Lunch/Recess	Talking with others in English Listening to others talk in English, playing soccer I do not learn English; I talk to my friends in Spanish I hear some English and it catches my attention.
Other context	At the stores I see and recognize brands, food, what the cashier says At church they teach like you do, everyday new words and verbs. My house I listen to music in English and read and see the signs in the neighborhood. At home with my niece, we are practicing English. No, only really in school. In restaurants, the food I am understanding this.

Note. The phrases are interpretations of the participants' words. Some participants intonated the same things across contexts and so they are not repeated in the table, rather included in a similar themed bullet point.

In the third interview protocol development (see Appendix C), my study took a minor digression. The participants testified to their experiences in many contexts and with different schooling experiences both prior to their coming to the United States and after arriving. Field notes and observations had confirmed and inspired many lines of inquiry. I decided to return to the scholarship of Gloria Anzaldúa and other critical feminists to understand more fully the participants' words and actions. From this process, an idea germinated around how the participants might have imagined school before they arrived, and how they might imagine a perfect school. I was still interested in cultural erasure and the possibility of hope in the participants, given BT scholarship insists upon finding strengths and assets of youth (Cortez, 2019; Fine, et al., 2007; Mirra & DLL, 2020). Yet, this shift inspired the creation of questions around how the participants might be holding onto their culture or seeing their culture in school. I was certainly observing cultural reproduction on the part of participants, not production of or for their own purpose. For

the notion of hope and strength in the participants, I asked them about being proud and how they felt when struggling at school.

Observations

For this source of data, I used a protocol from Aguilar-Valdez's (2013) *testimonio* study of undocumented high school students' experiences in science classes (see Appendix E). Aguilar-Valdez's (2013) tool enabled me as a participant and nonparticipant observer to identify social and cultural acts via what is said, done, and produced in various interactions. This tool helped establish patterns of adopting, modifying, or rejecting the data from interviews. The focus of the observation was on what participants said, did, and produced in the context of interactions with each other, the teacher, and the researcher. In this area of data collection, I fluctuated between a nonparticipant observer and participant observer (Zarate & Conchas, 2010). As a nonparticipant observer, I watched and listened to the participants and thickly described the social and cultural patterns they exhibited while in classrooms. As a participant observer, I was in the role of their teacher, immersed in the daily lives and experiences of the participants. This role was important to fulfilling my status as interlocuter.

I developed an intuition and applied that intuition in the process of data collection. The intuition was informed by extensive readings on Borderland identities and in the predictive abilities that 26 years of teaching affords. The interview data began to coalesce with the observational data and literally made connective webbing in my mind. Saldaña (2016) suggested qualitative researchers pay attention to routines, roles, rules, rituals, and relationships as they design tools to collect and analyze data. Table 3.5 shows the dates, contexts, and participants observed; I observed participants together in some situations

whereas in others, I focused on an individual. I determined individual versus group observation with two factors. First, a single participant was the subject of an observation if I needed to confirm or deepen my understanding of data from interviews or my fieldwork journal. Second, if the classroom environment was such that there was a rich amount of visible and audible interaction or a striking absence of it, the observation focused on all participants present in the room.

Table 3.5: Record of Observations

Participant	Date/ context	Date/ Context	Date/ Context	Date/ Context	Date/ Context	Date/ Context
Berto	9/28 Literacy	10/4 Science	11/7 Gym	11/10 Science	12/1 Math	
Elizabeth	9/28 Literacy	10/3 Math*	11/7 Literacy	11/10 Science		
Imelda	9/28 Math	10/3 Literacy*	11/7 Science	11/9 Science	11/10 Literacy	12/1 Math
Jose	9/29 Math	10/10 Art*	11/7 Science	12/14 Drama		
Marco	9/28 Math	10/17 Science	11/8 Drama	11/9 Science	12/1 Math	12/14 Drama
Mario	9/29 Math	10/18 Math*	11/9 Math	11/30 Literacy*		
Mateo	9/28 Math	9/29 Math	10/3 Literacy*	11/1 Literacy*	11/7 Gym	12/1 Math
Nina	9/28 Science	10/6 Math*	10/10 Art	11/7 Art	11/9 Science	11/10 Literacy
Nivea	9/29 Math	11/9 Math				
Sam	9/29 Math	10/4 Science	11/7 Literacy	11/8 Drama	12/1 Math	12/14 Drama
Yadira	9/29 Math	10/3 Literacy	10/10 Art	11/7 Art	11/9 Math	

Note. (*) represent observations where one participant was the focus.

Fieldwork Journal as Observation Tool

Along with the formal observations, I kept a fieldwork journal to document students' daily experiences in other contexts. Moving away from the formal protocol allowed me to richly describe the settings in which the participants operated and simultaneously make

analytic memos. For example, one entry from the fieldwork journal dated October 18 noted Elizabeth had made a friend outside the group of recently arrived students. I observed them arriving to Newcomer English class after lunch giggling and quickly hugging each other at Elizabeth’s locker. The memo around that interaction noted this was confirmation of Elizabeth’s desire to have more friends and her opinion that to be successful in school, one must “*sea un poco mas amistosa*” (be a little more friendly). Other entries in the fieldwork journal described the differences between students’ interactions and engagement in the Newcomer English class and the other contexts in which they were observed. I made a conscious decision not to do formal observations of students in my classroom out of a desire to fully appreciate them all as students and to not take any risks with confidentiality. The data were rich enough coming from other contexts as is seen in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Summary of Formal Observation Data

Date range	Number of observations	Number of contexts	Number of unique gerund codes
9/28–10/18	11	9 different classrooms; 4 content areas	130
11/1–12/14	13	10 different classrooms; 4 content areas	213

The process, or gerund codes (Saldaña, 2016) that emerged from this data source were informative and inspiring. A gerund is a verb that ends with -ing and can describe a behavior or a process. A note should be made here to understand my position in the recording of data from this source. First, Aguilar-Valdez’s (2013) protocol was created for and implemented during a 1-year critical ethnography in which they as researcher were fully engaged with students every day in their schooling experience. I chose and then adapted the protocol into this dissertation project specifically for the potential to

create gerund codes. As a teacher with years of experience in classrooms, I innately understood the need to record actions and processes because the recently arrived students had always shown many agentive acts in their learning. Aguilar-Valdez's (2013) protocol fit perfectly because it allowed me to document participant interactions in three different ways, attuning to what are they saying, doing, and producing. This protocol proved to be a valid instrument across contexts and participants. I was the variable in this instrument; for example, note the difference between the number of gerund codes in the first round and the second round of observations. This difference could be attributed to the fact that I observed in more contexts. More likely, however, is that I became familiar with the tool and sensed the power of gerunds to describe participants' actions and processes in a variety of contexts. My vocabulary also influenced the interpretation of the data here. However, through member-checks and confirmation points between interviews and fieldwork journal, I confirmed that what was documented was accurate and should serve as a model for others who seek to observe the actions and interactions in classrooms.

This section has detailed the data collection sources and sampled the results of the data collection. In the next section, I described the data analysis process to give attention to theoretical frameworks and reveal the possibilities for iterative data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis depended heavily upon coding language data. Selecting an appropriate cluster of coding methods depends upon the nature and goals of the study, the research questions, the data source, and the methodological imperatives necessary to the theoretical frameworks that guide the research design (Saldaña, 2016). I applied a cluster of strategies that Saldaña (2016) organized as elemental methods.

In the following section, I describe how I understood and implemented initial coding, in vivo coding, process (gerund) coding, and concept coding to analyze the data collected. Then, I demonstrate the nature of iterative data analysis as the interview data and observation data informed and inspired lines of inquiry and specific questioning strategies in the second and third interview cycles.

Elemental Methods

As a cluster of related strategies, Saldaña (2016) asserted elemental methods are appropriate for all qualitative research studies because “they have basic but focused filters for reviewing the corpus of data and they build a foundation for future coding cycles” (p. 97). As a novice researcher employing a critical theoretical framework, I needed a flexible and proven set of guidelines to follow so that I did not lose the way and possibly misinterpret the participants’ experiences. To remain in a critical stance toward the data, I needed a mix of methods with which to work. The corpus of data in this study originated from diverse sources including demographic attributes, interviews, field notes, observations, artifacts, and member-checking. The cluster included initial or open codes, in vivo codes, process codes, and concept codes. These codes are not presented in order of their application or importance, but rather as their function within the data sets and levels of analysis.

Initial Coding

Also known as open coding, initial coding allowed me to approach the entirety of the data, break the data down into discreet parts, and compare those parts across different data sets. Saldaña (2016) prompted novice researchers to use initial coding because it affords the opportunity to reflect and begin to take ownership of the data.

For the interview data, initial coding was done through listening to the interview audio several times and in every phase of data analysis. I never stopped listening to them. The act of listening and reading was a powerful strategy because along with the participants' words, their tones of voice and recalled expressions and shared emotions became patterns in the data. I visualized the participants and began to embody the interviews by reliving them. For example, Berto had a unique growling tone when he expressed something sneaky or funny. I would growl like him when I read the print of his interviews. Mateo had a way of tossing his head back and pursing his lips when he answered questions about learning English. I also embodied this mannerism when I worked with his arc. Sam was perhaps the most animated of participants interviewed. He moaned when he turned words over in his mouth, as if he was chewing on every question, and his mouth would fill itself up with answers before he articulated them. The listening became visceral, bringing me closer and more aware of each participant. I read transcripts as I progressed toward connecting concepts across data sets.

I typed up the observation notes and began connecting gerunds immediately. I made analytic memos on the transcripts of observations and used bright pens to highlight and then categorize the gerunds that appeared. The initial coding was more focused on the confirmation of participant interpretations and then on the general atmosphere and physical lay outs of the classrooms.

In Vivo Coding

Throughout analytical phases, in vivo and process codes were the foundational platforms of this study. According to Saldaña (2016), in vivo coding is especially appropriate for action research, educational research, and for beginners. In vivo coding

entails literal, inductive, indigenous quotes generated from members of microcultures and shows their unique contextualized experience (Saldaña, 2016). The research question directly called for participants' interpretation of their experiences, be they physical and/or psychological. Using their words recognized their ability to create and hold knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This process also provides access to imagery, symbols, and metaphors that are essential for rich category development. *Salir afuera, salir adelante, raro, a no olvidarse, a no me olvida de dónde vengo, entre nervios y miedo, el idioma inglés, que te matan por lo gusto, peligroso pero bonito, me falta la respiración, and son presumidos*⁷ are apt examples of the idea that the participants' language is powerful and describes their experience, beautifully, subtly, and brutally. The strength and diversity in which these codes appeared in participant *testimonios* was indicative of telling cases. Andrews (2017) stated telling cases make visible, and in this case audible, previously hidden or misunderstood theory. For example, *salir afuera* (going out and about freely) was used by several participants to describe not only their desire to “go outside” but also their longing for familiarity and belonging in a physical place. *Son presumidos* (they are presumptuous) illuminated how some participants described the way other Latinx people wielded power through their citizenship and English-language proficiency.

Process Coding

Process coding, or action coding, uses gerunds to describe simple, observable behaviors (e.g., eating, yelling, gripping) and general conceptual activity (e.g., coping,

⁷ Translation is offered here: to go out and about, to persevere and move on, strange or weird, to not forget yourself, to not forget where I come from, between nervous and afraid, the English language, they kill you for the fun of it, dangerous but beautiful, I lose my breath, and they are presumptuous.

resisting, engaging). Process coding revealed routines and rituals in the physical, emotional, and psychological world. Because a principal aim of this study was to identify, from the point of view of the participants, the process of adjusting to their new context, then process coding was necessary because it led to “what slows, impedes, or accelerates the process, and under what conditions the process changes” (Charmaz 2014, as cited in Saldaña, 2016, p. 114). Process codes were applied in the observation data. These codes, or gerunds, were insightful because they both confirmed participant interpretations of their learning and identity in schooling contexts and inspired lines of inquiry to be taken up in subsequent interviews. The sheer magnitude of them was instrumental in the formation of an understanding of the mythical nature of a pre-production or silent period in language acquisition theory. Combining both in vivo and process coding as analysis of direct language-based data served the critical stance in this study.

Concept Coding

As a transition step to be employed in the formation of findings for the study, I clustered and condensed initial codes, in vivo codes, and process codes into concept codes. These concepts were critical to the iterations of interview questions and contexts observed. Concept coding applies to diverse sources of data and was appropriate for macro-level analysis in this study. I sensed this coding would be particularly important to the presentation of findings in larger sociocultural discourses. Saldaña (2016) explained concept coding bypasses details and is transcendent toward the larger picture. Informed by the tenets of LatCrit and BT, I imagined the bigger picture included attitudes toward language, citizenship, immigration, deculturation, resilience, and resistance. Concept

coding the entire corpus of data is how I began to pull threads together and display themes in manageable chunks for myself and the audience. As a check on the potential for bias in my interpretations, I meticulously confirmed concepts, or themes, in the data with in vivo codes and process codes from the data. This confirmation is reflected in the next chapter, as the themes explored are consistently backed up by participant *testimonio*.

Analytic Memo Writing

Saldaña (2016) proposed researchers follow guideposts when coding data, realizing that each analytic approach is unique. For this study, and for myself as a novice researcher, I tried to keep detail of coding decisions and thoughts to identify and reflect on my positionality. This detail level added rigor to the study, requiring systematic analytic memo writing. I selected Saldaña's definition and framework for structure, which served as a transitional process that contributed to intuition, informed hunches, and serendipitous occurrences. Analytic memos aided me in "working away from a problem and toward a solution" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44). Analytic memo writing served to illuminate relations between themes, empathetically connect with participants, reveal biases and positionality, and explain intuition and hunches.

Iterative Analysis

In this section, I present a narrative summary of how iterative data analysis played out in the first cycle of interviews and observations to both inform nodes of analysis and inspire further lines of inquiry. This approach enhanced the dependability of the data as well as the validity of the instruments used to collect that data. Instrumentation is a crucial component of the validity equation in all research (Billups, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I desire the reader to know how the questions were derived and the

observation contexts chosen and navigated through my commitment to a critical stance informed by tenets of Lat Crit. Iterative data analysis such as demonstrated here served to mitigate limitations in this study around my positionality and the dependability of the participants interpretations. Table 3.7 summarizes and shows the key ideas in this process.

Table 3.7: Iterative Data Analysis Process

Date and context	Participants observed	Revealed	Informed or inspired
9/28 Literacy Class	Elizabeth and Berto	School success behaviors <i>and</i> dynamic peer relationships	Confirmed school success beliefs/behaviors <i>and</i> How does language layer into identity and learning in different contexts?
9/28 Math	Marco, Imelda, Mateo, and Berto	Learning content <i>and</i> collaborating	L1 and prior knowledge <i>and</i> context literacy
10/3 Literacy	Imelda and Yadira	Agency <i>and</i> adapting	Identity comparison <i>and</i> experience comparison
10/4 Science	Sam and Berto	Translanguaging, collaborating, <i>and</i> technology	Spanish is not a resource? Learning English in contexts, <i>and</i> collaborating with peers
10/10 Art	Jose, Nina, Yadira	Responsive to feedback <i>and</i> forming relationships	Confirmed comfortable/favorites. How do they know their grades/progress? Feel seen, heard, accepted?

Note. This table illustrates a sample of the data collected and analyzed and does not represent every connective tissue that formed in the analysis.

Narrative Summary

Table 3.7 summarizes how interview and observation data wove together to inform the words and actions of the participants and inspire questions for the next interview cycles. Combing through field notes using a lens to reflect what the participants testified and what the observations revealed also offered a unique triangulation node.

From the 130 unique gerund codes recorded in the 11 observations in the first round of observations, it quickly became apparent that the participants were experiencing their schooling in dynamic ways. For example, in the first interview, Elizabeth and nine other participants insisted paying attention to the teacher was important to being successful in school. All participants reported the most important thing for school this year was to learn English. Paying attention and learning English were confirmed by the codes writing, complying, taking notes, listening, attempting, watching (the teacher), and looking at (the plot map and television). What also emerged in this observation was the idea of imitating. As seen in Figure 3.4, Elizabeth's note taking was precise and almost perfectly copied the teacher's notes. During iterative analysis, participants reported certain behaviors as important to school success and then observations deemed they were enacting these behaviors. The field notes, however, showed me wondering who was really teaching the participants: peers, google translate, or the teacher?

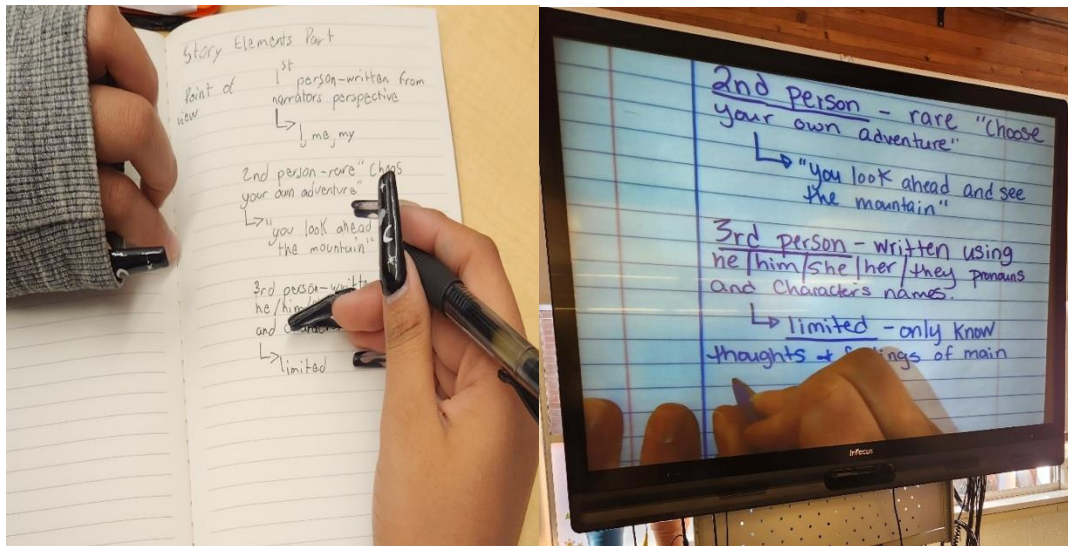


Figure 3.4: Comparison of Elizabeth and Teacher Notebooks

I became quite intrigued by the notion of mimic and imitate. Is this how the participants were learning English? Learning English was clearly the number one goal of all participants interviewed; further exploration of how they thought they were learning English was going to be necessary. I did not wish to place meaning upon the participants and so I made it a point to focus on their interpretations of learning English and learning in English in the subsequent interviews. I even made a chart to capture their answers methodically.

In an observation from September 28, Berto embodied his verbal interpretation from the first interview of experiencing new friendships and seeking out bilingual friends to help him understand. The gerund codes from this observation included asking for help (peer), looking at (his friend's paper), reading (in English and Spanish), and writing. Interestingly, Berto made a point of consulting with a bilingual peer. He did not ask for help from Sam, another recently arrived student, who was sitting at the same table. As his peer translated, I explained a plot map that had terms like rising action, climax, and

resolution on it. It was clear the meaning of the terms was unclear to Berto. From this observation, I decided to explore the identity of the participants as students and how the complexity of language and learning might be interpreted in their words. Questions were formulated for the second interview to explore their feelings around language learning, as language is a constant presence in borderlands scholarship (Bussert-Webb, et al., 2018; Cruz, 2012; Gallo & Link, 2016).

An observation of Sam and Berto on October 4 also demonstrates how I compiled and synthesized data into continuous cycles. This observation was also informative on the dynamic, contextual nature of how participants interacted with each other. In the previous observation, Berto and Sam, although sitting together, did not interact; they did interact in a seventh-grade science class where the teacher assigned the students to collaborative groups in which they were to research a planet, design a collaborative slide deck via Google slides application, and then present the show to another group. Sam and Berto, along with their non-Spanish-speaking peer, worked synergistically to complete the prescribed slide deck. The codes from this observation included collaborating, stylizing, designing, translanguaging, bridging (languages through content), negotiating, googling, speaking Spanish and typing English, engaging, animating (slides), comparing, checking (translations), talking, and sharing. These data accumulated into more curiosity about how the participants felt like they were learning English and science.

Most importantly, this observation confused me as to why the students did not see their Spanish as a resource in learning content. An analytic memo reads “so much language here! Why don’t they see L1 as a resource?” I consequently designed questions around identity and being seen and heard from this interaction because the non-Spanish-

speaking peer translated their work into Spanish so that all could understand. Did the participants realize recognition by others, and were they being seen and heard like this in other contexts? The absence of participant awareness of the observed strength and utility of their home language was a point of tension, as the participants reported their Spanish language was only a resource for them if they knew enough English to translate. Yet they embodied so much language negotiation that it propelled another peer to join in. I wanted to further explore the notion of participant use of Spanish in their everyday experiences at school and therefore asked the participants directly about other contexts, such as recess and lunch and in the hallways.

This short narrative explaining how I employed iterative data analysis serves to ensure the study's credibility. It is important to acknowledge how ideas were informed by LatCrit and BT and then turned into analyses of data, especially given my positionality as a long-time teacher and outsider to the inner workings of the participants' world views.

Methodological Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

The previous sections of the chapter justified the use of *testimonios* as a critical counter-narrative methodology for this study's context and aims. I thoroughly detailed the participant sampling process, along with the data sourcing and analysis. These elements of the design were aligned with the research question and connected to tenets of LatCrit scholarship. In the following section, I discuss methodological limitations and the mitigation of those limitations within the research design and implementation.

Researcher Positionality

It is important not to underestimate the influence, power, and control that a researcher's positionality has in shaping all aspects of the research process (Aguilar-

Valdez, 2013; Hernández et al., 2013; Machin & Shardlow, 2018; Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013; Milner, 2007). Milner (2007) asserted researchers do not have to be from or of the community “under study;” rather they should be “actively engaged, thoughtful and forthright regarding tensions that can surface when conducting research where issue of race and culture are concerned” (p. 388). Such engagement begins with an understanding that if researchers are not mindful of the impact of their own racialized positionality and ways of knowing, the effects of this ignorance can be dangerous to marginalized communities (Hernández et al., 2013). With this principle in mind, I begin a discussion of my own positionality in this study.

I am a White, middle-class, elite bilingual, cisgendered lesbian woman who was born in the United States. I have worked and lived my entire life within 50 miles of my childhood home. For 26 years, I have taught in urban public secondary schools. As an educator, I have held various roles in the system. I served 20 years as a soccer coach. I have designed and implemented district-wide professional development for best practices and equity in instruction for emergent bilinguals and multilingual learners. I have directed and taught in numerous newcomer programs and facilitated in regular mainstream programs. I have been an instructional coach and coteacher in myriad educational settings. During Summer 2009, I managed a 1 million-dollar grant from the state of Colorado to improve the literacy skills of emergent bilinguals in our district. I see myself as an advocate for equity while also being complicit in systems that have oppressed and deculturized people of color in the name of assimilation and raising academic achievement.

It is not lost on me that I am the “white lady that speaks Spanish” to most folks when they first meet me; here and now in the elder phase of my life, I aspire to be antiracist and use my privilege and position as a researcher to demonstrate the complexity and power of youth voice in their journey to become. Kasun (2015), in working as a White woman within marginalized communities, adeptly captured my sentiment as she confessed, “I still need to learn from frameworks that explore territories not germane to my embodied experience as a bilingual white person” (p. 281). Beyond simply understanding and stating my position and privilege, I have decided it is not enough to just teach. Educators must become activists, not activisors in the lives of our immigrant students and families. In my personal and academic life, I mitigate my privileged and White positionality by following Milner’s (2007) framework for working through the dangers and perils of research with racialized and vulnerable communities. The framework guides all researchers regardless of perceived etic or emic perspective to continually research the self, research the self in relation to others, be engaged in reflection and representation, and shift from self to system. This process prepared me to critically examine how I entered the space of this study, remember who I was in the context of this study, and determine how I exited this space. My positionality plays a significant role in the methodological limitations of the study; however, I planned mitigation strategies for these limitations. The limitations of this study are discussed next as cultural intuition, language, teacher–student power dynamics, and practical constraints. Table 3.8 summarizes these methodological challenges and the corresponding strategies in place to mitigate them.

Table 3.8: Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

Limitation	Description	Mitigation strategy
Cultural intuition	Cultural, racial outsider Lack ancestral knowledge	Theoretical sensitivity Experiential wisdom Analytic memo writing Audit trail- <i>engaged reflection</i>
Language	My Spanish fluency is situational and applies mostly to Mexican/global North dialects. Working in both languages takes more time. When interviewing and interacting in Spanish I can miss opportunities	Professional interpretation of nuances InVivo coding and analytic memo writing Organized and flexible with my life during the time frame of this study Audit Trail- <i>engaged reflection</i> and <i>translation/interpretations</i> Iterative data analysis along with <i>pláticas</i> to clarify meanings
Teacher–student power dynamic	Informants hide/embellish details. Perceived coercion Confidentiality with informant	Validity of qualitative research framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018) Clear and constant reference to informed consent Informants as collaborators Audit trail- <i>engaged reflection</i>
Practical constraints	Time Daily school-related disruptions Mobility of population	Organize timeline to be flexible and plan to pivot. Be proactive; plan ahead. Close contact with families

Cultural Intuition

Delgado Bernal (1998) codified the deep somatic and psychological feelings that exist within critical feminist researchers as *cultural intuition*. Chicana scholars and research involving the Chicana experience have often cited the use of cultural intuition as an embodied theoretical lens with which to analyze data, compile results, and report findings. As a White woman, I fully acknowledge my lack of cultural intuition in this study. The communal and ancestral knowledge does not live in my corporal experience. To mitigate this fault, I have continued to develop a theoretical sensitivity (Corbin &

Strauss, 1990). The strongest aspect of this sensitivity has come from 26 years of professional experience with immigrant communities and their teachers in the field of education. My professional experience is followed closely with the access I have gained by being fluent in Spanish and culturally proficient beyond foods, festivals, and dress. Furthermore, though I had just begun the formal analytical research process, I believe I chose an appropriate theoretical framework to guide the choice of literature throughout this project. Enacting LatCrit and BT has proven to be not only an appropriate choice to guide this work, but also to illuminate lines of inquiry that might be subsumed in traditional educational research. To specifically address the limitation of my positionality, I enacted a process of engaged reflection in the audit trail. This process included reflecting upon my actions and interactions with the participants in this study as both their teacher and as a researcher. I kept record of nuances that applied to my interpretations and choices in the timeframe of the study. The reflections allowed me to be responsive to changing codes and themes as I progressed.

Language

I made an ethical choice to conduct research with participants who do not speak English (Capps & Fix, 2013; Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013). In doing so, I answered the call for research that spurs social justice by challenging ideologies that perpetuate oppression by listening and talking with those with the lived experience. Moreover, because it was imperative to use participants' words, language, and worldview to reach them, I leveraged my bilingualism to amplify their voices. To mitigate the lack of native fluency, I planned for professional interpretation of informed consent documents. Although I was confident that I could interpret the majority of raw data collected, I knew

that nuances of meaning would escape me. In these instances, I made marginal notes, consulted cultural and language brokers, confirmed with participants, and went beyond digital translating software to explore idiomatic phrases. In two pilot narrative studies, I gained invaluable experience with how to conduct interviews in another language and how to clean the transcripts. Building in the notion of *pláticas* also gave me an avenue to clarify and confirm understandings with the participants, further adding to the credibility of the results.

Teacher–Student Power Dynamic

As threats to credibility go, the teacher–student power dynamic was the strongest in this study. I anticipated that participants would naturally embellish or hide details of their story. In constructivist epistemologies, this is an accepted part of de-objectifying knowledge. I wanted to make sure, however, that I did not subjugate the participants’ realities but rather confirmed their complexities. This meant triangulating data through formal observations, fieldwork journaling, interviews, and member checking with participants in each analysis phase of the *testimonio* interviews. Collaborating with participants and corroborating data strengthened dependability. For example, all participants were asked what they believed was the most important thing for them to learn in school this year. Without exception, “English” was their answer. As their English teacher, I thought they might feel obligated to say that, so I asked them if this was the case. Only Mario answered, in a teasing way, that yes, he said “English” because I was the English teacher. Triangulating data and further exploring language in different contexts was telling, however, of the significance of English in their daily experiences.

Clarifying my own bias through engaged reflection bolstered the credibility of the study. My position as teacher put me in a position of power, and I expected and planned to combat perceived coercion. I arranged for a community liaison to recruit participants and made sure to be explicit with parents that their students' privacy would be protected while at the same time conceding that mistakes could happen. I expected to be confused in the roles of teacher and researcher and so I made concerted efforts to note when this confusion occurred. I had access to information and data that outside researchers may not have had, and did my best to walk the line of ethical research practices and protecting the participants' privacy.

Confidentiality for the participant was of paramount importance. I thought about confidentiality in a few ways. The participants may have been worried about telling secrets their family did not know or did not want anyone else to know. I had to balance this challenge in two manners. I am legally obliged to report situations that are dangerous to and for the student; I am a mandatory reporter. I had an explicit discussion with each participant around their comfort in revealing stories. I did my best to make their *papelitos guardados* (unknown or untold secrets) visible and yet confidential by changing their names and generalizing their demographic data. The primary audience for this study is the larger community and so there needed to be careful attention paid to shielding the identity of the participant within all levels of representation.

Practical Constraints

Included in the limitations of this study are practical constraints. Extensive time in the field is a factor that intensifies the credibility of a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although this study occurred during only one semester of school, my 26 other

school years in the field informed this study. The daily routine and grind of school days can be baffling and exhausting to anyone. My experience created an advantage because it related to the planning of interviews, observations, and expecting the unexpected. I was able to mitigate the impact of unpredictable events. A surviving message from the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020–2021 is that humans can pivot and find ways to connect with each other. The COVID-19 quarantine experience provided insightful ways to plan for unexpected interruptions in access. Finally, I recognized the inherent mobility of immigrant families. I was fortunate to have recruited more participants than originally planned. This participation meant attrition would not have a substantial impact on the findings. Finally, I purposefully designed the timeline of this study around typical times of movement in the community.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the overall research design and methods I employed to construct the *testimonios* of recently arrived Latinx middle school students as they navigate borderland spaces and places in the U.S. schooling system. This study holds potential for contributing to the battle against negative stereotypes and deficit notions of students in U.S. schools. Implementing *testimonio* methodology with the age-group of participants in this study is fairly novel. *Testimonios* can help researchers interested in breaking into K–12 education systems with critical reflections on the beliefs and suppositions that inform programming decisions for immigrant students. Kasun (2015) asserted studies like mine could inform teachers’ pedagogy in literacy classrooms by including notions of transnational, cross-border thinking. The participants’ voices were crafted into artifacts that honored their place as knowledgeable, worthy, dynamic beings. Osorio (2018)

implied student stories challenge dominant neoliberal ideologies of race neutrality in classrooms and defy the myth that all Latinos in this country are “illegal.” Nesting participants’ knowledge in larger societal contexts compels readers to act, or at least rethink their prior actions in light of the *testimonios* brought to bear through the words of the students involved with this work.

In the next two chapters, I present findings from this study. I chose to always center the lived experiences of the participants and it became apparent that their prior lives and migrations here to the United States were an integral part of their interpretations. In Chapter 4, I present each *testimonialista* for the reader to witness. In Chapter 5, I pull and connect four themes across all the data, centering the participants’ most compelling testimonies.

Chapter Four: La Testimonialistas

The purpose of this study was to confront deficit ideologies about Latinx students by amplifying the experiences and voices of recently arrived Latinx middle school students in U.S. schools. This study addressed the silencing and marginalization of recently arrived students and combated the deficit narratives around their schooling experience. This counter-narrative study, framed by Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) explored borderland identities in U.S. public schools. The research question guiding this work was: How do recently arrived Latinx middle school students interpret their experiences within the first 2 years of their arrival in the United States and enrollment in school? The methodology of this study included elements that purposefully sought to home in on the principals of LatCrit scholarship, including basing the research in the pan-ethnic diversity of Latinx students, confronting racializing forces in educational systems, and presenting their unique cultural ways of knowing and being.

In this chapter, I begin unveiling the participants' delightful, and at times, sad existence as they interpreted their experience in the borderlands of U.S. public schools. Beginning with the participants, I present a summary of salient themes expressed by the original 11 participants. I provide this summary because the collective power of the participants' individual *testimonios* catalyzed the iterative nature of the data collection and analysis. The reader is invited to witness, as I did, the immediate urgency and clarity of the participants' words. Next, I braid elements of interviews and observations from

the eight participants' telling cases into their personal *testimonios*. These *trenzas* (braids) form narrative arcs in which the audience is introduced to the participants in a way to make us *emparejados* (empathetically matched).

Entering the Space: “Porque Trabajamos en Equipo”

Nivea's simple phrase, “*porque trabajamos en equipo*” (because we work as a team) can be an entry point into the complexity of each participant's personalized interpretation of their life. Each individual's *testimonio* revealed common and yet unique collective experiences. As each participant's distinctive retelling of their story unfolded, it became clear they had a position, a reality to be witnessed. Still, it was the overwhelming presence of these positions collectively that impacted me most. Summarized in Table 4.1 are four strong evidence points that were corroborated throughout the 11 participants' responses. In Anzaldúa's (1987) conception of the Mestizaje consciousness, there is a psychological netherworld where one does not belong anywhere. This netherworld is called *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word that describes being at a crossroads and connotes an anxious state of emotional health. Romero (2004) insisted that this netherworld is bounded by linguistic *and* citizenship ambiguity. In examining a few participant responses around belonging in school, there was a sense of being discriminated against, some fear and confusion, and some hope. Most often confusion was expressed as participants not knowing the place in which they resided; not having a solid sense of nation, and of course, not knowing English. These expressions reflected the participants' verbal affirmation of *Nepantla*. Confusion was also characteristic of the Coatlique state (Anzaldúa, 1987), a deep psychological place of change and shifting. Coatlique could also be a reckoning of consciousness and the beginnings of the Mestizaje consciousness.

Table 4.1: Summary of First Testimonio Interview

Participant date	Reveals	Participant testimony
Berto 9/23/22	Belonging in School	“I say a little bit, yes, I feel fine, but what I do not like is that if I want to ask something, I can’t.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“In gym class, or in this class, English class. Because in this class are all my friends...I can ask anything I want.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“Well, not understanding what someone says to you English.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“I believe so, yes? Because at some moment when I learn English it can help me help others who don’t speak English.”
Elizabeth 9/23/22	Belonging in School	“A little. I miss my friends [from last year] . . . I want to be able to talk, but I have to learn more English to express myself well.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“Without a doubt . . . in your classes . . . we and you speak Spanish. You explain things very well to us and this helps us.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“English and getting used to new things. New language, new people, new classes . . . you don’t know how different it is going to be.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“I think so? When we talk about personal things at a table where everyone speaks Spanish. Then no one knows what you are talking about.”
Imelda 9/23/22	Belonging in School	“The worst thing is I don’t know English. I feel confused. But it’s okay.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“Right here in this class because I have all my friends and they speak Spanish. And you explain things and you speak Spanish.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“Problems? Well, that they will get you and send you right back to your country. Just that.”

Participant date	Reveals	Participant testimony
	Spanish as a Resource	“Yes, because sometimes people want to learn Spanish and many want to learn English. I desire to have both!”
José 9/26/22	Belonging in School	“Yes. This is the place that is giving me so many opportunities!”
	Where Most Comfortable	“I felt better in Mexico. It’s because, like you know, I can’t talk to my teachers, I can’t express myself because of English.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“One, <i>la migra</i> . Another is racism, you know like you said, people treat you different. And in school, it is English and bullying. Not so much this year, but at the last school, there was a lot of bullying.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“The moment I learn English, I will be bilingual and be able to communicate with many more people.”
Marco 9/28/22	Belonging in School	“No. I am, I feel Mexican . . .and in school no because I don’t know enough English. In Mexico, yes, I talked and knew more people.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“In math class because I am starting to get it . . . and in Mr. Thomas’ class . . . yes there are many of my friends there.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“Some say language . . . but if you do something illegal . . . it can make it worse for you. I could do something at school and it affects my mom.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“Yes? I believe so, yes? Like in the future one could help the people who don’t know English.”
Mario 9/29/22	Belonging in School	“I would say yes, and no. I don’t know, in some classes I don’t what to do. Nothing.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“In your class, fourth and fifth period. I feel more distracted than in other classes. And in science.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“Learning the language.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“It is my strength because I have the ability to communicate with people who speak

Participant date	Reveals	Participant testimony
		the language, like I know a little English, but, yes, I can express myself.”
Mateo 9/27/22	Belonging in School	“I don’t know. I have no nationality or residence . . . and I don’t know English and it is so boring the classes that the teacher only talks and we write notes.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“In gym . . . and in English class with you because I can talk to everyone.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“Discrimination. Bullying. Why do I say this? Because there are many here from Mexico, but they have papers . . . or they were born here. They are presumptuous.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“Yes, because there are many who don’t speak English . . . and if one wants to be bilingual, one has to know Spanish. When one knows enough English, you can translate . . . and one becomes important.”
Nina 9/23/22	Belonging in School	“Not really. Not much. I don’t have English.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“In [English classes] . . . because we are from the same place . . . they speak like me and we are more or less equal for that.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“English and for being different, but really English.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“The moment one has learned English and knows English, that’s when it’s going to help people, like me.”
Nivea 9/29/22	Belonging in School	“Yes? I don’t know how to respond to that . . . I feel good and I am liking it at school. I can be myself.”
	Where Most Comfortable	“Classes with you, you are good to me and in math because we are doing math sentences.”
	Problems Immigrants Face	“The language. And getting used to seven different classes.”
	Spanish as a Resource	“To know my language and another language would be good, this would be

Participant date	Reveals	Participant testimony
		very helpful. I'd like to be someone who knows many languages."
Sam 9/23/22	Belonging in School	"Well, I think so. I feel good. I don't feel uncomfortable . . . I am not treated badly and my friends don't use bad language."
	Where Most Comfortable	"Well, with Miss Hutchinson because I am not afraid of making mistakes and laughing or whatever. And in Mr. Connell's class, he has a good plan."
	Problems Immigrants Face	"The language [English]...and the stereotypes. There are those that bother others with saying 'ah look there's that Mexican or here comes the Colombian.'"
	Spanish as a Resource	"I don't know. I just like helping my classmates, I suppose."
Yadira 9/26/22	Belonging in School	"I feel good here because, like, how they treat a person. If they don't treat you well, then we know how it's going to go."
	Where Most Comfortable	"I really like art class because I love art and your class because it's fun and we are all pretty much in the same place."
	Problems Immigrants Face	"Well, that we don't speak English. Some would say discrimination. Or simply that we are from Mexico and we don't know this place."
	Spanish as a Resource	"I don't know. I believe so, but with whatever language."

Note. The interviews took place entirely in Spanish. For ease of access and aesthetics of the table, I interpreted the participants' words into English.

Participant Arcs

The participant arcs represent a thematic analysis of data pulled from the participant attributes, *testimonio* interviews, fieldwork journaling, observations, and educational data. These arcs follow a similar outline so the reader can better expect the content to be portrayed. I have intentionally left an opening quote from each participant in their exact

words untranslated so the reader may know what it is like to negotiate meaning in different languages and linguistic styles. In the next chapter, more nuanced analysis specific to the nodes of borderlands theory (BT) and LatCrit are portrayed and further deepen the value of the participants' *testimonios*.

Berto

Tradicional como que siguen haciendo lo que hacían en su país natal . . . lo que hacían como sus antepasados. Mhm, así es lo que yo sé, que es tradición.

Introduction

Berto was an almost 12-year-old seventh-grade boy who liked to teach me things. He proudly corrected my Spanish pronunciation, enlightened the connotative meanings of unfamiliar words, and explained the traditional ways he enjoyed learning from his father and grandmother before he left rural Mexico this past summer. He noted, “*En mi tierra natal . . . aprendí a muchos a construir, a arreglar cosas, aprendí mucho de mecánica, que mi papá es mecánico. Me enseñó y yo les hecho más o menos. Todo eso me gusta a mí*” (in my home country, I learned about construction, fixing things, I learned a lot about being a mechanic because my dad was a mechanic. He taught me and I did them more or less. I like all of that). And of his *abuelita*, Berto used his hands to simulate grinding corn into flour on a *comal*, then flip-flopping masa into tortillas, evoking the following scene:

Hay molinos eléctricos aquí y allá no le gustan esos. Le gustan los otros, hecho por mano. A ella le gusta ser muy tradicional muy de antes. Allá es que ella se desde chiquita estuvo en el rancho entonces pues ya se acostumbró a ella y le gusta más.

(Here, there are electric machines that make tortillas, and over there she did not like those. She likes the others, making them by hand. She likes to be very traditional,

very much like in the past. It's that she's been on the ranch since she was little so she is just used to it).

Berto had been in the United States for just under 3 months. He lives in the United States with his mother's father, Papa Tenio, his *abuelita*, *hermana*, y *tíos* (grandmother, sister and aunt and uncle). He said he was closest with his *tío* because they were nearer in age and "*es con él que me llevó mejor*" (he is the one I get along best with). He had been living on a large ranch in rural Mexico since his parents *se divorciaron* (got divorced) when he was around 5 or 6 years old. His mother was still in Mexico. Separation was indicated in many contexts for the borderland dwellers. I anticipated this as they crossed the geo-political border. But finding it in their lives prior to the crossing in the form of divorced families was unique in all the literature I reviewed for this study. This theme was confirmed repeatedly throughout the data collected in this study.

The Migration

(For this part of Berto's *testimonio*, I did not record him out of an abundance of caution to protect confidentiality). The journey to the United States was a clandestine adventure. Berto was very eager to attest to all the ways one could come to the United States. He had more information than any 11-year-old boy ought to about stealthy operations in borderland cafes and furtive actions that could make or break one's ability to pass along to the next stop. His mother insisted on concealing his money in hand-sewn pockets of baggy jeans and made him rehearse his cover story countless times before he left. He possessed knowledge of different systems of underground railroads for modern migrants seeking safety and an elusive better life.

Berto originally had no immediate intention of leaving the narrow river or the beautiful canyon that bordered the *rancho* he knew as home. But his mom packed his suitcase, told him to follow the directions of his *tía*, and that was that. He was not scared until the morning they were *al Norte* in a breakfast café, where a woman cross-examined their story. The woman asked him for his name and who he was in relation to the woman he was with. He almost slipped up and told the truth, but quickly remembered the cover story and hid his fearful face behind a hand-held video game toy. He swore to me that his journey was not so bad, considering his Papa Tenio had to walk 8 days in a desert and ran out of water after 2 days. He did not have to get caught by *la migra* (immigration officers) travel with cattle or sheep in truck, or risk a tunnel collapsing on his head.

Transitions

Comparing his life here and his life there, Berto missed the *llano*, where he would walk “*con mi perro y me iba a caminar y llamé a donde ya quería, me subí a un árbol, o me acostaba y casi siempre lleva un libro en la mochila*” (with my dog I’d go wherever I was called and wanted to go, I’d climb a tree or lay down and almost always had a book in my backpack). He missed the ranch life and his friend who died in a horse-riding accident. With a kiss to his thumb, he crossed his lips and sent it upward as he recalled:

Allá nos movíamos en caballos y una vez no lo pude acompañar porque iba a viajar. Y fue él solo. El caballo se asustó con una serpiente y se aventó para un cerro y mató al muchacho.

(Over there we got around on horseback and one time I couldn’t go with him because we were going to travel. The horse was frightened by snake and it reared up on the hill and killed the boy).

Berto declared his home as a place full of family, yet very remote. He adeptly detailed the sense of remoteness as he said:

Ahí es un lugar que hay muy poca señal. Para la señal de que subiera hasta el cerro, la punta. Ahí no hay policía, no hay nada, nadie. Hay pocas tiendas, no hay muchas y para encontrar la gasolina está muy difícil. Pero hay un río que pasa por abajo y ahí vamos, a divertirnos y está ubicado en un cañón.

(Over there is a place that has very little signal [as in phone/internet service]. For signal you have to climb up a hill, to the top. Over there, there are no police, there's nothing, nobody. There are few stores, not many, and to find gasoline there is very difficult. But there is a river that flows through and down and that's where we go to have fun and it's located in a canyon).

Berto created for me a picture of a large family ranch, noting, "*Teníamos caballos, chivas, tuvimos muy poco tiempo, pero luego se las comieron a los animales. Teníamos vacas, perros, y así teníamos como 180 gallinas*" (we had horses, goats for a little while, but then we ate the animals. We had cows, dogs, and also, we had like 180 chickens). His family ate what they grew and the animals they raised. Berto described his culture as one of farmers and planters as in this sentence, noting, "*pues allí nos dedicamos a la siembra y cultivar de maíz, frijol, todo en común y de granado también*" (well, here we dedicate ourselves to planting and cultivating corn, beans, everything together and farming, too). Berto interpreted himself as traditional, but modern at the same time because he liked television and video games. He knew that traditional ways were the ways of older generations and the way one grows up in their home country. In the United States, Berto

described being generally happy because he was with his Papa Tenio and was able to help him.

Unlike other participants, Berto revealed he did not have many friends, per se, in Mexico, and so having lots of them in the United States had been a joyful experience. His friends helped him translate in class as he recalled, “*yo me siento bien junto a un amigo que se llama Johan. Es que él me ayuda mucho*” (I feel good sitting next to my friend Johan. It’s because he helps me a lot). He often copied Johan’s notes and consulted his opinion. In the group of recently arrived students, Berto liked helping everyone figure out what to do and how to get things. He saw himself as a leader in the Newcomer English class because he knew what to do now and could help the others.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

Going deeper into his schooling experience, Berto began by comparing the logistics of school in his home country and the United States. He had no hesitation affirming that “*aquí la escuela es mejor que allá, mucho mejor*” (here school is better, much better). Then, he shifted into the schedule and classroom he had in Mexico. He noted, “*Salimos hasta las tres, entramos de ocho. Tenemos dos recreos y todas las clases son en el mismo salón matemáticas, español, la misma maestra nos da todo*” (we leave at 3 pm and enter at 8 am. We have two recesses and all the classes are in the same room, mathematics, Español, the same teacher gives us everything). He was describing a similar experience to what elementary school was like in the United States; however, in the secondary schools of Mexico, the students still stay in the same classroom together and different teachers come to give different lessons for each subject. This difference is a big adjustment for recently arrived Latinx students because they are used to being with the same friends all

day in school and out of school. Berto admitted that he liked the different classes with different students because:

Prefiero andar moviéndome porque como allá, había muchos que no me caían muy bien, bueno, casi nadie, pero. Y aquí, casi todo me cae bien. Ya no tengo que estar siempre con los mismos. Puedo estar haciendo más amigos.

(I prefer to move around because like over there, there were people I didn't get along with and here I get along with almost everyone. I just don't have to always stay with the same people. I can make more friends).

He felt good in school and liked the way they teach in the United States, noting, "*Me gusta la forma en la que enseñan y quiero aprender inglés.*" (I like the way they teach here and I want to learn English). At the beginning of the study, Berto reported that the teachers explained things and "*no te castigan con cosas muy feas*" (they do not punish students harshly) like they do in Mexico. Berto believed teachers here care about what students learn more so than they did in Mexico. He attested, "*en México nos decían, no nos explicaban cómo vamos a hacer el trabajo. Aquí, si tenemos una duda, le preguntamos al maestro que sí y él nos ayuda.*" (in Mexico, they told us, they didn't explain how we were going to do work. Here, if we have a question, we ask the teacher and the teacher helps us). If any of his teachers do not know Spanish, Berto said, "*puedo preguntar a algún compañero que hable los dos idiomas*" (I can ask a friend that speaks both languages). He was learning English and he was learning how to navigate classroom dynamics.

Belonging

Berto did not feel like he completely belonged. He said about belonging, “*un poquito. Que no me siento muy gusto porque casi sí quiero preguntar, casi no puedo*” (a little. It’s that I don’t feel very comfortable because I just want to ask questions but I can’t yet). Berto was curious and yet found it hard to express that curiosity in places where only English was spoken. Berto shared he feels seen in this school. He expanded, “*cuando la maestra nos pregunta aquí no pues nos preguntan a todos, sólo a una persona, sino a toda, toda la clase*” (when the teacher asks us a question here, they don’t ask everyone, only one person, but from the whole class). Clarifying this sentiment, he explained teachers in Mexico always chose the same students to answer questions, “*es tú y tú y tú y los demás, no*” (it’s you, you and you and everyone else, no). Here in this school, there was more participation by everyone in the class. Berto believed he was seen and recognized by his peers, too. He interpreted this recognition as “*creo que sí, porque así me ven y me saludan como los de otras clases que conozco, y así platicamos, que nos toca en grupo, o algo así*” (I believe so, yes because they see me and greet me like the students in other classes that I know and so we talk, the teacher puts us in a group, and stuff like that).

Berto said he felt most comfortable in classes with other recently arrived students (i.e., homeroom, Newcomer English, and social studies), math, and gym. In Newcomer English and social studies classes, he revealed that comfort, explaining, “*porque todos de aquí son mis amigos. Entonces, ya si quiero preguntar algo, le puedo preguntar a quien sea*” (because everyone here is my friend. So, if I just want to ask something, I can ask it to whomever). He expanded on this notion and reiterated that to learn English was why

he came to the United States, so he was having fun. As he noted, “*Me gusta mucho el inglés porque lo quiero aprender y aparte me divierto*” (I really like English because I want to learn it and besides, it’s fun to me).

Language became a complex theme in the experiences of the participants and is explored throughout this chapter. For example, math was hard for Berto—even though he professed to be fairly good at math—because the teacher made them write a lot of notes. He was conflicted, as many border crossers were. Berto explained even though math was hardest for him, it may have been easier for him than others, stating, “*las matemáticas, pues, es casi puro escribir, entonces yo no más copeo todo lo que escribe la Miss y lo entiendo bien*” (math is, well, almost pure writing, so I just copy everything that the teacher writes, and I understand fine). Whether he meant he was understanding math or understanding how schooling works via compliance was unclear, but Berto felt like he was good at math when he copied notes.

The hardest class for Berto, and the one which he felt was harder for him than any of his classmates, was literacy class. His words illuminated the idea of dynamic language learning in different contexts. He revealed, “*en lo que me dificulta mucho es en literatura porque como nada más escribir y leer, y eso como está en inglés, eh, no lo puedo entender muy bien*” (the one that gives me the most trouble is literacy because it’s like nothing more than writing and reading and that it’s all in English, well, I can’t understand it very well). It was important to understand the nature of writing and the context of it when students were learning *in* another language. Even though writing notes in math class was how Berto accessed language and content, it was the thing that blocked him in literacy class.

Education and School Success

Berto believed education is a good thing, even if he did not like it so much, because he was going to learn English and help all his family members who did not know English. He testified to this goal:

Pues me gusta, no me gusta mucho, pero más por lo que quería venir, es por ayudar a mis familiares que nadie sabe inglés. Entonces como mi papá Tenio, que es mi abuelo, él trabaja en la construcción y ahí los súper no hablan español. Entonces para poder ayudarle en eso de traducir y eso. Y porque algún día yo quiero ser ingeniero.

(Well, I like [going to school], I mean not too much, but the reason I wanted to come over was to help my relatives that do not know English. So, like my Papa Tenio, my grandfather, he works in construction and none of the supervisors speak Spanish. So, it's for being able to help him with that, translating and stuff. And because one day, I want to be an engineer).

Berto also believed education was better in the United States because of the technology, computers, and resources. He noted, "*Aquí la escuela es mejor que allá, mucho mejor porque, ya aquí las computadoras y todo eso nos ayudan a entender mucho más*" (here school is better than over there because here there's computers and all that and they help us to understand much more). He went on to explain that in U.S. schools, one can use the internet very fast and find whatever answers they need. The idea that Berto's education was better here was one that motivated him to focus and give his "*atención maxima*" (maximum attention).

Berto enumerated a long list of habits for success in school such as, *“pórtate bien y poner atención a tus clases, que se ocupa. No es de estar haciendo tu relajo, no ser tan peleonero, y enfocarte más que todo, y estar siempre con tu mente en las clases”* (behave well, pay attention, stay busy, don’t be too relaxed, don’t fight, focus more than anything, and always have your mind in the classroom). He noted the biggest problem immigrants face is not knowing English, or more accurately, *“no entender lo que te dicen de inglés.”* (not understanding what they say to you in English). Getting used to how schooling worked was hard for immigrants, too, in Berto’s opinion. There were a number of things he was confused about in his first days here and he recalled being embarrassed to ask people if they spoke Spanish or if they would help him find his class or open his locker. The most important thing for Berto to learn this year was speaking in English so he could help his Papa Tenio at work. Spanish was a little bit of a resource for him in school. He explained, *“me puede ayudar en algún momento, sí. Cuando aprendo inglés me puede ayudar a otras personas que no hablan inglés”* (it can help me at some point, yes. When I learn English, it can help me with others that don’t speak English). Here was a resonating theme. Spanish was a resource in school only when English was learned and one could use both to help others. Berto’s plan for the future was more of a *sueño* (dream) right now. He planned to focus on English and someday be an engineer.

Elizabeth

Bueno, es que a mí me gusta observa y también un poco como investigar.

Introduction

Elizabeth was a tall 12-year-old female from Honduras. Her native language was Spanish. She began school in the United States as a sixth grader in late December 2021.

At the time of this study, she was in seventh grade, and she had been in the United States for less than 12 months. She lived within the school's attendance boundary with her mom, one aunt, and her sisters. The geography of her family, she explained as such:

Mi familia esté en varios lugares. Por ejemplo, yo sólo estoy aquí con mi mamá y mis hermanos y tias así no, sino que tengo una tía, pues que ella está en otro estado. De ahí casi toda mi familia, pues está en Honduras, por ejemplo, tengo tíos en Juticalpa, otras en Tegucigalpa, en Tela, en Choloma, así entonces no toda la familia está junta. Está dividida.

(My family is in various places. For example, I'm only here with my mom and my siblings and aunts. No, I have an aunt, but she is in another state. So, almost all my family is in Honduras, for example, I have aunts and uncles in Juticalpa, others in Tegucigalpa, in Tela, in Choloma, so then not all the family is together. It's divided). On her mother's side, Elizabeth had an aunt and grandmother who lived in Spain. Once, her mom mentioned moving to Spain instead of the United States. Elizabeth noted, "*Mi mami, al principio ella solo se iba a ir para España . . . al final de ella prefirió venirse para acá y ella nos trajo a nosotras.*" (My mom at first only wanted to go to Spain. In the end she chose to come here, she brought us here). the end, her mother brought them all to the United States.

Elizabeth adored and felt closest to her little sister. She professed spending more time playing games and watching cartoons with her than her other siblings. She said, "*la favorita de mi familia por parte de mamá es mi hermana, la pequeña. Y por papá, pues es mi otro hermano que él tiene 6 años*" (the favorite from my mom's daughters is my little sister, the baby. And from my dad's family it is my brother who is 6 years old). Her

parents divorced in Honduras when she was young. Throughout her childhood, Elizabeth lived with both her mother's family and her father's family in various places throughout Honduras. She described her father's side of the family as more religious and therefore more united than her mother's side. She disclosed, "*bueno, la familia de mi papi es como un poco más cristiana, como tiene un poco más cultura que la familia de mi mamá y pues la familia de mi papá está más unida que la de mi mamá.*" Separation and division created many opportunities for Elizabeth to become accustomed to crossing geographical and emotional borders and understanding the nature of familial separation.

The Migration

The 2-week trip to the U.S. border was "*como más turística*" (more like a tourist trip) in Elizabeth's memory. She noted, "*Nosotros fuimos por varias ciudades, así fuimos a Cancún, México, allí estuvimos en hotel, salíamos afuera. Fuimos a la playa jugar y eso. Y pues la verdad que fuimos, conocimos bastantes lugares.*" They visited different cities, stayed in hotels, and ate meals in restaurants. They went out and about and spent time with family. Her mom, who was a teacher in Honduras, always tried to make things seem educational and fun. But Elizabeth felt torn, knowing it was going to be a permanent change. She explained, "*pues, todo donde la zona que yo vivía allá, todos ya están viviendo para los Estados Unidos . . . ahí está muy pocas personas*" (Well, everyone in the small town where I used to live are living in the United States . . . there are only a few people left there). As they rode buses through Mexico, Elizabeth said she met more *gente* and got to know them as fellow travelers. There were around 20 or 30 of them. They communicated and looked out for each other.

When they got close to the border, which Elizabeth described as *el rio*, their group was told that the children would go separate from their parents. Her mother refused this option and explained to Elizabeth that bad things happened to children who travelled alone. There were many people waiting around and Elizabeth recalled that there were two streets they could walk down. Someone in charge separated the group and then they walked a short time to the river. It was the middle of a very cold night. They were given *cobijas* (blankets). They piled onto an inflatable raft and were piloted across the border. It was the first time Elizabeth had felt scared during the trip. As she recounted:

Entonces, caminamos, pero poco ya cuando veníamos para la frontera. Cruzamos el río. Ahí fue, pues no me gustó cruzar el río porque como es una lancha, pero es una lancha inflable. Y, pues el río da miedito. Pues fue corto, pero al mismo tiempo da miedo. Cuando pasamos caminamos. Había dos caminos, uno era más largo y otro era más corto.

(Then, we walked, but only a short time, just when we came to the border. We crossed the river. It was, well, I didn't like crossing the river because it is a raft, an inflatable raft. And well, the river was a little scary. Well, it was short, but at the same time scary. When we crossed the border, we walked. There were two paths, one was longer and the other was shorter).

When they found *la migra*, it was early morning. They were taken to a “*habitación, blanca y super-grande*” (a big, white building) where Elizabeth and her mom were separated by U.S. immigration officials. Her words testified to the scene:

Pero como tipo hileras, no sé exactamente cómo se llaman ahí estuvimos. Había bastantes personas. En un lado tenían a los hombres en una habitación super grande.

Las mujeres estaban a partes y mi hermanita, con la que niña tenía 5 años, pues a ella si le dejaron con mi mami. A mí me apartaron, donde estaban solo niños adolescentes. Yo le pedí, hablar con un guardia de los de ahí porque no quería estar en ese lugar. Me trasladaron con mi mamá dónde estaba. Había mujeres grandes embarazadas y mi hermanita. . . . Pero lo que había ahí es que ahí tiene los niños divididos, hombres, mujeres, ahí está todo dividido. Entonces, hay niños como adolescentes que se vienen ellos solos desde Honduras.

(But it was kind of like in rows, I don't know exactly how to describe the place we were. There were so many people. On one side, they had all the men in a super-big house. The women were separate and my little sister, the one who was 5 years old, well, they let her stay with my mom. Me? They separated me where there were only the adolescents. I asked to talk to a guard because I did not want to be in that place. I was transferred to where my mom was. There were very pregnant women there, and my little sister. . . . But what it was like there, is that there all the children are separated, the men, the women, all divided. Then, there are the teenage kids who come alone, by themselves, all the way from Honduras).

Elizabeth remembered being in the detention center in Texas for about 3 days. From here, her family was received by extended family in Florida, where her new and most favorite sister, was born. They left shortly after her sister's birth to live in Colorado.

Transitions

Comparing her life in the United States to her life in Honduras, Elizabeth reported she missed her family the most, along with many places and things. She described spending time outside with all her cousins and friends from school. She missed the time they would

“*salir afuera*” (go out and about). Everyone lived close and “*salió uno bastante*” (one could go out a lot). Elizabeth wished she could still be there but expressed at the same time—as many students living in borderlands will—she did not want to be there. She told me, “*extraño Honduras, muchos lugares. Extraño a mi familia. Ahorita quisiera estar allá. Pero al mismo tiempo aquí, porque aquí tengo más oportunidades que Honduras. La economía en Honduras no es tan buena*” (I miss Honduras, many places. I miss my family. I’d like to be there right now, but at the same time here because here I have more opportunities than in Honduras. The economy in Honduras is not good). In the United States, Elizabeth noted she spends time indoors watching her sisters because her mom worked different hours. She said she has few friends in the United States, unlike in Honduras, where she had many friends and lots of family around.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

Going deeper into her schooling experiences, Elizabeth recalled that before the COVID-19 global pandemic, she went to school Monday through Friday from 7 am until 12 pm. Their school year was from February until November. She studied the same subjects as in the United States, with her favorites being science and Spanish language arts. During the pandemic, when the schools shut down, she lamented that there were no classes. Elizabeth said, “*no había tanta infección de COVID, pero había el miedo de que al COVID, entonces, todo ese tiempo no hubo clases*” (there were not a lot of COVID infections, but there was a fear of COVID, so all of that time there were no classes). This meant that her entire school year—from February 2020 to November 2020—her peers and family were not in school at all. They had no online school, no remote school.

Elizabeth shared, when comparing expectations for school in Honduras to school in the United States, the majority of students start school with pre-kindergarten and then go to school for 11 or 12 years and graduate. However, she noted, “*si usted quiere salirse del colegio pues se sale y hace otras cosas y no estudia. Pero los que quieren estudiar pues sigue en su estudio y los que no, pues no*” (if one wants to leave at middle school, well, one leaves and does other things and does not study. But those who want to study, they continue in their study and those who do not, well, they don’t). *Colegio* is not a cognate for college; it is the Honduran equivalent to secondary schools including Grades 7 through 12.

The logistics of school in Honduras were much the same as in other Latinx countries. The students remained in the same room all day except, as Elizabeth explained, “*si tiene tecnología, pues ahí cambia aula*” (if you had technology class, you changed rooms). The elementary school only had one teacher all day, whereas Elizabeth noted, “*en colegio, pues como que sus maestros tiene más clases y tiene diferentes maestros*” (in secondary school, well, it’s like your teachers have more classes and you have different teachers). There were a few days off for *días patronales o fundadas* (national holidays) and weeks of vacation for religious holidays such as *semana santa* (Easter week). Elizabeth noted one of the main differences as far as teaching was in the United States, “*uno es mas con computadora*” (one is more with a computer) and in Honduras “*la usábamos, pero sólo para tecnología y las demás materias, pues usted solo usaba cuaderno*” (we used it, but only for technology class and all the other classes one only used a notebook).

Belonging

When asked if she belonged in school, her reply was a simple, “*un poco, sí*” (a little, yes). Clarifying further, Elizabeth felt good at school but “*como que me hacen falta compañeros amigas, que están en el lonche B*” (for the lack of friends who have a different lunch period). Although things were different, she was getting used to them as she nodded her square chin and explained, “*pues la verdad sí se siente bien . . . me estoy acostumbrando*” (well, the truth is yes it feels good . . . I am getting myself used to it). Elizabeth said she felt most a part of school when she was learning new things. She felt disconnected from school when she wanted to just talk about anything and could not because she did not have the English skills to do so. She testified:

Es decir, que a veces sí me siento parte de la escuela, porque puedes conozco un poco más así, pero al mismo tiempo no. No me siento parte de la escuela, porque a veces quiero hablar así, a veces es solo en inglés. Tengo que aprender un poco más el inglés para poder comunicarme con todos bien y como lo estoy aprendiendo, aprendiendo se me dificulta un poco.

(That is to say, at times, yes, I feel part of the school because you can know a little more like this, but at the same time, not. I do not feel part of the school because sometimes I want to talk like this [referring to conversing with ease in Spanish] but in only English sometimes. I have to learn a little more English in order to be able to express myself with everyone that I am learning. Learning is hard for me, a little). Elizabeth internalized her native language as a barrier, not as a resource, and furthermore had privileged English as she stated, “*tengo que aprender un poco más inglés para comunicarme bien*” (I have to learn a little more English so I can express myself well).

Her favorite classes were, “*sin duda,*” (without a doubt) those she had with the other recently arrived students including homeroom, English, and social studies. Elizabeth testified that in this *aula*:

aquí tengo casi todos mis amigos como más hablamos del mismo idioma. Es como no tiene que estar preguntando qué es lo que tenemos que hacer y eso. Porque aquí lo entiende y más ayuda. En otras clases es super más diferente porque algunas profesoras hablando en inglés. Entonces, es complicado entenderle. Y las clases que tengo aquí, en esta aquí, (her nails are really tap tapping on the desk) son más fácil porque está con sus compañeros, con los que más se lleva, con los que más convive. Entonces se siente como más cómodo.

(Here I have almost all of my friends, like the ones who speak the same language. It's like you don't have to be asking what it is we have to do and all that. Because here you understand it and that helps. In other classes is very different because some teachers are speaking English. So, it is complicated to understand. And the classes I have here, in this class, are easier because you are with your friends, with those whom you get along with most, with those whom you share experiences. So, you feel most comfortable).

According to Elizabeth, other classes were “*súper más diferente.*” She did not say that it was impossible to understand or that she did not understand, only that it was complicated to understand. This sentiment spoke volumes to the meta-linguistic agency these students yield in order to learn. She interpreted herself as different in other classes because sometimes her Spanish-speaking friends were not in class. Elizabeth stated Spanish was

only a resource in school because she could have personal and private conversations with her tablemates in class and at recess.

Education and Success

Elizabeth interpreted education to be “*súper importante porque gracias a la escuela, uno aprende más. Si uno no viene a la escuela, no aprendería a leer, ni a hablar otros idiomas, ni a las matemáticas*” (super important because, thanks to school, one learns more. If one does not go to school, one would neither learn to read, nor speak other languages, nor learn mathematics). The biggest problems that immigrants face in school, in her interpretation, are the language and getting used to all the new things. Elizabeth wrapped around this idea saying:

Es decir, los problemas . . . casi no sabe cuando viene acá es muy diferente a su país natal, entonces, uno se tiene que acostumbrar un ambiente nuevo, personas nuevas, idioma nuevo, tener que adaptarse como son las cosas acá.

(It is to say that the problems . . . you really do not know when you come here that is very different than your home country, so then one has to get accustomed to a new environment, new people, a new language, you have to adapt to how things are here).

To be successful at school, Elizabeth insisted students have to pay attention, adapt themselves to the new surroundings, and be a little nicer. The most important thing for her family, as far as school went this year, was for her to learn English because that was what they needed. In the future, Elizabeth predicted that she would pass all grades, study and become “*una abogada, profesora o también ser azafata*” (a lawyer or a professor or even a flight attendant). She noted Spanish will be a resource later because she wants to communicate with people all over the globe.

Imelda

Lo que lo importante es aprender inglés, que aprendo inglés. Porque aquí todo es inglés.

Introduction

Imelda was a 13-year-old tough girl from Honduras. A self-described “*peleonera*” (fighter), she arrived at school every day with her younger sister right by her side. Imelda reminded her sister to not talk like a baby and pay attention. She described her culture in terms of food and dress. She said, “*me gusta el pescado. Vestirme ropa floja*” (I like fish. I wear baggy clothes). Her description of family started with a laugh and “*peleona*” (argumentative) description, and then more seriously as, “*son amables y respetan a la gente*” (they are nice and they respect people). When Imelda enrolled at Crystal Lakes Middle School, she started with her two sisters. Imelda was placed in the seventh grade, her older sister in eighth grade, and her younger sister in sixth grade. Once the sisters’ ages were confirmed, the older one was moved to high school, Imelda was moved to eighth grade, and the younger sister stayed in sixth grade.

Imelda lives in the United States with her three sisters and their older brother, along with his wife and their child. She said she feels closest to her *suegra* (sister-in-law) because she watches out for all of them. At the time of this study, she and her sisters had barely arrived in the United States a few weeks before. Their mother passed away in Honduras and the four sisters had to leave. Imelda revealed the two sides of the family, her mother’s side and father’s side, never got along:

Familia de mi papá osea como mis tíos, mis primos y mis sobrinos, es de la de mi mamá también, con toda la de mi mamá convivíamos, o sea, vivíamos en el mismo

pueblo todo y pasábamos tiempo con ellas, con toda la familia. Pero no convivíamos con ellos, no lo llevábamos bien. Solo con la de mi mamá.

(My dad's family, that is, like my uncles, my cousins and my nephews, it's my mom's too, we lived with all of my mom's, that is, we all lived in the same town and we spent time with them, with the whole family. But we didn't live with them, we didn't get along. Only with my mom's).

Imelda's eldest sister in the family, along with her daughter (Imelda's niece) and Imelda's very youngest sister, were still in Honduras fighting with their father's family over the house and property where their mother raised all the sisters. Imelda reported their departure was forced because there were threats against them and this journey was to keep them all safe.

The Migration

Imelda recalled the journey to the United States with few details. She, her sisters and two older male friends, travelled in a large group that she estimated to be up to 300 people at times. They would stay in different places, sometimes for a few hours, sometimes for a few days. Imelda said the older male friend with whom they travelled for a time went "*sólo la mitad, porque él no podía pasar, era mayor de edad y le tocó que rodear*" (only halfway because he couldn't cross the border, he was older and he had to turn back). They travelled in cars until they got to the border where they were transported by buses. She said:

Y después los treparon al camión cuando ya los iban a pasar al río en camión, sí.

Fue bien, sí, aunque como estaba mareado andar en bus. Ahí fue mal también porque pega ganas de vomita. . . . Después los apartaron sólo nosotros. Y los llevaron con

otras amigas de nosotros, sólo ellas ya los otros varones, los apartarme como el otro, era mayor de edad.

(And then, they loaded us on the bus when we were going to cross the river, on a bus, yeah. It was fine even though I was feeling dizzy going by bus. Here it was bad also because I felt like throwing up. . . . Then we were separated from our friends and they took them with other friends of ours, just them and the other men. They separated me like the other ones, I was older).

Imelda's interpretation of events came through as confusing; however, given her state of mind, this confusion was easy to understand. The context was the same as many others. Imelda was travelling unaccompanied and was separated from others not only because of her status, but also because of her gender and age. It was easy to understand why the sisters all ended up in the same school; there had already been too much separation.

Transitions

Comparing her life there and her life here, Imelda asserted Honduras "*es uno peligroso, pero bonito*" (is at once dangerous but beautiful). The tension in this statement was not lost on Imelda. She offered this evidence:

Bonito porque como hay muchas frutas y uno puede salir así a jugar. Es bien bonito, hay ríos, montañas y hay muchas flores. Y es un pueblito pequeño, no hay muchas casas. Solamente sé. Y peligrosos cuando se embolan y cómo andan pistolas y te matan. Que se ponen a pelear, por eso. Como de que te matan de por gusto.

(Beautiful because, like, there's a lot of fruit and one can go out to play. It's really beautiful, there are rivers and mountains and there are a lot of flowers. It's a small pueblo with not many houses. That's all I know. And it's dangerous when they get

irritated and go around with guns and they kill you. They start to fight for that. Like they kill you for fun).

She remembered the beautiful flowers, the abundance of fruit, the rivers and mountains right along with the realities of “*que lo matan por lo gusto*” (they kill you for the fun of it). She missed her sisters and her niece and really everyone that was left there. Even though everyone wanted to come, they could not. Imelda said, “*van a venir para acá, pero no, no están pasando ahorita con niñas*” (They are going to come here, but not yet, they are not crossing the border with young girls). She used to “*salir afuera*” to be with her cousins and friends every day. In the United States, Imelda said people work differently and there are so many different jobs, not like in Honduras where one builds houses by hand and chops firewood for sale or trade. She made a motion with her hands all waving around, “*también hacer casas como acá, pero con la pura mano y aquí es con*” (also building houses like here but totally by hand and here it’s with [hands waving around]). Here in the United States, Imelda noted she does not go out and stays close to home to help her sisters and sister-in-law. She reported life is okay in the United States, but “*raro*” (strange).

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

Going deeper into her schooling experiences, Imelda began by recalling how it was during the COVID-19 global pandemic shut down:

Ahorita por el COVID, solo por teléfono hacíamos las tareas. Nos mandaban las fotos por teléfono y nosotros hacíamos. Después le mandábamos fotos a las maestras. Fue bonito, pero por una cosa no, porque uno no entendía nada.

(Just then because of COVID, we would do work only by telephone. They sent us pictures through the phone and we would do it. After that, we sent pictures to the teachers. It was fine, but for one reason no, because one did not understand anything). She admitted to learning extraordinarily little by telephone. Because the students did not have computers or sufficient internet, the teachers would take pictures of worksheets and notes and text them to the students. Still, Imelda liked her school, describing it as, *“grande en el lugar donde nosotros vivíamos solos. Era una escuela bien, no había otra escuela y era bonita”* (big in the place where we lived alone. It was a good school, there wasn't another school, it was nice). The schedule was pretty much the same in Honduras as the United States and the subjects, too. Imelda recalled her classes as, *“el inglés, sociales, matemáticas, física, y otras más de español, naturales y arte.”* Children in Honduras were expected to go through all the grades like the United States, but, if they got to *segundaria*, where students were in Grades 7 through 9, they could leave if they wanted. This confirmed Elizabeth's accounting of school expectations, too.

Imelda indicated the teachers in Honduras did not watch the students and the students ditched a lot of classes. For Imelda, school had been very different in the United States in that respect. She gave an example about recess, saying, *“y aquí lo cuidamos a uno. Allá no lo importa que golpeen y aquí los pasan viendo. Allá en recreo, los maestros se van y los dejan a uno”* (and here, we take care of each other. Over there, no one cares if you fist fight and here, they are watching over us. Over there during recess the teachers went away and they left you alone). This sense of being watched was interpreted by Imelda as feeling safer and being cared for or watched out for by someone. She knew the teachers in the United States worried about their students and noticed if they left class. She said,

“*Acá ya pasan allá en el pasillo viendo todo y pasa una alerta, o sea, si pasan viendo todo revisando.*” (Here if you walk through the hallways out there someone is seeing you and an alert happens or if you are seen everyone is reviewing it). Imelda interpreted the monitoring of hallways as everyone being on alert. She found this vigilance comforting and noted the difference in the way teachers act toward students:

Aquí, o sea, se preocupan por uno de todo. Lo cuidan más a uno le enseñan más y allá no. Y allá los maestros no les importaba si se salían de las clases. No les dijeron nada.

(Here, for example, they worry about each and every one. They care more for you and they teach more, over there, no. And over there the teachers didn’t care if you left class. They said nothing to the students).

The sense of comfort in being watched was contradictory to the intuition adults often have about eighth-grade students. Imelda appreciated watchfulness and security. She did not want to be invisible.

Belonging

Not knowing English made schooling different for Imelda, who noted, “*Lo malo que no se ingles.*” (It’s bad that I don’t know English). When asked about belonging in school she answered “nah.” She explained, “*siento que sí, siento que no, confundida*” (I feel like yes, I feel like no, I’m confused). Imelda’s favorite classes were science, gym, and Newcomer English. She enjoyed science because “*la maestra bien chistosa y les pone hacer como cosas así*” (the teacher is really funny and she puts us to do things like this). Although she discussed liking seventh-period gym class better than her current second-period gym class, she said “*es bueno, jugar*” (it’s good to play). Imelda also said she

liked Newcomer English class “*porque nos enseña inglés, todos hablan español*” (because you teach us English, everyone speaks Spanish). English class was where she felt most comfortable and her evidence was akin to Berto’s. “*Aquí tengo todos mis amigos. Y bueno, hablan español y es de lo explica bien, entiendo porque habla español*” (Here I have all my friends. And well, they speak Spanish and it’s that you explain it well, I understand because you speak Spanish). In all her classes, Imelda interpreted herself as someone who did not understand most things and noted work was harder for her because of English. She said it this way: “*si ellos sienten más fáciles, pues yo siento más difícil por lo de inglés, por eso lo de ahí es más difícil y porque casi no le entiendo mucho*” (if they feel it’s easier, well I feel it’s harder in English and because of that here it’s harder and because I don’t understand it very much). Imelda had made a few friends outside of the recently arrived students who spoke Spanish and in English and said, “*Tengo varias y ellos hablan español y en inglés*” (I have some and they speak Spanish and English). She felt seen and heard here, and despite her academic level of math, she had faith that she would learn and pass all her exams.

Education and Success

Education had an important purpose for Imelda. She explained that one has to go to school first before going to go work because school teaches everything, such as numbers and writing. She attested to the purpose of education, noting:

Es educarlo a uno para seguir adelante con los consejos Y la escuela, esa venir a aprender. Para que, digamos, no quiere trabajar de algo tiene que como estar primero en la escuela porque la escuela enseña todo. Digamos en los trabajos hay que aprender a los números y escribir, todo eso.

(It is to educate yourself and move forward and apply what you have learned. And school, that's to come and learn. Because, let's say, you don't want to just work for something you have to be first in school because at school they teach you everything.

Let's say in jobs you have to learn numbers and write, all that).

The notion that school is the center of one's learning with the goal of future employment and careers came through clearly in the participant *testimonios*. There was also a clear illumination of home being another central space for learning and maintaining culture and language.

To be successful in school, Imelda corroborated her peers' testimonies in this study, saying that one has to "*poner atención, hacer las tareas, y portarse bien*" (pay attention, do the work, and behave yourself well). For Imelda and her family, the most important thing to learn in school is English. She declared, "*lo que lo importante es aprender inglés, que aprendo inglés. Porque aquí todo es inglés*" (what is important is learning English, that I learn English. Because here, everything is English). Imelda was not sure about the problems all immigrants face, but her main concern was "*que lo agarren y lo manden de nuevo para allá, para el país de uno y pues solo eso*" (that you could be grabbed up and sent back to your country and well, that's it).

Imelda made evident her future plans, which included, "*terminar todo y después, trabajar eh, de policía*" (finishing everything and after that doing police work). She wanted to visit Honduras again and also wanted to live in Colombia, "*porque me gusta como hablan*" (because I like the way they talk). Her belief about Spanish as a resource revolved around helping people who want to be bilingual. She indicated, "*porque a veces muchas quieren aprender español y mucho inglés. Sí, pues, desearía tener los dos*"

(because sometimes many people want to learn Spanish and many want to learn English. Yes, well, I would want to have both). An admirable statement, to be sure; yet, there was a pattern percolating through the *testimonios* of the participants. Participants' views of their home language, really the biggest part of themselves in the United States, was only valuable when compared to or with some aspect of English proficiency. They were living witness of complex language ideologies playing out in their psyches.

Marco

Pues, de Estados Unidos, yo siento que todavía soy y seré mexicano . . . y de la escuela, no me sé, no tengo el mismo idioma.

Introduction

Marco was a polite, happy 13-year-old boy from a large border city in Mexico. Every year, one of the favorite cultural celebrations he recalled was going to the downtown area on September 16 and “*hacer una grita*” (making a loud cry/shout) and eating tacos or hamburgers from street vendors. He recalled this scene, noting, “*La de en septiembre vamos casi todos al centro va y se hace el grito. Y de comida, pues es muy común que muchos puestos de que tortas, carne asada, tacos o hamburguesas*” (On September 16th almost everyone goes downtown and makes a big shout. And the food, well it’s quite common to see street carts with sandwiches, grilled steak, tacos or hamburgers). Marco began school in the United States midway through his seventh-grade year in 2021. During Summer 2022, his family, “*a parte de mi mama,*” (my mother’s side) travelled together with his grandmother who came to take care of him because mom had to work a lot. They toured “*un pueblo fantasma y un parque acuático*” (a ghost town and an aquarium). Marco was not shy with his feelings toward his mom and felt closest to her.

Even though he had not seen his father's side of the family in a long time because his parents *se separaron* (separated) before he came here, he was quite fond of his cousins and his *tíos*. Marco felt close to his father and his father's side of the family, too, and recalled a beach vacation they took during one Christmas, right before he came to the United States:

En Navidad fui a la costa oeste de México con mi papá. Y allá hace mucho calor y ellos sienten que en invierno hace frío, pero es como si estuviera haciendo calor en mi estado natal y empezabamos a tronar cohetes y todo eso y en una cierta hora empiezan a tirar como balazos al cielo como del Año Nuevo. Eso pasar y luego fui con la familia, ahí jugué con mis primos y fui a la playa.

(At Christmas, I went to the west coast of Mexico with my dad. They all felt like that in winter it's cold, but it's not like in my home state where it was getting hot. We started, firing rockets and all that and at a certain time, they started shooting like bullets into the sky like it was New Year's. That happened and later I went with the family. There I played with my cousins and went to the beach).

Marco told me he has two older half-siblings from his father's side who live somewhere in the United States, saying, "*tengo dos, pero no son de mi mamá, son de mi papá, son medios hermanos*" (I have two, but they're not my mom's kids, they are my dad's, they are half siblings).

The Migration

Marco's journey to the United States was a car ride straight up the highway. When they got to the border, there was a delay. They got COVID-19 tests and slept in the car

and ate food from restaurants and gas stations. His mom had been to the United States before and had an apartment and job when she and Marco arrived.

Transitions

Comparing his life now to his life in Mexico, Marco stated that it was pretty much the same. He explained, “*lo que estoy viviendo actual son iguales. Mi mamá trabaja mucho, pero le va mejor. Acá en lo de que le pagan a ella lo que gana en una semana allá lo ganaba en un mes*” (The way I am living now is actually the same. My mom works a lot, but it’s better for her. Here, what they pay her in a week over there is what she earned in a month).

One thing Marco had to get used to was the climate in the United States, particularly Colorado. The temperatures change dramatically and it snows in Colorado. Marco noted the cold weather and the dryness give him bloody noses sometimes. He also described the way it looks in this country as opposed to Mexico. He explained, “*y también la ciudad porque en México las ciudades todo está más rayado, todo está más como maltratado. Y acá se ve todo más bonito, más verde*” (and also the city because in Mexico the cities are worn down, everything is old and torn up. And here things look more beautiful, more green). He had a physical sense of space and belonging as well as an emotional sense, as seen next. Exiting in *Nepantla* he exemplifies what Anzaldúa (1987) described as the “subtle ways we internalize identification” (p.83) from the foods, smells, and images tied to the homeland.

Marco described missing his friends in Mexico because they had been together “*desde kinder*” (since kindergarten). He stayed in touch with one friend as he described, noting, “*Tengo un amigo que es de Ciudad de México, que sepa mi estado de origen, y*

ese era mi mejor amigo en la secundaria” (I have a friend from Mexico City who knew my home, and he was my best friend in middle school). His best friend on the U.S. side of the border was José, another recently arrived student and participant in the study. They did not see each other outside of school, which was a different experience for Marco. When asked if he played with his friends here in the United States outside of school, he reported, *“a de los de aquí? No. Hablo con José, pero no juego en particular con los que juego, son más con los de México”* (with my friends from school? No. I talk with José but I don’t play particularly with those I play with at school). Marco was getting used to his home in the United States, going out and seeing new places. He was starting to know more people in the community with his mom, which made him more comfortable.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

For his schooling experiences, Marco remembered little about the COVID-19 global pandemic shutdowns in Mexico. For the 2020–2021 school year, Marco went to school for 1 week and then were off for a week. It was erratic, too, because of quarantines and strict rules for contact tracing. He noted:

Fueron, creo que un día, si un día no porque estaba quarentine. O, no fue una semana de lunes a viernes y luego la próxima semana. No, había clases por el COVID. Como se separaron a grupos por el COVID porque los salones estaban muy pegados a todos.

(They went, I believe, one day yes, one day no because it was a quarantine. Or, no, it was 1 week Monday through Friday and then the next week there was no class because of COVID. Like they separated groups through COVID because the classes were all being hit hard).

Marco squinted as he explained how much homework they had to do because they would only get one week at a time with the teachers. The students had to do everything, then come to school where the teachers would give them more and send them home. It was like this, he said, for 2 months or more. Marco attended middle school only a short time in 2021 before coming to the United States. He only had a few months in 2022 at school in the United States before summer break. Comparing this school year to the end of last school year, Marco felt:

Bien, me siento en la anterior, me sentía muy nervioso, tímido. Pero aquí ya no, no tanto porque como ya estoy con amigos, ya me siento bien y he conocido en el plazo del recreo de la escuela he conocido a más gente.

(Good, I feel in the school before, I felt very nervous, shy. But here not really, not so much, like I have friends, and now I already feel good and I am familiar with the school playground at recess and I have met more people).

The idea of interpreting experiences was powerful here as interpretation required a nod to contextual clues. The COVID-19 global pandemic was a global experience, yet the experience of it was interpreted in many different contexts for these participants.

Marco affirmed there were indeed similarities and differences between schooling in Mexico and the United States. In both places, school began with “*como lo más básico para que no se olvide*” (like the most basic stuff so that you don’t forget). According to Marco, the big difference between Mexico and the United States is:

allá encargan muchas tareas para que tú aprendas, intentes más veces y acá no. Allá hay veces que no las puedes cumplir todas porque pues son de cada profesor y es muy difícil.

(over there they give you a lot of work so that you learn, you have more chances to try, and here no. Over there, there's times you can't finish all of it because it's from every teacher and it's very hard?).

Marco attested to the difficulty of the workload, but at the same time did not equate lots of work with being better educated. He enlightened this understanding, saying:

Yo creo que aquí es mejor porque van más avanzados y allá no tanto. Cuando yo recién entre lo que dure fue lo más básico de aprender, pues no de olvidarse de cómo multiplicar fracciones y todo eso y aquí lo nuevo que aprendí fue lo de dividir fracciones o de pasar una fracción a un número decimal.

(I believe here is better because they go more advanced and over there not really.

When I first entered what was happening was the most basic things to learn, well, not to forget how to multiply fractions and all that, and here the new thing I learned was dividing fractions or converting a fraction to a decimal number).

Arriving mid-year may have had something to do with this interpretation of learning more advanced things from the start of school; Marco's current context was one in which his math class and teacher were more advanced and fast-paced than the prior school year. Context was crucial to interpretation.

Belonging

Even though Marco had gained familiarity with the community and the new school, he felt like he did not belong yet. "*Soy Mexicano*," he declared. He emphatically stated he belonged in Mexico. He had friends and he knew the physical space within which he resided. It was an earthy, environmental connection for him as he compared the hot, dusty scratches of the city where he lived to the cool, green cleanliness of this place.

Marco had three distinct places where he belonged at school. His testimony was clear as far as his favorite classes:

Diría que ciencias. Se me hace muy divertida, la maestra, aunque grite, no es como de regaño, es como que así habla mi mamá de repente. Yo diría que matemáticas. Me gusta mucho matemáticas. La maestra no es regañona. Sí, parece si estuviera enojada, pero no. Me empezó a gustar, se me hizo más fácil. En un tiempo parece lo tengo dominado Yo diría que Drama porque es muy chistoso, muy gracioso. Son la mayoría de mis amigos están.

(I would say science. The teacher makes it fun for me, even though she yells, it's not like scolding, it's like how my mom talks all the time. I would say math. I like math a lot. The teacher is not mean. Yah, she seems like she would be mad, but no. I started to like it and that made it easier. At some point, I'll have it mastered. I would say drama class because it is funny, really funny. Most of my friends are in that class).

Marco was least comfortable in social studies and English language development class.

He was not in the Newcomer English class, rather a 45-minute language acquisition block because he read and wrote at an ELP-L of 2.5 as measured by the WIDA ACCESS test.

As far as social studies, Marco admitted that he did know a lot about history and as for the language development class, he explained, "*como es mucho, es más inglés que español. No le entiendo mucho*" (it's a lot, it's more English than Spanish. I don't understand much). Marco was clearly exhibiting how much language and content knowledge influenced a sense of belonging. He also illuminated the disposition of teachers as important for him as well.

Education and Success

Marco believed education is meant to teach students things they never knew before. To be successful in school, Marco noted one has to “*poner atención, intentar al trabajo, no portarse mal lo mayor posible, y enfocarte más en el trabajo que en hablar*” (pay attention, try to work, do not behave bad as best you can, and focus more on schoolwork than talking). Marco thought the biggest problem that immigrants face is if they do something illegal or without thinking, it may make things worse for them. His testimony paralleled Imelda’s fears and was very personal:

Pues a lo mejor hacer algo ilegal, puedes tener más problemas que un ciudadano de aquí. Si tengo . . . varios problemas en la escuela, por ejemplo, puedo afectar a mi mama. Puede afectar que viene siendo de afuera de la escuela. Haciendo que pues ya nos regresamos a México.

(Well, if you do something illegal, you can have more problems than a citizen. If I have . . . any problems in school, for example, I will have an effect on my mom. It can affect what happens outside of school. Doing that, well, we are going back to Mexico).

This passage was a succinct summation of immigrant beliefs around deportation and paths to citizenship, and more importantly, a tremendous burden for a young person to carry.

A point of fracture from his *Soy Mexicano* identity was when Marco expressed that the most important thing for him to learn in school this year was, “*lo que me enseñan y el inglés*” (whatever they teach me and English) because he was learning the prescribed eighth-grade U.S. history and was not being instructed formally in Spanish. Marco’s

plans for the future included learning English, understanding teachers better, passing all his exams, and studying at a university. He believed Spanish would be a resource in the future. “*Podría ayudar a otras personas que no sepan inglés*” (I could help others that do not know English). Again, the comparison of their native language as important only as it related to some aspect of English that was corroborated.

Interestingly, Marco asked me directly about how the exams “counted” in the United States because he wanted to focus more on those, noting, “*No más de que si se vale los exámenes. ¿Aquí valen, verdad aquí valen, pero en la calificación, o sea, si perjudican a cuáles exámenes como este? Los finales, como los de antes?*” He asked me if the exams we take at the end of the year harm students’ grades and if they count for anything.

Marco explained simply that it was important to him so he knew where to focus more on learning English. Everything is presented in English in this school, and Marco wanted to understand his teachers, his subjects, and content being taught. Final exams carried a different weight in his experience. If one did not pass the final in Mexico, one did not pass the year. All participants confirmed this rule in subsequent interviews about the weight of exams. These participants possessed schema for high-stakes testing and it was obviously motivating Marco.

Mario

Pude entrar en sexto sin repetir año y allá en sexto me hice un abanderado!

Introduction

Mario was a cheerful and talkative 12-year-old boy from Nicaragua. He was raised near his *bisabuela* (great-grandmother) for whom he had a deep, dimpled smile, and “*le digo Mita*” (I call her Mita). At the time of this study, he was in seventh grade and had

been in the United States for just under 18 months. He was closest to his mother; she was in charge of him. When asked about his culture and family ethnicity, Mario called his mother's family Sandinistas and said they were less religious than his father's side. His father's family were Liberales and they celebrated the *Purisimas* in their small town. He recalled this cultural celebration:

Una de las culturas de Nicaragua es que cada cierto tiempo, digamos, el 7 de diciembre se celebra algo que le dicen las purísimas. Es también cultura y religión, porque andes en casa, cantando leas y alabanzas a Dios, sí, y te dan cosas religiosas, parte de la cultura.

(One part of Nicaraguan culture is that during certain times, let's say the 7th of December, something called las Purisimas are celebrated. It is both culture and religion because you walk at home, singing lines and praises to God, yes, and they give you religious things, part of the culture).

Mario had a large extended family. He enumerated them:

Por parte de mi mamá le tengo siete tíos, tres tías y cuatro tíos. Tengo dos acá y uno que vive conmigo. . . . Por parte de mi papá tengo, no sé exactamente, pero creo que igual 8. Tengo uno en Miami y los otros en Nicaragua.

(On my mother's side I have seven aunts and uncles, three aunts and four uncles. I have two here and one that lives with me. . . . On my father's side, I don't know exactly, but I believe it's the same, eight. I have one in Miami and the others are in Nicaragua).

Mario's mother did not work in Nicaragua and his father worked in the mining industry as an engineer. They all lived together, his mother, father, and younger brother with

several *conocidos* (neighbors) from his hometown. About 20 of them all left at the same time to come to the United States.

The Migration

Mario loosely recalled their month-long journey to the United States by dragging his finger along a map of the western hemisphere on the wall of my classroom. He vaguely portrayed hotels, restaurants, and people's homes by making squiggly lines at certain points and landmarks. He was clear and precise in three places. First, the day they left, he noted, "*salimos el 9 de julio, a las 3:00 de la mañana*" (we left on July 9th at 3 in the morning). Second was a path they hiked north up from de Leon to Honduras for 12 hours. The other was the "*punto de Tejas*" where "*nos secuestaron*" (they were detained) for a bit more than a week, then crossed over on a canoe. They walked in a line until *la migra* found them. Mario described the experience in the detention center:

Este era una carpa grande, blanca y era todo cerrado. Solo podía salir al baño y este te daban la comida en unas cajas que ponían ahí y te las podías ir a traer y hay veces te sacaban a bañarte. Y yo estaba con niños de mi edad y mi papá estaba solo y mi mamá estaba con mi hermanito pequeño.

(This was a big, white tent and it was all closed up. One could only leave to go to the bathroom and here they gave you food in boxes that they put here (motions toward the floor) and you could go get it yourself and at times they came and got you to take a bath. And I was with other kids my age and my dad was alone and my mom was with my little brother).

It bears noting at that time, Mario was 11 years old, alone in a tent, surrounded by other kids and being fed from a box. There was no fear or sadness when he talked about it,

though. It was as if Mario knew what was going to happen as generations of Central American men, women, and children have migrated to the United States and their chained knowledge prepared them (Kasun, 2015). Elizabeth and Imelda, too, spoke matter-of-factly about the separations at the border. It was almost as if a schema existed in their minds and bodies for the coming *Nepantla* existence.

Transitions

Comparing his life now with his life in Nicaragua, Mario noted missed his routines the most. He fondly recalled playing soccer with rocks for goal posts in the street every day with his friends or “*saliendo al parque y el centro*” (going out to the park and town center). He named all his friends for me as if to conjure them in his memory. He visualized a typical afternoon as follows:

Y mis amigos, pues sí, cada tarde iba a jugar yo a donde vivo, como le contaba que a mi papá lo crió mi Mita, allí donde ella vivía, porque al lado estaba el parque central de mi pueblo, y había canchas y todo. Yo iba a ir. . . . Como es en las calles poníamos piedras y con balón jugábamos así.

(And my friends, well yah, every afternoon I’d go play where I live, like I how I told you that my dad was raised by his grandmother, my Mita, here where she lived because next to her house was the central park of my town and there were fields there and everything, I’d go. Like in the streets, we’d put down rocks and with a ball we played like that).

In the United States, his experience was not like that. Mario explained it was because “*no he conocido nadie aquí. Allá, sí*” (I don’t know anybody here, over there, yes).

Mario preferred the food of home to the food in the United States, his favorite being Mita's "*caldo de pollo, bien rica, e arroz y frijoles de vueltos y vueltos*" (chicken soup and 'raiz n bainz' all mixed up). The food in Nicaragua was a joyful recollection for Mario as he said, "*hay bastantes comidas típicas de Nicaragua. Hay una que se llama el nacatamal y el indio viejo chanco con yuca es de la más típica.*" (there are so many foods typical of Nicaragua. There is one called nactamal and one is el indio Viejo chanco with yucca that is more common). *Nacatamal* is a special corn masa and *indio viejo chanco* is a pork dish made with yucca leaves. The climate and weather were also stark points of difference for him. He noted, "*No me acostumbro a ya me acostumbre pero hay algunas cosas que no me acostumbro. Como el clima. Me estaba acostumbrado a que hiciera sol siempre*" (I'm not accustomed to it here, well, I got used to some things, but there are others I'm not accustomed to. Like the weather. I'm used to it being sunny all the time). Mario specifically noted the weather in the United States changes and it gets cold at night.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

Going deeper into his schooling experiences here in the United States, Mario emphatically said this school was better than the middle school in Florida mainly because, "*nos daban el receso para la comida, pero no nos dejaban salir afuera*" (they gave us a recess to eat, but they didn't let us go outside). This role was probably left over from COVID-19 global pandemic-related return-to-school protocols, wherein students were sequestered in cohorts and limited in their interactions across the nation's public schools. Mario reported his family left their home in July, which was the middle of his sixth-grade school year. There was a large gap, around 6 months, in his formal schooling

records from his approximate time of arrival in the United States and his first enrollment in a U.S. school. Something in the timeline he recalled did not quite fit. In trying to clarify with him, he only shook his head and said, “*no recuerdo bien*” (I don’t remember well).

As far as Mario’s schooling in Nicaragua, it was much the same as the United States. But he noted if students did not arrive on time at 7:30 am in Nicaragua, they were locked out and could not go that day. His classes were shorter and they only went to school until 12:30 pm. Mario described it as “*dos turnos*” (two turns) with the primary grades (Grades 1 through 6) going in the morning and the seventh- and eighth-grade students in the afternoon. Interestingly, too, he reported, “*me daban todas mis clases al día pero de 45 minutos 30, así*” (they gave me all my classes each day, but only for 45 minutes or 30, like that). As in Nicaragua, Mario’s favorite classes in the United States were math and science. He judged schooling in Nicaragua and schooling here as about equal, noting, “*que las dos me gustan, sí*” (I like them both). English was his favorite class at school now in the United States because he was learning more advanced things like spelling words and using adjectives correctly.

Belonging

Mario said he felt most comfortable and powerful in Newcomer English class where he could be himself, full of energy and participating. He indicated this comfort as, “*en su clase en cuarto periodo y quinto, me siento que me distraigo más que en otras clases*” (in your class, in fourth and fifth period, I feel more distracted than in others). On the surface, that answer may have seemed contrary to what one would expect. After all, being distracted should not be part of feeling powerful and comfortable. But for Mario, the

freedom to speak, ask questions, crack jokes, and make connections all over the room with all of his peers was powerful because he had the level of comfort and confidence to be a seventh-grade boy.

Mario felt conflicted about belonging in the larger school context, however. With a sad smile and a shake of his head, his *testimonio* portrayed it best:

Yo diría que sí, diría que no. Es que hay veces, no sé. Es de que hay algunas clases que pues, no les entiendo nada y hay algunas que sí. Como en la clase que estoy ahorita no sé cómo crear aplicaciones ni nada. Y es igual leen en mi segundo período no sé tengo que preguntar pues a los que tengo al lado porque no le no entiendo nada.

(I would say yes and I would say no. It's because there are times, I don't know. It's that there are some classes well, I don't understand anything and others that I do understand. Like in the class I'm in right now, I don't know how to create applications or anything. It's the same with reading in my second period I don't know what to ask of those next to me because I don't understand any of it).

Clearly, Mario's interpretation of belonging in school resided within his own ability to learn and understand, regardless of language. Mario's interpretation of belonging in school was exemplified as he gave an example of how it felt to belong at school in Nicaragua. He testified:

cada lunes y viernes tocaban el timbre para ir a tu salón, porque si llegas temprano podía salir del salón y andar por ahí. Pero cuando tocaban el timbre tenías que irte para el aula. Y cada lunes y viernes este hacía en la decimos tarima nosotros.

Digamos como un auditorio. Esta instalación a las islas estructura de cemento y ahí

hablaba la directora, y el director, de cosas que pasaban, pues que iban a pasar y de actividades que van a hacer. También al final hacíamos una oración. También cantábamos el himno nacional. Cada lunes y viernes, lunes y viernes cantábamos el himno nacional, mirando a la bandera.

(Every Monday and Friday the bell rang for you to go to your classroom, because if you arrived early you could leave the class and walk around there. But when the bell rang, you had to get yourself to your class. And every Monday and Friday they bring us to the stage, like the auditorium. This was like island structures made of cement and here the school principals [one female, one male] talked about things that happened or that were going to happen and about activities we will do. Also, at the end we said a prayer. Also, we sang the national anthem. Every Monday and Friday we sang the national anthem, looking at the flag).

Education and Success

In Mario's interpretation of education, "*para mí, significa aprender los valores y aprenderá a valorar la vida y aprender cosas que te puedan ayudar en el futuro, sí*" (for me it means learning values and you will learn to value life and to learn things that can help you in the future, yes). To be successful in school, Mario believed, "*venir preparado todos los días, participar en todas las actividades que puedas y responder todo lo que puedas*" (you have to come prepared every day, participate in all the activities, and respond to everything that you can). His Spanish was a resource for him and a point of separation from his peers because although he had enough English to use his Spanish to translate for classmates, he noted they sometimes did not understand the "*palabras de mi país*" (words from my country). Mario was experiencing the marginalization of his

Central American dialect through the sheer numbers of Mexican-origin students at this school and in this group.

In school, the biggest problem immigrants face is the language—learning English and *in* English—and getting used to the routines. Apart from changing classrooms and having to ride a bus, Mario mentioned one has to get up earlier and do the same thing every day, and then come home. He missed having time with friends. He also knew immigrants fear being deported if they have some accident. There was an injustice in his mind to this law, because he had heard of people who did really bad things and then escaped to Nicaragua where they would not be extradited to face their crimes. Most important to his parents this year was, “*que aprendo el inglés*” (that I learn English). He also said that “*uno de las cosas importantes a mi papá y mi mamá es hacer una casa de mi país . . . y llevaba gente para ahí*” (that he helps his family make a home here as in his country and bring others from there).

Mateo

Pero era bonito porque uno vivía en la infancia . . . y ser humilde porque no hay algo más bonito que una persona humilde hacia los demás.

Introduction

Mateo was a persistent, 13-year-old, seventh-grade male from Colombia. He came to the United States in late July 2022 with his mother and her fiancé. At the time of this study, he had less than 3 months in the country. He began describing his culture in this way:

en [mi ciudad] no es como una cultura que tengan así como México. Lo que sé es que no somos personas, pues dicen mucha gente que somos, no somos personas de los

que nacen ahí no son personas que aguantan mucho—personas que no tienen paciencia—y que a veces son muy peleoneros, gritones. Un humor muy fuerte, entonces. . . . No somos como otros países, como los argentinos que se tratan normal . . . la mayoría, gente en Colombia se tratan con insultos.

(In [my city] it is not like a culture that they have say like Mexico. What I know is that we are not, though some people say we are, we are not the people who were born there, we are not people who will put up with a lot—people who don't have patience—and at times they are very argumentative and yell. Strong-spirited, then. We are not like other countries, like Argentinians who treat folks normal . . . the majority of Colombians are insulting to others).

The perspective Mateo took was that of how others view him and his cultural character. He specifically called out the comparison to Mexican and Argentinian culture. This interpretation and preoccupation with how others viewed Mateo and his culture played out in complex ways throughout his *testimonio*. He also talked, as other participants did, about food as an important cultural artifact. He attested to the variety and richness:

hay mucha variedad de comida, por decir en Medellín es la bandeja paisa que es frijoles, chicharrón de cerdo, arroz, plátano y carne molida. Pero en (mi ciudad) es el tamal. Es ese hecho de harina de maíz con carne, arroz, verduras y existe también está tolimense que es de otra región. La comida es muy rica...pero siento que en algunos aspectos no, porque tal vez se caracteriza mucho Colombia por la comida callejera.

(There is a lot of variety of food, for example, in Medellín, it is the “paisa platter” which is beans, pork chicharrónes, platanos, and ground beef. But in (my city) it is

tamal. This is made from corn flour, rice, vegetables, and there are also *tolimas* [tamales made with chicken, pork, boiled eggs, carrots, peas, and rice], but they are from another region. The food is very delicious . . . but I feel like in some ways not because it is characterized as street food).

Mateo's parents divorced not too long ago, and he said his mother's family and father's family were from two different worlds. "*Por parte de mi papá mi familia tiene mucha plata. Son abogados, doctorados, doctores e jueces.*" (In my father's family they are well off. There are lawyers, doctorates, doctors, and judges). His father was an elected representative for their district. On the other hand, Mateo said, "*por parte de mi mamá siempre ha sido una familia de campo, como en un monte con una finca, pero eso es lo que a uno le gusta*" (my mother's side they have always been a country family, like a mountain with a farm, but they are satisfied in this). Mateo felt closest to his mother and it was only for her that he came to the United States. He did not want to leave his barrio and said, "*porque nunca supe nada diferente a estar con ella*" (because I never knew any different than being with her). It came down to almost the last day when his mom packed a bag for him and explained they were leaving.

The Migration

They flew over the Caribbean to Cancun, Mexico, where they stayed for 5 days. Then came another flight to Mexico City and then, Mateo noted, "*el día que yo viajé de Ciudad de México a Mexicali, nos pidieron 100 dólares por 3 personas. Entrando al avión, y si no dábamos esos 100 dólares, sentíamos como que eso era un secuestro.*" At the airport, they were held up on the plane by a band of three men that Mateo believed were *narcotraficantes* (drug dealers). They, along with all passengers, were told to pay

\$100 dollars each, or else they would not be allowed off the plane. Of course, this experience was disturbing for Mateo. Reflecting back, he apologized and said, “*o es por que no quiero hablar mal de Mexico ni Mexicanos*” (I don’t want to speak bad of Mexico or Mexicans); however, he interpreted this incident as exactly why people think bad of Mexico: “*por que hay mucha corrupción*” (because there’s a lot of corruption).

From the airport, they were shuttled by bus to some place. Mateo believed they would go over the border in a car, but instead, they walked. They walked a southeast diagonal road for several hours, with a large “*pared*” (wall) always in sight. Mateo did not remember clearly, as the journey was very arduous, and no one really talked. He remembered little but recognized Arizona on a map that hung on the wall of my classroom. He and his family knew nothing. When the helicopters flew over them, they ran and hid. Eventually, *la migra* found them. They were taken to a large complex, given a health exam and some food. They bathed and were allowed to stay together. From here, they went on a bus to Colorado. Mateo’s family was told the people were friendly to immigrants in this state. He explained, “*aquí nos dijeron que este estado era un estado pródigo de inmigrantes y que es bueno para recibir inmigrantes y la gente aquí son muy pasiva*” (here they told us this state was a good destination for many immigrants and the people were peaceful).

Transitions

Comparing his life now to his life in Colombia, Mateo said he missed “*salir a jugar con mis amigos*” (going out to play with my friends). A theme arose in the *testimonios* of all the participants around going places, being outside, having many long-time friends, and *saliendo afuera*. Mateo was animated as he expounded upon this notion, stating:

Porque yo siento que salir a jugar es muy bacán, es muy chévere. ¡Yo llegaba de mi casa hacia las tareas del colegio . . . y llegaba a hacer mis tareas y cuando terminaba mis tareas ya no tenía! Ya todo tenía toda la tarde libre y mis amigos iban y me buscaban allá a mi casa y para jugar y yo salía y disfrutar toda la tarde.

(I feel like going outside to play is very cool, very awesome. I used to come home, do my homework . . . and when I finished all my homework, I wouldn't have any! I would have the whole afternoon free and my friends would come look for me there at my house to play and I would go out and enjoy the whole afternoon).

Mateo shared he was not like a kid in a poor neighborhood, as he described, “*de esos barrios de que uno a veces corría sin zapatos*” (like those that ran around with no shoes). He had no intention of being independent from his family like so many other kids his age. Mateo's interpretation of young people who ran the streets and who “*independizarse*” (become independent) too soon was that “*le pasa que siempre caen en un vicio . . . y le va mal en mi mente*” (what happens to them is that always they fall into vice, and that's bad for them in my mind). He spoke very seriously about the harm the drug cartels unleashed upon his country. Mateo blamed the cartels by name—Pablo Escobar, the Medellín Cartel, the Cali Cartel—for the ruin of his country's grand heritage and the decimation of their reputation worldwide.

Mateo said he was happy to be in the United States for several reasons. Above all others, the U.S. education system had high value in Colombia. He was sure that “*puedo volver a Colombia y conseguir un puesto alto. Van a decir que yo he estado en Estados Unidos*” (I can return to Colombia and demand a higher salary. They were going to say that I have been in the United States). Mateo noted when he returns to Colombia, his U.S.

education will put him ahead in social and economic systems. He referred to England's Oxford University and Cambridge University as "*unas de las mejores universidades de todo el mundo*" (perhaps the best in the world) and starting in the United States at Stanford, said he might get there someday. His desire for an U.S. education became evident when he noted, "*Digamos yo voy, apunto doctorado en computadoras. Voy a en Estados Unidos lo hago entonces. En Colombia o en la mayoría del mundo, va a ser algo impresionante*" (let's say I am going to be or get a doctorate in computers. I go to the United States to do it then. In Colombia or in the rest of the world, that is going to be really impressive). Finally, Mateo believed, in comparison to Colombian life, "*es como aquí Estados Unidos, que aquí todo es justo, nadie pierden, nadie gana*" (it's like here in the US, here everything is fair, no one loses, no one wins). Make no mistake, Mateo missed his home, his bedroom, his computer, his television, his friends, and his street food; yet, there was a hope for the future.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

Going deeper into his schooling experiences, Mateo confirmed the accounts of other participants explaining that over there (i.e., in Colombia), students stay in the same class with the same people for all their classes. Students only leave if they have gym or technology class. In the primary grades, students have one teacher, and in secondary, they have one for each subject. Mateo also highlighted the importance of character education and uniforms in the grades at his school. He began his testimony as follows:

En Colombia, que bueno, mis experiencias eran como muy bonitas porque los conocía a todos. Conocí a todos mis amigos y ya los conocía desde hace mucho tiempo. Entonces las experiencias como escolares eran muy bueno. A cambio aquí

no. Sí, aquí llegué, soy nuevo, soy de otro país, no soy del mismo, no hablamos el mismo idioma. A la hora de expresarse uno con las palabras uno sabe que no le van a entender. Pero después ya cogiendo después ritmo de largo tiempo ya después, si te pueden entender a ti.

(In Colombia, well, my experiences were like really good because I was familiar with everything and everyone. I knew all my friends, and I had known them for a long time. So, my school experience was really good. The change to here, not so much. Yes, here I arrived, I am new, I am from another country, I am not the same, we don't speak the same language. When one wants to express themselves with words one knows they are not going to understand you. But after picking up the rhythm for a long time, later, yes, they can understand you).

Mateo explained that everything is harder in the United States for him—not necessarily because of English, but because in Colombia, education was basic. For example, math was all numbers and calculations, no *letres* (letters, as in reading). If students could multiply and divide and simplify a fraction, then they had all the math they needed. Or, in the case of English, which Mateo took from Grade 3-on, if students knew how to conjugate a verb and memorized a few words, then they had all the English they needed to have whichever career they wanted. Mateo was learning so much more here, especially English. He noted, “*En la clase inglés aprendo mucho. En los juegos, los trabajos y los vocabularios que manejamos en lo que escribimos en los verbos, en todo.*” (In English class I learn a lot. In the games, the work, and vocabulary we deal with, in what we write, in the verbs, in everything). There was an implicit acknowledgement as well that he was learning *in* English as he said that the hardest classes were the boring

ones where the teacher talks the whole time and he did not understand anything. English language played a big part in why Mateo believed some of his peers had an easier time. He explained, “*como que Mario habla más o menos el idioma, sabe como es todo, entonces a él siento que entre esa diferencia ganaría Mario*” (like Mario, he speaks the language, more or less, so for him I feel that this difference would put Mario at an advantage).

Belonging

Mateo’s favorite classes were Newcomer English, gym, and if he had art, it would be art, too. He did not feel like he belonged in school because, as he noted, “*no sé manejar el idioma*” (I don’t know how to handle the language). He also brought to bear what other immigrants at times pinpoint as a crux of their borderland existence by adding, “*no sea la forma de decir que yo no tengo una nacionalidad, residencia, nada*” (I don’t know how to say it, I don’t have a nationality, a residence, nothing). For Mateo, the biggest problem immigrants face in school and outside of school was discrimination. Mateo’s explanation of discrimination was telling, though, as he testified:

Porque hay mucha gente aquí que son de México, pero tiene papeles. Tiene residencia o es mexicano y nació aquí. O sea, puede ser que reconozcamos así normal, o sea jugar y todo pero que no llegara al punto de ya hacernos bullying . . . pues a mí todavía no, pero siento que, a la mayoría de gente, sí, les hacen bullying o discriminación. A la hora de hacer un inmigrante, hay mucha gente aquí que son muy presumida porque tienen sus papeles o vinieron con visa.

(Because there are many people here from Mexico, but they have papers. They have residence or they are Mexican but were born here. It’s like they can say it’s normal

and it's just playing around, and that it never gets to that point that they bully us . . . well, it hasn't happened to me yet, but, yes, there are many people here who bully and discriminate. When it comes to immigrants, there are a lot of presumptuous people here because they have their papers).

Mateo was very perceptive in his interpretation of an immigrant's place, as it was determined by document status. Although bullying had not happened directly to him, he knew it was coming eventually. He anticipated it saying, "*a mí no me han hecho bullying. O sea, puede ser que recochemos así normal, o sea jugar y todo. Pero no, que no llegara al punto de ya hacernos bullying.*" (They haven't bullied me. Well, maybe they could get away with saying it's normal or it's just playing around and all that. But no, it hasn't got to the point of them bullying us). In Mateo's realization, there were seeds of *la facultad*, which Anzaldúa (1987) described as an ability to see through the myths and foretell dangerous situations.

Schooling and Success

For Mateo, education was important, but he noted, "*es decisión suya si usted quiere aprender*" (you have to make the decision to learn) or one will never be successful in life. In his words, "*si quieres aprender va a prestar atención. Va a participar en sus clases, a sus trabajos. Los que no quieren aprender, solamente escuchan lo que pasa en clases, no escriben, no hacen nada y sólo vienen aquí por venir a perder el tiempo.*" (To learn, one had to pay attention and do their work. You are going to participate in your classes, your work. Those that don't want to learn only listen to what's going on, they don't write, they don't do anything, they only come to come and waste time). Mateo believed his Spanish was a resource because there were many people who did not speak

English and he said, “*si uno habla los dos idiomas, español e inglés . . . esté llevando una persona. Esa persona le va a poder ayudar a esa persona y siento que va a ser más importante*” (if one speaks both languages, English and Spanish, this will carry a person. That person is going to have the ability to help another person and I feel that you are going to be more important). Note in Mateo’s testimony, however, that his Spanish was only a resource because it related to English and the ability to translate for others.

The most important thing Mateo’s family wanted him to accomplish in school was that he graduate eighth grade and that he learns English. He looked forward to this future because he believed individuals are seen as important if they can translate. As for the future, Mateo shrugged. He wanted to return to Colombia and be a businessman. But in reality, he understood very clearly and said, “*la vida se cambia en un paperador de ojos*” (life can change in the blink of an eye).

Nina

El inglés es muy difícil. Para nosotros aprenderlo de nuevo, o sea, aprenderlo en inglés desde el principio. Ser diferente a los demás, o sea, no entender las cosas.

Introduction

Nina, like most eighth graders, was prone to one-word answers and interjections that demonstrated the full power of an emotional palette contained within a 14-year-old city girl from Nicaragua. She sat upright and looked at me only from her side-eye in our first interview. For some, this mannerism could be interpreted as shyness or being unable to understand and articulate. But with Nina, patience and thoughtfulness came from a guarded place that was her culture and her road-weary consciousness. She was the first participant within whom I began to notice *la facultad*. It is like a sixth sense that Latinas

especially develop to sense danger or see through false pretenses (Anzaldúa, 1987). She lives in the United States with her aunts, her mother, and *una prima* (female cousin). Her father lives in the southeastern part of the United States. Nina said she misses him because she was so very used to him being around and now, he was not. She had younger siblings still in Nicaragua and said, “*Ah sí, eso pensaba en lamentarlo*” (ah, yes, when I thought about that, I regret it). Nina admitted she was closest to her *tía* because, as she noted, “*em no sé, desde chica he estado con ella, entonces siempre fue así, sea siempre esté más cerca de ella que las demás personas. La quiero mucho, sí*” (um, I don’t know, since I was little I have been with her, so it was always like this. I love her a lot, yes). At the time the study began, Nina had been in the country for around 9 months.

The Migration

The journey to the United States, Nina recalled, “*fue muy difícil*” (was very hard). This period was when her parents first separated. She explained, “*y luego ahí que se separan de seguridad el vino primero acá que nosotras*” (and then, at the time, they separated for safety, he came here first, then us). Nina came on a route many other Nicaraguans had travelled from the southern side of their country. A 12-hour walk to El Paraíso, Honduras left her “*muy cansada*” (very tired) and they, her mom and cousin, stayed an entire day there to rest. They travelled together with a large group of women and two older male cousins through Guatemala and onto Mexico. Eventually, the men had to leave the group. This horde of people from Central America, as Donald Trump described them, was comprised of women, teenage girls, and small children.

Nina’s recollection of the journey was blurry at best, as if it was all a nightmare. She could not say how long it took. She remembered having COVID-19 at some point along

the way through Mexico. She witnessed many dreadful things such as people getting robbed, arrested, or kidnapped and turned over to immigration officials. This time was “*muy dura*” (very hard). She recollected as follows:

Pasábamos muchas cosas, como que mirábamos como las personas roban a otras personas o dónde estamos escondidos según y llegaban personas. Como quiere nos entregan a la migración y luego tenían que pagar.

(A lot of things happened to us, like we were watching like people rob other people, or where we were hiding others arrived. Like how they wanted to turn us over to immigration and so we had to pay them off).

Nina understood that bribes were a part of the cost of the journey, not unlike Mateo’s interpretation of corruption. The women in this band of migrants, as she noted, “*nos cuidamos entre todas*” (watched out for each other) and when they arrived at *el rio*, they went across, found *la migra*, and were taken in by relatives in Florida. Her one-word answer for how she felt during this journey was “*triste*” (sad). She looked at me sideways and continued, “*triste porque quedaron muchas personas atrás*” (sad because many people were left behind). From there, Nina went to a state far to the North and enrolled in school. Then during this past summer, they moved to Colorado where her other aunts had settled in from their migration that started in Spain the year before.

Transitions

Comparing her life there to her life here, Nina recalled memories of the food, the patriotic parades, and time spent with her 82-year-old aunt from Spain. Her father’s parents were very involved in their life for a time, but now after the divorce, not so much. The families did not get along well. Nina smiled as she remembered how her aunt taught

her how to make *platos de antigüedad* and how all of them enjoyed painting together. She revealed her younger sisters were still in Nicaragua and lived with her maternal grandparents. She was torn between the families across borders as she really missed her sisters and her paternal grandparents in Nicaragua. But Nina believed she and her mom were here to make a better future for her sisters and that it would all come to pass.

Nina said she missed going about her day in Nicaragua, “*pasando tiempo, caminando, saliendo afuera, relajando con mis primas*” (passing the time, wandering around, going out and about, relaxing with my cousins). She does not do that in the United States, explaining:

Porque es como que viven muchas personas y luego nos sentimos como muy impresionados y allá como que podíamos salir y aquí no. No. Y se me hace raro como o sea si puedo salir, pero se me raro y diferente. Entonces como que no.

(Because it’s like here, there are many people that live here and so makes us feel like we are very pressured and over there we can go out but here, no. No. And it seems strange to me, that is, I can go out, but it is weird and different to me. So, then, like no).

Nina said she is not the same person in the United States, and she missed her way of being, mostly. Yet, it was all for the promise of opportunity, as she flatly stated that she felt fine and that she was going to have a better future.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

In terms of her schooling experiences, Nina attended a large school in Nicaragua with many students and did not really pay any attention. She said she did not have to pay so much attention there because, as she noted, “*eh era muy diferente porque si todas las*

personas hablan español y no tenía que estar preocupada o algo así” (eh, it was very different because, yah, everyone speaks Spanish and I didn’t have to be preoccupied or something like that). The school year in Nicaragua went from late-January through November. Their school day was from 7 am until noon, like Mario attested, and they would go to four different classrooms each day. They travelled as a “*grupo junto*” (group of students), unlike in the United States where class membership changes each time. Nina interpreted her schooling in the United States as:

Eh, aquí hay muchas clases más avanzadas que allá. He aprendido mucho más aquí por cosas que, o sea, aquí es como. Hay una clase de que allá, ni siquiera sabía que existía o algo así, entonces como que aprendo más.

(Eh, here there are more advanced classes than there. I have learned so much more here like for example here it is like this. There is a class that over there I didn’t even know existed or something like that so like here I learn more).

The subjects may be different, but the classroom set up was the same in Nicaragua.

Students sat in rows or a big circle sometimes, and that was how it was at Crystal Lakes.

Teachers were pretty much the same in both places, but Nina noted, “*casi igual, no tampoco solo le es muy diferente, solo explica la clase y ya se sientan con su*

computadora nada más y no y solo nos explican, pero casi no hablamos con ellos”

(almost the same, it’s not very different either, the teachers [in Nicaragua] only explain to the class and then they sit with their computer, nothing else, they don’t explain to us, but we also never talked to them). She did not completely blame the teachers for lack of interaction. Nina expressed the students have some responsibility in this. She even went so far as to say that the teachers here treated her “*muy bien y eh, me explican las cosas*

bien” (very well, and, eh, they explain things well to me). One must factor into this response that I am a teacher at the school; perhaps Nina felt like she must be positive.

The most confusing class for her was math. About this subject, Nina reported, “*O no en la matemática es muy diferente. Cada día o cada semana miramos más diferentes (materias), aprendemos cosas . . . pero es muy diferente, ya aprendemos cosas muy diferentes que aquí*” (oh no, in math it is very different. Each day or each week we are looking at more different [material], we are learning things . . . but it is very different. We are learning things that are very different here). Her favorite classes were art, English, and science. Nina happily explained her reasons, noting:

En arte, me gusta dar más y acá porque paso más tiempo con todos los chavos y. Y porque me gusta eh aprender inglés. Y la clase de Ciencias porque me gusta como experimentar cosas nuevas.

(In art, I like to give more and here [in Newcomer English class] because I get to spend time with all of the group. And because I like learning English. And in science class because I like to experiment with new things).

Belonging

Even though she was making friends in different classes, Nina did not feel like she belongs in the United States because she does not have enough English. She testified to the way others have marginalized her, saying, “*no mucho no. A veces como que cuando me oyen en inglés y luego no entiendo, las personas se ponen a reír cuando no entiendo. Siento más incómoda*” (not much, no. Sometimes when they hear me in English and then I don’t understand, it makes the people laugh when I don’t understand. I feel really uncomfortable). She had made friends, however, due to her desire to know more English.

Other students empathized that Nina did not understand and they translated for her and told the teacher she needed help. Nina interpreted these actions as friendship. She felt seen and heard in classes, for the most part.

Nina noted “*¡Chismeamos!*” (gossiping) was her favorite morning activity. Nina said she felt most comfortable in Newcomer English class because, “*las otras personas también hablan igual inglés que yo y ahí casi no saben . . . hablan el español igual que yo y no saben inglés, entonces siento que somos iguales*” (the others also speak English the same as me and in here almost no one knows it . . . they speak Spanish the same as me and they don’t know English, so then I feel like we are the same). Nina called the students in Newcomer English class “*los chavos*” (the kids) and had a big smile for them.

Education and Success

Education, in Nina’s mind, was supposed to teach one respect and how to value others. She believed all immigrants arrived with the same purpose. Her words were powerful testimony on this subject:

Porque si es así, venimos a algo, aquí solo teníamos un propósito, ir a aprender el inglés y entonces pensamos que lo es igual a tener los valores para aprender inglés y le da y poner atención, entonces eso es lo mismo.

(Because if that is the case, we came here for something, here we only had one purpose, to go learn English and then we think that is the same as having the values to learn English and paying attention to it, it’s the same).

Valores was a theme in the educational beliefs of the recently arrived students. They figured out what was valuable, and they learned it, like English. In Nina’s opinion, the

biggest problem immigrants faced in school was the language, and a little bit of the *acostumbrando*, or getting used to things. Nina attested:

el inglés es muy difícil. Para nosotros aprenderlo de nuevo, o sea, aprenderlo en inglés desde el principio. Ser diferente a los demás, o sea, no entender y eso las cosas.

(English is very difficult. For us, those that are new to learning it, or for example, which are learning in English from the very start. To be different from all the others or like to not understand the things like that).

To be successful in school, Nina emphatically stated one must “*poner mucha atención a que decía la maestra y venir diario hacer los trabajos*” (pay a lot of attention to what the teacher says and come every day to do the work). Nina said she wanted to pass all the years and grades of school and then study to be an agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She believed, as the other participants did, that Spanish was a resource for her, noting, “*sí, porque al momento de aprender el inglés y saber inglés y español, ayuda de muchas personas igual que ellos, y les podemos ayudar a eso*” (yes, because the moment that I learn English and know English, this helps many people same as them and we have the ability to help them). Not until she had learned English well enough to help others, would her Spanish be a strength.

Sam

Porque el chiste de la escuela no es que sea sólo el más inteligente puede hacer cosas. Es de enseñarte para que tú seas más inteligente.

Introduction

Sam was a hard-thinking, 12-year-old seventh-grade male from central México. He savored words, almost chewing them, as he described his culture in terms of parades, dances, and *mole de boda*, a traditional gravy-like sauce common in central Mexico.

Pulling at his lanyard moving his ID back and forth across his chest, Sam said:

No, la verdad, no sé demasiado. Supongo que es como por parte de México y todo. No sé la tradición de algún tipo como de desfile o algo así como danza, así como de una banda o algo así, tocando por las calles y de vez en cuando. Es muy común por ahí en (mi ciudad) el mole de boda. Que es como un tipo de platillos. No sé cómo describir el mole, que es así como con chocolate, pero también con un poco picante y algo así. Y arroz.

(No, the truth is, I don't know too much. I suppose it is like a part of Mexico and all that. I don't know the tradition of any one type of say parade or anything as well as some dance or like some band playing in the street from time to time. In [my city], *mole de boda* is very common. That is a type of traditional food. I don't know how to describe *mole*, it's like chocolate, but also with a little spicy heat and like that. And rice).

Sam lives far enough from school that he has to ride a bus to get here. He lives in the United States with his mom only, and as such, described feeling closest with her. She had a friend here. Sam knew of some distant cousins that lived in Arizona and a *tía* somewhere to the east of Colorado. At the time of the study, Sam had been in the United States for less than 3 months.

The Migration

Sam arrived in Colorado after a brief airplane ride from Dallas. The longest part of his journey from home was the bus ride to the airport in Mexicali. His mother decided to come and take care of his uncle who Sam attested, “*me cayó muy bien*” (I liked him very much). Before his mom made the decision to move, they talked at length about it. Sam’s recollection of this time is as follows:

Luego, después de sexto y en las vacaciones, pues mi mamá, mmm hm, decidió que nos fuéramos a Estados Unidos unos días. Primero porque tenía un tío que estaba medio mal, así que estaba enfermo, y fuimos primero a Dallas creo. Por un día estuvo y luego tomamos un avión 2 horas a Colorado y de aquí estuvimos viviendo hasta ahora, con un departamento. Luego mi mamá me inscribió en esta escuela y aquí estoy muy bien.

(Then, after sixth grade and during vacations, well my mom, hmm mmm, she decided we would move to the United States in a few days. At first because she had an uncle that was a little sick and we went to Dallas, I believe. For one day she was there and then we took a 2-hour plane ride to Colorado. We have been living currently in an apartment. Then my mom registered me at this school and I am here, very well).

Sam felt resigned to go because mom explained they would go and check out Colorado for a brief time and see if they liked it. After his parents divorced when he was about 5 or 6, he did not really see his father much, but noted they communicated via texts and phone calls often. Sam figured because he did not have much and there was no hope of returning to the private, bilingual *Liceo* (Lyceum) that he loved, he would pack his meager clothes and come to the United States.

Transitions

Comparing his life now to his life in central Mexico, Sam missed so many people, places, and things. He specifically named his cats, “*un monton de gatos,*” as primary among all of them. As far as people, Sam said he missed “*a toda mi familia paterna*” (all of his father’s side of the family). Among this family, he really missed his grandparents because, as he noted, “*pues son los únicos que tengo, porque mi abuelo materna . . . murió como cuando ella tenía como nueve años sí, así que nunca lo conocí. ¿Mi abuelita? Pues ya murió como cuando yo tenía 11 años*” (well, they are the only ones I have because my maternal grandfather died when my mom was like 9 years old, yah, and I never knew him. My grandmother? Well, she died when I was 11 years old).

Sam also mentioned other family on his mother’s side, noting, “*por ejemplo, del lado materna, está mi tía Lidia, que ya estaba medio grande, y todo pues implantó todo bien y siempre me ha caído bien y todo*” (for example, on my mother’s side, is my aunt Lidia, and she is about half grown-up, she turned out very well and she has treated me very good). Sam said he appreciates relationships with people who treat him well, because he had been bullied and injured when attending a public kindergarten program. Among these friends were his classmates from *Liceo*, the private bilingual school, because they had been friends since kindergarten until now. Sam fondly remembered going out walking with his mom, playing at the rec center and park, and seeing his cousin while walking her dog. Things were confusing and not familiar to him in the United States, and he noted spends most of his time at home, inside with his computer or his mom.

Interpreting Schooling Experiences

Going deeper into his schooling experiences, Sam clearly remembered his experiences in public school in Mexico first. He was pushed down the stairs by another student and this was the first time he broke his arm. He expressed frustration with the result, saying, “*a Abraham no le hicieron nada, ni los suspendieron, ni un día, ni lo expulsaron, ni nada*” (they did not do anything to Abraham, they did not suspend him not even for a day, nor did they expel him, nothing). But his mom did do something. She arranged a payment plan with the private bilingual school, and got her ex-husband to pay some of the tuition. The result was clearly a wonderful time for Sam. He spoke fondly and happily about this time:

Y luego, cuando entro a primaria me cambiaron a una escuela privada bilingüe llamado Liceo de Juan de Leon. Que es el lugar donde más amigos he conocido, donde más cosas se me han enseñado. Ahí es donde aprendí más o menos inglés. Porque era una escuela bilingüe. Y ahí conocí a uno de a los tres mejores amigos, bueno. Si lo reconocí, pues seguimos siendo amigos y todo. Conocí a uno llamado Andrés, que todavía somos amigos y eso.

(And then, when I entered elementary school, they changed me to a private bilingual school called Liceo de Juan de Leon. That is the place where I made the most friends, where they taught me the most things. There is where I pretty much learned English. There I met three of my best friends. If I remember, we stayed friends and all that. I met one named Andres and we're still friends now and all that).

Sam interpreted his experience in the United States as being a mix of the private- and public-school experience he had in Mexico. He noted, “*Es como más la privada, pero*

también con los alumnos de una pública, pero como que más controlado” (It’s more like the private school, but with public school students, but like more controlled). The students here, in Sam’s interpretation, were still rebellious and say vulgar words, but not like they did in the public school in Mexico.

Like other participants, Sam attested to being in the same room with the same classmates all day and the teachers moving to different rooms. One difference in his experience, though, was as follows:

lo del horario se me hace diferente porque ahí en México era cada día un horario diferente porque todos los días de la semana tenían sus propias clases. Un día te podía tocar matemáticas, y un otro educación física.

(the schedule seems different to me because over there in Mexico it was that every day you had a different schedule because every day of the week you had your own classes. One day you might have math class, and another day gym class).

It seemed they were on a block schedule with rotating days and subjects. He seemed to like it, the variety. The schedule here at Crystal Lakes created a feeling of “*muy apresurado*” (being under pressure) for Sam. He lamented:

no era un plan como de activación y todo, por ejemplo, con lo del camión, que no me tengo que levantar aún más temprano que antes. Mhm de los casilleros y que todo de hecho me sorprende ver como todos que a ellos se les hace como andar caminando y todo.

(There was no plan for me to start up and all that, for example, about the bus, that I didn’t know I have to get up even earlier than before. Mhm, and about the lockers and all that surprised me to see how everyone was walking themselves around and all that).

The notion of passing periods and hallways crowded with students seemingly going everywhere was a stark difference in Sam's experience. Others, too, commented on how if students did move through the school, it was done by plan and organized. Like Sam said, "*a veces, [fuiste] a otros salones, pero siempre en plan, en fila y todo para ir . . . a tu salón donde les toca. Pues aquí es al revés*" (sometimes you went to other room, but always organized, in a line and everything to go . . . to your room where you were told to go).

Exploring further, Sam said the way school worked in the United States, with the exception of the language being English, was "*casi igual*" (almost the same). However, he made an interesting point saying that in Mexico, "*eran como menos interactivas las clases*" (the classes were less interactive). He elaborated:

digo que sí (hay más interacción). Es bueno las de los Chromebooks, sí. Se me hizo muy interesante. Es que te den una computadora para que puedas estudiar y hacer las tareas y todo.

(I say that there is more interaction. The Chromebooks are a good thing, yes. They made me more interested. It's because they give you a computer so that you have the ability to study and do homework).

Sam professed to learning many new things in the United States, including math and English. He loved games they played in science class because he was good at them. He had already learned about the solar system and the moon phases.

Belonging

Because this was Sam's first time back to in-person school since the COVID-19 global pandemic, he felt strange with so many people, and noted making friends was not

easy. However, it was not such a strong feeling of belonging, rather the absence of a feeling of not belonging that was his indication of feeling comfortable. Sam stated, “*es que al sentirme bien así un poco. Como si me sintiera incómodo y que algunas mecánicas que no me gusten pues sería que como que no pertenezco ya, que si no me gustaría*” (it’s that I feel pretty good. Like if I felt uncomfortable and didn’t like some of the logistics [how it works here], that would be like I don’t belong anymore and well, that I wouldn’t like). He felt most comfortable in Newcomer English class because he was not afraid of making mistakes and getting laughed at. Sam had a higher level of English proficiency than his peers in this class and he liked to help. His English had given him status as a translator. He continued detailing the evidence of classes he liked, noting:

Pues de Miss Hutchinson porque son divertidas sus clases. A veces más o menos sabe cómo dirigir a los alumnos. Pues es divertido, clase, pero no en plan de no nos dejen plan de ya, hagan lo que quiera y me voy, no? Pues, como que si estaba más al pendiente de nosotros y todo. Con Mister Connell porque por los juegos hay quizlet kahoot, sí. Y también porque enseña bien y si me acuerdo de la mayoría de las cosas que. Me enseña de que la clase de carnívoros, el sistema solar, fases de luna. Y la de Miss Malto la maestra de matemáticas. Está todo bien preparado y estructurado. Empieza la clase, como que ya sabe. En sacan esto sí y ya como hasta automáticamente.

(Well, Miss Hutchinson’s because her classes are fun. Sometimes, she more or less knows how to direct the students. Well it’s fun, but not like there is no learning plan, like she doesn’t leave us alone and just say “Do what you want, I’m leaving.” With Mr. Connell because there are games, Quizlet and Kahoot, yah. And also because

he's a good teacher and I remember most of the things that he teaches about like the classification of carnivores and solar system. And Miss Malto's class, the math teacher. Everything is well prepared and structured. She starts the class, like you know already. You get this and ya, so it's automatically done).

Confirming other participants' testimonies, Sam said he liked Newcomer English class, but because of the teachers' ways of teaching, not because everyone had a common language or his desire to learn English. He said he liked science class, again because there were fun times and a good teacher. Finally, the math class was a favorite because the teacher was structured and had routines. This sentiment spoke volumes about who Sam is in relation to school and how language was absent from his sense of belonging. It is almost as if he is exhibiting a fluidity between languages, a heteroglossic understanding of language practices.

Education and Success

Like others in this study, Sam believed education was important because one could always use something they had learned in their life. Being successful in school required, as he noted, "*primero sea un entendedor bien las cosas porque un bueno entendedor sea pocas palabras*" (first one is to be a good understander because a good understander is one with a few words). Sam meant one had to understand things well and be a listener, not a talker. He continued explaining that one has to avoid getting distracted and concentrate. He testified:

Porque no necesito ser, no sé, ultra inteligente para todo. Porque el chiste de la escuela no es que sea que sólo el más inteligente puede hacer cosas y ya. Es de enseñarte para que tú seas más inteligente. Pero para ser buen estudiante, pues nada

más hay que tener disciplina, respeto ante los otros compañeros, las clases y los profesores. Y también, pues echarle ganas.

(One does not have to be, I don't know, the smartest about everything. Because the trick of school is not that you are the most intelligent and can do all the things and that's it. It is to teach you to be more intelligent. But to be a good student well it's nothing more than having discipline, respecting other students, the classroom, and the teachers. And also, to put some effort into it).

Sam believed the biggest problem immigrants face are the “*stereotypos*” others place on them and make fun of them. Sam told me that for others, not him, English was an obstacle, too. The most important thing for him to do this school year was to not fall behind like he did during the COVID-19 global pandemic, when he did online public school. As he understood it, “*me he sacado un montón de ventaja a mis amigos porque había mayor educación porque era privada y todo*” (I had a huge advantage over my friends because I had a better education because it was a private school and all). Sam had no plans for the future, “*de verdad*” (honestly) but did see himself studying at a university when he graduated. This finding resonates with Mirra and DLL (2018) conclusions around the perspectives of Latinx males in middle school. Sam is considering options and does not have a firm plan in place. Neither did Mateo.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the participants and foreshadowed the analyses of critical themes to come. The *testimonialistas* were given their own space in this study because their experiences were central to the cultivation of empathy within the audience. Through these *testimonios*, it is possible to witness their familial ties, their journeys, their first

sense of geographic and psychological transition, their initial interpretations of schooling, their sense of belonging at school, and their beliefs about the role education has in their lives. Moreover, this chapter foreshadowed critical themes that were analyzed across all the *testimonios*. The participants' words continue to propel the analysis toward the greater sociocultural context in which they interpreted their experiences.

Chapter Five: Critical Themes

The previous chapter served to catalyze awareness of the complex and beautiful nature of the participants in this study. Each participant testified to the unique realities of their lives and their situations. In this chapter, I present four broader themes that threaded through each participant's testimony. I begin with their changing identities and move toward their current self-images in schooling contexts. I intentionally separated the change in identity and the current self-image because the former excavates personal notions of *Nepantla* in borderlands theory (BT), and the latter attends to an intersection between Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) and BT in countering cultural erasure. Then, I present a strong counter-narrative to the notion of a "silent period" in language acquisition that includes not only the power of meta-linguistic agency exhibited by the participants, but also the harmful consequences of clinging to traditional theories of language acquisition. In this finding, the audience witnesses the fruition of LatCrit theoretical understandings of commonly held beliefs about immigrant students. Finally, I pose the *choque* (crash) between the participants' imaginations and realities around their experiences in U.S. schooling contexts. The crash of reality and ideality is a common experience for human beings; in this study, the participants' *testimonios* enlighten an analytical node in critical feminist epistemology regarding the consciousness gained from experiencing these crashes. Table 5.1 models the connection between the themes and the theoretical frameworks for this study.

Table 5.1: Alignment of Critical Themes to Theoretical Frameworks

Theme	LatCrit Scholarship	Borderlands Theory
Change in student identity	Explores ethnic and racial identity as fluctuating and situational.	Illuminates subtle ways identity is internalized and enlightens the imbalance in <i>Nepantla</i> .
Current self-image	Representation is important to counter cultural erasure.	Shows how participants hold multiple perspectives while maintaining a center.
Not-so-silent period	Critical confrontation of commonly held beliefs unveils misconceptions that have harmful consequences.	The dialogic imperative for developing <i>conocimiento</i> requires the wild tongue to express forms of resistance to oppressions.
Imagination versus reality	Illuminate complex interpretation of reality and highlights participant unique ways of knowing.	The <i>Mestizaje Consciousness</i> is developed and realized through <i>choques</i> and resolution of them.

I exhibit critical themes in this chapter using data from observations, interviews, and field journal entries. Each theme is divided into subheadings wherein participant *testimonios* present robust evidence illuminating previously misunderstood or oversimplified theoretical understandings. This chapter demonstrates the analytical position I, as researcher, employed to make telling cases for the audience (Andrews, 2017). Not all participants were included in each theme, nor were they included with an equal weight of evidence. I introduce each section with the words of participants as a way to honor their unique insights and powerfully emotive capacities—as an homage to their brilliance (Delgado, 2002).

Change in Identity: “Sí, Tengo Miedo”

The participants in this study interpreted their identities as students in complex and changing ways; they were in a state of flux, in *Nepantla*. Humanizing them in educational borderlands meant portraying wholistic portraits of their realities that expanded beyond their English proficiency and other labels that promoted deficient notions of their personhood (Delgado, 2002). In this section, the participants described straddling cultures

and languages in their everyday existence in U.S. schools. Table 5.2 displays a summary of findings about identity from the second interview. I began to understand their marginalization through the lens of monoglossic language ideologies (García & Kleifgen, 2018) but was curious to discover their views, quite literally, through their eyes.

Table 5.2: Participant Interpretations of Change in Identity as a Student

Participant/ date	Reveals	Participant testimony
Berto October 18	Have more friends	I sat alone there and was quiet. Here I have more friends and there is more pressure and it is fast paced, so I have to focus myself.
Elizabeth October 17	Serious and silent	I feel weird talking here. I was more fun in Honduras, more outgoing. I would go out and talk to everyone. Here, my mom asks why am I so serious and quiet? I don't ask questions of the teacher. I listen.
Marco October 20	I am different	Others are more accustomed to being around people that speak English. Since I don't speak English, I am different.
Mario October 18	Happy and focused	I feel happy here because I am learning English...I used to only pay attention when the teacher gave directions...now I have to focus myself 100%.
Mateo October 20	Losing Colombian-ness	Weird. Like you are an excluded person. Others see me as different. There are a lot of different people here, but no one is Colombian.
Nina October 21	Awakened	Before, I didn't pay much attention, nor did I want to know things. Now my mind wakes up and understands, so I am very different here.
Sam October 18	Silent and important	I am so much quieter here. Like it was in El Liceo, but for a different reason. I have a lot of friends in class. I translate for them.

Note. All interviews were done in Spanish. I interpreted quotes and captured the essence of participant voice/meaning. Imelda is not included here as her interview was cut short.

The findings were complex around the changes in identity that the participants interpreted in themselves. José, whose words foreshadowed this group of findings, agreed

with my assertion that perhaps he was afraid of losing his culture when he struggled to interpret his identity in the United States. González Ybarra (2018) offered an Anzaldúan understanding of *Nepantla* as a liminal space for “reflection, knowledge production, and transformation [in] the margin of various intersections and multiple realities” (p. 508). As the participants spoke to their shifting identities and straddling of spaces and places, they bore witness to the lived experience of *Nepantla*. The participants in this study had all crossed political and familial borders as most had lived in various states of separation their entire lives. One example of border crossing was the automaticity with which the participants divided their families as being *a parte de mi mama* and *a parte de mi papa*. All but two participants, Mario and Nivea, experienced familial separation in more than just a geographical sense. All of the other participants experienced divorce. Nina attested to one of the most powerful events that changed her life forever as being, “*cuando se separaron mis padres*”(when my parents separated).

Imelda’s mother died suddenly and rather than being able to stay in her homeland close to her father’s family, her four sisters had to leave because, as she noted, “*no convivían bien con ellos*” (we did not get along well with them). Marco lamented the fact he had not seen his father’s family in a long time. Similar to Marco, Mateo was sure that even though he did not have close contact with his father, they had both found paths “*pa’ salir adelante*” (to move forward through tough times). This was evidence of both geographical and psychological border crossing.

“Raro” (Weird)

The word *raro* can be interpreted to mean weird, strange, or different. Participants used *raro* and *diferente* to explain the emotional content of various psychological places

they occupy in educational borderlands. In their interpretations of how their identity had changed, Elizabeth and Mateo explicitly began their testimonio in this way: “*raro*.” Marco used “*diferente*” to describe his identity at school and quickly attached it to the notion of the English language.

Elizabeth stated, “*me siento raro hablando aquí, porque no puedo comunicarme bien en inglés*” (I feel weird talking here because I can’t express myself in English). She interpreted her shifting identity in school in the United States via an exclusion from the English language. Although Elizabeth stated she was “*mas callada y calma*” (more quiet and calm) according to her mother’s gaze, my observations countered this was true only in contexts where communication and instruction in English was the expectation. In math class, English was predominate. I also noticed Elizabeth rarely took advantage of opportunities the teacher created to speak with her tablemates (all monolingual English speakers), however, in science class, she chatted with, clarified, and even scolded her bilingual tablemates in Spanish. Her identity shifted and morphed depending on context. For example, Elizabeth insisted without doubt, she was most comfortable in classes with other recently arrived students, noting, “*donde todos hablan español y nos enseña en español*” (where everyone talks Spanish and you teach us in Spanish). However, she contradicted this sense of comfort as she attested to feeling *raro* talking in Spanish because her Honduran accent and dialect sometimes garnered giggles from other students.

There was a sense, then, that Elizabeth felt Othered through the centrality of English in classrooms and through the exotification of her native dialect. This finding could be akin to the internalization of monoglossic ideologies because of the prevalence of

Mexican Spanish encountered by the recently arrived students. Moreover, when I asked if she used *diferentes españoles* (different Spanishes) in different contexts, Elizabeth did not hesitate, noting:

Sí. A veces digo palabras mexicanas o colombianas porque puede escuchar a los demás. Y pregunto, como de México, no con la dicen palabras que no sé qué significa. Entonces con una pregunta, ¿qué significa esa palabra? Entonces a uno se le queda y lo dice, es cuando uno va aprendiendo a otras palabras, otros significados cosas así.

(Yes. Sometimes I say Mexican or Colombian words because I have the ability to listen to all the other recently arrived students. And I ask, like a Mexican, about the Mexican words I don't know, what does that word mean? So, one learns that word and says it and that's how you learn other words, other meanings and things like that).

Elizabeth was developing some multilingual mannerisms (García, 2009) in wanting to know the meanings of other words. It is funny to note, too, that in Elizabeth's experience, she said, "*lo primero que uno aprende hablando inglés o que escucha son unas malas palabras . . . lo que escucho son como pláticas, así que dicen bastante malas palabras*" (the first thing you learn talking English or that you hear are the bad words . . . what I hear are like little conversations where they say a lot of bad words).

Mateo had a unique sense of how his changing identity as a student interplayed with language. The first word out of his mouth when I asked about his identity in school was "*raro*." Clarifying this term, he told me for him, *raro* meant one was "*como una persona excluida*" (like an excluded person). He was the only recently arrived student from Colombia or South America in general. He testified:

Yo soy, pues yo, y otros me vean como diferente. Mi identidad cambia a la hora de yo hablo, porque yo no puedo hablar como habló un colombiano . . . cuando estoy con mis amigos hablo mexicano porque ellos me van a entender más el mexicano. Si yo hablo como mexicano, no me van a entender como colombianos, sino porque ellos van a hacer lo mismo . . . o sea, ellos empezarían a practicar el colombiano...aquí nadie va a entender. . . . Entonces tengo que aprenderme los tres idiomas porque si no, se me olvidan todos.

(I am, well, me, and others see me as different. My identity changes when I speak because I cannot speak like a Colombian would speak . . . when I am with my friends I speak Mexican so that they will understand me more. If I speak like a Mexican, they are not going to understand me as Colombian, otherwise they would do the same . . . or for example, if they would start to practice Colombian...nobody here is going to understand them . . . so I have to learn three languages myself because if not, I will forget all of them).

There are a number of threads to tease out in this transcript. Mateo had a strong sense of himself as Colombian, and only others appraised him as different. He demonstrated how language was his Colombian identity as he lamented that he would not be understood as a Colombian person when he spoke Mexican Spanish. When I consider Mateo's earlier statement about not belonging in the United States because he has no nationality or residence, the complexity of this borderland identity becomes apparent in a three-way intersection of his Colombian heritage being interpreted through a Mexican language in an English-only setting. The intersection of language with identity and belonging is the epitome of borderland existence for those who are not of Mexican

heritage. Mateo desired to belong and morphed his identity through language to fit in with the Mexican majority. He was embodying heteroglossic languageing strategies (García & Kleifgen, 2018) by negotiating and morphing his identity as centered in language.

Marco also reflected his change of identity being language dependent. He attested to the fact that because he did not know English very well, he was different. He explained, “*Me siento diferente*” (I feel different), because he was not used to using so much English, even though his uncles had told him how it would be in the United States. Marco’s feelings of exclusion in classrooms around not knowing English were confirmed as he said, “*si hay veces que yo sé la respuesta, pero no como decirlo en inglés*” (yes, there are times I know the answer but I can’t say it English). He could not participate and learn as quickly as he did in Mexico, but noted his comfort and sense of belonging were not defined solely by exclusion. For example, Marco explained, “*que hay mucho gente de México en clases y también son amigos*” (there are a lot of people from Mexico in classes and they are [my] friends).

In math class, I observed Marco’s group working to solve a warm-up problem. He was sitting with sImelda, Mateo, and one bilingual student. Marco clearly took the lead in this group activity and I recorded him justifying, discussing, pointing, and grabbing. The group communicated via speaking, writing, reading, and computing fluidly between languages: English, Mexican Spanish, Colombian Spanish, Honduran Spanish, and math. Marco was a leader and was able to participate fully when the tasks were not centered in the ability to vocalize English.

“Mi Mente Está Despierta” (My Mind is Awake)

Another idea that wove through the participant *testimonios* about how their identities had changed in educational borderlands was that of an awakening and intense focusing. I found this idea to be a very agentive property of the participants’ identities because no longer could they simply “do” school as they had in their home countries. Mario, for example, told me in Nicaragua, he used to listen to teachers only when they gave directions. Then, he would just talk or do work. Now, he said he pays attention 100%. The work even made him more tired, and he went to bed earlier. There was an enormous amount of focusing, concentrating, watching, and listening recorded in my observations and then confirmation of these mental processes by their words in our interviews. These words classified focusing and paying attention as a change in their identity as students. Nina, Berto, and Sam all illuminated this aspect of mental discipline in their *testimonios*.

“*Demasiado!*” This interjection, meaning “so much,” is how Nina, a 14-year-old female student, described her changing identity as a student in a U.S. school. Nina’s case was like many other recently arrived students who come with an elevated, albeit interrupted, level of education and skills. She recalled she never really had to pay attention in Nicaragua and school was “*tan facil*” (pretty easy). One way she was a different person in the United States was that:

Pon más atención a lo que los maestros hacen y lo que dicen . . . escucho inglés y unas palabras me tengo que memorizar y analizar en mi mente en español . . . luego sé que hacer y entiendo.

(I pay more attention to what the teachers do and say . . . I listen to the English and some words I have to memorize and analyze in my mind in Spanish . . . then I know what to do and I understand).

Nina was quieter in school and had fewer friends, but she was not passively hearing or looking around. She chose to be quiet and let her mind be awakened. She was actively analyzing, memorizing, listening, and observing. She was a harder working learner in the United States than before. For her, having to work harder was not a problem; rather, she said, “*siento como una oportunidad*” (I view this as an opportunity). Accepting her challenges as an opportunity was an identity construction and production of her own making.

Berto was another student whose identity change was centered around focusing and paying close attention. Barely 12 years old, this seventh-grade boy had vivid recall of his identity before coming to the U.S. schools. He described his place at school in Mexico as solitary and lonely, noting, “*Antes era más de pasármela sentado así, solo, sin hablar, pero ahorita ya tengo más amigos, le digo, ya es más comunicación*” (Before, it was more about sitting around like this, alone, without talking, but now I just have more friends, I tell you, there’s just more communication). The rural environment in which Berto grew up, combined with the COVID-19 global pandemic shut down of schools in the last 2 years, isolated him. He explained, “*cuando recién llegué sentía un poco de miedo. Que no conocía nada. Era todo extraño para mí. Ahorita ya me siento un poco familiarizado. Ya siento que conozco un poco más*” (when I first arrived I felt a little scared. I didn’t know anything. It was all foreign to me. But now, it feels more familiar to

me. I feel like I know a little more). Berto was aware that his life had changed and his identity was in flux. This fear was replaced with familiarity, both in space and in place.

At school, Berto warranted the fast pace of schooling as, “*me siento apresurado*” (I feel hurried/pressured). Hence, he noted he must put all his attention into what was going on in class, explaining, “*porque si no, la maestra pasa y ya no alcanza a escribir, como la maestra de matemáticas, escribe bien rápido y si no terminaste, mueve la hoja y ya*” (because if not, the teacher goes on and you can’t write it all down, like the math teacher, she writes fast and if you didn’t finish, she moves the paper and that’s it). This pressure was one of the most powerful experiences Berto has had in the United States. He ranked the experience right up there with the actual crossing over the border. He testified:

Cuando pasamos, fue emocionante y me sentía con miedo y presión, sí. Lo que me lo que me cambié aquí es cómo adaptarme más al tipo de enseñanza que sea aquí, porque aquí enseñan más avanzado que allá en México. Entonces, aquí nos enseñan cosas que allá todavía no nos enseñaban.

(When we crossed the border, it was very emotional and I felt scared and under pressure, yes. What has changed me here [at school] is that I’ve adapted to the way of teaching done here, because here they teach more advanced than in Mexico. So, here they are teaching us things that they had not taught us over there).

It is safe to say that Berto was adjusting to high-pressure situations and was finding a way to thrive by being attentive with all his focus. This shift was his choice and demonstrated agency for his learning.

Sam’s experience with pressure paralleled Berto’s experience. Although he said, “*me mantengo como allá*” (I’ve stayed the same), getting used to the chaotic passing periods

and waking up earlier to catch the bus changed him. Sam reported, “*lo mejor para describirlo y todo sería muy apresurado*” (the best way to describe it would be very rushed). He has had to *acostumbrarse* (get used to it). In Mexico, Sam had experience with fast-paced classes, just not the fast pace of getting to classes with all the stuff from one’s locker. He testified:

Es que allá en México no se usan mucho esa tele o lo de la computadora. Todo usan mucho el pizarrón, que van notando y muy rápidos y todo lo que tienes que notar. Tienes que copiarlo en el cuaderno. ¿Y nombre? Pobre de si acabas tarde porque obviamente el pizarrón no es infinito. Lo digo, anda tener que ahorrar lo que muestren. Y el maestro dice lo voy a borrar y lo borran. Y termina así con un hueco interdimensional en tu cuaderno, en tus apuntes.

(Over in Mexico, the teachers don’t use the televisions and computers. They all use a chalkboard and they write everything extremely fast and whatever they write, you have to write. You have to write everything in your notebook. And man! Poor you if you arrive late because obviously the chalkboard is not infinite. And I tell you have to save what they show you. And when the teacher says, “I’m going to erase it,” he erases it all. And it ends like this, you with an interdimensional hole in your notebook, in your notes).

What was different for Sam in this passage is that he had to pay attention at Crystal Lakes more to what the teacher said and to what he was reading because his English was good, but not quite good enough. Being quiet and paying attention was his choice now, not a reproduction of compliance, as in *Liceo*. Sam also explained his quiet nature as not having friends like he had in *Liceo*, the private school, noting, “*En la escuela privada fue*

donde tuve buenos amigos . . . porque tenían todos grados de kínder a novena y conocía mas” (In the private school is where I had good friends because they had all the Grades there from kindergarten to [Grade] 9). In the United States, Sam had friends and status because he translated for them.

“¡De la Primaria Tengo un Chorro!” (From Elementary School I Have a Ton!)

Friends and friendships played a huge part in the participants’ changing identities at school. There was always a special dynamic in the classroom where all the recently arrived students gathered for English and social studies classes with me. Early on in the year, I noted in the field journal how fun it was listening to them all argue over what to call a pen, a pencil, underwear, certain kinds of foods. At one point, Imelda, Mateo, Mario, and a sixth-grade Venezuelan boy were all sitting together, collaborating on a cut-and-paste project to label objects in a classroom. The different Spanish dialects were popping around and the discussion became quite heated about the difference between a *bolígrafo, pluma, lápiz, o lapicero*. I entered the debate with the deciding vote of, “We can all just call it a pencil!” With great huffs and playful groans, the group agreed and moved onto discussing distinct types of underwear and the difference between *platanos* and bananas.

It was vital to their survival in these first few months that they all came to know each other. As José attested, “*es como nos dice, Miss, somos familia*” (it’s like you say, Miss, we’re family). A big adjustment they had to make in their schooling experience was the movement between classrooms and the variety of students in each class. This movement had a tremendous impact on their identities as students. U.S. educators in the middle grades understand this as a sixth-grade phenomenon; however, for the Latinx immigrant

students, they only knew being in the same classroom with the same people throughout their entire school career. They had come to know this style of classroom instruction from their own experiences and from the experience of generations before them. A resounding theme in the data collected in this study was the nature of friends and friendships.

Starting with Marco's declaration above about the huge amount friends (*un chorro*) he had from elementary school, there was an implicit understanding of straddling two lives. Marco clarified, without prompting, that he had a best friend at his old school and one in the United States. Among those counted as friends by the participants were their *tíos, primos y sobrinos* (e.g., aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews). Imelda wore a delicate bracelet with her niece's name spelled out with little white letter blocks. She missed her very much. She recalled they would always be, "*saliendo afuera a jugar así*" (going out and about to play around). Mario, too, echoed the sentiment of missing his family home where he would play soccer every day near his great-grandmother Mita's home, as it was located right next to the city's largest park. Nina juxtaposed her friendships now with those she had in Nicaragua by saying, "*sí, tengo varios aquí, pero no mas hablamos en escuela de clase, eh, como los trabajos*" (yes, I have some friends but we only talk in school about classes, eh, like the work). To bring new understanding to the notion of friendships, I have chosen to portray the *testimonios* of Elizabeth and Mateo.

Elizabeth was very consistent throughout the interviews, observations, and field journal data with the centrality of friendships in her lived experiences. She was resigned

to the fact that eventually she would become accustomed to her life in the United States.

There was hope and exasperation in her *testimonio* when she noted:

Pero al tiempo me fui acostumbrando un poco más, pero también me fui sintiendo sola, porque pues no tengo mis amigos, mis familiares. Tengo mis hermanos, pero tengo más hermanos en Honduras. ¿Se siente como extraño? Al mismo tiempo se siente solo, pero al tiempo uno se va acostumbrando.

(But over time I got used to it a little more, but I also felt like I was still alone because, well, I don't have my friends, my relatives. I have my brothers and sisters here, but I have more brothers and sisters in Honduras. It feels like, strange? At the same time you feel lonely, but after a while you get used to it).

When I compiled this evidence with observational data that indicated Elizabeth's active participation and comfort in classrooms where she had friends who spoke Spanish and were bilingual, I was compelled to believe the desire for friends and belonging was a powerful force in her life. She professed an unfortunate part of her identity as a student was loneliness. I witnessed her anxious vocalization of being in different classes and with different people; as she noted, "*difícil siento cuando tengo que irme para otras clases y a veces pues mis compañeros que hablan español no van*" (it's hard for me to have to go to other classes and sometimes my friends that speak Spanish don't go).

In Elizabeth's imagination, she had a vision of school in the United States. She thought it would be much like her schooling in Honduras, what with the classes and the schedule. She even expected English would predominate and this would be her challenge in the first years, recalling, "*Pero cuando llegué aquí me sé que las cosas cambiaron en la escuela . . . pensé que iba a ser como con más amigos*" (But when I arrived here, I

came to know things changed at school . . . I thought I was going to be with more friends). *Compañeros, amigos, amigables*, and *más unidos* (close friends, friends, friendly/kind, and more united/together) were codes that appeared with significant magnitude in Elizabeth's interview data, which accumulated into the strength of her desire to have friends and yearning to belong.

Mateo, too, strongly evidenced the impact of friends left behind and the nature of friendships in the United States throughout the interviews and observations. Mateo echoed the sentiments of many participants as he explained that at Crystal Lakes, he only hangs out with friends in school. They do not hang out after school and do not know each other well enough to notice or miss each other. Mateo illustrated this challenge by recalling:

Tenía muchos amigos en Colombia, muchos, muchos, muchos. Y más llegar a un colegio y que lleguen y me digan. Y lo saludan uno a uno. Una vez, falte un mes al colegio porque pues me fui de viaje. Y entonces después, yo llegué, me abrazaron entre todos y estaban contentos de que yo había llegado.

(I had many friends in Colombia, many, many, many. And most came to the same school and they'd come up and call out to me. And everyone greets each other. One time, I missed school for a month because I went on a trip. So when I got back, they all hugged me and they were happy that I had come back).

I observed Mateo in a gym class and noted his cooperative attitude and lighthearted humor throughout the interactions he had with his peers. He was trash-talking, rotating through the order of servers, coaching, and playing the game of volleyball. In the end, he and another student on the opposing team finally were able to sustain a volley of six

bumps over the net. This move garnered great cheers from both teams and although he dove valiantly for one final volley, he was not able to return the ball. But in that moment, Mateo was being a hero for his teammates and when they all came to help him up, his smile and laughter were truly brilliant.

I continued to explore Mateo's interpretation of friendships and himself as a friend. He stayed consistent in his testimony around the quality of friendships he had in Colombia. For example, he stated, "*mis compañeros de Colombia, los tengo un gran aprecio*" (I have a great appreciation for my Colombian friends). He lamented that he did not know what was going on with them. His words were precise, noting, "*Me bajo de tono, porque lo que no pase con ellos, lo que está pasando ahorita ellos y entonces, no.*" (It brings me down because I don't know what's going on with them, so, no). Of his friends in the United States, Mateo explained, "*no siento que sean mis amigos aquí porque . . . no han hecho nada para mí, nunca a mí no me han mandado como esa mano de vengador lo ayuda*" (I don't feel like they are my friends here because they haven't done anything for me, they haven't offered their hand to help). Still more than this sentiment, Mateo confirmed the sense of loneliness in his Colombian existence, stating, "*me siento atacado. A cambiar en Colombia, un amigo te dice algo y es por jugar, pero aquí la mayoría te hace algo y no es*" (I feel attacked. As opposed to in Colombia, a friend tells you something and it's like they are playing, but here mostly they do something to you and it's not). Mateo was unfamiliar with the social codes in U.S. schools. Developing in him was *la facultad* (Anzaldúa, 1987) as he interpreted the actions of others as a bit threatening.

Current Self-Image: “Que No Olvide De Donde Vengo”

In the third interview, participants illuminated the nuances of language and culture as it impacted their self-image in the current school. Table 5.3 summarizes three important lenses of LatCrit and BT: how immigrants cling to their home culture and why, where they see themselves reflected in the school, and how they maintain a sense of pride in themselves. Immigrant students often find their home and school lives to be vastly different, and negotiating these differences is a large part of their borderland identity (Bussert-Webb et al., 2018; Ek, 2009; Fine et al., 2007). Elizabeth’s words, which head this section prior, reflected the constant reminder of her mother: “Don’t forget where you come from.”

In several reports, researchers have cited the importance of the home culture being reflected, seen, or intentionally honored in schools and programs for recently arrived students (The APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Gándara, 2015; Irizarry & Nieto, 2010; Yosso, 2005). I sought to hear the participants’ interpretations of these ideas around culture and positive self-image. In this section, I present the sense of pride the participants felt in themselves, their friends, and their families, along with their interpretations of others’ pride in them. I show the participants’ insistence on importance of their families in staying grounded in their cultures, a complicated relationship with the Spanish language as being a link to their culture, and how they saw/heard their culture reflected in the school.

Table 5.3: Participants' Self Image in the Schooling Context

Participant	How are you holding onto your culture?	Where is your culture reflected in school?	Are you proud of yourself?
Berto	<i>Con las ganas de salir adelante.</i>	There are lots of Mexicans here. They were congenial like in Mexico.	Yes. It has always been my dream to come and learn English.
Elizabeth	I focus on my culture. My mom reads stories so we don't forget our <i>raices</i> .	When I learn about other cultures, I start thinking about mine.	Yes. Compared to how I was, I am better now. Learning <i>poco a poco</i> .
Imelda	I don't know. I hold it in my head. <i>Me hayamas.</i>	<i>En este aula.</i> We all speak Spanish and you in English and Spanish.	No. Well, yes and no. I have friends. I am learning things.
Marco	<i>El idioma latino</i> , my family celebrates and my grandma visits.	In drama class. Not everyone is Mexican, but most are.	Yes. I am learning and I don't <i>batallando</i> as much as before.
Mario	Through my family, my community.	I don't know. I wouldn't know it.	Yes. I have learned many things. I learned English.
Mateo	By learning English. This makes me feel a part of this place not just a person who speaks Spanish.	<i>En ningun lugar.</i> I don't express myself as a Colombian. I express myself like a Mexican.	No. In Colombia I made excellent grades. I don't present my real self.
Nina	My whole family is here. We cook foods and celebrate Nicaraguan culture.	<i>En este aula.</i> We have similar experiences and language.	Yes. I have achieved a lot compared to before.
Sam	By talking in Spanish and playing with my friends online.	There are a lot of Mexicans here. Like they could serve tacos at lunch.	Yes. I am doing good in school and I am not falling behind.

Note. The participant responses were interpreted and condensed by the researcher to ease the understanding. Some phrases are left in Spanish because the connotative hit has more force in Spanish.

“Siempre Ha Sido Mi Sueño” (It Has Always Been My Dream)

To begin exploring their self-image, I asked the participants questions around being proud of themselves, their families, and friends. In turn, I asked them if others were proud of them. I followed this line of questioning to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on themselves and their progress since arriving in the United States. With the exception of Imelda and Mateo, all participants were proud of themselves. They all related their pride, or lack of it, to their progress in school. Imelda responded true to her other responses about her experiences as being confused or in a state of flux. Imelda experienced profound trauma in losing her mother and being rejected by her father’s family in a very violent context in Honduras. The confusion was indicative of coping with recent traumatic events. Mateo also reiterated in this context that he was not able to show his true self, or at least the self he was proud of. He testified to his lack of pride, noting:

En Colombia me sentía claro, porque pues ya me iba bien, sacaba muy buenas notas, todo era muy bien. ¿Pero cómo llegué aquí? No sé inglés entonces todo se me fue para abajo. Ya como que no me siento orgulloso de mí mismo.

(In Colombia I felt sure of myself because I was doing well, I had good grades, everything was really good. But how was it when I came here? I don’t know English, so everything for me went down. I feel like I’m not proud of myself yet).

Mateo internalized a high standard for himself and had wrapped up his whole being in trying to be a good student. Silence was not his choice; rather, it was imposed upon him because English was the only medium of instruction. Again, Mateo and Imelda were the

exception in this study, but I present their lack of pride in themselves as evidence of the diversity of individual experiences.

The other six participants all had great smiles and pride in themselves. Berto's dream was coming true as he desired to learn English. With a little growl and a chin tilt, he revealed, "*Porque yo desde pequeño quería venirme a estudiar acá en los Estados Unidos*" (because ever since I was little I wanted to come study here in the United States). Mario was so proud that he had "*aprendido inglés*" (learned English) well enough to be in mainstream classes. Marco was aware that he was struggling less with everything and this made him proud. He explicitly spelled out his learning of English, saying, "*antes de venir en México no sabía nada de inglés, nada . . . nomás sabía cómo presentarme. Y acá entiendo muchas más cosas desde que llegue*" (before coming, in Mexico, I didn't know anything in English . . . except how to introduce myself. And here I understand so much more since I've been here). Elizabeth, Nina, and Sam all had especially difficult experiences during COVID-19 global pandemic shutdowns what with no classes, shortened days, and being unsupervised in virtual environments. They expressed their pride in that they were starting to learn more and not fall behind. Nina went a little further than just academics, stating, "*yo he logrado muchas cosas como aquí académica como personal, todo sí*" (I have achieved many things here like academically and personally, all of this, yes).

In this interview cycle, I also asked the participants if they were proud of their friends. With the exception of Mateo, they all said they were proud of their friends.

Elizabeth stated:

Sí, porque me fijo que a todos nos cuesta aprender nuevas culturas, aprender nuevas cosas y poco a poco nos vamos adaptando y en cambio también es difícil cómo adaptarse en nuevos ambientes, nuevo clima, nuevos amigos, pero poco a poco nos vamos acostumbrando.

(Yes, because I've noticed we have all had a hard time learning new cultures, learning new things and little by little we're getting used to it and changing also is hard like adapting to new environments, new climates, new friends, but little by little we're going to get used to it).

A similar sentiment of pride in hard-working friends was reflected in Nina's answer, "*los que están estudiando*" (those who are studying). Sam corroborated the pride in hardworking friends as he stated, "*es de, bueno, no de todos . . . los que están estudiando, sí*" (it's like, okay, not of everyone . . . those who are studying, yes). The preponderance of evidence showed pride rooted in work ethic and academic progress, both in the participants and their friends. Valenzuela (1999) noted that immigrants' positive attitudes toward school are unique among the Latinx student body and a strength that could be leveraged more in secondary schools.

Yet, when I asked the students if they thought their teachers or their families or friends were proud of them, all except for Sam said they did not know if their teachers were proud of them. Four participants flatly stated, "*no sé*" (I don't know). Sam merely stated, "*supongo, sí, porque seguro que al ver mi crecimiento no sé si todo bien ahora*" (I suppose, yes, because surely they see my growth, I don't know if everything's good now). Even in Sam's answer, there was supposition, not hard evidence that his teachers were proud of him. All participants professed pride in their families, especially hard-

working mothers. Mateo described his mom as a “*luchadora*” (fighter), and Sam was grateful to his *ama* (mom) because, as he noted, she “*se pone a trabajar mucho para mejorar las cosas y todo bueno*” (she has worked a lot to make everything better and all things good). Marco gave credit and felt pride to his entire family for being hard workers, attesting to “*se esfuerzan para trabajan para poder tener dinero y poder . . . el próximo año nos mudamos de dónde estamos*” (they’ve put a lot of effort toward working to have money for us to be able to . . . move next year from where we are now).

Paradoxically, the participants were unable to confirm with complete certainty that their families were proud of them. For example, Berto told me he was proud of his family because “*gracias a ellos es por lo que yo estoy acá*” (thanks to them it’s why I am here), but as to if they were proud of him, he said, “*¿quién sabe? Creo que sí*” (who knows? I believe so). From their standpoint, participants were proud of themselves, their friends, and their families. They were unsure, however, how others felt about them. This questioning is a complex place to reside in one’s self-image. What others think of you and how you are seen is very impactful on your overall psyche (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1990).

I shift now to exploring how students expressed holding onto their cultures. Being grounded in one’s home culture while getting used to another is a prevalent theme in research that centers borderland identities (Bussert-Webb et al., 2018; Ek, 2009; Osorio, 2018). Schools and communities often need to bridge their home cultures with the expected school cultures in the United States, especially in borderland spaces (The APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Gallo & Link, 2016; Valdes, 1996). I was excited to pursue this topic with middle school-aged youth and amplify their voices.

“Hemos Salido Adelante” (We Have Persevered)

As the third round of interviews turned toward the participants’ self-image in school, it is interesting to note that five participants mentioned *salir adelante* (persevering and moving forward) for the first time in the study’s data collection cycles. The “underdog mentality” (Kasun, 2015) can be hopeful, and the idea of *salir adelante* is a well-documented phrase expressing the hope and passion of immigrant families.

Overwhelmingly, the participants interpreted their cultural knowledge as being sustained in the home, with family and friends, and through their Spanish language.

Mario emphatically answered, “*por mi familia, mi comunidad*” (through my family, my community) when I asked him about how he was holding on to his culture amid all this change. He simply explained, “We have persevered.” Although he feared he might not be understood when he returns to Nicaragua because he has changed so much or lost some of the words of his *pueblo*, he looked forward to helping more of his community come to the United States. Berto, too, credited his family and their “*ganas de salir adelante*” (desire to persevere for a better future) as the way he held on to his culture. For Nina, another Nicaraguan participant, she credited her family with the maintenance of her culture and language, saying, “*festejamos cosas que se hacen allá cada vez que pasan allá, entonces eso es como que me ayuda a no olvidar*” (we celebrate the same things at the same time as they do over there, and so that helps me to not forget).

Elizabeth testified to the notion of *salir adelante* and the intentional effort by her mother as to how she was maintaining her culture. She noted, “*Gracias a ellos me apoyan y mi mamá me apoya. Siempre me fijo como ellos salen adelante, pues tienen problemas entre familias, nos ayudamos*” (Thanks to them, they help me and my mom helps me.

Always, I pay attention to how they have persevered, even though there's been problems between the families, we help each other). Her family in the United States and in Honduras, although separated through geography and divorce, played an important role in Elizabeth's life. Elizabeth lived in a borderland and seemed grounded on both sides. Elizabeth told me:

mi mamá se pone a leer historias de Honduras y nos dice a mi hermana también, nos podemos saber. Veo TIK TOK o youtubers de Honduras, como que uno va viendo más sobre su cultura y que nunca hay que olvidarse de sus raíces.

(my mom reads stories about Honduras and she tells me and my sister, too so we can know. I watch TikTok or YouTubers from Honduras so that you are going to see more about your culture and there isn't going to be a time that you forget your roots). There was an explicit acknowledgement from both Nina and Elizabeth that the culture of the home was still very much one of the home countries, not just of the home in the United States.

“El Idioma Latino” (The Latin American Language)

Marco was truly clear that for him, hanging on to his culture was done through “*el idioma español latino.*” It was not hard for Marco to maintain his *Mexicanismo* because of his language and frequent visits by his grandmother. Living and learning in the United States, Marco said he was not afraid of losing his Spanish because, as he noted, “*mi mamá solo habla español y hablamos solo español en la casa*” (my mom only speaks Spanish and we only talk Spanish at home). Berto attested to the importance of Spanish in his home because all of his relatives speak Spanish. In fact, all but one participant intoned that at home was where their Spanish would be maintained as a cultural connection.

Mateo, however, opened a complex issue with his response that, combined with other evidence, opened a node of analysis that became a regional node of analysis around participants' responses to this question of language and culture.

First, Mateo answered English helped him hold onto his culture. His answer warranted a further explanation. He reported, "*por el inglés yo puedo comunicarme con varias culturas, puedo, ósea, sentirme una parte más de ellos no ser como esa persona que solamente habla español*" (through English, I am able to communicate with different cultures. I can, for example, feel like I am more a part of them all, not just to be that person who speaks Spanish). Mateo very much wanted to belong, to have a home. He evidenced this desire in many different ways. For example, in his earlier testimony about his changing identity, Mateo recognized his language was his culture and he was consciously, purposefully adjusting his identity vis-a-vis his language to a context where his friends were all Mexican, Central American, or bilingual English/Spanish speakers. Mateo's testimony on this topic combined with the informal observations I had made in this study, as well as my experiences throughout 20 years that prompted further investigation into the different Spanish dialects employed in the school and how the students might be negotiating these dialects as part of their self-image.

In general, the Mexican participants all needed some clarification on what I meant when I asked them if they used different Spanish in different contexts. The Central American and South American participants were all able to understand and express that they used different Spanish in different contexts with different people. Marco, after I prompted him with an example, was able to pinpoint how his vocabulary was different from Mateo's and explained, "*y se me hizo extraña la palabra, porque nunca la había*

escuchado, pero no cambiamos nada de idioma” (and the word was strange to me, because I had never heard it before, but we don’t change anything about the language). Sam said the other dialects of Spanish in this school warranted he listen differently, and he noted, *“porque siempre por los acentos y todo”* (because it’s always about the accents and all that). Berto explained, *“nosotros [mexicanos] manejamos varios tipos de español. Hay uno que le dicen español barrio. Entonces ahí, ya te puedes identificar mejor con como un mexicano”* (We [Mexicans] use various types of Spanish. There’s one called barrio Spanish. So here, you just identify yourself better as a Mexican). This evidence led me to think that Mexicans, when prompted, are aware that there are other Spanish dialects out there and that they do not have to change their Spanish in different contexts. Berto’s statement strengthened the connection between identity and language use. Participants’ use of Spanish at school, then, was a natural part of their self-image.

The Central American participants had an immediate response to the question of using different Spanish in different contexts. Mario stated three times in interviews that he was not understood because of the *“palabras de mi pueblo”* (the words of my town). When I asked if he had adapted his Spanish somewhat here at school, he replied, *“tal vez pues al español Mexicano. Como en vez de que nosotros decimos maje y ellos dicen vato”* (maybe, well, Mexican Spanish. Like we say *maje* and they say *vato*). Similar to Marco, there was an awareness of different vocabulary; however, when asked if the Mexicans in the United States adapted their Spanish to his language, he flatly insisted, *“no!”* Elizabeth, too, understood the notion of using different Spanish, noting, *“Sí. A veces digo palabras mexicanas o colombianas porque puede escuchar a los demás. Y si no sé qué significa, entonces con una pregunta, qué significa esa palabra?”* (Yes.

Sometimes I say Mexican or Colombian words because I've listened to others. And if I don't know what a word means, I ask with a question, what does that word mean?) Elizabeth also noted there is a slight difference between Honduran and Nicaraguan accents. Taken with her earlier testimony about how others giggled at her Honduran accent, her self-image was intersecting with Spanish language dialects. Nina also affirmed that she understood the differences in Spanish that she heard and used. She qualified Nicaraguan and Mexican Spanish to be almost the same, stating, "*pero Honduras, no*" (but Honduras, no). Still Elizabeth was learning and was happy about it. She said, "*y cuando digo algo que es diferente a ella, ella me lo corrige y me lo di entonces 'ok, perfecto'*" (and when I say something different from her, she corrects me and I say, "okay, fine").

This analysis has suggested Spanish is not a monolithic language and the participants in this study are aware of this notion. At this time in their lives, they were adjusting and adapting not only to English and English speakers, but also to fellow speakers of *el idioma Latino* (the language of Latin America). When I conceptualize multilingual learners, the notion of various dialects of Spanish was considered in this finding. These participants were expressing themselves as emerging multilingual learners. Becoming multilingual was a phenomenal accomplishment for them and ought to be leveraged as another of their strengths.

“En la Cafetería No Se Sirvieran Tacos” (In the Cafeteria They Don’t Serve Tacos)

Sam and his deep-thinking brain led him to the conclusion that because the school does not serve tacos in the cafeteria, his culture is not reflected in school. He said this

statement jokingly but rather poignantly, he hit the target. I have seen the occasional bilingual signs in the cafeteria and a bulletin board in the basement next to my classroom decorated with Day of the Dead themes in October. Teachers have books on the shelves of their classroom libraries by any number of Latinx authors. As always, I wanted to witness the participants' interpretations of themselves and their cultures at school. As each participant has their own place, or stance, so did their responses to the visibility of their culture.

Berto, Sam, and Marco each mentioned in the Crystal Lakes school, there are a lot of Mexicans, and in this environment, they see their culture. Berto went a little deeper than food, as in Sam's response, and said, "*es como tratan a las personas, como te ayudan, cuando llegue, la gente me ayudó*" (it's how they treat people, how they help you, when I came, the people helped me). Elizabeth, in her observant, investigative way, relayed that she sees her Honduran culture when she researches and learns about other cultures. She continued, "*cuando uno habla sobre su cultura, es cuando está representando su cultura con los demás, entonces ahí es cuando se refleja más su cultura*" (when you talk about your culture is when you are representing your culture to others, so this is when you reflect your culture most). Elizabeth reflected her culture and noted she was taking responsibility for representing it to herself and others. She understood she represented a group and here was a seed of critical citizenship development (Salazar et al., 2016).

Imelda and Nina insisted they only see their culture "*en este aula*" (in this classroom). They referred to my classroom often as being a place where they were comfortable, where they learned English, where they understood everything, and where they have seen themselves. Both cited the fact that even though all the Spanish was not

the same, the students were similar because they were immigrants. Nina added she feared losing her culture as she became bilingual, indicating, “*me he puesto a pensar de que como se sentirá hablar dos idiomas. Pienso de que va a ser bien diferente, entonces pienso perder mi cultura y eso*” (I have thought about how it would feel to speak two languages. I think it’s going to be really different, so I think about losing my culture and stuff).

Not surprisingly, Mario and Mateo had definitive “nowhere” answers to the question of cultural representation in school. Mario interpreted his answer this way, saying, “*no sabría*” (I wouldn’t know it). Interpreting his culture in school must have been difficult, considering how in Nicaragua, the student body was addressed as a whole twice a week in the auditorium by both school administrators. Recall that Mario’s entire school gathered weekly and sang the national anthem while looking at their flag as a traditional practice. Mario explicitly told me, too, that the purpose of education in Nicaragua was to teach the values necessary to be a good person. At Crystal Lakes, Mario noted the principal brings students together only as necessary and always separated by grade level. In these group meetings, the students are reminded of dress code and hallway behavior expectations.

Mateo, too, knew his culture and knew it was not reflected in the United States or at school. He testified about the power of the Mexican culture around him, noting:

Porque, pues lo único que dicen . . . si les digo donde es mi ciudad? Ellos no van a conocer mi ciudad, ¿pero si ellos dicen donde es la Ciudad DF?, pues yo voy a conocer. Osea, yo sé las culturas de México, a cambio ellos no saben las culturas de

Colombia. Lo siento, no me expreso como un colombiano, me expreso más como un mexicano, porque aquí la mayoría son mexicanos.

(Because, well the only thing they say . . . if I tell them where is my city? They are not going to be familiar with my city. But if they tell me where is Mexico City? I am going to know it. Like, I know the cultures of Mexico, but in turn they don't know the cultures of Colombia. I'm sorry but I don't express myself as a Colombian, I express myself as a Mexican, because here the majority are from Mexico).

Mateo was not losing his Colombian-ness, per se. I took his awareness of his place in this borderland as a way to strengthen his cultural identity. His home base would always be Colombian, but he showed the signs and dispositions for being a critical multicultural citizen in his awareness and negotiation of linguistic nuances and knowledge of other cultures (Gutierrez, 2008; Salazar, et al., 2016). This strength could be leveraged for his achievement.

The Not-So-Silent Period: “Tenemos que Esforzarnos Más”

Clearly and vociferously, the participants in this study pushed against being labeled as a phase of their English language development. The data confirmed—through interviews, observations, and field notes—that recently arrived immigrant youth did not interpret themselves as passive receptacles of language input. All participants, regardless of English language proficiency level (E-LPL), were actively constructing meaning in their content areas and learning English. José's words, quoted previously, reflected the work these participants put in every day. He testified, “*es el doble de atención que tenemos que poner, pues porque no sabemos inglés exactamente, tenemos que*

esforzarnos más” (it’s the double attention we have to pay because we don’t know English exactly, we have to put forth more effort).

The students were not passively silent in their classrooms. They enacted agency through leveraging friendships, connecting their prior knowledge, and participating in meta-linguistic analyses of their learning. They were intentionally aware of talking, watching, listening, focusing, translating, memorizing, writing, asking, analyzing, consulting, copying, recognizing, seeing, pronouncing, practicing, understanding, hearing, and changing. Their words repeatedly informed and inspired the notion of superhuman perseverance that I observed in several school contexts.

What follows is a presentation of participant testimony about how they learned English and learned content in classrooms where English was the dominant language of instruction. This means the teachers speak and write in English and the curricular materials are primarily available in English with some supplemental materials sporadically available in Spanish. A commonly held theory around English language acquisition in U.S. schools is that students go through predictable, general stages, much like one does when acquiring a language naturally from birth. Although Krashen (1982) is credited with the theory, it has been adapted and morphed by many scholars and educators over the last 4 decades. Briefly, there are five stages of language acquisition. At issue in this study were the first three stages, as they supposedly describe the characteristics of the students who participated in this study. Table 5.4 summarizes these first three phases.

Table 5.4: Krashen's First Three Phases of Language Acquisition

Stage	Characteristics	Teacher prompts
Pre-production (0–6 months)	Has minimal comprehension Does not verbalize Nods "yes" and "no" Draws and points.	Show me... Circle the... Where is... Who has...
Early production (6 months–1 year)	Has limited comprehension. Produces 1- or 2-word responses. Participates using key words/phrases. Uses present-tense verbs.	Yes/no questions. Either or questions Who, what, how many questions
Speech emergence (1–3 years)	Has good comprehension. Produces simple sentences. Makes grammar and pronunciation errors. Frequently misunderstands jokes.	Why, how, explain Short answers

Note. Table adapted from “Asking the Right Questions” by J. Hill and K. Flynn (2008). *Journal of Staff Development*, 29(1), 46–52.

This study interrupted the objectification and marginalization of recently arrived Latinx youth (Valenzuela, 1999). The unfortunate consequences of silence in Krashen’s (1982) theory were challenged by the participants in many ways. In this chapter, concerning the findings of the study, I lean into Krashen’s timeline and typical characteristics purported to be descriptive of student abilities, or lack of abilities and capacities.

Although there is a generous notation of other factors that may influence the time period of silence and production imposed upon recently arrived emergent bilinguals, such as background knowledge, distance of home language from English, or traumatic factors related to migration, these were not fully explored in Krashen’s (1982) work. In a “natural approach” to learning a second language, it may have been helpful 40 years ago to frame language learning into phases so educators might be able to apply sets of

strategies (e.g., tiered questioning and sentence frames) based on the supposed time a student may have been learning the English language. This view is antiquated and should be interrupted because, intentionally or unintentionally, U.S. schools have adopted programs and policies that marginalize immigrant students based on these unidimensional; monoglossic; or, at best, binary perceptions of language learning abilities. Witness, in the following section, how various factors besides the assumption of time learning English can influence the acquisition of English. I begin by summarizing the attributes of the participants in terms of their English language learning experiences in Table 5.5. It is often assumed that recently arrived students have no formal English language experience, and I believed it to be important to the analyses to uncover the first layer of misconceptions.

Table 5.5: Participant Exposure to English Instruction

Participant	Length of Time in United States	Months of School in United States	Prior English Instruction (self-reported)
Berto	< 3 months	< 3 months	One time we had a teacher but not every day. She left after about 2 months and we never had class again. We learned greetings and numbers, just basics.
Elizabeth	≈ 10 months	≈ 6 months	English class was one time per week, but not during COVID. I knew some numbers and the alphabet.
Imelda	< 3 months	< 3 months	Never.
Marco	≈ 8 months	≈ 6 months	Only sometimes did we have a class. We learned numbers and greetings. I don't remember much because it was COVID and we came here.
Mario	≈ 15 months	≈ 11 months	None in Nicaragua. My mom put me to watch videos on YouTube. Then, in my other school, I had a teacher like you. And in the church we had free English classes.
Mateo	< 3 months	< 3 months	Some English classes from about Grade 3 on. I don't remember much. It was once a week or maybe less.
Nina	≈ 9 months	≈ 5 months	We had English class every day until COVID. We started in Grade 7.
Sam	< 3 months	< 3 months	The private school was bilingual. My teacher was an English speaker. It was only one class, but every day. Not during COVID, though. I like learning languages.

Note. The timeframes are estimated from the beginning of this study and are approximated to further protect the confidentiality of participants. The data were collected as a member check session.

Table 5.5 shows the diverse experiences each participant has had with English language instruction. One misconception hidden in Krashen's (1982) phases is that people come from diverse backgrounds, and assuming they have not had formal English

instruction ever is a bit of a disservice. Conflating recently arrived students with a label of non-English proficient reduces their prior knowledge and experiences to null status. Throughout this presentation of findings, it became clear that the participants in this study were active agents in their educational experiences. Participants had an uncanny awareness of their place, or position, in the school. They could describe their identity, their self-image, their sense of belonging, their membership in an oppressed group, their beliefs about education and success, and their hopes and dreams. The students could also cross-examine the myth of silence and passive learning in their *testimonios* around how they learn English, content, and English through content. To position their agency, I present the analysis in terms of leveraging friendships, connecting to their prior learning, and asserting their meta-linguistic awareness.

Friendships: “Puedo Preguntar a Algún Compañero” (I Can Ask a Friend)

Berto recalled an experience he had in Mexico with a U.S. student who was in the same position he was in now. The student did not speak Spanish and, as Berto noted, “*le hacían mucha burla al pobre niño, los maestros también*” (they teased him a lot, the poor kid, the teachers, too). This treatment made Berto feel bad for the English speaker. Berto and one or two others befriended the “poor kid” and helped him. It follows, then, that one of Berto’s primary strategies to learn English and content was to ask a friend for help. He explained, “*aquí, si tenemos una duda, le preguntamos al maestro y él nos ayuda*” (here, if we have a question, we can ask the teacher and he helps us). If the teacher did not speak Spanish, then Berto surmised, “*puedo preguntar a algún compañero que habla los dos idiomas*” (I can ask a friend that speaks both languages). He conceded the friends he had made outside the immigrant group were ones who noticed he needed help and

translated for him. More than translating, his bilingual classmates explained what things meant, helped him find work on the computer, and helped him pronounce words. He felt successful and like he belonged when he had friends like this in class. Berto did not see himself as silent or unable to produce knowledge; rather, as his earlier testimony revealed, he was more communicative here in U.S. schools.

Nina actively sought opportunities to practice English during the most social time of the day, recess and lunch. Nina reported she and Imelda, unlike the other participants, always sought out English-speaking peers at lunch and recess because, “*cuando hablamos con personas de que saben inglés tratamos de hablar con personas . . . para aprender como lo hablan, ya como que se nos puedan palabras*” (when we talk with people who know English, we try to talk with people to learn how they speak it, just so the words stay with us). Nina wanted the English to stick with her, and rather than passively absorbing it, she was cementing the language within her. She, too, had made friends with bilingual peers and enjoyed having conversations with them. She admitted they were not like the friends she had back home, in that they usually just talked about the school and lighter topics such as music or classwork. In one observation during math, I confirmed this statement, as Nina quietly chatted with a bilingual tablemate about watching an instructional video. The two of them negotiated their way—mathematically and linguistically—through a complex video where the teacher was lecturing about how to solve problems with complex fractions.

Elizabeth also had an exceptional take on how she thought engaging friends were important to learning. At lunch she explained, “*pues este estar con sus amigos y casi sus amigos, pues hablamos español. Entonces se usa más el español que el inglés en lonche*

(well it's being with all your friends, and almost all of them speak Spanish. So you use more Spanish than English at lunch). But, when with all her friends in Newcomer English class, she confessed, "*se aprende más el inglés, porque pues aquí se traduce, le traduce en español inglés, entonces cuando la maestra traduce en inglés y de ahí se lo traduce en español uno le entiende mejor*" (English is learned more, because here it is translated, it is translated into Spanish into English, so when the teacher translates into English and from there it is translated into Spanish, one understands it better). Elizabeth adroitly negotiated meaning in classrooms leveraging her friendships. She reported, "*tengo en cada clase más amigos que pues me ayudan con el inglés y me lo traducen también*" (I have in every class more friends that, well, help me with English and they translate it for me, too). In the Newcomer English and social studies classes, she was comfortable and held the view that everyone had the goal of learning English. Friendships played both a tactical role and an emotionally supportive role. It was important to reiterate that social practices were being produced by the participants and evaluating their silence in English completely robbed them of this agency.

In his language arts class, Mateo recalled, "*yo aprendo con ayuda de un compañero*" (I learn with the help of a friend). He detailed their interactions revealing a reciprocal partnership, noting:

Él me ayuda y yo lo ayudé a él cuando él no entiende, entonces yo le explico. Como yo lo ayudé a él, él me ayudó a mí al entenderla en inglés, entonces a veces en la clase de literatura él me dice esto o ella te dijo esto y a veces nos ponemos a practicar inglés en la clase cuando ya terminamos y, entonces nos ponemos ahí los dos hablar en inglés.

(He helps me and I help him when he doesn't understand, then I explain to him. As I help him understand it, he helps me to understand English, like sometimes in Literacy class he tells me this or "she told you this" and sometimes we start practicing English in the class and when it's over, we hear we are both talking in English).

In this exchange between friends, there was an implicit acknowledgement that Mateo had some prior content knowledge of language arts and he leveraged this to help his bilingual friend. He provided this help of his own accord, too. Here again was the notion of recently arrived students flexing agency to learn. Mateo also distinguished quite well the difference between relationships in language arts class and English class. In Newcomer English class, he rattled off the ways he learned English, much like Berto did, noting, "*En los juegos, los trabajos y los vocabularios que manejamos, en lo que escribimos, en los verbos, en todo. Sí, entiendo mucho el ingles porque se práctica más la materia de inglés*" (In the games, the work and vocabulary we deal with, in what we are writing, in the verbs, in everything. Yes, I understand English a lot because the subject of English is practiced more).

Authentic interactions occurred and were expressed by the participants as friendships. Looking through a monoglossic lens of language acquisition blurred and made invisible critical literacies such as relationship building. The participants in this study refused to be limited by linear, one-way understandings of their learnings. Their testimonies continued to cross-examine one-size-fits-all programming as they expressed, in the next section, their agency in using what they already knew, or did not know, to learn in classrooms.

Prior Knowledge: “¡Bueno, ni sé!” (Well, I Don’t Know!)

Imelda’s words begin this section. I found her candid response to how she learns content without knowing the English language—“*bueno, ni sé*”—was contrary to what I had observed in her classrooms. Imelda was aware that her prior learning was not keeping pace with what she had to learn in U.S. schools, and she noted, “*En matemática es la que llevo más atrasada*” (in math is where I am most behind). What Imelda could not express was the amount of learning she had done since arriving and how that knowledge was playing out in her classes. In one observation during science class, I found Imelda to be wholly engaged and keeping pace while the teacher lectured and the students took notes on a Google slide deck. In this class, there were eight recently arrived students, and four of them were participants in the study. Imelda was imitating exactly what the teacher did. She was changing the font and color, searching for and inserting special characters, looking up, typing exactly what the teacher typed, translating the words on the slide, toggling back and forth between slide deck and Google translate, zooming in on a graphic, inserting text boxes, viewing the slides, consulting with me, and focusing on the completion of each slide. All of the instructional material was presented in English, including the directions and the lecture about the information on each slide.

Imelda reported to me she was trying hard because there was going to be a test on Friday and the teacher let them use their notes. Prior to 2020, Imelda’s schooling experience was with blackboards, chalk, and notebooks. During the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020, Imelda completed school on a phone. In 2021, her mother passed away, and she began the planning and journey to the United States. She now sat in a science class with all the accoutrements of a 21st-century classroom and, since August,

had learned good notes on a computer meant good test scores. Even though Imelda could not pinpoint exactly how she was learning, her actions spoke volumes beyond the commonly held belief that recently arrived students are in a silent period and should be left to observe and listen. Language learning theories that do not consider the dynamic nature of learning in diverse contexts are promoting the myth of silence and weakness in immigrant students.

Sam admitted to having a huge advantage over the other recently arrived students because of his bilingual education at a private school in Mexico. He not only applied his prior learning in math to figure out the U.S. curriculum, but also understood how English complicated prior knowledge about integers and operations. He testified:

En matemáticas, eso con los signos y todo, eso sí es totalmente nuevo para mí, los símbolos y menos más. Así lo he hecho, ni sabía que subtract creí que era un nuevo tema así, frente, pero resulta que es una resta. Se me está haciendo más difícil aprender matemáticas, porque encima hay que van en temas más avanzados. Pues está más difícil entender en inglés, los términos de matemáticas, sí.

(In math class, it's everything with the signs, that's all totally new to me, the symbols minus and plus. So, I've done that, but didn't know that subtract grew into a new theme, like in front and the result is a subtract. It's made it a lot more difficult for me to learn math, because on top of all that the topics are more advanced. Well, it's harder to understand English, the vocabulary of math, yes).

Another factor for Sam, reminiscent of Imelda's testimony about being behind in math, was that science was a subject about which he admitted to not knowing much, but he said he loved learning things now. Sam noted, "*no me enseñaron mucho en ciencias . .*

. *aprendí a jugar al juego ese del Charlie Charlie*” (they didn’t teach me a lot in science . . . I learned to play this game, Charlie, Charlie). He explained further that here he was learning so much about science including the phases of the moon and the skeletal system. Sam was also quick to point out, “*de ciencias, está aprendiendo mucho en ciencias, no de inglés*” (But about science, one learns a lot in science, not about English). Sam’s advantage in prior knowledge came from his English language proficiency level. Sam did not speak much and he often was classified as non-English proficient (NEP) by his teachers simply because he was recently arrived; however, his WIDA placement score was 2.5, which ranked him above non-English proficient to limited-English proficient. Understanding the nature of language acquisition as linear, time-bound, and applicable to all contexts is marginalizing students and robbing others of their unique talents and desires.

Marco revealed math was a subject with which he used to struggle in Mexico, but with his father’s help and putting his mind to it, he came to enjoy math. He even admitted that if he were to imagine himself as a teacher, he would be a math teacher—a bilingual one. His case was one of how not leveraging his skills due to a perceived lack of language impacted him. Beginning with his testimony, Marco noted:

¿En matemáticas? Pues es que creo que ahí no aprendemos mucho, porque la mayoría de las veces, como nomás estamos escribiendo. Pues no hay muchas cosas que le entiendo y al tema pues batallo. Hay unos temas que batallo en aprender por, pues no saber inglés no entender lo que está escribiendo.

(In math class? Well, it’s that I believe in there we don’t learn a lot [of English] because most of the time we don’t do anything but writing. And so there’s not much I

understand about the topic, and I struggle. There are a few topics that I struggle to learn because well, I don't know English enough to understand what the teacher is writing).

I compared this report to an observation. I focused on Marco because he had reported that math was a comfortable place for him. During the observation, the teacher had assigned a warmup problem from the text. The student desks were arranged in quads and Imelda, Mateo, and Marco, along with a bilingual peer, sat together. As they worked out a situation in which they were to determine if a small business would be a good investment, I recorded 24 unique gerund codes to describe how Marco was negotiating the task at hand. These codes included: understanding (her tone of voice), listening, responding, nodding, pleading, smiling, considering, translating, interpreting, debating, calculating, copying (notes), looking (at the text), writing, showing (their work), watching (each other), expressing (an opinion), reading (in English), simultaneously translating, comparing, converting, engaging, and leading.

This observation's codes became the basis for unveiling the harmful nature of a "pre-production" phase in language acquisition because it completely overshadowed the dynamics of learning math in a foreign language. The four students collaboratively evaluated a complex, real-life problem. Marco showed himself as a leader, Mateo as the skeptic, and Imelda as the dutiful imitator making sure to document everything her tablemates wrote down. These students were active participants in their learning, adopting roles in classrooms, and synergistically making meaningful progress. This example was one of few where I saw the students producing their own sociocultural

practices as opposed to simply reproducing compliant procedural knowledge. They were capable of producing in this so-called preproduction phase.

The participants' testimonies, combined with observational evidence, strongly support a case for the eradication of oversimplifying recently arrived students' learning processes into sequential boxes and tightly bound strategies that should work for all children. In the next section, the participants voiced their understanding of language and learning and presented a strong counter-narrative for the consideration of their meta-linguistic agency in learning.

Meta-Linguistic Agency: “Entiendo Absolutamente Todo” (I Understand Everything)

Students in the middle grades are developmentally ready for activating their own meta-cognition and exercising their agency in expressing and choosing ways to learn that suit them. Recently arrived students are keenly aware of language and the ways they learn both content and languages. I argue their meta-linguistic abilities are evidenced in their articulation of differences in domain and content areas, their intentional choice of strategies for these differences, and in their distinctive knowledge around the influence and impact of their home language in their educational experiences. Having and making meta-linguistic choices counters the preproduction and early production phases because they are flexing agency toward their learning strategies. It is evidence of their intentionality and awareness that these students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with English.

Sam continued his thoughts, which open this section. He said, “*solo que no soy muy bueno hablando en inglés. Entiendo absolutamente todo. Pero para responder en inglés .*

. . . *se me hace difícil pronunciar*” (The only thing I’m not good at is speaking in English. I understand absolutely everything. But to respond in English . . . to pronounce it is difficult for me). As for writing, Sam noted he always writes in English, saying he uses Google translate as a tool “*nada más por una que otra palabra que no hace tanto que significa*” (only for one or another word I don’t know exactly what it means). Using the translator selectively was evidence of Sam choosing a specific strategy for a specific reason. He was meta-linguistically aware that he was learning English when reading, as he disclosed, “*cuando tengo algunas palabrasque lo comprendo al menos de algunas cosas que no sea que son*” (when I have fewer words that I don’t understand what they are). Sam demonstrated a growth mindset in this context because he focused on the fact that he has fewer and fewer words that he does not know and thereby more and more words that he does know in English.

Sam had more time formally learning English and one might argue he learned as an elite bilingual student in a private school. He had been enrolled in the *Liceo* for 3 years before the loss of income forced his mother to place him in public school again. As I continued to explore his previous experience with learning English at the *Liceo* however, Sam admitted he only had one class two or three times per week to learn English. Before enrolling at Crystal Lakes, he had not had formal English instruction in 3 years. Sam described the interplay of language in his classes as he read to learn content, noting, “*Pues la verdad, lo único que hago es traducirlo en mi mente o así. Es que yo leo en inglés y ya. Sé que significa y ni lo traduzco ni nada ajá ni lo intento leer en español cuando leo algo en inglés*” (The truth is, I only translate in my head. It’s that I read in

English and that's it. I know what it means and I don't translate anything, uh huh, nor do I try to read in Spanish when I read in English).

Bilinguals will attest to the voices in their head as they read words in one language and simultaneously interpret the meaning in another. What Sam illuminated was how he was actually thinking and understanding, without translating, in English. His fluid translanguaging was confirmed in an observation from October 4, 2022. While working collaboratively with two other peers, I recorded that Sam was dictating in Spanish what he was reading in English to his friend, who then typed it into a Google slide. Looking over the slide, which was shared with the team, Sam gave stylistic advice to Berto in Spanish and would switch to English with the other collaborator who spoke to him in English.

Mateo also had awareness about how he learned English and in English. He admitted at school, he does not speak much in Spanish; rather, he noted, "*en las otras clases me quedé callado y solo escucho para poder entender al maestro lo que hablo por lo que aprendí en estos días en inglés*" (in other classes, I am quiet and only listen to be able to understand what the teacher says through what I have learned these past days in English). Here, Mateo was transferring his lessons in Newcomer English class to his mainstream classes; however, I found his statement about not using Spanish at school confounding when I observed him on November 1, 2022. On this day in literacy class, the students were presented with the opportunity to revise their narrative writing before turning in a final draft. I observed Mateo listening, watching, chewing his pencil, and opening the assignment on his Chromebook. From here, I recorded the processes of reading (his draft), struggling to revise, and being frustrated. Mateo's draft was in English and he did

not understand it, nor did he understand how to revise the paper. I asked him about how he came to this English draft and he replied he had written this story entirely in “*el traductor*” (the translator). He did not have the original Spanish version. He used his Spanish to complete a writing assignment, yet did not interpret this as using his Spanish to learn English or in English.

Mateo was consistent in his testimony, though, with how he was leaning English in a variety of contexts. In terms of math, he stated:

Cuando la maestra escribe, yo a lo que voy escribiendo el cuaderno voy leyendo lo que yo sé. Y cuando no sé, pues pregunto o me sacó la idea de las palabras que he escuchado a ver si me acuerdo. Así es como medio brindó mi inglés y matemáticas es como yo lo entiendo.

(When the teacher writes, I read what I know as I write in the notebook. And when I don't know, then I ask or I get the idea from the words I've heard to see if I remember.

It's like I gave half English and half math is how I understand it).

This sentiment was indicative of an activation of prior knowledge and inference from context to learn both content and English. The observation was so much more than listening, observing, and imitating, and worthy evidence to prosecute the myth of silence in language acquisition. This observation reflected meta-linguistic agency.

In science class, Mateo reported, “*al maestro sí le entiendo un poco más*” (I understand the teacher a little more). He clarified the teacher had various ways of talking “*con palabras que se entienden*” (with words that are understood). This teacher, in Mateo's interpretation, used English words that everyone, “*todo el mundo,*” has learned.

Science, as a school subject, contains many cognates; perhaps Mateo's understanding came from an intentional activation of this learning strategy.

Of all the participants, Mario was perhaps the most cognizant of how he employed his native language to learn English. He noticed he was learning English, as he said, "*con las palabras que no me sé lo noto, sé que si no me la sé*" (with the words I do not know, I make note of it, I know that I don't know them). Mario had about 15 months in the country and 11 months of schooling experience. His awareness of learning English peaked when there was an unfamiliar word. He indicated:

Es que cuando yo escuché una palabra en inglés, si no la recuerdo, me pongo a recordar la en mi mente y pues las que me sé de memoria, arreglo mi cerebro las y sabe que son. Es como cuando uno aprende a hablar. Mhm que venga palabras poco a poco. Y yo estoy aplicando eso para aprender más rápido al inglés.

(It's like if I heard a word in English, if I don't recognize it, I start to remember it in my mind and well the words I know by memory, I arrange them in my mind so that I know what they are. It's like when one learns to talk. Mhm, that words come little by little. And I am applying that to learn English faster).

Mateo gave credence to the notion that one learns a second language in the same way one might learn their first, at least with the first words. What was unique, as with all participants' disclosures, was that Mateo actively arranged the English and Spanish to function complementarily.

Mario was meta-linguistically aware that he was learning English and content because of his prior educational experiences. For example, in math, he revealed, "*cuando yo estaba allá en Nicaragua, pues teníamos la clase de matemática, le digamos*

avanzada, e nos enseñaron a dividir, multiplicar” (when I was in Nicaragua, well we had a math class, we’d say advanced, and they taught us to divide, multiply). Although Mario conceded he was bored in the United States, he said, *“hay algunas cosas que no me sé, porque no la sé, no alcancé a llegar a que me las enseñaron allá, pues y me la están enseñando aquí”* (there are some things that I don’t know for myself, because I just don’t know it, I did not get to be there [in Nicaragua] when they taught it, and well they are teaching it to me here). As far as learning English in math, Mario was excited to say, *“estoy aprendiendo a pronunciar bien los números, aunque me los sé, pero no los puedo pronunciar tan bien que digamos”* (I am learning to pronounce numbers well, even though I knew them before, but I couldn’t pronounce them as well as I can say them now).

This achievement was important for Mario for two reasons. He was able to participate in the multiplication games the teacher played with the class, and a critical strategy for him to understand occurred through hearing. This strategy became clearly evident for me as I noted in the field journal that when I administered the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test, Mario read everything—every question, prompt, text, direction—out loud. He scored a 4.0 in the Listening domain and then 1.0 in every other language domain. Two observations of him in math class noted Mario read math texts aloud and repeated everything the teacher said. When asked if he was aware that he does this, he smiled and said, *“a propósito también, naturalmente, sí”* (on purpose as well, naturally, yes).

Mario was an agent in his own learning, which should be leveraged toward his achievement. Of science class, he said he learns English because, *“sí, lo que me están dando ahorita, yo lo vi en mi escuela anterior”* yes, what they are giving me here right

now, I saw in my other school). In Literacy class, even though he did not know exactly what he was reading, Mario insisted, “*eso te ayuda porque lees mucho porque te dan las hojas. Pues debes mucho y ahí vas a ir aprendiendo hablar bien*” (that helps you a lot because you read a lot because they give you the packets. Well, you have a lot to learn and you will learn to speak well). Technically, Mario would not be classified in Krashen’s (1982) preproduction phase simply based on the time he had been in U.S. schools learning English. Rather, Mario might be considered as an early production student which, by the way, is the first place educators often see that students can make mistakes. He was developing language domains in strikingly different ways that are not accounted for in simplistic theories that inform one-size-fits-all programming.

Elizabeth was tickled to tell me that the first English she learned were bad words, and her friends were happy to translate; she noted, “*así con amigos y cuando pregunto, pues me las traducen*” (like with friends and when I ask, well, they translate them to me). Elizabeth offered a meta-linguistic explanation about language learning and learning in a language that one does not understand, saying:

ha sido un poco difícil porque ya uno está más grande, el español lo tienes superpegado, lo tiene ya porque es su idioma natal . . . es más complicado para cuando ya está más grande

(it has been a little harder because like when you are older, the Spanish you have is more deeply embedded in you, you have it like this because you know, it’s your native language . . . it’s more complicated when you’re older).

Elizabeth understood this explanation because she had younger siblings whose English seemed to be developing differently than hers.

Elizabeth enumerated different strategies for learning in every context, even at lunch, where she admitted to not learning any English because she was just with her friends talking Spanish. She noted, *“pues este estar con sus amigos y casi lo sus amigos, pues hablamos español. Entonces se usa más el español que el inglés en lonche.”* (well, here being with your friends and almost all of them, well we speak Spanish. So one uses Spanish more than English at lunch). She clearly activated her prior knowledge, which was a meta-cognitive strategy, to make sense and learn; as she said, *“me puedo hacer lo que al cosas que yo ya la sé”* (I have the ability to do the things I already know). In math, Elizabeth was recognizing numbers spoken in English, but she already knew how to perform operations like addition, subtraction, and multiplication. Further clarifying, she reiterated using her Spanish in math was important because, *“si ustedes sólo se pone a decirlo en inglés, entonces no le va a entender, tiene que primero saber el significado en español para poder entenderle bien”* (If you only start to say it in English, then you won't understand it, you have to first know the meaning in Spanish to be able to understand it well). Elizabeth had power in her meta-linguistic choices and intuition as she navigated learning English and in English. Her testimony demonstrated she was actively engaged, whereas other theories about her language phases might label her as being quietly observing and only capable of the lowest of intellectual endeavors.

Berto was aware he understood English better when he read than when someone was talking to him. This understanding might have something to do with how he employed his native language. For example, Berto reported, *“cuando me están hablando así me enfoco y como que mi mente lo escucha y lo procesa y lo pasa a español. Y ya hay un medio. Lo entiendo”* (when they're talking to me like that, I focus and my mind sort of

listens to it and processes it and turns it into Spanish. And there is already a meaning. I get it). Along the lines of both his native language used and his need to translate, Berto told me he took all his work home and translated it and then read it. His words explained the process he went through to learn both English and math:

Escuchando a la maestra y enfocándome. Luego, como los de todos los trabajos, los traduzco en mi casa. Entonces ya sé más o menos las palabras que significan.

Llegando a mi casa, saco mi teléfono, le tomo una foto, le pongo a traducir y ahí ya la leo todo. Entonces ya veo las letras. Más o menos, entiendo las que cada cosa que significa.

(Listening to the teacher and focusing myself. Later, with like all the work, I translate them at my house. Just then, I know pretty much what the words mean. Arriving at my house, I get my telephone, take a picture of it, I put it to translate and here I read everything. So, I see the letters. And I pretty much understand what everything means).

Berto had just turned 12 years old, and this passage reflected his level of commitment and agency to learn. His strategy of choice was to work hard and confirmed Valenzuela's (1999) assertions that immigrant attitudes and *empeño* (work ethic) toward education are remarkable.

In each class, Berto was aware and articulated different ways he learned English. In general, he noticed he was learning English, as he said, "*cuando estoy leyendo*" (when I am reading). He could also attest that he did not understand "*cuando me están hablando casi no*" (when they are talking to me [in English] almost none). In math class, which was his favorite subject, Berto said he learned English and math by "*escuchando a la*

maestra y enfocándome” (listening to the teacher and focusing myself). Berto demonstrated a range of conscious learning choices that showed him to be anything but passively observing and digesting language in comprehensible chunks. He learned best when he was relaxed. Berto said he rides his bike “*en vueltos*” (in circles) listening to music in English and when he goes to sleep, he thinks about his day and all the things he has learned. He lets himself relax with some music in English because, as he said, “*cuando estoy relajado, mi cerebro la procesa mejor las cosas*” (when I am relaxed, my brain processes things better). Here becomes evident a grand amount of processing through reflection and meditation. Although from the outside, these acts were silent, they were far from powerless reproductions and imitations. Leveraging Berto’s ability to concentrate and focus as well as be interactive would prove the preproduction phase to be mythical at best and shamefully silencing at worst.

These participants articulated knowledge beyond their years. Their experiences in borderland spaces had given them unique perspectives on their place in U.S. schools. I make the case against silencing our students and would be remiss if I did not include a final analysis on what the participants reported about their emotional state while struggling to learn.

The Embodiment of Silence

I end this section with Table 5.6, which introduces the audience to the unfortunate aspects of silencing recently arrived, emergent bilinguals in their schooling experience. This table reflects the participants’ answers to a direct question. I asked them to describe how it felt in classes when they were struggling to learn, and further, where they felt this

struggle. As an inquiry into their corporeal experience, I felt it necessary to probe their physical and emotional connection.

Table 5.6: Embodied Silence

Participant	What is it like when you are struggling to learn?
Berto	I'm frustrated and confused. I'm shy to approach someone and ask if they speak Spanish. I wonder what I can do to understand. I feel it in my head.
Elizabeth	I get anxiety. I want to shut down or leave class. I feel it in my chest. I lose my breath.
Imelda	Bad because I can't say what I want to say. I feel it here (points to throat). I think I need things repeated and I look lost.
Marco	Between nervous and afraid. I think "what am I doing right or wrong." I feel it in my <i>mente</i> .
Mario	I only think about the work. <i>A la vez</i> I think: I can do it, I can't do it. I feel it in my <i>mente</i> .
Mateo	<i>Mucha rabia</i> . When I go to talk, I can't. I feel like I am being impeded. My body fails me and my head aches. I look angry.
Nina	I feel pressure put on me. I think "what am I doing right and what am I doing wrong?" I am concentrating and it all accumulates in me, then I forget!
Sam	I feel stress and anxiety. <i>No más rezando por lo mejor</i> . I feel it on my forehead and my face.

Note. The participant responses were interpreted and condensed to ease the understanding. Some phrases are left in Spanish because the connotative hit is more impactful in Spanish.

Here is a *frontera* in the students' psyches that they cross and straddle. The preponderance of evidence in this study revealed the participants to be strong, resilient, smart, and conscious of themselves and their learning. They were agents of their learning and had metalinguistic capabilities, including prior knowledge and the ability to apply strategies in targeted ways to learn both language and content. They were explicit in their descriptions of what they felt, thought, and outwardly showed when they were struggling

in classrooms. Imelda concurred with Anzaldúa's (1987) sentiments about her throat and soul being sore from the constant struggle with language when she pointed to her throat to show me where she feels her struggle. In fact, all participants were able to pinpoint where in their bodies they felt their emotions that ranged from confusion to *mucha rabia* (rage). Most participants felt the struggle in their minds or heads.

Of note, however, were Mateo and Elizabeth's answers. Mateo said, "*sentiría mucha frustración y mucha rabia. ¿Por qué? No me puedan prestar yo mismo*" (I would feel very frustrated and angry. Why? Because I can't participate fully as me). Elizabeth lamented the feeling of wanting to shut down and leave class when the work got too tightly packed, as she reported, "*le agarro ansiedad como de dejar el examen y irse por lo frustrado. . . . Y me pegan dolores de cabeza o me siento mal. Me duele mi pecho, me siento que me falta la respiración*" (I get anxiety like wanting to leave the exam and leaving frustrated. . . . And I get headaches or feel bad. My chest hurts, I feel like I have lost my breath).

The fact that these 12-year-old children had such strong emotions and felt it explicitly in their bodies is a harken to the validity of BT, which is based in Chicana feminist epistemologies. BT was a valid theory to apply in understanding the lived experiences of the participants of this study, as this theory is capable of managing and empowering greater understandings than traditional notions of the affective filter or silent period in language acquisition theories in which U.S. educators are immersed. With these deeply psychological processes being reported, it was imperative to document in as many observable ways as possible to triangulate the data and create a wholistic portrait of the

super-human perseverance of the participants. These participants should not be left simply “*rezando por lo mejor*” (praying for the best).

Imagination and Reality: *Choque*

In the borderlands, Anzaldúa (1987) imagined an *herida abierta* (open wound) in the psyche and physical realities of border crossers. The wound may scab over or scar in to heal some, but there is always something that grates when cultures collide and seek to coexist. I wanted to be witness to the participants’ interpretation of enduring this collision, or *choque*. Leaning heavily into the work of borderlands scholarship, I crafted questions that might reveal expressions of hope that contradicted participants’ realities. This study originated in my desire to understand the changes that inevitably happened within recently arrived students. I saw changes in identity of some students, their almost certain withdrawal from interactions, and sometimes a clinging to memories and places from home that simply made them sad. I described this *choque* as an “acculturation dip” and it was always part of my opening talks with parents and families. I encouraged families to look out for signs of depression, rebellion, and significant risk-taking behaviors, especially around the first major holiday or family member’s birthday that they would miss back home. I was not sure if I could study this part of the acculturation process, predict it, or perhaps develop some grounded theory to share with other educators. For now, this study has just tapped into the lived experiences and the contradictions participants face in schools that have become borderland spaces.

Grappling with the idea of *choque*, Table 5.7 shows how the participants compared their lived experiences to their expectations prior to arrival in the United States. The table provides an interpretation of their realities against their ideals. My assumption in the

answers about a perfect schooling experience is that the participants did not interpret the site of this study as perfect. The summary table shows the persistent presence of language and peer relationships in the *testimonios* of schooling experiences.

Table 5.7: Summary of Participant Imagination of School

Participant	How did you imagine school in the US?	How do you imagine a perfect school?
Berto	I imagined a beautiful place, a big city with tall buildings. I knew it would be in English.	<i>Mas compañerismo</i> , they wouldn't tease or judge you.
Elizabeth	I thought it would be like Honduras. I thought I would have more friends, though.	<i>Lo mejor, la forma de respetar</i> , no bullying. We'd be more united and teachers would not get mad at us.
Imelda	<i>Bonita como es</i> . They would teach me English. I would have friends.	We could use phones! (<i>jajaja</i>) If one doesn't understand, then they explain it and they teach each and every person.
Marco	We had plans to stay, so, yes, I imagined uniforms, short hair, and lots of homework.	They'd help us learn English. Like 5 classes of English. The teachers would help everyone.
Mario	<i>Yo no lo imagino</i> .	I don't know, I have never thought of that before. I might change the teachers. They give us work but don't help us do it.
Mateo	Like what you see in the movies, friends, lockers, but scary because of bullying here. <i>Bajo mi animo, este</i> .	Teachers would speak English and Spanish at the same time without clinging to English.
Nina	I imagined it but with more friends. I never imagined not being able to understand what is said to me.	I imagine more Spanish and <i>no molestamos</i> .
Sam	Not this specific school, but I knew <i>que tarde o temprano</i> I would be in school. I imagined learning in English.	I imagine you could choose your subjects to study. If you are good at science you could have more science. <i>Las materias que mejor se adapten a lo que te gusta</i> .

Note. The participant responses were interpreted and condensed to ease understanding. Some phrases are left in Spanish because the connotative hit is more impactful in Spanish.

“No Es la Misma” (It is Not the Same)

To begin this analysis, I must share Sam’s interpretation of a perfect school. When I asked the question, he became still and thoughtful. He started to fill his mouth with words and chew on them, as he normally did when a question intrigued him. We were less than 1 week away from the Christmas break. Exhaustion and sickness were rampant in the student body and faculty. It was a grinding week. Yet, Sam took the question quite seriously, or so I thought by his initial physical appearance. He drew me in slowly, saying, *“pues yo estoy ahí. Y pues vería que la entrada tendría un cartel que iría a ser cerrado. Cerraron por un mes por vacaciones. Así sería! Una escuela perfecta”* (well, I’m there. And then I would see that the entrance would have a sign saying that the school would be closed. They closed for a month for vacation. Here it would be so! A perfect school). The two of us shared an excellent laugh, releasing our minds and bodies from the tense atmosphere of schooling for a moment. Sam quickly recovered and explained that for him, a perfect school would be one where he could choose to follow his interests deeper and in a more advanced way. Sam is neurodivergent and simply described his perfect school as a place where one could pursue his passions.

The participants demonstrated a range of expectations for their schooling after crossing over, yet these expectations definitely showed what they imagined was not what was found. From Mario’s not imagining anything about school to Sam’s understanding that crossing over was going to be inevitable, the participants’ responses could be reasonably explained if put into the context of their prior experiences and understandings of *el Norte*. For example, Berto, Marco, and Imelda had anchors in the United States and had some exposure to what might happen as they crossed and later as they enrolled in

school. Marco told me his older siblings explained to him what it was like in school, including the fact that there were many people in school who spoke Spanish and would help him. He said he imagined that *“iban a tener como a lo mejor un uniforme o que tenías que tener como el pelo corto, y que iban a encargar tareas y . . . pensé que íbamos a usar tablets”* (they were going to have to wear a uniform or you would have to have short hair and they were going to assign homework and . . . I thought we’d use tablets). Imelda’s answer about how she imagined school, *“bonita, como es”* (nice, like it is) did not quite line up with her conceptualization of a perfect school, “where they teach each and every one.” She clarified her brother’s wife had gone to school in the United States and told her what it was going to be like. Imelda said she expected *“todo en ingles”* (everything in English).

Elizabeth was practical in her explanation of how she imagined school and how that crashed with the reality. She testified:

Pues pensé que iba a ser como . . . iba a ser como en la escuela de Honduras, algo así. Pero cuando llegué aquí me sé que las cosas cambiaron en la escuela, la educación pensé que iba a ser como si el inglés y eso iba a ser diferente, pero pensé que iba a ser como con más amigos, así que no iba a estar tantas horas de la escuela... Me ha afectado cuando tenía amigos bastantes . . . entonces ahora me tengo que acostumbrar a otra algo nuevo y es algo difícil.

(You know, I thought it was going to be like school in Honduras or something like that. But when I got here, I found out for myself that things changed at school, I thought the education was going to be, yes, in English, and all that and this was different but I thought it was going to be like with more friends and that it wasn’t

going to be for so many hours. It affected me a lot, when I had a lot of friends . . .
now I'm getting used to another new thing and it's hard).

Elizabeth started in one school in late December 2021 and then had to go to a new school in August 2022. If I count her school in Honduras, Elizabeth had changed schools three times since 2021. Not only was school different in the United States from Honduras, but there were also differences from school to school. Even in the same school district, experiences can vary tremendously. Elizabeth had experienced the grating of cultures colliding, reopening the wound over and over.

“Porque no me Puedo Comunicar” (Because I’m Not Able to Communicate)

Another clear concept expressed by participants in the realm of imagination versus reality implicated the importance of languages spoken and by whom they were spoken in school. Language was interfering with, or more accurately, according to Mateo, *impidiendo* (impeding) the participants’ learning. Even though there was an expectation of English on their part prior to coming, the participants’ realities crashed hard into the lived reality of these expectations, as was witnessed in their embodied struggling from the previous chapter. After 4 months of schooling, participants were feeling and experiencing education in different ways. Mario felt like the teachers did not give help, Marco desired to learn English in five classes a day, and Imelda wanted teachers to explain topics she did not understand.

Apart from English and Spanish, Sam raised a good point about content language. He explained that in math class, “*en matemáticas porque se usan diferentes términos, pues está más difícil buscar un video en español de como hacer cierto tema con términos que no entiendo*” (in math because they use different terminology, well it’s hard to find a

video in Spanish that explains how to do certain things with terminology I don't know). Sam had stated previously that learning math in English was harder even though the result of operations was the same. This witness testimony countered myths that math is the same regardless of language. The unfortunate consequence of this assumption is that educators misunderstand recently arrived students' abilities. Also, language bias in all tests—including high-stakes, large-scale exams such as the Colorado Measure of Academic Success-Math and the Scholastic Aptitude Test—are not confronted heartily enough on behalf of language minoritized students. In the minds of participants, language of content areas and the language of instruction were foreign languages with which to grapple that perhaps educators did not think about before.

Nina's *testimonio* profoundly summed up the *choque* some immigrants face when confronting the reality of English domination as she disclosed, "*o sea, yo sí me imaginaba estar en la escuela, pero con amigos, así como que él mismo tiempo decía, no, porque no imaginaba que no va a entender lo que nada me dicen*" (In other words, I did imagine being at school, but with friends, and at the same time I would say no, because I did not imagine not understanding anything being said to me).

As to the point of who used which language in school, Mateo had an excellent insight as to the use of language by adults as being a site of contention as he explained,

Una escuela perfecta tiene que tener maestros, si es en Estados Unidos, que hablen inglés a la vez que no solamente se aferren el inglés. Porque aquí, hay muchas personas que puede hablar inglés y español, pero son estudiantes o son secretarios. No son alumnos, no son maestros y eso es lo más importante . . . lo único que sería era eso que los maestros hablaran español o que hubiera maestros que hablen

español inglés a la vez porque pues muchas personas llegan aquí como que hablen dos idiomas.

(A perfect school has to have teachers, if it's in the United States, who speak English while not just clinging to English. Because here, there are many people who can speak English and Spanish, but they are students or they are secretaries. They are not [recently arrived] students, they are not teachers and that is the most important thing. . . . The only thing that would be better is that the teachers spoke Spanish or that there were teachers who spoke Spanish and English at the same time because, well, many people come here who speak two languages).

Nina, too, explicitly referred to language as being an impeding factor. She attested a perfect school would be like Crystal Lakes but noted, “*lo único que cambiaría por ahí que todos hablan español porque la verdad sí me gusta . . . más español*” (the only thing I’d change about here is that everyone speak Spanish, because honestly, yes I’d like that . . . more Spanish). The evidence provided by Mateo and Nina around how they imagined school and imagined a perfect school supported the notion of the clash between their reality and their imagination. It was as if they knew English would be important and they came with all the *ganas* (intentional effort) to learn it, but when the reality of the situation really started to grate on their minds and bodies, the toll it took on them was evident.

“Más Compañerismo” (More Comradery)

According to both Elizabeth and Berto, a perfect or ideal school would be one where there is more unity and friendship. In this final round of interviews, bullying emerged in different spaces for the participants. It was clear in their imagination that a perfect school was not one that involved bullying. I believe the participants were implicitly and at times

explicitly stating that bullying was happening at the site of the study and therefore Crystal Lakes was not a perfect school. Elizabeth's response to this question was lengthy as she recalled specific incidents that her friends had experienced on the playground, online, and via texts and other messaging apps.

The participants were both blending in more and becoming more visible and vocal in the school. I inquired about how their experience might be different if no one knew they were an immigrant. This question, more often than not, warranted a clarifying question from me. I explained to the participants who did not understand what I was asking if they thought everyone knew they were an immigrant. They had reported earlier and observations confirmed that they felt seen and heard in school, but whether expressly as an immigrant was unclear. This line of questioning came from Anzaldúa's (1987) assertion that new immigrants, especially female immigrants, are the most vulnerable to exploitation and attacks or bullying. I combined this idea with criterion in measures of critical consciousness that tested the individuals' awareness of their group oppression.

Sam showed he was not aware of his membership in the immigrant group as he stated, "*yo creo que no importa tanto porque . . . pues no lo van, no tienes un papel en la frente que dice inmigrantes y no creo que importe la verdad*" (I don't believe it's that important because . . . well, they aren't going to put, you don't have a sign on your forehead that says immigrants and I don't really think it matters). Sam had a higher level of English according to the WAPT screening test and also had left the Newcomer English classes like Mario. Another disconfirming case was Imelda. When asked if she thought people at school knew she was an immigrant, she said, "*sí porque hablo español*" (yes, because I speak Spanish). She was conflating her immigrant identity with all Spanish

speakers. There are many students at this school who speak and understand Spanish and English. She did not immediately recognize herself a member of a marked group, at least not an immigrant group. As Berto said, a perfect school is one where one is not judged “*por su apariencia física o económica*” (for your appearance or your economic status), it became clear bullying was happening to him. Again, being known as an immigrant, Berto stated, “*no sé si sería diferente o sería igual*” (I don’t know if it would be the same or different). However, as a boy experiencing poverty, it was clear Berto felt bullied as a member of this group.

Nina reported being an immigrant was the first thing others would bully her about, but she just brushed it off as a normal thing that happens. She responded immediately to the original question about how she might experience school if everyone knew she was an immigrant, saying, “*Cuando alguien insulta lo primero que se ven eres migrante . . . siempre me dicen eso y es normal porque sé lo que es cierto . . . no me afecta mucho*” (when they insult you, the first thing they see is you are a migrant...they always say this to me and it’s normal because I know what’s true . . . it doesn’t affect me much). It was almost as if she expected bullying or at least had become accustomed to it. Nina’s expectation of bullying was an indicator of *la facultad*, and her brushing it off showed she has become resilient in this *facultad*.

Mateo testified as well to the bullying immigrants experienced. He reported, “*no hablaría de ese tema. Nunca lo tocaría porque van a decir que ellos los invadir. Porque hay muchas personas que piensan eso, que los inmigrantes son unos invasores*” (I never talk about this topic. I never touch it because they are going to say that they invaded us. Because there are many people who believe that immigrants are invaders). The “invader”

crash had just begun to happen in December, or at least this was when the participants were willing to share with me about the issue. What came through to me in this finding about bullying was the development of *la facultad*. Anzaldúa (1987) wrote oppressed Latinx people, especially women and queer people, develop an ability to see through and sense dangerous situations by sniffing out the lies being told about their personhood.

Conclusion

This chapter brought forth critical themes in the findings of this study: changing identity, self-image, a not-so-silent period, and the *choque* of imagination and reality. The evidence gathered and reported build a prosecutorial counter-narrative to prevailing myths about recently arrived students. These myths include that student immigrants are passive and not agentive in their learning or identity development; that they can be objectified into language categories and therefore be taught in some one-size-fits-all program of strategies; and that they acculturate in linear, monolithic patterns. The participant *testimonios* warranted further exploration of their lived experiences in U.S. schools. The purpose of this study was to amplify participants' voices and therein advance wholistic portraits of their personhood dismantling over-simplified and conventional beliefs about *la travesía* (the journey). The following chapter discusses the implications of this research as they relate to aligning beliefs with instructional practices, disrupting the greater societal narratives that inscribe deficit positions onto recently arrived Latinx students, and reflecting a final desire by me to advance the abilities of these young people to freely live as themselves, *saliendo afuera*.

Chapter Six: Salir Afuera

In Spanish, the verb *salir* literally means to leave a place. For example, when we, Spanish speakers, say *salir de compras*, it means to leave one place and to shop at another. If we say *salir de vacaciones*, it means to leave one place and to vacation at another. If we say *salir Adelante*, it means to leave one place and to overcome and succeed in another. If we say *salir afuera*, it means to leave one place and simply to go outside. The interpretation of this word is very important because it implies a choice in where one goes and what they do when they get there. There is a freedom in *saliendo afuera* (going out and about) that perhaps has been taken for granted, but not by the participants in this study.

Coming up over and over again when the participants revealed the joys of their lives was this phrase, conjugated in some way, *salir afuera*. The participants reminisced on their favorite moments with their friends and family as those when they were *saliendo afuera*. There was a freedom that had been lost as they experienced schooling in the United States as *apresurado, raro, impidiendo, frustrando, y callado* (rushed, weird, impeded, frustrating, and quiet). In school, participants' freedom to just be youthful characters was constrained. At the same time, the participants expressed hopeful and agentive ways that they were experiencing school and themselves in school. If there is one thing I wish for my participants and for all recently arrived students, it is the ability to be free. Free to *salir afuera* and just be.

The purpose of this study was to amplify the voices of recently arrived, middle-school aged Latinx immigrants to begin dismantling deficit narratives that feed racializing ideologies around their cultural and linguistic heritage. Their *testimonios* cross examined notions of silence in their educational journeys and opened pathways of complex understandings of their humanity. Beginning with a simple question, “How do recently arrived, Latinx middle school students interpret their experiences within the first two years of their arrival in the United States and enrollment in schools?”, I constructed counter-narratives that interrupt conventional beliefs about immigrant children and the children of immigrants in our schools, presenting them as much more than one-dimensional labels of language proficiency. The participants enacted a tremendous amount of agency in constructing their identities and learning strategies in school. They showed awareness of themselves and their membership in an overtly marginalized group. In their words, they expressed a powerfully hopeful futures that were not without critical awareness of the obstacles they must overcome.

Key findings in this study indicated that humanizing participants in research by applying culturally relevant, critical theoretical frameworks and methodologies yielded deeper understandings of student experiences in schooling contexts. Through this understanding, educators and students can become *emparejados*, building strong relationships to move educational equity forward in fruitful ways. Dismantling deficit narratives was a goal of this study and findings from this study showed participants had the ability to rationalize and overcome great obstacles, including their journeys to the United States, their agency in finding a place to belong, their meta-linguistic power to learn, their critical thinking in various settings, and their determination *pa' salir adelante*

(to persevere and move forward through challenges). Their *testimonios* offered convincing evidence in the prosecution of dominant narratives that both silenced and placed domination upon them.

In this chapter, I discuss findings of this study in three arenas. First, for my participants, I offer a critical examination of their lives as they experience the first few months of schooling in the United States. Second, I offer the educators with whom I work and all those interested in educational equity and social justice some ways to employ the agency and critical hope of these participants in our pedagogy. As educators, we can leverage their strengths for academic and interpersonal achievement while at the same time disrupt damaging ideologies that trap us in complacency. Third, I address larger social and structural mechanisms that could be critically addressed by the *testimonios* of the participants. This chapter also includes an examination of the limitations and value of this study to the greater academic community, along with recommendations of ideas for future research.

The Listening Subject and Practicing Antiracism

Dauge-Roth (2012) asserted, “Understanding testimony as a space of social encounter constitutes a crucial shift as it affirms that survivors’ views cannot be reduced to judicial proofs, historical footnotes, or academic subjects” (p. 64). It was imperative in this work that participants’ voices were authentically represented and heard by the audience. As presented in the literature review, youth epistemology involves disrupting conventions of language appropriateness (Bussert-Web et al., 2018; Mirra & Debate Liberation League [DLL], 2020), identity productions (Ek, 2007; García, 2017; González Ybarra, 2018), and the illegitimacy of embodied communal knowledge (González Ybarra, 2020; Rodriguez-

Vega, 2018), but only if we listen. Youth epistemology has the potential to reframe understandings of their humanity and in turn, our own humanity, and transform educational policies and practices (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Each participant displayed their unique interpretations on themes common in borderlands theory (BT) scholarship such as belonging, shifting identities, linguistic inclusion and exclusion, and agentic choices in their identity and learning. Most importantly, the participants were able to articulate depth and complexity to their lives and in doing so, took our time spent together in this study to a place of antiracist possibilities. Of course, this outcome happened only when I reconciled myself as a White, English-speaking, middle-class adult listening subject (Flores & Rosa, 2016). Theoretical intuition garnered from Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) and BT guided me toward *testimonio* methods and opened spaces and places for the participants in this study to express themselves in their words. Their words were powerful and spoke to the marginalization language of minoritized students.

Antiracist stances, recalling from the literature reviewed for this study, position researchers in such ways to understand the lived experiences of students as interruptions of “cultural hegemonic domination in education research” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 556). Cultural racism, as defined by Kendi (2019), is the creation of a cultural standard and then imposing that standard to create hierarchies. Language, especially English, is one such cultural standard imposed upon the participants of this study. Eight of the original 11 participants explicitly noted English was the biggest problem immigrants faced in school. This sentiment might be explained by the English-only and language development pull-out model of instruction at Crystal Lakes, the site of this study. Mateo

duly noted only students and secretaries spoke Spanish, not teachers at this school. Elizabeth had internalized the group oppression as she stated, “I need to learn more English to express myself better.” She was implying that the listening subject with whom she desired better communication was not receptive to Spanish and therefore the onus was on her to learn English; it was her problem. Nina also concurred with the language barrier being a problem as she reported “English and for being different” were among the challenges faced at school by immigrants. Even Mario, who had been in the United States for about 18 months—longer than any other participant in the study—lamented “learning the language” was a problem for immigrants.

Evidence that the recently arrived students were racialized, or judged as inferior because of English, came again from their own testimonies. In the arena of belonging in a space, six participants expressed exclusion in terms of English, and eight expressed inclusion in terms of Spanish. In this arena, perhaps the listening subjects’ acceptance of Spanish was a signal of antiracist principles. Listening subjects are not just teachers and adults, but also peers. As noted in the literature review, studies that employ BT must examine the many layers of shifting identities and racializing nuances in educational spheres. Something that traditional acculturation models miss is what Ek (2009) called *multiple socializations*. Adding nuance to the notion of language hierarchies was Mateo’s desire to learn three languages: Mexican Spanish, Colombian Spanish, and English.

The findings in this study clearly showed that Mexican Spanish and, by association, Mexican culture, was another standard to which the participants had to adhere. Take, for example, how the Mexican participants were unsure at first if they used different Spanish in different contexts, yet the non-Mexican participants knew exactly how to answer that

question. Mario had specific words that changed between the languages and attested to how the Mexican-origin students did not change their language to suit his. Elizabeth, too, felt Othered by her Honduran dialect in the face of the Mexican and Mexican American majority students at Crystal Lakes.

By centering the student interpretation of language and culture at school, I opened a space for educators to practice antiracist actions. The aforementioned cases exemplified how working from the lived experience of students can inform educators' beliefs and in turn their actions. One action to be undertaken by educators of recently arrived students is to understand their awareness of themselves as lacking English is damaging to their psyches (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bussert-Webb, et al., 2018; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Rosa, 2016). Educators can instead frame their recently arrived students as holders of specialized knowledge. Structuring interactions with bilingual peers and privileging these interactions as transcultural acts (Malsbury, 2013) would increase the agency already present in these students. I remind the audience now of Imelda's words, "The worst thing about me is I don't know English."

In spaces such as those at Crystal Lakes, where English is the privileged language standard, all stakeholders should be encouraged to come together and learn from one another. Valenzuela (1999) recognized that "were students to experience a politic of shared material cultural interests, their relationships would likely improve" (p. 143). This means educators would be actively involved in decentering the English language in favor of constructing environments of shared experience, thereby fighting subtractive educational practices for all Spanish-speaking or Spanish-heritage students. Observations conducted in this study showed these authentic interactions happened organically in

science classes for Sam, Berto, and Mario, and in math class for Marco, Imelda, and Mateo. With intentional structuring, teachers of these participants could leverage the strengths of more students and create more democratic knowledge sharing and building.

García and Kleifgen (2018) offered translanguaging as a medium to bridge cultures and honor the dynamic nature of linguistic practices in schools. Translanguaging was borne from heteroglossic ideologies that embrace complex linguistic systems and reject monoglossic language ideologies that separate and name languages as unique to nation-states. Translanguaging pedagogies hold the belief that emergent bilinguals “possess a *full* and unitary linguistic system . . . made up of features that have been developed in the *social* context in which they have done language up to now” (García & Kleifgen, 2018, p. 64). In this picture, any and all students are complete and not lacking, which is an antiracist way of thinking. Educators must be released from boundaries that insist they add a language to a student’s language; rather, the educator should be free to develop and expand the linguistic repertoire of students.

In reviewing literature for scholarship that elevated student voice in borderland spaces, Rodriguez-Vega (2018) used student drawings to demonstrate their awareness of shared experiences in immigrant communities. No language is privileged over another in classrooms in this structure; this is antiracism in practice. Valenzuela (1999) would call this concept a pluralistic model of schooling, in which social capital is built and divisiveness is reduced.

Systemically, there is no policy in Northwest Public School District (NWPSD) around the notion of bilingual education. The school district has a Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Education division that envisions all students entering the global

community as “self-advocating citizens” with a “myriad of skills and contributions.” The principles of the language program include all schools implementing English language development programs, prioritizing the acquisition of academic English, conducting systematic assessment of student progress in acquiring English, and ensuring all instructional staff are qualified and trained to work with English learners. Such a focus on English and academic English signals a monoglossic ideology, one in which educators need to add English to whatever existing language or languages the student may possess. No policy prescribes the language of daily instruction or instructional materials.

This lack of policy is sometimes the policy itself. In systems like this, where educators are encouraged to develop English explicitly, the unfortunate consequence is a prioritization of English and a limitation of other linguistic repertoires. As noted in the literature reviewed for this study regarding theorizing immigrant experience in schools, limiting and bounding knowledge creation and performance in English only is a racializing force in classrooms (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Fine, et al., 2018; Flores & Rosa; 2015). Such is the world of public education in the era of high-stakes testing where even in 2023, emergent bilinguals who have recently arrived are only exempted from accountability in English for 1 year. Recalling the historical contexts reviewed in Chapter 2 of this study, it is evident that indeed little has changed in the past 100 years.

In the next section, I discuss data from this study, focusing the lens to borderland constructs and illuminating potential pools of strength in recently arrived Latinx students that could increase success outcomes in schooling contexts.

Borderlands Identity

In theorizing immigrant identity through a borderlands perspective, the data collected in this study illuminated previously studied constructs investigated by scholars interested in implementing culturally sustaining and critical methods. One such construct is *Nepantla*. In the literature reviewed for this study, researchers invariably examined and expanded Anzaldúa's (1987) conceptualization of this shifting space and place as a unique element in the lives of Latinx people. Before continuing, it is important to note that I am not a cultural insider and acknowledge "legitimate critiques around the (mis)use . . . and at times, appropriation of Indigenous knowledge in Chicana feminist work" (González Ybarra, 2018, p. 508). *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl word and concept that has been extrapolated and applied to research and contexts outside of the cultural heritage that it represents. That being stated, there were strong resonating data that informed and represented the experiences of the participants in this study.

Literally understanding the participants in this study as physically and psychologically existing in *Nepantla* was affirmed in three areas reported by them: separation, belonging, and shifting identities. Historically, Latinx students were segregated in schools and at times completely excluded. As noted in the historical literature reviewed for this study, separation was a telling case of the majoritarian beliefs about Latinx language and culture in U.S. schools. Listening with the participants of this study enlarged my conceptualization of *Nepantla* because all participants had a schema for it before their migration to the United States. In this study, I found all participants were geographically separated from family and homes. Of the original 11 participants, nine experienced familial separation by divorce, or in the case of Imelda, her mother's

death. Half of the participants were also separated from their families at the geopolitical border by immigration officials. However, as the participants reminisced about their homes in Mexico, Central America, and South America, I began to recognize a hallmark of the in-betweenness that characterizes *Nepantla*, that of never fully being out of one place or in another. So, even though the participants were experiencing physical separation, their psychological place was still in both worlds. Anzaldúa (1987) wrote that in leaving home to find herself, she never lost touch with her origins because “I am a turtle, I carry ‘home’ on my back” (p. 43). These students were recently arrived to the United States, but it was important not to forget they were also “recently left” from another.

The participants understood the reasons why they left, even though they may not have had much of a choice. Imelda came because she was in a very dangerous place. Sam’s mom and Marco’s mom left for better employment and opportunities. Berto was sent by his mother to follow his grandfather. Mario’s family left to build a home place in Colorado and help others in their town come. Elizabeth expressed a desire to be Honduras; however, she specifically cited the poor economy of Honduras, as did Mateo of Colombia’s economy. Mateo stepped a bit further into the cultural loss his homeland experienced because of drug cartels as being a reason to come to the United States. This awareness harkened to the double consciousness that Chicana feminist scholars have described as characteristic of *Nepantla*. “Seeing double” was a conscious awareness the participants had and should be considered a major strength. Lost in traditional acculturation theories that have assimilation as the end point is the great amount of consciousness development that happens in crossing borders.

My research showed a major concern of recently arrived students was getting used to new things. Elizabeth stated one thing she was not expecting when coming to school here was, “no one tells you how different it is going to be.” For her and other participants, differences especially included friends, the weather, moving from classroom to classroom, meeting so many new people, having to ask for help, and just feeling *apresurado* (rushed or hurried). The participants adapted and had an unusually high tolerance for ambiguity.

Anzaldúa (1987) wrote in developing *conocimiento*, “rigidity means death” and that border crossers (e.g., the participants in this study) develop “a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 101). Data from observations confirmed the participants to be flexible and adaptable. These students, for the most part, learned with notebooks, chalkboards, and final exams before the COVID-19 global pandemic in their home countries, and text messages and photos during the global pandemic. In their current setting, students were designing Google slide presentations, accessing assignments and materials on a Chromebook, and turning in work in five different ways in as many classrooms. They were using language brokers, Google translate, prior knowledge, and their will power to focus for 7 hours a day to learn. That shift reflected cognitive flexibility and adaptation to the highest degree.

As an educator, operationalizing *Nepantla* in a classroom or school might entail recognizing the potential for critical consciousness development. Middle school youth have all the right tools for realizing a critical stance in their lives. They are rebellious, fiercely loyal to friends, understand themselves as oppressed, and frankly love to argue. They want to be heard and they want to be right. What recently arrived emerging

bilinguals have is the embodied knowledge of “living on the margins and navigating the intersections of multiple sociopolitical realities” (Gonzalez Ybarra, 2018, p. 508). This knowledge can and should be leveraged as a strength and as an asset in classrooms.

In literature reviewed for this study, Fine et al. (2018) discovered schools where educators and students were positioned as “collective learners,” where there was no tracking of students based on academic or language history. Students at these schools testified to the expectations that everyone participated in authentic projects requiring multimodal presentations of learning. Students represented their borderlands identities in learning projects that specifically centered their ways of being and knowing. Findings from the research done by Fine et al. (2018) of schools and classrooms where students’ “in betweenness” was specifically leveraged as strength showed students developed “psychological muscle to persevere . . . and ultimately grow a sense of responsibility to transform their collective contexts” (p. 90). Education that is transformative is liberatory for all stakeholders and fundamentally antiracist.

Cummins (as cited in García & Kleifgen, 2018) insisted, “We do have the power to push back against myopic and irresponsible policies” (p. 3). Shortsighted and negligent policies that chain schooling systems to high-stakes testing and draconian consequences for accountability should be disrupted. Deficit labels such as “non-English proficient” and racially marking entire groups of students as “English learners” is a very important battleground for educational institutions who truly want to be in the business of educational equity. The data in my study overwhelmingly positioned recently arrived Latinx emergent bilinguals as creative, resilient, agentive, and hopeful. All of this humanity is wiped away when educational systems cling to labels and do not promote

liberatory educational practices in the name of funding or federal punishments. The eight telling cases in my research represented, through their *testimonios*, a collective experience of the fastest growing subgroup in U.S. schools. Educators need to look for strengths and assets in their communities if they desire to succeed. Investigating culturally sustaining pedagogies that center students' lives is imperative.

In the third section of this discussion, I posit that the evidence gathered in this study, positioned as counter intelligence, offers an opening into the debunking of ideologies that silence recently arrived students' intelligence, agency, and humanity.

Myths of Silence

Amplifying the voices of recently arrived students in this study produced a listening space and constructed a powerful case against deficit ideologies that racialize immigrant youth and the children of immigrants in our public schools. Far from being silent and passive, the participants in this study demonstrated "flexible use of their linguistic resources" (Malsbary, 2013, p. 4), demonstrating their strength as learners and their desire to belong in school. What educators commonly believe as a silent or preproduction phase in recently arrived youth was strongly countered in my research by positioning a one-way, English-only perspective of language acquisition theories as racializing and hurtful. The portrayal of recently arrived students as lacking or having low levels of English, and therefore in need of remediation before they can handle grade-level core content, robs them of their strengths and desires.

Witnessing the *testimonios* of the participants in this study revealed the multitude of ways recently arrived students expressed themselves and figured out how to learn beyond the confines of a unidimensional language construct. As in the literature reviewed for this

study, the participants had dynamic language awareness (Fine, et al., 2018; Mirra & DLL, 2020), agency in their choices to learn (Rodriguez Vega, 2018; Ek, 2009), and powerful voices that informed the strategic nature of their learning (García, 2017; González Ybarra, 2020). The dynamic use of linguistic resources was shown by the participants in a few ways. Imelda, Nina, Elizabeth, Marco, and Berto confirmed traditional notions of recently arrived students' needs to observe and listen to language as being important to learning the target language. They reported that "*mirando*" (watching) was a strategy for them in every classroom to learn content. This code was confirmed in 22 of the 24 observations by at least one, if not all participants. Where their agency came into play—and might get lost in the uncritical gaze—came through in having them explain what this code signified. Berto enacted agency beyond simply watching to learn, and instead by expressing his intentional activation of "*mi maximo atención*" (my maximum attention). Imelda and Elizabeth watched and then practiced imitation as their teachers modeled either through notes or physically demonstrating labs. In the natural sciences, imitation was an evolutionary principle of survival. Although evolutionary survival can be viewed as accidental in nature, these participants purposefully imitated to survive academically in the classroom. The participants' agency shed light on an oversimplified understanding in traditional language acquisition and learning theories.

Another interesting finding in this study that relates to the dynamic nature and awareness of linguistic resources by the participants was that the participants enacted different learning strategies in different contexts. For example, though Nina recalled that she intentionally learned English at recess by listening, she used a unique sentiment as to the nature of the listening. She said when she heard English, it captured her attention and

she knew by maintaining the attention, she would eventually get used to the language and learn it. This sentiment showed her as an active learner and also showed a potential way to enrich classroom interactions by intentionally structuring language rich interactions would be helpful.

While Mateo and other participants expressed using prior knowledge to help them learn, he extended the idea by indicating a reciprocal relationship between he and a bilingual friend would end, sometimes, in both of them practicing English in their literacy class. The idea of using Spanish as a classroom resource to negotiate meaning, although not explicitly reported as important by the participants, was observed to be very important and implied in many of their learning actions. This finding was especially true when the participants interacted with each other and actively sought “friends” to help them. The language brokering happening in the observation of Max, Berto, and their peer in science class was organic and powerful. Spontaneity was beautiful, but imagine the power of intentionally leveraging this type of learning and interacting in a classroom with recently arrived students. Malsbary (2013) reported youth forge powerful notions of exclusion and belonging around acceptable linguistic practices in school. Moreover, she found classrooms where students feel relaxed and comfortable, as indicated in this study as well, are ones in which students “pooled together their linguistic resources” (Malsbary, 2013, p. 10).

The translanguaging, although all around them, was not legitimized by the participants as a part of their agentive learning process, thereby reinforcing the bracketing of school language and home language as separate entities (García, 2009). Bussert-Webb, et al. (2018) explained in the rush and push to prepare students for standardized tests in

English, teachers often use “a transmission style direct instructional approach, rather than interactive and inquiry-based pedagogies” (p. 2662). Mismatch between what the participants did and what they could recognize as important in learning was evidence of how monoglossic ideologies silenced the participants. That is to say, instructional practices that centered the knowledge needed to pass a test in English were silencing the creativity and agency of THE recently arrived students. These participants did not choose silence; rather, they chose to pay attention, to focus, to ask friends for help; to synthesize what they observed with what they heard; and to learn in different ways in different contexts.

A practical way for educators to apply this knowledge about natural translanguaging processes is to structure classroom instruction for authentic linguistic practices. García and Kleifgen (2018) offered several strategies for educators, including structuring interactions between classmates via targeted language goals and technology to make language negotiation a priority, not an afterthought. Explicitly encouraging students to use Google translate and search for resources about classroom themes in their home language “has resulted in achievement gains” (García & Kleifgen. 2018, p. 94). Sam hinted at this strategy as he explained that math was hard in English and even finding videos to help was difficult because of the terminology. Even though Sam could not find videos to help him sometimes, he was agentive in looking for them. Structuring time in the classroom, his math teacher might have solicited the help of other students in the search, or perhaps taken time to prepare this resource. It is important that this time is available in school, because as García and Kleifgen (2018) noted, students “take advantage of technology at school because their access elsewhere is limited” (p. 94).

In addition, my study revealed that taking advantage of peer interactions at school should be leveraged much the same way as is access to technology. Participants, like Marco and Mateo, reported they did not interact with friends outside of school. Nina lamented, “*saliendo afuera*” (going out and about) after school or on the weekends just felt “*raro*” (weird), a sentiment also presented from Elizabeth. Reasons for this lack of freedom and emotional anxiety varied, of course, but viewing access to friends—like access to technology—as a resource to leverage might motivate more interactive pedagogy from educators of recently arrived students. Structuring classroom interactions with different aims could increase participation by all students, as was noted in the observed interactions between Sam, Berto, and their peer in science class.

Primary to the objective of solving the persistent problem of practice my research attempted to address was the dismantling of deficit ideologies that marginalized recently arrived students in U.S. classrooms and schools. The youth in this study demonstrated, through their *testimonios*, that educators have a number of strengths to leverage within these students. Viewing the recently arrived students as language proficient and prioritizing this proficiency as their main instructional goal is silencing and harmful. Embodied silence in classrooms was making these participants feel frustrated, anxious, angry, and confused. Their bodies failed them, they lost their breath, and their heads pounded.

Mateo was acutely aware that a perfect school in the United States would be one where teachers would use English but not necessarily “cling” to it. These middle school students, who were largely ignored in educational research (Martinez & Castellano, 2018; Mirra & DLL, 2018), were indeed talking back to systemic beliefs that silence their

voices. Take, for example, how six participants readily said they were proud of themselves because of their academic progress and learning of English. All participants declared they were proud of their families, and all but one thought highly of their friends as well. The telling point in this discussion of silence was that only one participant thought his teachers must be proud of them. This inference was Sam's, though he really was not sure. Further silencing was expressed by the students as they discussed where they saw their culture reflected in school. The Central American participants only understood their culture at school in a classroom where everyone was an immigrant and spoke English about the same. The Mexican participants expressed their cultural reflection in the friendships and classmates around them in the whole school. Mateo adroitly recognized his Colombian culture was "*en ningun lugar*" (in not one place). I reiterate again that these participants were being silenced via restrictive language policies (or lack of policies) and equitable access to content instruction.

Educators would do well to listen closely to these youth. The recently arrived students in my study demonstrated incredible perseverance in their journeys to the United States and their lofty goals to learn English and learn *in* English strategically and meta-cognitively. They flexed agency by seeking friends to help them. They were clear on what it took to be successful in school and have aspirations for their future. Valenzuela (1999) observed that immigrant students have high work ethics and *empeño* (putting forth effort), if leveraged better, could be a force to bring students together, not divide them. Imagine a classroom where recently arrived students could fully present themselves, as Mateo wished, in intentional and structured ways. This space would be one where

cultures meeting would not grate and reopen wounds, rather would heal them and promote new growth, new consciousness.

Limitations and Contributions

The power of this study hinged, as shown from this discussion, in the language and identity of the participants. Participants' vulnerability and courage countered many misconceptions and enlightened previously misunderstood theories. The limitations of this study should not dampen the value of these participants' lived experiences. Two limitations are worth noting.

One limitation in this study was my positionality as both a White, middle-class woman and as the participants' teacher. The frameworks and epistemology that I employed in this study were informed by theories built by Chicana and Latina scholars from constructs with which they were intimately familiar, and from my experience outside of this community. I am sure the participants at times answered questions in a way they thought I might want them to do so, and changed their behaviors a bit when I was in classrooms with them. To mitigate this limitation, I interviewed the participants three different times, using iterative strategies that combined theory, observations, and personal experiences to dig into what they were revealing. I consulted trusted members of the Latina immigrant and Chicana communities to aid in my understanding of language and for ideas around the continued nodes of analysis that bloomed throughout the iterative cycles.

In observing the participants, I abandoned the notion of being an absolute nonparticipant observer on the principle that it only served to objectify situations and that I had too close of a relationship with the participants to simply watch them. I formally

observed the participants 24 times in nine different contexts across a 3-month period. The protocol I adapted for observations was useful in identifying the codes necessary to deeply analyze their social and academic interactions. I also abandoned the collection of data around participant and teacher interaction because I was sure my presence in the classroom interfered with natural ways teachers might interact with them.

A second limitation of the study involved practical constraints. This research should be an extensive critical ethnographic study. I pushed a lot of theory and set lofty goals for a 12-week timeframe. The time constraints hurried the collection of data and stunted the deeper analysis of data. Being in schools and subject to the unknown albeit predictable nature of schedules, absences, periodic safety drills, vacations, and testing priorities proved to be daunting in the face of my deadlines. Another practical constraint was my own inexperience with formal data collection and analysis. As a teacher, I understood that I collected data daily on students as informal assessments and made necessary adaptations to lessons. However, this kind of deep research on their lived experiences was thrilling and completely overwhelming. Although I attempted to triangulate data and stay on top of emerging themes, I found myself at a loss sometimes simply because there was not enough time. I had to make instinctual decisions about what to follow and though I used theory, I could have used more time to explore complexities. Here is where cultural intuition might help future researchers discover even more layers of meaning in participants' testimonies.

These limitations should not, however, discredit the power of the student voice and body in the findings or implications of my study. The implementation of *testimonio* methods in this study brought to light a vernacular not often heard in middle school

classroom research. *Testimonios* are the truest form of representation of participants' realities. In her study of Mujerista pedagogies in informal educational spaces, González Ybarra (2020) found *pláticas*, a form of home-based *testimonios*, to be a method of data collection that “destabilizes rigid and distant approaches” (p. 239) in education research. Distance and rigidity only serve to objectify and therefore dehumanize participants and researchers alike. My study contributed to the growing call for critical scholarship regarding the experiences of Latinx immigrants in schools using methods such as those mentioned. Ascenzi-Moreno (2017) directly called for studies like mine and insisted, “As more recently arrived emergent bilinguals move into metropolitan areas, it is not only their diversity that should be investigated, but also how they adjust to their new environment” (p. 296). In exploring their experiences, this study revealed agentive students who had uncanny awareness for situations and contexts. They revealed their shifting identities and sense of belonging in their own unique ways.

Recommendations for Future Study

There are so many opportunities for teachers and students to engage in research that is mutually beneficial. For exploring experiences, my study has opened the door to the power of youth epistemology. More studies need to be done around how recently arrived students might enact their awareness and corporal knowledge in specific learning contexts. Understanding their humanity better might also include bringing the entire family into the research process. Additional research would be beneficial in comparing the youth voice with other family members. Research building on this exploratory study might also include more depth into the dynamics of Newcomer English classrooms, where students like those in this study were able to find their culture and comfort. In the

realm of belonging and creating powerful learning experiences, I would love to understand the nature of friendships and language brokering more deeply in classrooms where multiple cultures meet. Following a pair of students as they develop friendships, such as those described by Berto, Elizabeth, and Mateo, would be fascinating. Finally, this type of exploratory research should be done with varying immigrant populations as a comparative study to see how culturally diverse ways of knowing might inform educational practice and policy.

Conclusion

I began this study with an intuition that the differential treatment and silencing of voice begins early in the educational careers of Latinx immigrant students, especially recently arrived immigrants. I believe students have awareness and the beginnings of the voice to express this oppression in their middle school years. If we, as educators, choose to ask the right questions, listen to their responses, and scaffold their stories into larger regional and national contexts, a journey toward critical consciousness can begin in the present, not just in reflections years later. Finally, I posit the notion of *salir afuera* could be the participants' unique contribution to borderlands scholarship, as the concept seeks to qualify the longing for self-determination and hopeful futures.

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Appendices

Appendix A: First Testimonio Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Participant: _____

Interviewer: _____

Beginning:

Offer a snack and water. Place the informant at ease by asking about their day or anything fun they have done lately.

Present the Assent form signed by the participant. Explain the purpose of the study, the benefits of the study, and the potential risks of the study. Be intentional with the centering of their experience and emphasize that all information obtained will remain confidential. Make sure they understand that at any time if they want to stop, the interview will cease. The participant must also understand that some questions may make them uncomfortable, and they don't have to answer them. They can always choose to come back and answer them at another time. Remind them that the interview is a conversation and they should feel free to ask you any questions or talk about whatever they feel is important.

Questions:

1. Where are you from? Tell me about your culture, background, your family, your friends.
2. Are there things, places, or people you really miss?
3. Tell me some things about your family.
 - a. Of what race/ethnicity are your parents?
 - b. Who are you growing up with?
 - c. Who are you closest to in your family?
 - d. Is your family the same/different from the way they were in your home country?
4. How do you feel at school, in general, this year?
 - a. Do you feel like you belong here?
 - b. Who are your favorite teachers/classes? Why?
 - c. Are you treated differently here? By whom?
 - d. Where do you feel the most powerful or most comfortable in school? Why?
5. Do you feel like things are easier or harder for you than your classmates? Why?
6. What are some issues that immigrants face in this school?
7. What does school or education mean to you?
 - a. Do you think other students feel the same as you? Why?
 - b. What do you think it takes to be successful at school?
 - c. Do you think your Spanish language is a resource for you in school?

- d. What is most important to your family about school this year?
8. What are your plans for the future, like for high school and beyond?

Closing:

Ask the Participant if they could sum up their feelings right now, how might they do that? Could they briefly name any themes that seemed to occur to them today?

Ask them if they have any questions for you. Prompt them with “sometimes people ask me if I understood this or that” or “Some people ask me if they were helpful” or “some people ask me if I like doing this.” Get them talking and thinking a bit to make certain they are okay and can express any questions.

Let them know you will follow up with them in a few days concerning the things you talked about and schedule another time to talk.

Protocol Questions in Spanish

1. ¿De dónde eres? Cuéntame sobre tu cultura, antecedentes, tu familia, tus amigos.
2. ¿Hay cosas, lugares o personas que extrañas?
3. Cuéntame algunas cosas sobre tu familia.
 - a. ¿De qué raza/etnia son tus padres?
 - b. ¿Con quién estás creciendo?
 - c. ¿Con quién estás más cerca en tu familia?
 - d. ¿Es tu familia igual o diferente de la forma en que eran en su país de origen?
4. ¿Cómo te sientes en la escuela, en general, este año?
 - a. ¿Sientes que perteneces aquí?
 - b. ¿Quiénes son tus profesores/clases favoritas? ¿Por qué?
 - c. ¿Te tratan de manera diferente aquí? ¿Por quién?
 - d. ¿Dónde te sientes más poderoso o más cómodo en la escuela? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Sientes que las cosas son más fáciles o más difíciles para ti que tus compañeros de clase? ¿Por qué?
6. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los problemas que enfrentan los inmigrantes en esta escuela?
7. ¿Qué significa para ti la escuela o la educación?
 - a. ¿Crees que otros estudiantes sienten lo mismo que tú? ¿Por qué?
 - b. ¿Qué crees que se necesita para tener éxito en la escuela?
 - c. ¿Crees que tu idioma español es un recurso para ti en la escuela?
 - d. ¿Qué es lo más importante para su familia sobre la escuela este año?
8. ¿Cuáles son sus planes para el futuro, como para la escuela secundaria y más allá?

Appendix B: Second Testimonio Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Participant: _____

Interviewer: _____

Introduction:

Set the participants at ease by asking about their day and how things are going for them in general. Remind them again that their participation in this study is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without consequence.

The first 10 minutes are reserved for Member Checking themes from the prior interview and observations. These notes are recorded by the researcher and not part of the audio recording.

Protocol:

1. Help me understand the similarities and differences between your **schooling experiences** prior to being here in the U.S. and how it is now.
 - a. Schedule and school days
 - b. How were/are you being taught?
 - c. The use of your native language in classes (math, science, art, gym, literacy, drama, ELD, Hutchinson's, social studies, lunch, recess, if so, how?)
 - d. The use of English in classes (math, science, art, gym, literacy, drama, ELD, Hutchinson's, social studies, lunch, recess, if so, how?)
 - e. Breaks and Vacations
 - f. Teacher relationships
 - g. Friend relationships
 - h. Testing, exams
 - i. Grades and progress reports
 2. What has your experience been like learning English?
 - a. How are you using your native language to learn English?
 - b. Do you do you notice any changes in your native language since attending school in U.S. schools?
 - c. When do you notice you are capturing English?
 3. How do you **identify** yourself in school?
 - a. How do you feel about being a student in this school?
 - b. Has your identify as a student changed since moving to the U.S.?
 4. Do you feel seen and heard or like you matter here in this school?
 - a. Do teachers recognize you?
 - b. Do other students, besides the other immigrants, recognize you?
 - c. Are you making friends outside of our class? How? Who? Why?
 5. What else can you tell me about your experiences learning English or how you feel about being a student at this school?
-
- 1) Ayúdame a entender las similitudes y diferencias entre tus **experiencias escolares antes de** estar aquí en los Estados Unidos. S. y cómo es ahora.
 - a) Horario y días escolares
 - b) ¿Cómo te enseñaron/te están enseñando?
 - c) El uso de su lengua materna en las clases (matemáticas, ciencias, arte, gimnasia, alfabetización, teatro, ELD, Hutchinson, estudios sociales, almuerzo, recreo, si es así, ¿cómo?)

- d) El uso del inglés en las clases (matemáticas, ciencias, arte, gimnasia, alfabetización, teatro, ELD, Hutchinson, estudios sociales, almuerzo, recreo, si es así, ¿cómo?
 - e) Escapadas y Vacaciones
 - f) Relaciones con los docentes
 - g) Relaciones de amistad
 - h) Pruebas, exámenes
 - i) Calificaciones e informes de progreso
- 2) ¿Cómo ha sido tu experiencia aprendiendo inglés?
 - a) ¿Cómo estás usando tu lengua materna para aprender inglés?
 - b) ¿Nota algún cambio en su idioma nativo desde que asistió a la escuela en las escuelas de los Estados Unidos?
 - c) ¿Cuándo te das cuenta de que estás capturando inglés?
 - 3) ¿Cómo te **identificas** en la escuela?
 - a) ¿Cómo te sientes acerca de ser un estudiante en esta escuela?
 - b) ¿Ha cambiado su identidad como estudiante desde que se mudó a los Estados Unidos?
 - 4) ¿Te sientes visto y escuchado o como si importaras aquí en esta escuela?
 - a) ¿Los maestros te reconocen?
 - b) ¿Otros estudiantes, además de los otros inmigrantes, te reconocen?
 - c) ¿Estás haciendo amigos fuera de nuestra clase? ¿Cómo? ¿Quién? ¿Por qué?
 1. ¿Qué más puedes decirme sobre tus experiencias aprendiendo inglés o cómo te sientes acerca de ser estudiante en esta escuela?

Space Learning English?

Math

Science

Literacy

Social Studies

Elective

Lunch/Recess

Other Context

Appendix C: Third Testimonio Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Participant: _____

Interviewer: _____

Introduction:

Set the participants at ease by asking about their day and how things are going for them in general. Remind them again that their participation in this study is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without consequence.

The first 10 minutes are reserved for Member Checking themes from the prior interview and observations. These notes are recorded by the researcher and not part of the audio recording.

1. Describe how you felt when you first arrived in the United States and how you feel now. How are things the same and how are they different?
 - a. What helps you hang onto your culture, language, and identity?
 - b. Are you proud of yourself? Are you proud of your family? Are you proud of your friends?
 - c. Is your family proud of you? Are your friends proud of you? Are your teachers proud of you?
2. Did you imagine being in school before you came here? Can you describe what you imagined school would be like here in the United States?
 - a. What have been some powerful experiences for you?
3. Now I would like to talk about what you imagine a perfect school might look like, sound like and feel like.
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do you hear?
 - c. How do you feel?
4. Imagine being able to speak and understand all your teachers, friends, etc.
 - a. What would you ask?
 - b. What would you say?
5. Imagine yourself as the teacher of your favorite subject at school.
 - a. Who are you and who are your students?
 - b. What do you see?
 - c. What do you hear?
 - d. How do you feel?
6. Now I would like to talk about when school is difficult and frustrating for you. Imagine a situation when you felt like you could not understand or could not express yourself.
 - a. How do you feel? What do you feel? Where do you feel it?
 - b. How does language influence the way you are treated?
 - c. How do you imagine yourself as different if everyone here spoke the same language and understood each other?
7. Imagine you are in some class and you are struggling to understand or express yourself.

- a. What are you thinking?
 - b. What do you look like?
8. Imagine that no one here knew you were an immigrant. How might you experience school differently?
- a. Imagine a classroom or school where everyone had “Google Translate” brains. Would that make a difference in how you interpret your experience at school?
9. Now let’s talk about your beliefs about education.
- a. Is this a place where everyone is treated equally and fairly?
 - b. Do you believe education gives everyone an equal chance to succeed?
 - c. Are the expectations for girls and boys the same at school?
 - d. Would school be better for you if more folks, adults and kids understood Spanish and understood your culture?
10. Do you feel comfortable speaking Spanish with all your friends? Do you utilize different Spanishes for different contexts?
- a. Where do you see or hear or feel yourself your culture reflected in this school?

Protocol Questions in Spanish

1. Describa cómo se sintió cuando llegó por primera vez a los Estados Unidos y cómo se siente ahora. ¿En qué se parecen las cosas y en qué se diferencian?
- a. ¿Qué te ayuda a aferrarte a tu cultura, idioma e identidad?
 - b. ¿Estás orgulloso de ti mismo? ¿Estás orgulloso de tu familia? ¿Estás orgulloso de tus amigos?
 - c. ¿Tu familia está orgullosa de ti? ¿Tus amigos están orgullosos de ti? ¿Tus profesores están orgullosos de ti?
2. ¿Te imaginabas estar en la escuela antes de venir aquí? ¿Puede describir cómo imaginaba que sería la escuela aquí en los Estados Unidos?
- a. ¿Cuáles han sido algunas experiencias poderosas para ti?
3. Ahora me gustaría hablar sobre cómo imaginan que se vería, cómo se escucharía y cómo se sentiría una escuela perfecta.
- a. ¿Que ves?
 - b. ¿Qué escuchas?
 - c. ¿Cómo te sientes?
4. Imagina poder hablar y entender a todos tus profesores, amigos, etc.
- a. ¿Qué le preguntarías?
 - b. ¿Qué dirías?
5. Imagínate a ti mismo como el profesor de tu materia favorita en la escuela.
- a. ¿Quién eres tú y quiénes son tus alumnos?
 - b. ¿Que ves?
 - c. ¿Qué escuchas?
 - d. ¿Cómo te sientes?
6. Ahora me gustaría hablar de cuando la escuela es difícil y frustrante para ti. Imagina una situación en la que sintieras que no podías entender o no podías expresarte.
- a. ¿Cómo te sientes? ¿Qué sientes?
 - b. ¿Cómo influye el lenguaje en la forma en que te tratan?

- c. ¿Cómo te imaginas diferente si todos aquí hablaran el mismo idioma y se entendieran?
- 7. Imagina que estás en alguna clase y estás luchando por comprender o expresarte.
 - a. ¿Qué estás pensando?
 - b. ¿Cómo te ves?
- 8. Imagina que aquí nadie sabía que eras un inmigrante. ¿Cómo podrías experimentar la escuela de manera diferente?
 - a. Imagina un salón de clases o una escuela donde todos tuvieran cerebros de "Traductor de Google". ¿Haría eso una diferencia en cómo interpretas tu experiencia en la escuela?
- 9. Ahora hablemos de sus creencias acerca de la educación.
 - a. ¿Es este un lugar donde todos son tratados con igualdad y justicia?
 - b. ¿Crees que la educación da a todos la misma oportunidad de tener éxito?
 - c. ¿Son las mismas expectativas para niñas y niños en la escuela?
 - d. ¿Sería mejor la escuela para ti si más personas, adultos y niños entendieran español y tu cultura?
- 10. ¿Te sientes cómodo hablando español con todos tus amigos? ¿Utiliza diferentes españoles para diferentes contextos?
 - a. ¿Dónde ves, escuchas o sientes tu cultura reflejada en esta escuela?

Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Participant Observation Protocol

Observations Made	Interaction among participants	Interaction among participants and teacher	Interaction among participants and researcher
What are participants saying? (Words written or spoken)	Saying to each other	Saying to teacher	Saying to researcher
What are participants doing? (Actions)	Doing with each other or for others to see	Doing with the teacher	Doing with the researcher
What are students producing? (practices or artifacts)	Cultural and social practices and artifacts produced by the participants in context	Social or cultural practices or artifacts produce for or with the teacher	Social or cultural practices or artifacts produce for or with the researcher

(Aguilar-Valdez, 2013)