JOURNEYS INTO THE K-12 CLASSROOM: LATINA TEACHERS' NARRATIVES OF BECOMING

by

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ABSTRACT

ALICIA HASANOEDDIN REID. Journeys Into The K-12 Classroom: Latina Teachers' Narratives of Becoming (Under the direction of DR. SPENCER SALAS)

A Project in Humanizing Inquiry (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), this qualitative dissertation study combined in-depth interview with a LatCrit framework to story the journeys of three Latinas into teaching. Data analysis underscored the layered racialized systems of oppression that marked the three women's educational identities and professional trajectories. Notable forms of oppression included deficit-laden interactions within schools and schooling that largely predicted the individual women as failures. Likewise, much more intimate familial messaging framed teaching as a dead-end career. With the support of key mentors and through their own determination, the three women, nevertheless, were able to make sense of who they were, what they valued, and the teachers they would ultimately become. Implications for diversity-oriented teacher education and research are presented.

Keywords: Latina teachers, testimonios, in-depth interviews

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother who has always supported and encouraged me. Mother, thank you for always believing in me and providing me with countless opportunities. Thank you for a quality education and an amazing upbringing. Thank you for your strength and love.

I do not say it as often as I should but, I love you ma. Thank you for everything.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this Project in Humanizing Inquiry (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) was my own journey into K-12 teaching as a Latina and my subsequent relocation to Charlotte, North Carolina. When I began teaching for the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District in 2004, I was one of the few Latinas in the classroom. Almost two decades later, as I complete this study, I am still one of a disproportionally few. Who I am as a Latina and the teacher I am still becoming were the motivations for exploring the narratives of my colleagues. I was the first person in my family to earn a Master's Degree and the first to seek a Ph.D. I grew up in New York City schools, and all my postsecondary experience happened in the South. Either way, I rarely saw Teachers of Color and internally questioned why that was so.

Statement of the Problem

In 1990, I relocated to North Carolina to work as a Special Population Coordinator for the city of Charlotte. Because of the influx of Latinos in the early 1990s, the city created a new position, Select Population Coordinator. The Select Population Coordinator worked with the Latino community. I transitioned into the position and planned and implemented recreational and educational programs in the school system in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. I always envisioned myself as a teacher, having my own students and my own classroom. I returned to school for my Master's in Education and became an ESL teacher.

I personally experienced challenges in school and in my professional work environment, such as racism, discrimination, and the assumption of others that I was less qualified because of my cultural background. I successfully overcame the obstacles in my

academic and professional careers despite the systematic factors against me. As a Latina, and a teacher, I wanted to hear the stories of how other Latinas had become teachers here in Charlotte. What could we learn from their experiences? The purpose of this study was to document and theorize a trio of Latinas' journeys to K-12 teaching and the critical incidents that shaped their choices and the meaning they assigned to their careers. Latina teachers come from diverse backgrounds and self-identify across a continuum of ethnic and heritage-language identity groups, and they generate narratives to make meaning of their lives. Latina teachers and their stories matter.

Latino immigration has transformed the demographic landscape of the United States with Latinos accounting for approximately 18% of the nation's population at 55 million and counting. This is more than a 50% increase since 2000 (Census Bureau, 2019). Historically, diversity has presented challenges for K-12 schools, and the contrasting growing numbers of Latina/o schoolchildren with the unchanging and overwhelming White femininity of the teaching workforce is a cause for concern especially in what has become known as "The New Latino South" (Salas & Portes, 2017). As North Carolina's Latina/o population has grown, so too have the numbers of Latinas/os in K-12 schools. However, in North Carolina and nationally, Latina/o teachers are disproportionately underrepresented (Parker et al., 2016). Because Latina/o teachers make a difference in the lives of their students (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017), capturing how Latinas come to teaching matters, especially if we are to increase their representation in schools.

A robust body of scholarship has examined and theorized Latina/o schoolchildren and their families in New South contexts as they navigate dimensions of identity

(Carrillo, 2016; Carrillo et al., 2017; Silver, 2018), and community (Graves & Smith, 2010; McDaniel et al., 2017; Salas & Portes, 2017; Smith & Furuseth, 2006). Research suggests that Latino teachers are perhaps more equipped to meet the needs of Latino students (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Ochoa, 2007). Unfortunately, Latina/o students rarely see teachers who look like them or share similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds and experiences. Moreover, the lives of Latina teachers remain somewhat understudied especially in the context of metro Charlotte. Given the increasing Latina/o student population and the disproportionate scarcity of Latina teachers across the state, the narrated experiences of Latinas' choice to teach can potentially inform efforts to diversify the teaching profession in and beyond North Carolina.

Conceptual Framework

For San Pedro and Kinloch (2017), "storying" is the convergence of theory, practice, and method "in the telling and listening of stories that address questions relevant to education" (p. 379S). This qualitative dissertation study, in a contemporary LatCrit tradition, centered storying or "testimonios" as a means for understanding the lived racialized and gendered journeys of a trio of Latinas into K-12 teaching, the critical incidents that shaped their choices, and the meaning they assigned to their career paths.

LatCrit embraces Critical Race Theory (CRT); however, its focus is specifically on the experiences of Latinos, extending beyond a White/Black issue that is not always inclusive of Latinx communities and individuals (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit takes up the coproduction of language, immigration, and ethnic identity in ways that are specific to U.S. Latinas/os. CRT emerged in the late 1970s and examined

implications in other areas of society (Tate, 1997). CRT has been since leveraged to explore schools and schooling for minoritized communities (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Yosso (2005) defined CRT in education as a theoretical and analytical framework for unpacking the ways race and racism interact with educational structures, practices, and discourses. CRT, thus, is a framework for thoughtfully and critically exploring the relationship between race, racism, and power (Amos, 2013; Daniels, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and acknowledges that racism is ingrained in the school system (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

LatCrit is complementary to CRT and defined by Solórzano and Yosso (2001) as "a framework to theorize and examine ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes and discourses that affect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically" (p. 479). Accordingly, LatCrit enables researchers to articulate the experiences specific to Latinas through a focused examination of the unique forms of oppression they encounter due to language, culture, skin color, class, immigration status, or English language proficiency (Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Fernandez, 2002).

Among other things, LatCrit highlights the testimonios, seldom heard from Latinas/os or People of Color. According to Valdes (1997), LatCrit incorporates four main principles that assist scholars in analyzing, naming, and addressing the issues specific to the education of Latina/o students: 1) the production of knowledge in which research is being done by voices that have been silenced in the past to share the stories that have often gone unheard, 2) the advancement of transformation, which is possible through sharing these stories and pushing against dominant ideologies, 3) the expansion

and connection of struggles through research that continues to build up the knowledge gathered on these topics that have been ignored, and 4) the cultivation of community and coalition of scholars and activists to form an alliance to push against majoritarian discourses (Osorio, 2018).

Research Questions

As Seidman (2019) explained:

> The root of the word story is the Greek word history, which means one who is "wise" and "learned" (Watkins, 1985, p. 74). Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. . . It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience. (p. 7)

Thus, the guiding questions for this qualitative study were twofold:

1. What were the critical, personal encounters and lived experiences that brought them to teaching?
2. What meaning did they assign to that journey?

The three 90-minute interviews that generated the data stories represented in the chapters that follow were shaped by Seidman's (2019) in-depth interview protocol. The first 90-minute interview with each woman established her journey into teaching. The second 90-minute interview asked the individual participant to elaborate on certain critical incidents to which she had alluded to in the first interview. The final 90-minute interview captured

her sense-making of these specific and combined events as they related to her journey into teaching.

Outline of the Dissertation

After this brief introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, I contextualize this study with a review of national concerns about Latina/o achievement and related initiatives geared towards the improvement of the educational experiences of Latinas/os in the United States. I conclude Chapter Two with examples of how LatCrit theory and testimonios have been leveraged to represent the layered experiences of Latinas/os in educational settings.

Chapter Three includes an outline of the research methodology I leveraged to access the three participants' narratives. I describe the processes and procedures of the in-depth interview sequence as well as the analytic procedures I used to compress, analyze, and amplify the often-silenced voices of Latinas. I include my subjectivity statement in this chapter.

In the suite of data chapters, I narrate their lived experiences, how the women conceptualized their schooling, the perception of their education, the critical incidents that contributed to their career in education, and the meaning they made of the incidents.

In Chapter Four, I describe Janet Castillo's grade school, high school, and college years, her move to North Carolina, and her subsequent professional path into public education. As I shall explain, even as Castillo dreamed of being a teacher from an early age, Castillo's mother frowned on the idea of her daughter studying to become a teacher and expected her to choose a career with a higher status. Castillo wanted to make her

mother proud and constantly sought her approval. Thus, even as Castillo experienced oppression in school, she also experienced a degree of oppression in her household.

In Chapter Five, I turn to Maya Rivera—a special education student, class president, and first-generation college student as she navigated several elementary, middle school, high school, community college, and college. Her encounters with language barriers, low expectations, and microaggressions were commonplace. However, Rivera's "helping hands," the people God placed in her life, provided support and encouragement resulting in academic success, ultimately guiding her to her professional career as an urban public school teacher in North Carolina.

In Chapter Six, I concentrate on Nancy Fuentes, an English Learner and first-generation college student. I focus on Nancy Fuentes's dream of becoming a teacher despite the stereotypical behaviors and racist mindsets of her teachers and classmates. These obstacles only made her more resolute to prove the doubters wrong. She was academically successful due to her determination.

Chapter Seven concludes the study with a summary of my findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Contribution to the Field and Significance of the Study

As North Carolina K-12 Latina/o student enrollment increases, so does the need for Latina teachers—and their centrality in cultivating the future potential of that critical mass of North Carolinian society. The significance of this study is layered.

First, the shifting demographics of the region along with the persistent shortage of Latina teachers in the New South create an imbalance in teaching and learning. Diversifying the teacher workforce will support the educational needs of the increasing

Latina/o school-age population and improve the academic performance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students more broadly (Carver-Thomas, 2018; The Hunt Institute, 2021). North Carolina's governor created the Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education, (DRIVE) Task Force. The DRIVE Task Force was charged to develop a solution for the imbalance we see in K-12 contexts. According to the DRIVE Task Force, North Carolina's school age population is incredibly racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, and the Latino school age population has had the state's most significant growth in recent years (The Hunt Institute, 2021). Nevertheless, North Carolina's teacher workforce remains statically White and feminine. Moreover, potential BIPOC educators encounter multiple barriers to realizing a classroom career. For this reason, we need to listen carefully to Latina teachers' experiences of professional becoming; and, we need to find spaces where we can amplify their narratives.

Second, and from an intensely personal point of view, listening carefully to Latina teachers in a LatCrit testimonio tradition creates access points for naming the intersection of oppression as it applies to the Latina educator experience in a creative, non-hegemonic, decolonial aesthetic (see, e.g., Calderon-Berumen & Espinosa-Dulanto, 2020). As a teacher in Charlotte for the past two decades, I still represent a small minority of Latina teachers. It is my intent that by amplifying my participants' courageous stories that we might begin to overcome the social constructions of "less-than" that these women encountered in their educational and professional trajectories—that I also encountered. This dissertation details the experiences of Latinas in their own words and in their own truths to underscore "the power of personal stories, or testimonios, as collective healing

toward resistance and liberation" (Juárez Mendoza, 2020, p. 288). How Latina women overcome racialized and gendered situations, deficit thinking, and toxic institutional discourse to choose teaching—matters tremendously. LatCrit elevates narrative or "testimonio" as a way of pushing back and gives voice to the Latinas in this study.

Finally, these women's stories authenticate their voices seldom heard and can empower other Latinas who aspire to having a career in education. It is my hope that this study will add to the body of knowledge that teacher education programs access for teacher recruitment and teacher preparation. This study may also be beneficial to parents as they support their daughter's educational and career choices. This qualitative analytic representation of the lived and educational experiences of a trio of Latina teachers informs our understandings of how we might take a narrow and brittle teacher pipeline and make it wider and more resilient.

Definition of Terms

Critical Race Theory is an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the legal barriers to racial justice, challenged traditional civil rights strategies and the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 2013), it studies the relationship between race, racism, and power (Amos, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 2013), and acknowledges that racism is ingrained in the school system (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

English as a Second Language (ESL) is a program of coursework to help students who are learning English as a new language.

In-depth interview as proposed by Seidman (2019), consist of a three-interview sequence with an interest in the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they

make of that experience, allowing participants to focus on their lived experiences, the critical details of their experiences, and time for reflection.

Latina is defined as a woman who considers herself Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central American, South American, Mexican, from the Caribbean or a descendant of any of these Spanish-speaking countries, and she may or may not be bilingual. For this study, the term Latina refers to females. I honor the women in this study who identify as Latina.

Latina is used when referring to only the female group.

Latino is used when referring to only the male group.

Latina/o (as/os) is used when referring to both male and female as a group, instead of Latino/os.

Latinx is a gender-inclusive when referring to people of Latin American descent and is used when citing an author.

Latino Critical Theory is rooted in Critical Race Theory, and provides a foundation for discussing the implications of race and ethnicity in the educational system, and focuses specifically on the experiences and realities of Latinas/os (Valdes, 1997; Villalpando, 2004).

Microaggressions are systematic forms of everyday racism that are subtle, layered, cumulative and directed to towards people of color in automatic and unconscious ways (Huber & Cueva, 2012).

Project in Humanizing Inquiry center the daily experiences (e.g., storytelling, story gathering, relationship building, reciprocal engagements) we have with people in ways that, on the one hand, emphasize our shared desires for racial, linguistic,

educational, political, and social justice in schools and communities (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017).

Storytelling or Narrative allow the participant to reflect on his or her experience and allow the participant to make his or her story public (Fernandez, 2002).

Testimonio is a way in which oppressed groups can document and challenge oppressive conditions (Cervantes-Soon, 2012), a verbal journey (Pérez Huber, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To reiterate, this dissertation study leveraged qualitative in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2019) to capture the narratives of Latina urban educators living and working in metro Charlotte, NC. As a way framing the interview sequence and the theorization of how and why these women chose teaching—and how more might follow the paths they took, I turned to the overlapping literatures surrounding Latino K-12 achievement, the benefits of having Latina/o teachers, and issues surrounding their recruitment. I follow these with elaboration of LatCrit and its emphasis on "testimonio" for storying Latina teachers' trajectories.

Responding to the Latinization of U.S. Schools

The Latina/o population is the fastest growing demographic in the United States (Krogstad, 2020). The growth of this population changed the demographics in states where Latinas/os have not traditionally been part of the minority population (Fry & Lopez, 2012; Gándara & Mordechay, 2017); in North Carolina, the number of Latina/o students has more than doubled, and represents roughly 9% of the total population. However, in metro Charlotte, NC, the Latina/o population constitutes approximately 14% of the population.

Historical and contemporary studies have documented the educational gap between Latinas/os and other groups in their completion of high school (Gándara & Mordechay, 2017), undergraduate education (Solórzano et al., 2005), and graduate education (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). As the Latino population grows, there are concerns about the academic success of Latina/o youth because their educational success lags behind other groups. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the first executive

order to conduct research on Hispanic Americans and established The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH). The purpose of the initiative was to address educational disparities faced by Hispanic Americans in the United States and increase educational opportunities for Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

The initiative addressed concerns and focused on several areas regarding current and future generations' success, spanned several years, and several presidential administrations, and served as a resource to close the educational achievement gap. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed an executive order reestablishing the initiative, and in 2001, 2012, and 2018, Presidents George W. Bush, Barack H. Obama, and Donald J. Trump renewed the initiative. Each initiative built upon the previous one and established an advisory commission to study the lack of educational achievement, promote the awareness of educational opportunities and high-quality education as well as increase the graduation rate among Latino youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Thirty years later, the WHIEEH is still striving to increase educational opportunities for Hispanic students.

Closer to home, the North Carolina governor-created task force looking to unpack the state's K-12 diversity noted that while Latina/o students constitute 17.9% of the student population, Latina/o educators comprise a mere 2.7%. of the teacher workforce (The Hunt Institute, 2021). In North Carolina and across the nation, we must create spaces to hear and think deeply about the testimonios of Latina teachers and why they choose (not) to teach. Some Latinas do make their way through college, the teacher pipeline, and become teachers. By acknowledging the unique stories and lived

educational experiences of Latina teachers who become and stay teachers, we can perhaps understand better pathways for more Latinas to do the same.

The dropout rate for Latina/o students ages 18 to 24 reached a new low, declining from 32% in 2000 to 10% in 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2016). In spite of this new low, Latinas/os continue to have a higher dropout rate than that of Blacks (7%), Whites (5%) and Asians (1%), and Latinas/os continue to trail other groups in obtaining four-year degrees (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). But there are Latinas who make their way through college, the teacher pipeline, and who become teachers. By acknowledging the unique stories and lived educational experiences of Latina teachers, we can recognize their accomplishments, and appreciate the critical incidents that shaped their journeys.

Latina Teachers as Agents of Change

Racial diversity can provide considerable benefits to students. A significant body of literature argues that a match between teachers and students' race and ethnicity leads to positive educational outcomes for minority students. For example, Villegas and Irvine (2010) noted that Teachers of Color serve as role models for all students and can improve the academic outcomes and schooling experiences for minority students. According to the researchers:

> Teacher race and ethnicity do matter in the education of Students of Color and the evidence confirms that well prepared Teachers of Color add value to schools and classrooms and have the potential for improving the educational experiences and academic outcomes of Students of Color, thereby helping address the pernicious racial/ethnic achievement gap (p. 188).

Students of Color perform better socially and academically when taught in a culturally responsive manner or by someone who looks like them (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Redding, 2019), resulting in an increase in academic attainment (Redding, 2019). Research shows that Teachers of Color have higher expectations from their Students of Color (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Jackson & Kholi, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Due to their similar backgrounds and language, teachers have a stronger rapport with their students (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Ocasio, 2014).

Ahmad and Boser (2014) asserted that Teachers of Color, including Latinas/os, have higher expectations of all their students, develop positive relationships, and provide more relevant instruction than White teachers. While there are White teachers who are effective teachers of Latina/o students, research indicates there are academic benefits to Students of Color when taught by Teachers of Color (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2004).

Learning more about Latinas' lived experiences and their decision to enter the teaching profession has the potential to guide teacher recruitment. In order to create solutions and increase the number of Latinas on the teacher pipeline, we must first understand their educational experiences and success given their historical underrepresentation in higher education.

Carter Andrews et al. (2019) examined research on Teachers of Color and challenges they encountered because of legislation, policy implementation, diversification, and the increased standards required for teacher certification. These researchers asserted that the challenges and issues regarding recruitment and retention keep Teachers of Color off the teacher pipeline. Even when Latinas/os attend college,

challenges persist, from difficulties with coursework, to state testing, and increased teaching standards (Amos, 2018).

Exclusion, isolation, discrimination, and stereotyping also make adjusting to college difficult (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Martinez-Vogt, 2015), which results in higher dropout rates. Latinos are rarely encouraged to take college preparatory courses, are often tracked into lower courses, have inadequate preparation, lack college knowledge, and lack support from counselors or teachers (Vela-Gude et al., 2009). Studies indicate that Latino students are less likely than other groups to have access to college prep courses (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), and receive less help from their family or friends when researching colleges. Lack of information regarding the college-going process limits the number of Latinas/os who apply, thereby limiting their number on the teacher pipeline.

Chlup et al. (2019) looking to understand Latino information access surrounding high school education conducted a qualitative study with high school students to understand their perceptions and experiences. Findings indicated that students encountered difficulties meeting with their counselors, or that counselors did not fully explain the information they provided, and favored “smart” students.

More specific to the teacher workforce, Ocasio (2014) conducted a review of the literature of the Latino teacher pipeline and revealed that many Latino high school students were unprepared for college, encountered barriers, or simply did not find teaching appealing. Ocasio confided, “although there is not one main struggle that Latinos face, the challenges that they face result in their lack of academic achievement, often pushing them off the educational trajectory” (p. 248). To navigate the pathway to teaching successfully, we must not only address the achievement gap but gather data on

successful Latina teachers if more Latinas are to enter the teaching profession. Areas of opportunity that may strengthen the pipeline are not as readily available, and the most important source of support is to begin with Latino teachers themselves (p. 258).

LatCrit and Teachers' Lives

Latina teachers' experiences are valuable; therefore, their voices and perspectives are essential to increasing the number of Latina classroom teachers. As schools become more racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse, focusing on Latina teachers will illustrate a better understanding of their pathway into the teaching profession. It is critical to give a voice to their lived experiences and get a greater awareness as to how they navigated the educational system, succeeded in college, persisted on the teacher pipeline, and became teachers. Their testimonios can provide valuable information on how inequalities shaped their educational trajectory and ultimately their decision to enter the teaching profession.

To explore the educational and lived experiences of Latina teachers, this study employed a Latino Critical Theory perspective. LatCrit is a theoretical branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory developed from the work of Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado as an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the legal barriers to racial justice and challenged traditional civil rights strategies and the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 2013). Villenas and Deyhle (1999) theorized that CRT is useful in understanding how the supremacy of Whiteness and the subordination of People of Color is created and maintained in the United States (p. 414). CRT studies the relationship

between race, racism, and power (Amos, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 2013), and acknowledges that racism is ingrained in the school system (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Scholars believe CRT was originally focused on the racial oppressions of Black/White issues and has five main tenets: (1) race, racism, and other forms of oppression are experienced by People of Color, (2) dominant ideologies that support structural oppression should be challenged, (3) experiential knowledge should be the foundation for research on communities of color, (4) interdisciplinary perspectives should guide research questions, and (5) researchers should pursue racial justice for communities of color (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT provides a voice to People of Color and contradicts the dominant narratives regarding their educational experiences (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Smolarek, 2020). In educational settings, CRT explores the inequality in institutional structures, practices, and policies (Solórzano et al., 2005), and examines "how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 21). CRT can be used to understand important issues in schooling such as disipline, student achievement, and tracking. However, CRT does not explicity address issues related to the Latina/o population.

Like CRT, LatCrit has components or tenets that are complimentary. LatCrit: 1) recognizes the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of oppression, 2) challenges the dominant ideology, 3) is committed to social justice, 4) recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Students of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical, and 5) is interdisciplinary. LatCrit is appropriate to use to examine the lived and educational experiences of Latinas.

The focus of this research was specifically on Latina teachers. Therefore, I used LatCrit to examine and narrate the experiences unique to a trio of Latina teachers as they navigated racialized and gendered educational and professional contexts and examine how oppression and deficit perspectives intersected with their lived experiences and how it relates to the underrepresentation of Latina teachers. There are many theoretical similarities between CRT and LatCrit; however, supporters of LatCrit believe that CRT at its foundation is not a complete representation of race. LatCrit expands and builds upon CRT principles to capture the experiences and realities of Latinas/os.

Scholars use LatCrit as a way of understanding issues of race, gender, class, and language, and challenge the dominant ideologies in education. As a theoretical framework, Geertz Gonzalez and Morrison (2016) asserted, "LatCrit elucidates the significance of race and culture in educational settings, particularly as it pertains to the pervasiveness of institutions to privilege one set of racial experiences over another" (p. 89). LatCrit provides a foundation for discussing the implications of race and ethnicity in the educational system, focuses specifically on the experiences and realities of Latinas/os (Valdes, 1997; Villalpando, 2004), and provides a framework to research their lived experiences of the growing Latina/o population, and the factors that challenged and contributed to their academic success.

I aligned the narratives presented in this study with the growing research on Latinas/os, their decision-making processes, and lived experiences. In the section that follows, I present previous research on how LatCrit has been leveraged with Latinas/os and discuss the scholarship around race, gender, immigration status, and discrimination in educational settings, and how these shaped the narratives of the participants. I sought

similar studies that focused specifically on Latinas/os and their experiences with discriminatory practices.

Testimonios as Theory, Method, and Practice

A recurring theme in LatCrit research is the idea of narratives or testimonios. In Osorio's (2018) research, the term "border stories" were used as a representation for narratives. Critical Race and Latino Critical Theory were the frameworks used as these theories provided students the opportunity to disrupt the majoritarian story. The second-grade students in this study told their own stories, their border stories, which are part of their identity and lived experiences. Through LatCrit analysis, the border stories challenged the dominant ideology of race neutrality, equal opportunities, and emphasized their experiential knowledge. Osorio explored the complexity of race and immigration status which added to the racialized experiences of the students and provided the opportunity for stories seldom heard to be heard. The outcome was the teachers who allowed their students to share their realities empowered their student's voices and provided them with opportunities to see themselves in the literature.

In a yearlong ethnographic study that challenged the dominant narrative, Martin-Beltrán et al. (2018) engaged participants in counter-storytelling and writing about their lived experiences. The researchers used a community cultural wealth framework to understand how teachers encouraged resistance among their historically marginalized students. The study focused on a lesson taught by an English Language Arts teacher and included two questions: how does one teacher's pedagogical approach encourage resistance and cultivate resistance capital among immigrant youth, and how do students respond to the teacher's invitation to engage in resistance and draw upon their

community cultural wealth through their writing? In their analysis, Martin-Beltrán et al theorized how the teacher cultivated resistant capital "by tapping into students' lived experiences to scrutinize oppressive rhetoric and persist in the face of adversity" (p. 97). Throughout the study, the participants resisted the dominant narrative through their counter-stories.

Amos (2016) used semi-structured interviews to investigate the working conditions of two bilingual Latina teachers. The research indicated that Latina teachers felt more isolated compared to their co-workers and experienced pressure to increase their expertise and prove their competence by working harder and more than their colleagues. Amos's recommendations were for administrators and faculty members to be more cognizant of what is happening within the school building and take steps in order to prevent negative working conditions. Amos asserted that schools must take positive actions to cultivate Teachers of Color.

Through a yearlong ethnography, Cervantes-Soon (2012) presented the testimonios of two high school girls coming of age in one of the most marginalized areas in Mexico. The narratives shed light on their life experiences, identity formation, and the knowledge and wisdom they gained in their struggle for freedom, dignity, and life. Elaborating her testimonio-approach, Cervantes-Soon explained:

> I chose these particular narratives because they exemplify the type of powerful testimonial discourse prevalent among many girls as counter-narratives, confessions, and *consejos* based on their own life experiences and shared among friends, sisters, and peers (p. 379).

In other words, stories offer a powerful way for women to tell their truths and in so doing to challenge dominant narratives about their potential.

In a her study of Latina teachers' process-oriented engagement and conscientization, Morales (2018) blended Chicana Feminist Epistemologies and testimonio to explore seven Latinas teachers' educational, professional, and personal experiences. The researcher brought the Latina teachers' narratives and experiences to the forefront so others could learn from the culturally and linguistically diverse teachers who provided affirming educational experiences for their diverse students.

Microaggressions and microaffirmations are subtle behaviors that have both negative and positive outcomes and occur over a period of time. According to Rolón-Dow and Davison (2021), microaffirmations are intentional or unintentional behaviors, remarks or cues that affirm and acknowledge the racial identities, and racialized realties, resist racism or advance cultural and ideological norms experienced by minoritized racial groups. The study of microaggressions and microaffirmations are helpful for advancing understandings of the everyday ways that individuals experience race and racism. In their study, Rolón-Dow and Davison (2021) specifically analyzed how microaffirmations acknowledged participants' experiences, and if and how they felt included in school settings, or if their wellbeing or success was supported. In other words:

> Understanding and enacting racial microaffirmations must occur in conjunction with ongoing efforts to address the entrenched and often exhausting ways that race structures institutional policies and practices that have consequences in the everyday life of individuals. (p. 257)

Looking at the intersection of race and education, Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) used LatCrit as they surmised Latina teachers' narratives on their preparation, recruitment, and retention throughout various times on the teacher pipeline. The narratives revealed that the experiences of Latina/o teachers were different from White teachers and not considered or validated. By including the perspectives of the Latinas into the dominant narrative and listening to their stories and experiences, teacher preparation programs might attract more Latinas into the teaching profession.

Quiñones's (2016) research examined the experiences and perspectives of two Puerto Rican teachers and a program called Grow Your Own (GYO) that supported their pathway into teaching. The researcher combined life histories and narrative inquiries and the data collected included individual interviews, focus group interviews, a survey, and the researcher's journal. Quiñones adapted Seidman's (2019) in-depth interviewing process to capture participants' narratives about how GYO programs provided access, shaped their trajectory to the teaching profession, and provided knowledge on college including financial aid and scholarships. From this research, Quiñones recommended collaborating with Latino serving agencies and partnerships with schools to increase the recruitment of Latinos in the teaching profession.

Rodela et al. (2019) conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with five Latinx administrators in the Pacific Northwest and used counter-storytelling to share their experiences. CRT and LatCrit examined the experiences of Latinx educational leaders in the New Latinx Diaspora. From the stories collected and experiences, the researchers outlined three themes: culturally responsive leadership, challenges, and professional isolation and discrimination. Rodela et al. identified the challenges the participants

experienced, yet despite the challenges, Latinx administrators had positive impacts on Latinx student populations. These researchers determined the need to support leaders of color and prepare them for the racism and sexism they will encounter in their leadership careers.

Another example of LatCrit and testimonios in educational research with the Latina/o population was done by García et al. (2020) with a group of DiaspoRican students. The researchers applied LatCrit theory to narrate participants' proficiency to make informed decisions about college access and attainment. The participants in the study believed the school intentionally withheld accurate information on college processes and had lower expectations of them since they were minority students. The researchers challenged the deficit-based discourse in the research with the asset-based counter-narratives of the participants and shed light on their experiences.

LatCrit challenges the belief that all students have an equitable learning environment (Yosso, 2005). Cooper Stein et al. (2018) reanalyzed surveys completed by Latina/o students and applied a LatCrit theory which informed their understanding of the racialized experiences of the participants in a high school setting. There were racial injustices, stereotypes, and prejudices within school policies and norms. The injustices felt by the students were common and prevalent throughout their high school experiences, and through their counter-stories the participants challenged the perceptions of Latinas/os in schools. The researchers expressed, "the principles of LatCrit demonstrate the interconnectedness among racism, interest convergence, and colorblindness that create racial injustice for Latinas/os" (p. 103) and indicated that administrators can reverse systematic racial injustices within the schoolhouse and

teachers must reflect on how their norms and their instruction privilege the White students.

According to Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010), LatCrit believes in the importance of revealing one's lived experiences through verbal stories and personal testimonios. Latina's experiences are overlooked, underrepresented in the literature, and often omitted from the dominant discourse (Gist, 2018). In educational research, LatCrit uses narratives that are centered on the lived experiences of Latinas (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The experiential knowledge and voices of the Latina teachers in this research emerged and emphasized the importance of how they contextualized their experiences. LatCrit gave voice to the Latinas and the experiences that shaped their educational trajectories. Narratives on lived experiences can expose the challenges centered on race, ethnicity, identity, and power. Incorporating a counter-storytelling method based on the testimonio, or life history of People of Color, is a story communicated from a non-majoritarian perspective—a story that White educators usually do not hear. LatCrit serves as a lens for studying the lived experiences of Latina teachers teaching in the New South by bringing attention to the factors that influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession and provides a deeper understanding of their lived experiences while navigating educational systems and succeeding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the U.S. Census Bureau projected that by the year 2060, the Latino population are projected to constitute 31% of the total population of the United States (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Urbina & Wright, 2015). According to Gándara and Mordechay (2017), the Latino population grew faster in the South than anywhere else in

the country and the Latino school-aged population grew by more than 200% since 2000. This population growth presents challenges in educational settings as the country faces teacher shortages, especially Latino teachers. These shortages are apparent in schools in the South with a growing number of Latino youth (Gándara & Mordechay, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016).

LatCrit's emphasis on testimonio is a dimension of the framework that inspired much of this study. Testimonios offer a venue to expose the complexities within Latina's lived experiences and provide valuable insight into what shaped their academic success. In the data stories I include in the chapters that follow, participants shared their backgrounds, challenges, lived experiences, and educational and career trajectories. Learning from their experiences can assist educators with understanding and addressing the needs of this growing population. Through this research, I intend to add to the literature by describing the critical, and personal encounters, and lived experiences of Latina teacher's conceptualization of their schooling, the perception of their education, and factors that contributed to their career in education. A LatCrit framework allowed me to narrate the unique forms of oppression most closely related to Latina's and their journeys. Findings can inform the efforts to improve the educational outcomes and quality of schooling experiences for Latinas/os, and by examining the inequities, address the underrepresentation of Latinas in the classroom.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this third chapter, I elaborate on the theoretical foundations and practical specifics for the design of the study. I begin with a brief overview of the intersection of LatCrit, testimonio, and in-depth interviews and their combined emphasis on the centrality of "storying" in humanizing research for Black and Brown teachers (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). I continue with a breakdown of the Seidman (2019) interview sequence followed by brief biographical sketches of the three Latina teachers and an outline of the analytic procedures I employed in crafting their data stories. Finally, I elaborate on my relationship with the study as a Latina educator and the highly personal significance I assigned to this inquiry.

Accessing Latina Teachers' Stories

As previously explained, LatCrit theory is complimentary to CRT, but addresses issues related explicitly to the Latina/o community highlighting their often-silenced voices and helps expose the underlying conditions which cause oppression in the Latina/o community. Pérez Huber (2009) underscored the relationship between LatCrit and testimonio:

1. Testimonios describes the injustices People of Color face as a result of oppression. A LatCrit lens helps expose the structural conditions, which cause oppression in Latina/o communities.
2. Implicit in the use of testimonios and a LatCrit framework is a direct challenge to the apartheid of knowledge that exists in academia.
3. The process of testimonios builds from the lived experiences of People of Color to document and theorize oppression.

4. Testimonios and LatCrit acknowledge the emancipatory elements of revealing oppression through lived experiences, which are rooted in the histories and memories of a larger community.
5. Revealing oppression moves People of Color toward dismantling and transforming oppressive conditions to end injustice. (p. 645)

Narratives are one way of bringing the voices of Latina teachers into dialogue within educational research. Defining testimonios and their importance, Cervantes-Soon (2012) explained:

> Testimonios as a pedagogical practice fosters humanizing knowledge stemming from students' and teachers' own narratives of survival and resistance, and promotes theory that offers both a language of critique and a language of hope through the reclamation, transformation, and emancipation of their own lives and communities. (p. 387)

Narrating the stories of Latina teachers provided an opportunity for them to share and recognize the complexities of the events in their life and the meaning they made of the events. Therefore, their stories challenged the dominant account persistent in educational discourse (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and illuminate the participant's life, connecting events and making meaning of their experiences.

Seidman's In-Depth Interview Protocol

To access my participants' testimonios, I turned to Seidman (2019) who explained:

> We interview to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories. We learn from hearing and studying what the participants say…Telling stories is one major way that human beings have devised to make sense of

> themselves and their social world. I would add that telling stories is a way to make sense of interview data. (p. 128)

Thus, Seidman maintained, “interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (p. 10).

For this dissertation, I focused on the lives of a trio of women and their journeys with the following research questions: What were the critical, personal encounters and lived experiences that brought them to teaching? What meaning did they assign to that journey? Notably, unlike other qualitative interviewing processes, in-depth interviews rely less on a specific set of questions as each interview sets the foundation for the next interview. Seidman recommends a 90-minute format for each interview:

> An hour carries with it the consciousness of a standard unit of time that can have participants “watching the clock.” Two hours seems too long to sit at one time. Given that the purpose of this approach is to have the participants reconstruct their experience, put it in the context of their lives, and reflect on its meaning, anything shorter than 90 minutes for each interview seems too short. (p. 25)

To that end, the first interview established the context of the participants lives, revolved around their life history, and allowed the participants to recall their life story. The participants recounted the critical personal encounters that brought them to teaching. During this interview, the participants provided as many details about themselves as possible, recreating early encounters with family, friends, school, and their social environment.

Per Seidman (2019), in the second interview, the participants focused on specific details of their lives:

> When we ask what their experience was like, we are asking them to reconstruct their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and actions, most of which they take for granted during their experience of the day. We do not ask for opinions but rather the details of their experience, upon which their opinions may be built. (p. 22)

The participants elaborated on the critical incidents that shaped their choices, and the details in which the incidents occurred, and the perceptions that contributed to their career in education.

During the third interview, the participants reflected on what it meant. Along the way, I asked probing questions that were applicable to the conversation in order to elicit additional responses, gather more information, keep the conversation fluid, or allow the participant to expand and elaborate. Seidman (2019) encourages interviewers to follow up on or probe participants' ideas:

> The key to asking questions during in-depth interviewing is to let them follow, as much as possible, from what the participant is saying. Although the interviewer comes to each interview with a basic question that establishes the purpose and focus of the interview, it is in response to what the participant says that the interviewer follows up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details, and requests stories. (p. 88)

Interviewing a smaller number of participants allowed me to conduct an in-depth analysis into their lives, and how they made meaning of their career trajectory into teaching.

A Trio of Latinas

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this research in February 2020 and created the consent form. Participation in this study was voluntary. I

am a Latina and a teacher in an urban public-school district. I am also a member of the Group of Latino Employees (GOLES). GOLES provides networking opportunities for Latino teachers in the district. During an event, I recruited three teachers who I knew were Latina. Criteria for participation included the following: 1) female, 2) Latina, 3) currently teaching full time in an urban public school, and 4) aged 27 or older. The definition of Latina is a woman who considers herself Central American, South American, or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, who may or may not be a Spanish/English bilingual.

In my initial conversation with participants, I provided a brief overview of the study and answered any questions they had about the research process and their participation. To protect their identity and anonymity in the study, participants selected a pseudonym. The following three Latinas participated in the study.

Janet Castillo

A Puerto Rican with more than 25 years of classroom teaching, Janet Castillo, was my first participant. At the time of the interview sequence, Castillo was in her early 50s and teaching English as Second Language in an elementary school. After completing her undergraduate degree, Castillo relocated to North Carolina and worked with the Latino community. Several years after receiving her undergraduate degree, she returned to school for her Master's in Education. Before she completed her degree, Castillo received an offer to teach in a middle school as a lateral entry ESL teacher. As a lateral entry teacher, she could work in the school system while completing her degree. Castillo decided not to accept the offer because she wanted to complete her degree and become more knowledgeable about linguistics, curriculum and instructional design, and literacy

for English Learners before entering the classroom. Her goal was to acquire the expertise needed to meet the linguistic and academic demands of her students. As graduation approached, Castillo applied for teaching positions. As her first interview concluded, the principal offered her a position. Castillo immediately accepted, and she began her career as an elementary school ESL teacher.

Maya Rivera

My second participant, also a Puerto Rican, was Maya Rivera. At the time of the study, Rivera was in her 30s and an ESL teacher in a middle school with more than 10 years of classroom teaching. She was born and raised in a Spanish-speaking household in upstate New York. Rivera described herself as a true bilingual, as she codeswitched between Spanish and English, depending on the audience and situation. Rivera communicated that she was an ESL student, a Special Education student, and was the first person in her family to attend college. As a first-generation college student, Rivera struggled in community college. However, she knew she wanted to be a teacher and had to do well to be able to transfer to a four-year college in order to pursue a teaching degree. Rivera relocated to North Carolina where she secured a position in a middle school.

Nancy Fuentes

My third participant was Nancy Fuentes. At the age of five, Fuentes, moved to the United States with her family from Costa Rica. Fuentes learned to read, write, and speak English in school. She, thus, became her family's de facto English teacher. At the time of the study, Fuentes was in her 40s, and a high school Spanish teacher. Fuentes described a few of the teachers who influenced her professional trajectory into public education and

how their positivity outweighed the microaggressions she encountered as an immigrant, an ESL student, and Spanish speaker. Her love of teaching from an early age made her ambitious and determined to follow her dream to become a teacher, regardless of the obstacles she encountered or the expectations of her teachers or her family.

Data Generation and Analytic Procedures

The primary means of data collection were through three individual in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2019)—a data generation sequence recently leveraged to explore Black and Brown teachers' lives in New South contexts (Benson et al., 2020; Salas et al., 2021; Salas et al., 2019). Data collection began in February 2020 and concluded in March 2020. I conducted three audio-recorded, 90-minute individual interviews with each teacher. All interviews took place in a study room at a local library to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to keep their responses private. Following, Seidman's (2019) in-depth interview sequence, the interviews with each teacher was conducted over a three-week period. I kept the data confidential and removed names, location, school, or any other leading information from the transcripts. I transcribed and stored the interviews in a secure, password-protected location. The spacing of the interviews allowed enough time for participants to reflect, but not lose the connection between what was conveyed during the previous interview (Seidman, 2019). After each interview, the participants and I scheduled the subsequent interview.

I digitally audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim. Upon transcription, I substituted all names and identifying information with pseudonyms to ensure the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data. Transcribing the interviews allowed me to appreciate the participant's stories, develop a greater meaning

of the events in their lives, and was an initial analytic process. I listened to each audio recording, checked, and rechecked the transcript for accuracy. I printed out a hardcopy of each transcript, read, and reread the transcript several times. I then underlined and circled key words and phrases and used Saldaña's protocol for coding the data (Miles et al., 2020). Saldaña described coding methods as categorizing into themes, words, and phrases from the participant's narrative. The in-depth interviews allowed me to gain insight into the lives of the participants in their own words. I searched for key words and phrases that captured the teachers' authentic voices (Miles et al., 2020). I sought connecting patterns and labeled passages that were interesting, meaningful, and crucial. I highlighted the most compelling transcript fragments, generating themes that occurred throughout each interview and created the basis of the narratives that I present in the chapters that follow.

An overarching theme that developed from Janet Castillo's interviews was her relationship with her mother. The relationship was a source of inspiration and motivation, yet at times contentious for Castillo. She believed she had to do everything "right" to make her mother proud of her. Although she did not begin a teaching career immediately following college, she knew her career path would lead her to the classroom.

As I read and reread Maya Rivera's transcript, I recognized a critical theme was the people God placed on her path. These people were God sent and made a difference in her life so she would be academically successful. Despite the oppression she encountered, and the time spent employed in other professions, Rivera knew these positions held meaning and were positioning her for a successful teaching career.

A significant theme in Nancy Fuentes's life was the fact that she always wanted to become a teacher. Despite the obstacles, microaggressions, and barriers she encountered

throughout her educational trajectory, Fuentes always knew teaching was in her future and proved those who doubted her wrong.

As I reflected on their experiences and themes emerged, I began the writing process. I wrote individual narratives, and focused on the incidents that were most noteworthy and critical to their stories. According to Seidman (2019), "the researcher must approach the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text…and in reducing the material, interviews have begun to analyze, interpret, and make meaning of the material" (p. 125-126). Finally, I provided participants with a copy of the transcripts for them to review. The participants confirmed that their transcripts were truthful representations of the events that happened in their lives, and did not make changes or provide additional information.

A Fourth Latina

Who I am has much to do with my research. When I conducted this study, I acknowledged my own subjectivity. I am interested in how other Latinas conceptualized their schooling, the perception of their education, and the factors that led them to a career in education, therefore, my research is on the lived experiences of Latina teachers. I am a Puerto Rican teacher in an urban public-school district in the New South. I grew up in a single parent household with an older sister in New York City. My family has always valued education and ensured that my sister and I understood the importance of having a good education, and that a good education would break the cycle of poverty. As a child, I witnessed my mother's struggle as she worked multiple jobs. My mother frequently told us that we already had two strikes against us: strike one, we were female, and strike two, we were minorities, and that she would work ten jobs if necessary, to make sure we

would not have that proverbial third strike against us by being uneducated. She firmly believed an education opened doors to opportunities that would allow us to pursue a career we could be proud of, and so others could bear witness to our success, and subsequently her success as a single parent. My mother constantly reminded us that we had to prove ourselves to others because we were Latinas. We had to prove that we were just as smart as everyone else and be academically and financially successful.

Going to college was a certainty, not an option in my family. After researching colleges and universities, I decided to attend college in North Carolina. Moving to the South was culture shock. Suddenly, race was an issue, not for me, but for those around me. I encountered racism, hidden racism, and blatant racism. I was the "other" in college, and the social environment did not reflect my cultural heritage, cultural upbringing, or cultural values. I reflected and wondered why it took so long to realize that I was unrepresented in the curriculum from elementary school through college. Because of the events in my own life, I am personally committed to researching other Latinas' perceptions in the educational system and their subsequent trajectory into teaching. Living and working in North Carolina, I was part of the population shift in the early 1990s. There were few Latinas/os in Charlotte during this period. However, by the late 1990s to the early 2000s, the Latina/o population significantly increased. I witnessed students struggle in school and wondered why they were academically unsuccessful. Conversations with parents and students exposed the lack of Latina teachers in the school district. The school system was not diverse.

As I reflected on my schooling, I realized I had only one Teacher of Color throughout K-12 schooling, yet I successfully navigated the school system. Living as a

Latina in the South I witnessed the educational disparities with Latina/o youth, and the underrepresentation of Latina teachers. Like the participants in my study, I always wanted to be a teacher. I knew I could make a difference. So, I returned to school for my Master's in Education. I began my teaching career in metro Charlotte as an ESL teacher in an elementary school. I worked with excellent teachers who embraced the cultural and linguistic diversity in their classrooms and some who did not. In the chapters that follow, my intention is to bring Latinas' voices into dialogue with what we already know and still have to learn about Latinas in K-12 teaching through the truths of women (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) as ways of increasing representation of Latinas on the teacher pipeline. Regardless of my ability to identify with the Latinas in this study, I tell their stories. They trusted me with their stories and believed I would amplify their lived experiences, positive and negative on their trajectory to teaching.

CHAPTER 4: JANET CASTILLO ON PROVING SHE COULD

> My mother, a strong, independent woman, set an example for us and returned to school. I had to make my mother proud. She believes in me and my ability to be successful. She is the most influential person in my life, and I have always and will continue to make my mother proud of me. My mother always says, "estoy orgullosos de ser puertorriqueño" [I am proud to be Puerto Rican]. She raised us to be proud, strong, self-sufficient, and independent, never take shit from anyone, and never let anyone tell you, you can't because you are a Latina. But, most importantly, never let the color of your skin define who you are.

Latina teachers' narratives have captured Latina teachers' resistance to sexist ideologies (Lapayese, 2013), the "double-bind" that Latina teachers face as they negotiate the demands of their own collectivist-oriented family culture and their individualistic-oriented school culture (Colomer, 2019) and the essentialization of young Latinas in border communities (Cervantes-Soon, 2017). As such, LatCrit analytic perspectives combine to challenge toxic discourses on race, gender, and class framing Latinas and other minoritized identities as inferior, inadequate, and/or pathological (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Yet, relatively few studies have examined the complexity of Latina mother/daughter relationships in the life trajectories of Latina educators, and how such relationships shape Latina teachers' aspirations as well as their anxieties.

In the opening minutes of our first of three 90-minute interviews, Janet Castillo (quoted above) explained that if she had become something in her life, it was because of her mother's insistence that she do better and, by so doing, bring honor to her mother

and, by consequence, herself. Her mother, as Castillo explained, emphasized that she had made sacrifices so that her children could do better and have more opportunities.

In this first data chapter, I share Janet Castillo's testimonio—relating her grade school, high school, and college years and her move to North Carolina and subsequent professional trajectory in public education. As my analysis will demonstrate, Castillo's relationship with her mother was a source of anxiety, inspiration, and motivation as she navigated racialized and gendered educational and professional contexts. Castillo explained that she owed everything to her mother and was indebted, obligated, and committed to making her mother proud. To that end, her decision to become a teacher, what Castillo's mother considered as a marker of poverty, created a struggle within her that took a career to overcome. Janet Castillo's story matters because children of Latinas/os who navigate dreams, while still honoring their parents' sacrifices, experience complex and simultaneously feelings of achievement and loss as they seek the familiar but optionally oppressive approval of the individuals who matter most to them.

Proving She Could in Grade School

Janet Castillo described herself as a student who did not have to study "too hard" to make good grades. However, she studied hard because good grades were not enough. Castillo's mother, and by consequence, Castillo wanted excellent grades. She wanted to prove to everyone that being a Latina, who lived in the projects, in a single parent household did not automatically equate to failure.

Although Sonia Castillo was Spanish-dominant, her two children did not learn to speak their mother's tongue. Rather, Castillo explained that she learned to speak Spanglish (combination of Spanish and English), as a child, and Spanish much later

through formal schooling because her mother did not speak Spanish in the home. Castillo rationalized that when her mother, Sonia, emigrated from Puerto Rico to New York City at age eight or nine; she struggled in school primarily because of her lack of English proficiency. Likewise, Castillo grew to learn that for someone like her mother growing up in the 1950s in NYC, Spanish was a language of poverty and under education. Castillo suspected that because of this linguistic stigma, Sonia Castillo spoke English only with her two daughters and Spanish only with her elderly parents who also lived in NYC. Simply put, Sonia Castillo did not want her children singled out and wanted them accepted, not ridiculed. Castillo disclosed that this was a source of contention between her mother and grandparents, but in the end, Castillo's mother had her way.

Castillo began school at the age of five in a kindergarten classroom and loved attending The Lila Price Enrichment Center. In our first interview, she vividly remembered her loving teachers from kindergarten. She confided she was the teacher's pet and knew it. The teachers always chose her to take notes to the office, hand out materials in class, and assist the other teachers in the three and four-year-old classrooms. During naptime (she never took a nap), teachers took their breaks and she was "responsible" for the class. They instructed her to make sure her classmates stayed on their cots. Castillo loved being in charge as she pretended to be a teacher and instructed her classmates.

Although at a young age she never described teaching as a career, she never forgot the role of playing the teacher and the happiness she felt. Outspoken, she delivered the speech during her kindergarten graduation and joked this was the only valedictorian

speech she would give, the valedictorian of kindergarten. This event made her mother proud and making her mother proud was, she explained, what mattered most.

Sonia Castillo worked hard at her full-time and part-time jobs to make ends meet, but even more, to be able to send her two daughters to parochial school. Sonia Castillo was a teacher assistant at Samuel Gompers Career and Technical Education High School in the South Bronx and had divorced her husband (Castillo's father) just a year after Janet Castillo's birth. As a high school teacher assistant, Sonia Castillo witnessed firsthand how Black and Brown students were (mis)treated and academically unsuccessful. Her mother told her two daughters about the daily inequities of public-school education—unpleasant and sometimes physical altercations between students and students, teachers and students, and administrators with students. She absolutely refused to allow her children to attend public school. For Sonia Castillo, being educated was synonymous with success. An education was something you will always have. Rather, it was an investment in her two daughters' futures. As a result, Castillo had an overwhelming sense of duty to her mother, as her child and as a Latina to never fail and never give up which created internalized conflict at times, as she later realized.

Holy Family Catholic School was a place for minority students whose parents worked hard to provide their children with a better education than the public-school education. Castillo did not like attending Holy Family, but the choice was not hers. Even though she skipped classes sometimes or would arrive late to school, Castillo made sure she completed her work and received good grades. Looking back some 40 years later, Castillo felt she was invisible and devalued in school. That said, she understood why her mother had made the choices she had:

> The older I am the more I realize why my mother wanted us in Catholic school. She often told us, no one could take our education away from us and all it entailed. An education would provide upward mobility even though we were Latinas. I often wondered if it was the best education for me since none of the teachers I had looked like me. I felt like my teachers were not culturally aware of us, the many minority students in front of them. The teachers did not live in our neighborhood and every teacher I had from first grade to eight grade was White, even the nuns were White. I did not have a Teacher of Color until I was in high school. I often felt like my mother was just wasting her hard-earned money, and even though I told her to put me in public school, she refused.

Sonia Castillo returned to college when Castillo was in the fourth grade. This surprised everyone. She explained to her daughters and anybody else who asked her why it was she had gone back to college; it was to set an example for her daughters:

> I have to set an example for my girls. I will get my degree so you can see that you can do for yourselves. You can make your own way in this world. You do not need a man or anyone else to rely on for anything. You will go to school. You will go to college and finish, and you will be something, someone you can be proud of.

Sonia Castillo continuously reminded her daughter that as a Latina she had to prove herself, do better, and be better than others around her. Castillo internalized these ideas of needing to prove herself, to the world and, more importantly, to her mother. Her mother constantly reminded her, if Janet Castillo failed, Sonia Castillo failed. Failure was not an option.

Thus, from her grade school years, Castillo's mother's insistence on education as a way out of the lower classes was a source of strength but also a source of anxiety. As Castillo explained, she was under constant implicit and explicit pressure to excel in school. Anything less would reflect poorly on her mother, something Castillo would never allow. She wanted more than anything to be Valedictorian for life—and education would lead to a noble profession. This was Castillo justified, her inspiration. It was a heavy burden that she would carry for years to come.

Proving She Could in High School

When Castillo graduated the eighth grade at Holy Family Catholic School, she transitioned to Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School. An academically competitive high school, Castillo's acceptance, to her mother's delight and to her own delight, meant she had achieved a milestone. Sonia Castillo beamed with joy and pride as she told everyone about her daughter's accomplishments.

Although Castillo had mostly good memories of her time at Holy Family and Our Lady of Mercy, it was striking, years later, how few Black and Brown teachers she had:

> As I think back to the number of teachers I had who were of color, I can count them on one hand. My only Teacher of Color from first through twelfth grade was when I was in high school, Ms. Fox. I never had a teacher who was Latina, until graduate school. Even my Spanish teacher in high school was a White woman. Ms. Fox made a major impact on my life. I could see me in her. She was amazing; she was a biology teacher, a field dominated by men. She had higher expectations from me. I wanted to do better for her, don't get me wrong, I wanted to do better

> for myself too, but she inspired me. I wanted to show her that I appreciated her, so I did a great job for her, myself and, of course, my mother.

Consequently, Castillo remembered Ms. Fox dearly. She was motivational, engaging, and went beyond any other teacher she had known. Mrs. Fox, she explained, encouraged her students to be successful. Ms. Fox was candid about her own experiences as a Black woman in a White school. She subsequently becomes an informal counselor as Castillo experienced a series of racial microaggressions on the high school campus.

Thinking about Ms. Fox, Castillo explained that it was her relationship with Fox who clarified that she too would be a teacher someday. Castillo had known from grade school that she would attend college. Her mother had told her she would, and she would make it possible. Castillo knew that someday she would be a Ms. Fox—an inspiration to students who looked like her:

> I remember Ms. Fox talked about how hard it was when she went to our school. She was a student at Our Lady of Mercy several years before and now was a biology teacher. She told us it was difficult because she was one of just a few Black students and we had it good because there were so many of "us" now, not like when she was in school. I really didn't see that. I saw how prejudiced, unaccommodating, and racist the teachers were, and quite honestly, the White kids were prejudiced too. Minorities stayed with minorities.

Her Junior year in high school, Castillo received a nursing scholarship but vaguely recalled not wanting to accept it because her sister hoped to become a nurse and she refused to follow her older sister's example. Castillo recalled the one and only time she met with the high school counselor. The counselor was shocked that Castillo received a

nursing scholarship and asked Castillo how she managed to secure such a scholarship. Castillo disregarded the counselor's comments only because she knew she wanted to be a teacher. Her mother disagreed, chiding that she would be poor, and she did not make sacrifices for Castillo and her sister to be financially impoverished. As she continued to apply to colleges her senior year, and as she received many rejections, Castillo's confidence was shaken.

Although she knew in her heart, she would attend college; doubts began to occupy her mind. She knew her grades were suitable for college, but the rejection letters made her question her academic abilities. She also thought she received rejection letters because she indicated on her applications that she was Latina. She felt guilty that her mother worked hard and spent so much money on parochial schools as she struggled to get into college. The thought of disappointing her mother was a source of tremendous angst.

Proving She Could in College

In something of a coincidence, Castillo accompanied a friend to North Carolina for a college tour. Inspired by the visit she applied for admission, was accepted, and enrolled as a freshman that fall. She had made it. She had achieved her mother's goal. However, Castillo still hesitated to realize her dream of becoming a teacher. For her mother, it was a dead end.

The day Castillo left for college was not easy. Her mother accompanied her to Charlotte to settle her in for the next four years of her life. They had rarely been apart, and Castillo remembered crying when her mother left. Her tears, she explained, were a mixture of happy and sad. Happy she was on her own, and sad because she was on her

own. Her first year in college was not what she expected. She felt alone at the predominately White college and realized there was a big difference living in the South as a Latina versus living in the North as a Latina. When people looked at her, they did not know her cultural ethnicity. Proud of her cultural heritage and vocal, she informed all those who asked that she was Puerto Rican, and sometimes provided a history and geography lesson for them. The faculty was not racially or ethnically diverse, they were White. Additionally, the student body was not racially or ethnically diverse, it was Black, White, and her. She often felt like an outsider, as if she was not part of the school and not part of the curriculum. She was always the only Latina in class, and each semester when classes started, she looked around the room, but she was still the only Latina, a fact that was sometimes made painfully obvious by her professors and classmates. Just as she dismissed the comment from her high school counselor, she dismissed the microaggressions inflected upon her.

Her mother believed teachers were inadequately compensated and discouraged her to pursue a degree in education and encouraged to choose another field. Therefore, Castillo rejected teaching. She wanted to please her mother so she chose a different major, Sociology. Along the way, Castillo's mother was her biggest cheerleader, made financial sacrifices and continuously supported her. Although she struggled internally, Castillo followed her mother's firm suggestion and did not pursue a career in education.

In Castillo's mind, sociologists helped people, just like teachers, so she would indirectly be a teacher. Her mother's voice was in her head about teaching. Her mother's definition of success was attaining a college degree and being financially secure. Being a teacher would not leave her financially secure. Even though she followed the path her

mother insisted upon, Castillo inquired about the education program at her college. She found out that pursuing a degree in education would take her five years to complete. Castillo had to complete college in four years, because four years was all she could afford. Determined and resilient she believed in her ability and completed her degree in four years. This was a great accomplishment considering she worked a work-study job to keep her financial aid, a part time job at the mall, maintained her grades, made the Dean's list, and graduated in four years. Her mother was proud of her and made sure everyone knew about her daughter's accomplishments, which were also her accomplishments as a single parent. Castillo knew, however, that she still wanted to be a teacher.

Proving She Could as a Teacher

Sonia Castillo was proud of her daughter. She graduated college and returned home to New York City. However, before she left North Carolina she interviewed for a couple of positions. Several months after she interviewed and graduated, she was offered a position in metro Charlotte. Castillo accepted the position and made a permanent move South to live. She was a social worker in an agency dedicated to the Latino community. In the early 1990s, a population shift occurred and made North Carolina a new destination state. Initially satisfied with her position, she thoroughly enjoyed working with her co-workers and especially loved the community. However, after being overlooked several times for a promotion, she knew she needed to make changes.

She was an exemplar employee, as indicated from the certificates and awards she received. She knew the organization, the community, and most importantly, she had the right credentials. When an opportunity with more responsibility arose within the organization, she wholeheartedly applied. Castillo commented:

> In hindsight I should have known something was up just by the way my supervisor looked at me when I informed her that I applied for the position. Her body language and facial expressions said it all. She simply told me, that's nice, we will see what happens.

Castillo did not receive an interview and she questioned her supervisor. Her supervisor informed her that she was not qualified and not ready for a promotion. Disappointed, Castillo looked at it as an opportunity for growth, and prepare for when the next opening presented itself. Two years later another position became available. Castillo reviewed the position and discussed the opportunity with her supervisor. Surprised she was granted an interview, and confident, she knew she would do an excellent job. Disregarded for the second time and informed that someone else with more qualifications received the position frustrated Castillo. Familiar with the individual hired, Castillo knew she was more qualified. Once again, in Castillo's mind, a Latina did not receive a promotion, and she recalled the negative encounters in school. She considered the lack of acknowledgment as another learning opportunity. However, after the third time, that third strike for her, she knew it was time for change.

Castillo became aware of the educational disparities of Latina/o students as she interacted with families. Many of the families informed her that the teachers spoke funny referring to their southern accents, they could not understand them, and the teachers did not understand their culture. However, what interested Castillo the most was when the parents told her that the teachers would not, could not, or did not want to communicate with them, and that bilingual staff members were not employed in the school. Castillo realized many Latino boys and Latina girls fell through the cracks and they deserved a

better education. Their experiences reminded Castillo of her own time in school and coupled with being ignored three different times for a promotion, motivated her and she made a change. She applied to graduate school for education and was on her way to what she always wanted to become, a teacher. Castillo expressed:

> Teachers have power, the power to make or break you and I want to build up students, let them know they can succeed, no matter who their parents are, or where they are from. I want to make a difference in their lives. It is time for me to become the teacher I was meant to be. It took me a long time get to this point in my life. The time is right and the time is now.

She considered her decision carefully, researched schools, the financial commitment, and of course spoke with her mother. Her mother's approval and acceptance were essential. Even though she was an adult, self-sufficient and lived in a different state, she continued to seek her mother's approval and reassurance. Castillo valued her mother's input and respected her opinion. At last, Sonia Castillo relented.

Conclusion and Discussion

As previously explained, narratives surrounding Latina teachers have illustrated the layered oppression that Latinas face—exploring the agency of Latina teachers in response to sexist ideologies (Lapayese, 2013), the tensions between home and institutional cultures (Colomer, 2019) and the gross essentialization of Latinas in general (Cervantes-Soon, 2017). Thus, LatCrit provides a language for deflating the toxic discourses surrounding Latinas' realities and potentials (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Yet, relatively few qualitative descriptions have amplified the complexity of Latina mother/daughter relationships in the life trajectories of Latina educators and how

such relationships shape Latina teachers' aspirations as well as their hesitations to realize themselves as teachers.

Janet Castillo loved her mother; and, as my analysis has demonstrated, Castillo wanted to become something in her life because in so doing, she would communicate that love and its value. She wanted to make her mother proud. Castillo owed everything to her mother, but she too mattered. Her decision to become a teacher was a realization of what she had dreamed of as a child; and, it was a transgression of her mother's desire that she be more than a teacher. A LatCrit framework provided a tool to understand and give voice to the oppression she experienced at school and at home.

Castillo's struggle mattered to me as I heard it and represented it, because I too was warned that teaching was a dead-end. I suspect that other sons and daughters of Latino parents have had similar experiences, not just navigating racialized school experiences, but—navigating what we want in life and what matters to our lives and finding a way to still value and honor our parents' hopes and dreams for us and the sacrifices they made along the way. I was proud to bear witness to Janet Castillo's story. I was proud that she had made a choice to make herself happy. However, I profoundly understood her sadness at the possibility that she had somehow disappointed her mother. A mother's love, at times, is a heavy burden.

CHAPTER 5: MAYA RIVERA AND THE PEOPLE GOD PUT ON HER PATH

> As I reflect, I think about the people who made a significant difference in my life. God places people in your life for a reason. You know, they were placed in my life at the right time and helped me. These individuals made such an impact in my education, in my life, and on my choices. They took the time to listen, encourage, and provide me with support when I needed it. It is because of these individuals who offered me a helping hand at just the right time that I feel influenced me to help people, especially Latinas. You know, I frequently wonder where they are now, and I wonder where I would be in my life today if I hadn't had their helping hands.

At the time of her interview sequence, Maya Rivera was a seasoned English as a Second Language teacher with more than ten years of teaching in a metro Charlotte, North Carolina public middle school. She explained in the opening minutes of our dialogue, that her purpose was to be a teacher and for that reason she had encountered individuals God sent along the way, to help her realize that destiny.

Contemporary scholarship for Latinx education has underscored, among other things, the centrality of Latinx spirituality as a meaning-making tool for survival and growth in educational and career spaces. Or as Campesino and Schwartz (2006) explained, Latinx faith systems "are interwoven with their daily lives and are foundations of strength in coping with life struggles" (p. 70). As my analysis will demonstrate, throughout her testimonio, Rivera framed the handful of individuals who played critical roles in her life as she navigated through special education, high school, college, and her professional career as "God sent."

In this second data chapter, I analyze "the helping hands" who lifted-up Maya Rivera (quoted above) as she made her way through public schools and eventually through a Graduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Helping hands included teachers across her elementary and secondary school years as well as a teacher education faculty member who confirmed her vocation. However, despite Rivera's recognition of and gratitude for the role these individuals played in realizing her career objective, I argue that increasing the numbers of Latina teachers requires more than just faith. Rather than waiting for miracles, diversity-motivated teacher education needs to implement deliberate and purposeful support processes for cultivating Latina teachers.

God Sends Mrs. Jimenez

Maya Rivera was born and raised in upstate New York in many different neighborhoods that she described as "very poor." Her parents were Puerto Rican. Her mother emigrated from the island to the mainland and her father was a Puerto Rican Brooklynite. Spirituality was something that she grew up with and the notion of "doing the right thing" was a family catechism:

> Like most Puerto Rican's my parents were Catholic. I think being a Puerto Rican, your parents' guilt you into believing that God is always watching you so you should do the right thing, and I always tried my best to always do the right thing.

During her childhood, Rivera, her three siblings, and parents moved frequently. She attended 12 different elementary and two high schools as her family worked to make a better life. Thinking back, Rivera described herself as stubborn, tough, loud, and not

afraid to pick a fight with the bullies she encountered in the many schools she entered and exited.

When Rivera started kindergarten, her mother walked her to class and she told her, “No hablas con ellos in español, ahora tienes que apprender ingles” [Don’t speak to them in Spanish, you have to learn English now]. Rivera recalled learning English in a different class, her ESL class. However, at home her mother was adamant that the family spoke Spanish: “En la casa, se habla español” [In this house we speak Spanish]. In contrast, her father wanted his children to be English dominant. Teased because he spoke Spanish and had an accent, Maya Rivera’s father, Mr. Rivera, believed if his children spoke English at home and in the neighborhood, they would have an advantage. Rivera thought of her father and explained, “He was convinced we would have an easier time than he had as a Spanish speaking Latino in school and in life.” In the end, Rivera and her siblings quickly grew to be Spanish/English bilinguals. She remembered, “They pulled me out of class to learn English and when I did learn English, I talked and talked and talked, so I was always in trouble for talking.” Consequently, Rivera made the conscious decision to stop talking. Because of her sudden and sustained silence and disengagement, Rivera explained that her teachers assumed she had a learning disability:

> I didn’t want to talk since I was always getting in trouble for talking so I decided not to talk anymore. Nobody was going to force me so I sat there. When the teacher would ask me questions, I didn’t answer, so she took my lack of response as the inability to do the work and possibly of having a learning disability as opposed just being defiant. I remember her making comments as if I was slow, unintelligent.

Referred to special education for evaluation, Rivera also refused to answer the test questions. It was not because she did not know the answers. She just did not want to provide the answers.

Mrs. Jimenez, Rivera's special education teacher, never believed she belonged in special education and neither did her mother. My mother told me, 'You can't be stubborn. You have to demonstrate to the teacher that you know the work and can actually do the work.' For two years, Mrs. Jimenez and her mother contested and opposed the school's decision of her placement.

Thinking back some twenty-five years later about Mrs. Jimenez, Rivera wept: "Mrs. Jimenez pleaded with me to show everyone what I was capable of accomplishing because she knew I was competent and proficient." Two years after her placement into special education, Rivera returned to the regular classroom and was on grade level. God had sent Mrs. Jimenez into Maya Rivera's life, and Mrs. Jimenez motivated and inspired her to achieve more than what the system believed she could achieve and accomplish. She was grateful to Mrs. Jimenez and to God for placing her on her path.

God Sends Mr. Sepulveda

For Rivera, Mrs. Jimenez was the first in a series of teachers who God placed in her life so that she might realize the best of herself:

> Life is very fragile, just thinking about these teachers who really took an interest in me, helped me understand the impact that you can make in someone's life socially or emotionally. You can really impact a child's life in a good way.

As previously mentioned, Rivera's family moved frequently throughout her childhood. As a result, she attended several elementary schools. For her middle school years,

Rivera's family did not move and consequently Rivera was in the same school for three consecutive years. Rivera was no longer in special education and expressed "I started getting serious about school, about my grades, and people were recognizing my abilities, my talent and my intellect." Rivera was motivated to do well in school and proud of her accomplishments. Her parents were equally proud.

In high school, Mr. Sepulveda, a Social Studies teacher, was another individual who God sent her way:

> He was always so inspirational and expected so much from me. He was the one who told me that I needed to be the school president. He helped me prepare my speech and what I needed to do to run for president. He saw something in me and wanted me to be successful. As a result, this motivated my ambitions and I became the eighth-grade school president. Imagine that. I was placed in special education because I refused to take school, my teachers, or myself serious and here I am the eighth-grade school president. It was a big thing, at least to me.

In addition to helping Rivera run and secure the position of class president, Mr. Sepulveda took an interest in a group of Latino students. Rivera was fortunate to be one of those students:

> Mr. Sepulveda would talk to us about life, and what we needed to do differently so that we could be better and do better. I literally internalized what he said and wanted to do better and excel. He would take the time to really speak to me, and make sure I was doing okay, something no other teacher had done. I mean in retrospect; it was just simple conversations about life. Things I never even

> considered or thought about. He forced me to think about where I was going, how I was going to get there, and what I was going to do once I was there.

As graduation approached, Mr. Sepulveda nominated Rivera for a scholarship that would facilitate her application to college and fund a portion of her tuition. The scholarship program selected students in middle and high school who came from low-income neighborhoods and provided candidates with leadership skills and scholarships for college:

> I graduated and got a job with the same program that I participated in while in high school. They hired me as a youth advocate in an inner-city school district. I was placed in a high school and I worked with students who were like me. The school would wand the students to check for weapons and check their bags for contraband. Unfortunately, this was commonplace. Yet as I sit here with you talking about it, I realize how horrible it was that students were subjected to detectors and bag searches, and that this was the norm. The saving grace was, I absolutely loved what I was doing.

Rivera knew college was a huge step, but with Mr. Sepulveda's support, she felt ready to take the chance, and, she wanted to be a teacher because there were other students out there like Rivera who needed someone. Or as she explained, "People were placed in my life to help me through things and I wanted to be that for students who look like me. I believe that God has a hand in my life to help others."

Rivera was not the oldest child in her family, but she was the first to attend college. She wanted to be successful for her own sake and for that of the larger family

and Latinas in general: So, she studied harder than ever and entered upon high school graduation, Northeast Community College.

God Sends Dr. Sanchez

Rivera struggled in her initial semester in community college. She was unfamiliar with college or the expectations since she was a first-generation college student. But she pushed herself with the goal of transferring to a four-year college so that she might become a teacher. She eventually transferred to Rockport College. A year later, her older sister also enrolled at Rockport College and Rivera sought solidarity and followed in her sister's footsteps and majored in Social Work. She was close to her sister and believed that together they would graduate college together. Social Work was not teaching; however, Rivera indicated, "it was a good foundation for teaching as far as life skills, social skills and behavior skills. It really transfers over into the school setting."

Six years later, Maya Rivera relocated with her husband and daughter to North Carolina. When she arrived in Charlotte, she researched opportunities for employment and contacted numerous organizations. Surprised Charlotte had a Spanish language newspaper, she contacted the editor-in-chief, Mrs. Barroso. Rivera was not a good fit to write for the newspaper. However, intrigued with Rivera's story, Mrs. Barroso connected Rivera with The Scouting League. Rivera was hired to conduct outreach programs to increase the Hispanic/Latino participation. She loved her job as she taught children life and social skills. Yet, she desired to teach in a traditional classroom.

After a few years with The Scouting League, Rivera decided it was time to teach in a traditional setting. Without a teaching license, she secured a position in a private school as the Assistant Principal and the Spanish teacher. She was finally going to be a

teacher—or so she thought. Rivera recognized what she always knew, she wanted to be in a classroom working with students who looked like her:

> I think what finally brought me to teaching was the realization that after being an administrator for two years at a private school, putting out fires, I needed to be with students and families who looked like me. I thought about myself and how I grew up. I was like nope, no can-do, I'd rather work with students that are impoverished or students that I felt I could relate to. I just really wanted to give back to children that were in the same type of scenario I was in growing up. I hate that it took me so long, but I knew God had a plan.

Rivera returned to school for her Master's in Education. The professors embraced her, her culture, and everything she brought to the classroom. She thought of Dr. Sanchez who advised her and expected her to excel. Dr. Sanchez valued her opinions, mentored her, offered her advice, and helped her navigate the academic environment, policies, and professionalization. She loved Dr Sanchez and expressed:

> I was in awe of the fact that Dr. Sanchez was a Latina and had her doctorate. I thought, wow, we have come a long way. We had a connection, she saw me for who I was, a Latina, like her. I felt like she was looking out for me.

With a teaching license in hand, Maya Rivera quickly secured a position in a middle school as an ESL teacher. She had realized her destiny.

Conclusion and Discussion

Rivera's narration of her schooling trajectory was a message of gratitude for the individuals she encountered at specific moments in that journey. God sent individuals included the teachers across her elementary and secondary school years as well as a

university faculty member who confirmed her teaching vocation. Rivera's story reminded me of my own story, her desire to go to college, to become a teacher, and to make a difference in the lives of others. Her only regret was not having entered the profession sooner. I am glad she became a teacher. We need more teachers like Maya Rivera in metro Charlotte. We need teachers whose lived experiences mirror those of the children they teach. I also admired Rivera's faith—and her emotional recollection of the helping hands she met along the way. Although she took a slightly different path and followed her sister's college choice (and justified her decision), her testimonio reveals her purpose and motivation for seeking a teaching career. The meaning she made of her career-path and the gratitude she felt for those that God sent her way is something many Latinas/os re-construct for themselves, especially when the ending is a happy one. But teacher education cannot and should not wait for or count on miracles or divine intervention to diversify the profession.

CHAPTER SIX: NANCY FUENTES AND RACIALIZED MEMORIES

In the previous data chapters, I focused on the testimonios of Janet Castillo and Maya Rivera. Janet Castillo navigated racialized and gendered educational and professional contexts as she aspired to make her mother proud. Through the oppression she faced in school and in life situations, she eventually found her way to the teaching profession. Maya Rivera's story included the individuals who played critical roles throughout her educational and professional trajectories. These individuals, she argued, were "God-sent" and helped her into a career of teaching. In this third and final data chapter I present Nancy Fuentes's story, focusing on a series of racialized memories that Fuentes articulated during the interview sequence. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation study to detail all the racialized incidents Fuentes experienced. Here, I focus on four memories distributed across her K-12 experiences and into her teaching career. As my analysis will demonstrate, Fuentes experienced racial microaggressions during her school years and in her professional capacity as a teacher. However, despite Fuentes's encounters with teachers who disregarded her name, her culture, and her academic abilities, she remained resolute in her learning and prevailed over the racial obstacles in her way.

Remembering School

At the time of the interview sequence, Fuentes was a high school Spanish teacher with over 20 years of teaching experience and was in her late 40s. Fuentes was from Costa Rica and immigrated to the United States with her family when she was five years old. She had an older sister, Mariana, a younger sister, Lucia, and a younger brother, Jonathan. Her father, Mr. Fuentes, never adjusted to life in the United States and left the

family shortly after they arrived and returned to Costa Rica. The sacrifices her mother made to come to the United States motivated her to do well in school. However, despite her mother's sacrifices and hard work, her family was poor and frequently moved in search of more suitable and affordable housing. Fuentes described living and going to school in New York and Rhode Island, as her family often moved between the two states. Fuentes attended numerous schools in elementary, middle, and high school, and could not recall the names of all her schools or most of her teachers, but remembered how they made her feel. Racial microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional, subtle, or overt, stereotypical assumptions about race, ethnicity, or gender. Students remember the tone set by the teacher (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012), and the tone in her classrooms were ones Fuentes distinctly recalled.

Racialized Memory #1: Elementary School

Fuentes only had vague memories of preschool in Costa Rica. In contrast, she vividly remembered the first three months of school in kindergarten, as she learned in a new country, in a new school, and in a new language. The Fuentes family arrived in New York from Costa Rica approximately three months prior to the end of the school year. Her family was the first non-English speaking Latino family enrolled in the neighborhood public school. It was the longest three months for Fuentes. She was isolated, lonely, and she was unable to communicate her needs in school. To her surprise and relief, the following school year, there was a Spanish-speaking teacher at the school. Fuentes disclosed:

> I can't remember exactly what she was, a teacher or an assistant, but I got pulled out of class and since she spoke Spanish, I assumed she was my ESL teacher.

> Miss Colón is a teacher who I distinctly remember in a positive light who helped me and made sure I understood my teachers and school environment even at such a young age.

Fuentes's initial introduction to schooling in the United States seemed positive. To her family's amazement, Fuentes learned English remarkably quick. By the end of second grade, Fuentes was considered English proficient, and she no longer participated in ESL classes.

It was several schools and several years later before Fuentes had another bilingual teacher like Miss Colón. After second grade, the Fuentes family moved and she attended a different school each year, sometimes two different schools within the same school year. As a result of constantly moving, she was extremely vocal and advocated for herself and her education. Fuentes understood the differences between schools, teachers, districts, and school dynamics. The positive experiences in first and second grade faded. In third grade, she specifically remembered an incident in class. She could not recall the teacher's name, but disclosed how she felt humiliated after the event. Fuentes shared:

> I remember my teacher reading the roster. He said, "Nancy," and I raised my hand, and he looked at me and he says, "You don't look like a Nancy, you look like a María." The class sort of laughed. That was heartbreaking to me, I was very embarrassed, and I don't remember why I was embarrassed, but I think it was because I never had anybody say that to me. I spoke up and told him, "Well my name is not María, it's Nancy."

This experience made Fuentes cautious as a teacher. She stated, "You know, words can hurt you. Teachers can build you up, but they can certainly knock you down too."

This was an example of one incident when Fuentes faced racialized school encounters. The teacher's comment seemed harmless; however, it was a subtle disregard for Fuentes's name, which was a racial microaggression. Microaggressions include the mispronunciation of or change to someone's name. Fuentes explained how at a young age she learned to be careful when she addressed individuals so they would not experience the ridicule that she experienced. During this interaction, Fuentes found herself on the defensive. But she refused to remain silent. She loved school and did not understand until she was older why the teacher disregarded her name and embarrassed her. For Fuentes, it was unfathomable that someone like him could be a teacher, "especially if you hold negative assumptions and views towards the very people you are supposed to guide and instruct."

These interactions, negative and positive, had a profound effect on Fuentes and her life choices. The elementary school teacher did not create a respectful and healthy school environment and Fuentes often wondered why he chose the teaching profession. Fuentes believed her teachers did not expect her to succeed or that she was academically capable of doing well, however, the discrimination did not affect her academic motivation or lower her self-esteem. Fuentes revealed how difficult it was to feel connected to her school, classmates, or teachers since she was never in one place for a long period of time and often felt alone. Nevertheless, she adapted to her new environments and schools and figured out how to successfully advocate for her own education, and credited Miss Colón with teaching her to advocate for herself.

As an immigrant she saw the racial disparity between the students and teachers. Like many children of immigrant parents, Fuentes and her siblings were burdened with

the responsibility of translating. As a child translator, she learned a great deal about life and the many responsibilities her mother had as a single parent. She always believed she was a teacher from a young age as she translated and as she taught her family English. More importantly, she learned valuable lessons while she translated. She observed the judgement placed on her and her family as she helped her mother. The judgment of people she did not know, and her perceived judgement from her teachers did not prevent her from learning, and she thrived despite the racial microaggressions she encountered.

Racialized Memory #2: Middle School

As previously communicated, the Fuentes family frequently moved, which meant Fuentes attended many schools. Despite the teachers, who she recognized had negative opinions and low expectations of her, combined with the subtle and overt racial microaggressions, did not lead Fuentes to self-doubt. In fact, the opposite occurred. These critical incidents strengthened her desire to flourish in school and one day become a teacher, a better teacher than the teachers she encountered. She knew she would be different, different from the teachers she had, who gave her dismissive looks, and who spoke to her in derogatory tones.

Fuentes attended several middle schools, yet she undeniably remembered the second middle school she attended. She indicated it was an excellent school, stating, “I believe I was only there for part of the year but I have to say it was the best because I remember receiving a brand new textbook in science class and I loved science. I never received a new book before in any school.” The school was not as diverse as her previous middle school but Fuentes was used to a lack of diversity in the schools she attended. Her classmates treated her differently, were unfriendly, or stared at her because of the way

she dressed. Fuentes was comfortable with who she was and confident in her ability to thrive. Her aspirations of becoming a teacher heightened because of the way certain teachers treated her. Fuentes expressed:

> After I was given my brand new science book, I told the teacher that I was going to treat it and use it with care because I loved science, and I was going to be a doctor. You would think I said I was going to cure cancer, because the look he gave me was very condescending. Here is another teacher who didn't believe in me or my academic ability to succeed. He actually told me that I should pick a career that someone like me could do.

Her teacher's reaction to her announcement that she was going to be a doctor made Fuentes realize the low expectations he had of her and this empowered her. Fuentes conveyed, "I never really thought about this until now but the teacher was actually prejudiced. He didn't think I could graduate and have a career." She believed the teacher was insensitive and demeaning to her gender and racial identity, and perceived from his comments that Latinas were not supposed to be doctors or have a job requiring a college education. She declared:

> Throughout my educational experiences none of my teachers could connect with me. I could not say, wow, I want to be just like her or him when I'm a teacher. In fact, it was the opposite. I wasn't going to be like them. I was just always an advocate for myself. I knew what I wanted. I knew I had to succeed. I don't know how I did it, I just did, I had to.

Racialized Memory #3: High School and College

Fuentes took her education seriously. She advocated for herself, learned how to obtain the information she needed to navigate the system, and knew her rights and responsibilities as a student. Moving was familiar, and according to Fuentes, a normal event. Halfway into her junior year, Fuentes's mother announced they were moving again. This move upset her more than all the others combined. "I was devastated. It was my junior year, I was thinking about colleges and my future, and now I had to start all over again, in another school, in another state." This move was traumatic for Fuentes. Hall High School in Rhode Island was hard, not academically, but hard because the school had low expectations of their students, and made little effort to improve their academic outcomes. As usual, she packed up and moved and made sure she had all her educational documents for the next school.

As a native Spanish speaker, Fuentes knew she would love her Spanish class, excel in the class, and assist her classmates. As she reflected, she discussed how her White Spanish teacher reacted to her overzealousness:

> I wasn't that great of an English student, but I knew my Spanish. I knew there were some things the teacher was saying incorrectly, so I would raise my hand and correct her. I would suggest activities to do as a class and she would knock down any ideas I had. She declared in front of the whole class that just because I knew Spanish and spoke Spanish didn't mean that my form of Spanish was correct, and I needed to stop talking and start learning. She embarrassed me so I would stay quiet. Now that I think about it, she was very derogatory towards the Spanish speaking students.

Fuentes knew one day she would be a teacher, “I thought about all these teachers who didn’t want to help their students. They made me want to be a teacher, a better teacher than they were.”

Fuentes refused to allow her teachers, the school, or the district dictate her success. Junior year was half over. So, she decided to understand the culture of the new school, did her best in her classes, and focused on her upcoming Senior year. Fuentes looked forward to researching and applying to colleges.

During her Senior year, Fuentes realized that most of the students in Hall High School and surprisingly in her honors class could not read. Disappointed and disheartened, she located her counselor’s office to discuss her class placement options. The counselor was often unavailable and when she finally had the opportunity to meet with him and discuss college, he was unreceptive. Fuentes disclosed:

> He seemed surprised that I wanted to go to college. The look he gave me was the look I was used to getting from teachers. That look that I was kidding myself if I thought I could go to college. I guess he thought since I was an immigrant and a native Spanish speaker, I didn’t have ambitions. I kindly informed him that as a counselor he was supposed to help me.

She excessively insisted that the counselor help her prepare and find resources for college. Fuentes remarked, “I was pleasantly surprised that the counselor found a program, The Preparation Program, to help me with college. It was perfect. I was persistent and bothered him daily since I didn’t know where to even begin.” As a first-generation college student, Fuentes was unfamiliar with the college process. Her participation in The Preparation Program provided access to college without the financial

burden. Fuentes's admission to this program provided financial and academic support. She had what she needed to successfully transition to the next phase in her educational journey, college. As the first in her family to go to college, she wanted to make them proud.

College and campus life were unique experiences for Fuentes. She lived on campus and it was the first time she remained at the same address for several consecutive years. Fuentes realized she needed assistance and sought guidance from her professors. She thought the professors would be different than the teachers from elementary, middle, and high school. She made it to college and believed this major accomplishment in her life proved she was intelligent and academically successful. She was wrong and continued to experience discrimination. Initially, Fuentes was a biology major. While in The Preparation Program her senior year in high school, she took pre-biology courses and early college courses. When college started, she was in advanced science classes, and these classes required her to spend a great deal of time in the lab.

> I was in the science lab all the time and recall a professor from the lab. I believe he ran the lab. Anyway, I remember he had a superior attitude and was kind of condescending. He always had a comment when he saw me, and I would just brush it off. I remember him saying things like, "Oh, little miss smarty pants, or not so smarty pants is here again, or I guess you need a lot of help because you didn't do good in school." I never really thought about correcting him the way I did the other teachers. For some reason I just remained quiet.

Once again, Fuentes encountered ridicule and stereotyping. The difference this time was she remained silent.

During her sophomore year, Fuentes's schedule required her to take an elective course. By chance, Fuentes's suitemate talked her into taking an education class. Fuentes dreamed of being a teacher and with the consent of her mother she took her first education class. The head of the department was a Latina named Señora Olga. Fuentes expressed, "I was thrilled to have a Latina professor, she made me realize my bilingualism was a gift and I needed to share it." Señora Olga guided her to bilingual education which impacted her educational trajectory. Fuentes often wondered why she did not have Latina teachers in school, and more important, why her teachers where not like Señora Olga—inspirational.

Racialized Memory #4: As a Teacher

Fuentes vowed she would never treat her students the way her teachers treated her. She divulged, "Kids, no matter where you teach, kids are kids. And all kids have different needs, but at the end of the day they're kids." Fuentes relocated to North Carolina with her husband. The week she arrived she interviewed and accepted a position in a dual language immersion school teaching Spanish. Fuentes taught all grade levels but described being a high school Spanish teacher as the best and most rewarding job she had, "Preparing students for success and college is something I look forward to year after year."

As Fuentes reflected on her lived and educational experiences, she recognized the critical times throughout her schooling when she encountered racial microaggressions. She reasoned that once she had a career as a teacher, racial microaggressions would be in the past. However, she discussed a time when she had to have a crucial conversation with a co-worker regarding the co-worker's treatment of minority students. Fuentes indicated:

> Watching how she interacts with the Latino and African American population; she degrades them and that is difficult. She'll say things like, my room smells, because they don't wear deodorant, they have a certain odor, or let me lock up my purse before these kids get in here. Stuff like that. It's been really, really hard for me.

Fuentes contemplated her next move regarding the situation. She understood the feeling of discrimination. She refused to let the students in her school feel the way she felt. She navigated the school system successfully and wanted the same for her students. Fuentes made her co-worker aware of her actions and words. Fuentes shared, "I talked to my co-worker and her response was that I was too sensitive and she was just playing." Her co-worker's response transported her to her own schooling experiences. She recalled after an incident when she was in school and was told not to take it personally and that she was overly sensitive. Fuentes carefully considered her co-worker's response and wondered if she was being too sensitive, and decided to observe her co-worker with students. After Fuentes witnessed the racial microaggressions as her co-worker made subtle, rude remarks to students such as, "You're different from your classmates. Why are you so loud? You're so articulate, how did you get so smart?" and "You don't speak Spanish like a Dominican." In addition to the remarks, her co-worker had negative perceptions of the students, was unpleasant and unsupportive. Once again she had a conversation with her co-worker, which was useless, so Fuentes decided to talk with her administrators and voiced her concerns, "I'm not okay with this. I don't like the way she treats kids. She's negative and I don't know how she continues to work here." As a student Fuentes

advocated for herself and was academically successful. So, she decided to advocate for her students. Fuentes communicated:

> I think my co-worker was spoken to by admin. I've noticed that this year she has been trying to be more supportive and encouraging to the students and is not as demeaning. I don't think it's 100%, but it's a little different. I always say when you come into education, you either come to encourage, for authority, or to have power. It's disappointing that she's here for the power.

After the incident, Fuentes continued to remain observant and vocal. She expressed, "As teachers you should address issues related to your students, support them, and teach them how to advocate for themselves." Fuentes's teachers perceived her as incompetent, but her negative schooling experiences did not have negative effects on her self-esteem or prevent her from attaining the career she dreamed about, being a teacher.

Conclusion and Discussion

Racial microaggressions affect Students of Color and Teachers of Color play a significant role in this type of racism. LatCrit enables researchers to articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), such as microaggressions. Although she felt overlooked, invisible, disconnected, and marginalized, she persisted. Latinas face barriers to becoming teachers, however, Fuentes had high aspirations and remained steadfast on her educational trajectory. Her desire to become a teacher was stronger than the microaggressions she experienced. What was remarkable was Nancy Fuentes's strong sense of self-worth despite everything. She was resilient, wanted more for herself and her family. Her spirit was strong. Within the school context, Love (2016)

described spirit murdering, a form of oppression, as “the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism” (p. 2). Unfortunately, due to racial microaggressions many Latina/o students do not experience positive educational junctures during their schooling years and are academically overlooked and stifled. Fuentes always knew she would be a teacher and realized her own educational experiences impacted her own career as a teacher. Classrooms need teachers who can relate to Latina/o students, serve as role models, and value their experiences and contributions.

I explored a methodology that addresses the individual stories of the women in the study and provide a platform to amplify each Latina’s voice. The voices of these women tell their stories about the oppression and marginalization experiences in their educational and professional lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

LEARNING FROM THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINA TEACHERS

This dissertation, in a contemporary LatCrit tradition, centered storying, testimonio, as a means for understanding the lived racialized and gendered experiences of a trio of Latinas' journey to K-12 teaching, the critical incidents shaped their choices, and the meaning they assigned to their careers. As I explained, Yosso (2005) defined Critical Race Theory in education as a theoretical and analytical framework to challenge the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses. Because CRT does not explicitly address the unique needs of the Latina/o community, LatCrit afforded me a theoretical lens for approaching an understanding of the layered, complex, and sustained oppression that the women in this study experienced—and the ways in which race, language, culture, oppression, and knowledge impacted their educational experiences and their journeys into teaching.

Rodela et al. (2019) and others (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Pérez Huber, 2008; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) have illuminated how LatCrit is rooted in Critical Race theory, but its specificity to Latinas/os. As Salas (2019) described, "LatCrit challenges paradigms that situate the Latinx community and other outgroups within a deficit view based on race, language, immigration status, and economic situation" (p. 59). Scholars have used LatCrit theory in educational research to examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly affect the Latino community. For example, to better understand culturally and linguistically diverse Latina teachers, Morales (2018) presented the narratives and experiences of Latina teachers so others could learn how Latina teachers provide affirming educational experiences for diverse students. Likewise,

Osorio (2018) amplified “border stories,” or the personal narratives of second-grade students to argue that Latina/o children must be given opportunities in their classrooms to share their personal experiences and become part of the curriculum. Focusing on bilingual preservice teachers, Salinas et al. (2016) leveraged LatCrit to explore Latinx preservice teachers’ resistance to White colonial ideologies that continue to dominate the spectrum of U.S. education.

In an effort to explore and understand the lived and educational experiences of the women in this study, and leveraging Seidman’s (2019) in-depth interview sequence as an access point for storying, I sought answers to these guiding questions:

1. What were the critical, personal encounters and lived experiences that brought them to teaching?
2. What meaning did they assign to that journey?

In this study, three women bravely shared their stories. Combined, their testimonios revealed barriers, challenges, and successes as the participants described their personal and professional lived experiences. I was moved by Castillo, Rivera, and Fuentes’s stories and what their stories can mean for future Latina teachers.

In Chapter Four, I began the presentation of my findings by introducing the first of three participants, Janet Castillo. Much of Castillo’s story revolved around her relationship with her mother. That is, Castillo’s youth and young adulthood was marked by her negotiation of her mother’s expectations—to do well in school, to make her proud, and to choose a lucrative career. Additionally, Castillo faced her teachers’ (lack of) expectations and classroom interactions that framed her as less than. Although Castillo dreamed of becoming a teacher, her mother had other dreams for her daughter—that she

would be well-off and, therefore, successful. Analysis revealed that the tension between Castillo's desires and her mother's desires for her were a source of lasting anxiety. Castillo wanted to make her mother proud, and her mother framed a career in teaching as a failure, a low-status career and one that would not provide financial security. Thus, the oppression that Castillo navigated was not only racialized and gendered in educational and professional contexts—it was intimate and familial.

In Chapter Five, I listened closely to my second participant, Maya Rivera. Rivera's story began with her experiences of the obstacles she encountered throughout her schooling trajectory, such as language barriers, low expectations, and microaggressions. She was lifted-up by a handful of individuals who played critical roles in her life as she navigated through special education placement, high school, college, and her professional career. Analysis revealed that Rivera had faith and gratitude for the God-sent individuals who helped her realize her career objective and who compelled her to be academically successful. She constructed her academic and professional success around these God-sent individuals who motivated her, recommended her for a scholarship program, and guided her academic and professional environment. However, as I stated, teacher education programs cannot hope, have faith, or pray that Latinas such as Rivera enter and remain in the profession. The route into the teaching profession for Latina/o students should begin early in their educational trajectory.

In the final data chapter, Chapter Six, I introduced Nancy Fuentes. Fuentes's testimonio spoke to the complexities of her lived and educational experiences as she recalled feeling unwelcomed and judged because of her culture, language, gender, and immigration status. The racialized aggressions she experienced, however, made her more

determined to achieve academically. She shared her frustrations as she challenged the microaggressions, and negative, stereotypical behaviors from her classmates and teachers as she stood up for herself, voiced her opinions, and focused on her dream of being a teacher. These challenges shaped Fuentes's educational life, gave her life meaning, and guided her purpose. Fuentes did not submit to the oppression and racist attitudes towards her, in fact, these incidents propelled her as she worked and studied hard to prove her worth. The testimonios revealed their purpose, motivation, and the ways in which they responded to the challenges, barriers, and educational inequities along the way to their careers as teachers.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

According to the Drive Task Force (2021) a special commission convened by North Carolina's Governor Cooper to understand the state's educator workforce, Latina/o students constitute 17.9% of the student population, and Latina/s educators comprise 2.7%. With the changing demographics of K-12 enrollment, we must listen closely to the testimonios of Latina teachers to intimately understand why they choose (not) to teach. Storying, as I explained, is the amplification of "the telling and listening of stories that address questions relevant to education" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 397S). As Pérez Huber (2010) explained:

> Testimonio and LatCrit both validate and center the experiential knowledge of People of Color, recognize the power of collective memory and knowledge, and are guided by the larger goals of transformation and empowerment for Communities of Color (p. 83).

The Latinas in this study directly and indirectly experienced racial microaggressions, discrimination, and stereotyping by teachers, counselors, classmates, and colleagues which created an atmosphere of marginalization as they discussed their perceptions, reactions, and thought processes. The testimonios of Castillo, Rivera, and Fuentes can potentially inform practice and future research. I conclude with a series of thoughts grounded in my findings and at the intersections of praxis and research.

Finding #1: Oppression Inside the Schoolhouse and Inside the Home

Across LatCrit scholarship, an emphasis has been placed on structures and relationships of oppression (Colón-Muniz & Lavadenz, 2018; Cooper Stein et al, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Rolon-Dow & Davison, 2021). All three women experienced oppression in a range of forms and relationships—and in many ways these experiences resonated with the aforementioned LatCrit scholarship. Castillo, Rivera, and Fuentes all described the pain they absorbed in schools where they were the objects of insults and humiliation from teachers and classmates. Castillo articulated how the non-verbal criticisms and facial expressions coupled with offensive comments made it nerve racking at times to be in class. She recalled, notably, how, a professor in her predominately White college made the comment, “Oh, you’re from the Bronx and you’re not dead or on drugs” and how the class chuckled. She was amazed that an educated man, a professor, could make such a comment to a student. Like the other women of the study, Castillo felt as if she were constantly having to prove herself: “I had to prove my worth, I had to prove that I was smart, not smart for a Latina, just plain smart.”

Fuentes shared a time when she missed a portion of the school day as she was out with her mother—serving as an interpreter. When they finally arrived at the school, the

secretary scolded her mother—implying that she needed to find an adult to interpret or needed to learn English. Decades later, the words still stung in Fuentes's memory. She explained, "Of course, I didn't tell my mother what the secretary said. As a child, I knew my mother needed my help and I didn't want my mother to be sad."

Rivera recounted how speaking Spanish was offensive to some and considered a lower-class language. She remembered an incident in high school when she was speaking Spanish to a classmate. When she re-entered the classroom, her teacher reprimanded her saying— "You know you will never amount to anything if you keep speaking Spanish. People will think you're uneducated and don't know how to speak English."

While some microaggressions were subtle, many times they were overt, hurtful, and commonplace. Rivera recalled an incident in college where the students were to write down on paper posted around the room their feelings about certain groups. The groups were Latinos, Native Americans, African-Americans, and Asians, yet excluded Whites. Most of the students in the class were White. The feelings they wrote down were cruel and disrespectful. After the lesson, Rivera approached the professor and asked her why White had not been a category. Why had she not been allowed to post her thoughts about White culture? The professor gave her the excuse that since there were so few of non-White students in the class that the professor didn't want the White students' feelings to be potentially hurt and figure out who wrote the comments. This incident always stayed with Rivera.

The educational and professional climate that the women experienced was often hostile, prejudiced, and discriminatory. Rivera explained when she first started working and new to the school and was the only Latina:

> I felt like they (other teachers, administration, the school community) held me at an arm's length. They really didn't trust me or my capabilities. They were not sure if I knew my stuff and made sly remarks to see my reaction. I felt and feel like I'm being tested and always having to show what I know, even though I've been teaching for many years. It's just exhausting, but I put up with it and speak up about it because I know I am making an impact and a difference.

In addition to these more "traditional forms of oppression," analysis of participant interviews revealed that messaging from parental figures—especially mothers—and the respect the participants accorded to their mothers was a sustained obstacle for considering teaching as a career.

Throughout the interview sequence, the women shared the sacrifices their families made for them so they could complete high school and attain a college education. Getting a good education was important for them and especially important to their families. They attributed their pro-education mindset to their parents. College was not an option for the women—it was the only option. To these Latinas and their families, being well-educated showed everyone that a Latina could succeed.

At the same time, and in somewhat of a contrast to contemporary LatCrit studies, the women spoke of intimate and familial forms of oppression. Even as LatCrit has framed oppression as central to experiences of Latinas, little has been said of the complexity of mother-daughter relationships in immigrant communities and how daughters' debt to parental care also limits their choices.

Castillo loved her mother more than anyone or anything. Her mother's sacrifices and unselfishness weighed heavily on her heart; and, she could not go against her

mother's wishes regardless of her own desires to be a teacher. She shared how exhausted her mother was when she arrived home from work as a teacher assistant. Castillo's mother would often express at the end of a long day of work how teachers were disrespected, how administrators had no control over the school, and how rowdy the students were. Carmen Castillo told her daughter, "Teaching is not the right choice for anyone, let alone a woman with children and bills." Castillo's mother regarded teaching as a low-status, low-paying job. She was an assistant because as Castillo expressed, "it was the only job a divorced Latina mother of two could secure, and the hours were appropriate, but the pay was not, which was why she had to have a part time job too." Castillo's mother did not want her children to be unsuccessful by being uneducated. She made countless sacrifices, often reminding her daughters of the sacrifices. This instilled a sense of guilt in Castillo. She suppressed her desires for a long time until she finally had the courage to discuss with her mother a career move. A career move that she said was a lifetime in the making.

Throughout her educational trajectory, Fuentes's family knew she would become a doctor. She learned English quickly, taught her family English, and did well in school. Her family always told her she was intelligent and she would aspire to great things as a doctor. Fuentes enjoyed teaching her family, she knew teaching was her calling. She revealed that although she wanted a career as a teacher and would be the first person in her whole entire family to go to college, she studied Biology. Her family frequently told her that she was too smart for teaching and they were excited that one day they would have a doctor in the family. Fuentes shared, "So, I was going to be a doctor because that is what my family expected, and I wanted my family to be proud of me."

The women attributed their success to having a good foundation and hard-working role models at home. As a Latina, familismo and respeto (familism and respect) are cultural values that refer to the importance of strong family loyalty, responsibilities, and closeness. Castillo's mother was all she had and Castillo would never disappoint her. According to Ortiz (2020), "at a deeper level, Latinos/as have internalized attitudes and strong beliefs regarding their nuclear families and these are perpetuated through feelings of unconditional loyalty, unquestionable solidarity, and faithful reciprocity" (p. 422). Castillo's individual wishes to have a career in teaching was secondary to her mother's wishes.

Notably, how Latina's parents' construction of "success" mediate Latinas' choice (not) to teach has been under-explored. In the case of Janet Castillo, for example, her reoccurring struggle was her fear of disappointing her mother. Castillo's mother was an educator. Yet, her mother framed a teaching career as a failure and communicated that notion repeatedly to her daughter—that she could be anything but a teacher. This message was a very familial, intimate form of oppression that Castillo navigated for many years. Likewise, Fuentes' family thought their daughter was far too intelligent to just be a teacher—a mind wasted. At the level of research, this analysis suggests that nuanced work is needed to understand how family structures and practices undermine Latina self-realization. Across LatCrit scholarship, an emphasis has been placed on structures and relationships of oppression. At the level of practice, these findings suggest that widening the Latina teacher pipeline also requires a re-branding of teaching and teachers. At the level of Latino urban community, de-professionalization of teaching has undermined teacher recruitment. Parental centers of influence are actively discouraging

their daughters to pursue teaching careers. Efforts to recruit Latina teachers must look to function at the family level.

Finding #2: Moving Beyond Narratives of Faith and Struggle

From the testimonios of the Latinas in this study, we saw how the three women's educational experiences were fraught with stereotypical and racial encounters. The participants spoke about the underrepresentation of Latina teachers when they were in school and years later when they became teachers. They described the inequities throughout their education and the critical incidents in their K-12 schooling and beyond. Encouraging and supporting Latina/o students from the start of their educational trajectory can positively impact their learning. School systems must recognize the diversity of Latina/o students' cultural and ethnic differences, race, immigration status, and experiences, and incorporate Latina/o culture into the curriculum. Incorporating Latina/o culture into the classroom increases confidence and pride and allows teachers and other students to understand and acknowledge a variety of cultures. Addressing sociocultural factors, racism, and classism, and how these factors impact Latinas/os in school should also be considered by school districts.

The Latina/o school-aged population has increased faster than other groups. As a result of this increase, schools would be negligent if they did not implement solutions to increase the educational experiences of Latina/o students. A clear understanding of this population may generate real solutions to improving their educational experiences. The trio of selected Latinas in this study learned how to adjust and cope in their new learning environments while simultaneously learning. Gándara and Contreras (2009) asserted, "many studies have shown that teachers hold lower expectations for Students of Color

than for white students and that these lowered expectations can result in diminished achievement" (p. 83). Cherng and Halpin (2016) theorized that minority students perceive minority teachers more favorably than White teachers and this perception makes a difference in their motivation to succeed. According to the participants, there were certain individual and teachers who established rapport, encouraged, and supported them inside and outside of school. These teachers were Latina or Black. How can we expect Latina/o students to consider a career in teaching if they rarely see or have Latina/o teachers? Because of their own negative and positive experiences, each participant described her desire to become a classroom teacher, be a role model, and enact positive change within schools.

It is impossible to address the Latino teacher pipeline if we do not address the educational experiences of Latina/o students. Lack of academic achievement keeps Latinas off the teacher pipeline. Information from current Latina teachers, such as the Latinas in this study, who successfully navigated the teacher pipeline can assist other Latinas with achieving their goal of becoming a teacher. Identifying and removing the negative barriers that impact Latinas can help inform leaders in the educational arena on how to provide supportive and welcoming environments that do not limit opportunities for Latinas to become teachers. The participants intrinsically knew they wanted to become teachers. However, Castillo and Rivera did not enter the profession immediately and Rivera expressed she wished she had someone who would have encouraged her and deliberately guided her to the profession while she was an undergraduate. Fuentes had a Latina college professor who strategically guided her through her teacher education program.

Despite the barriers and challenges they faced, these Latinas possessed a strong desire to achieve, were academically successful, and became teachers. Maya Rivera's Christianity proved to be a default for her struggles and her achievement. If she became a teacher it was not on her merits alone. It was very much thanks to the individuals God sent her way. Her Christianity was her armor and protected her from seeing too closely the racialized ideologies that had consistently marked her trajectory. Rivera believed deep in her heart that all things happened for a reason. God was always there. I argued that the sort of deep faith that Rivera articulated is something that Colleges of Education need to depend less on. That is to say, Latina teacher recruitment and retention are not divine intervention. Rather, diversifying the profession requires purposeful and deliberate action.

Nancy Fuentes's storying inventoried a range of racialized experiences that mirrored my own. That said, Fuentes's narrative spoke more of individual agency and less of the structures of racism that might have very well rendered her disposable. Many people would have just given up. How much more could all these Latinas have accomplished in an affirming place? Despite the growing Latina/o population, the majority of future teachers enrolled in teacher education programs are predominately White teacher candidates (Kohli, 2018). Latinas/os students face several obstacles along the educational pipeline that hinder their progress and success, and encounter challenges on the teaching pipeline. A teacher candidate must achieve a certain level of education, and prospective teachers must first complete high school, continue to college, and graduate. Unfortunately, Latinas/os graduation completion rates remain low in both high school and college. Although at the collegiate level, more Latinas/os enroll in college,

they lag other groups in earning a college degree. These challenges contribute to the underrepresentation of Latina/o teachers. To effectively increase the number of Latina teachers, providing more support and deliberate nurturing must occur before, during, and after Latinas enter high school, and continue as they navigate secondary education and the teacher pipeline.

A strategy for improving Latinas/os students' educational outcomes is to increase the number of Latina/o teachers to teach, mentor, and support them. During teacher preparation programs and when they navigate the teaching profession, mentors play an important role in guiding prospective and new teachers as they navigate the system. Research suggests mentoring relationships provide Latina/o students with support to overcome barriers (Clark et al., 2013; Medina & Posadas, 2012) and Latina/o students benefit academically from mentorship that validate their culture (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Latinas often feel overwhelmed and disconnected in school and mentors can guide, encourage, and cultivate their interests in teaching. Having a mentor who understands the Latina journey is pivotal.

During the interview sequence, the participants discussed a mentor. These mentoring relationships deliberately validated and acknowledged their culture, language, and background. Having a mentor had a positive effect and contributed significantly to their journey into teaching. Peer mentoring Latinas provides academic and emotional support (Moschetti et al., 2017) and sharing of perspectives. Providing mentoring relationships can increase high school graduation rates and aspirations of college, potentially increasing the number of Latinas on the teacher pipeline.

First-generation college students, may lack role models, therefore schools and universities should provide mentorship programs to help them navigate the educational pipeline. According to Salas et al. (2014) “college mentoring programs focused on Latina/o students that provide a sense of validation and sense of belonging can positively affect Latina/o student’s academic achievement, their self-worth, their identity and cultural awareness, and their leadership and goal development” (p. 241). Deliberate, structured mentoring of Latinas can enhance a desire to enter the teaching profession.

I listened to Castillo, Rivera, and Fuentes’ stories. The narratives told of familial oppression, miracles, and anger. Castillo, as I explained, spend much of her young adult life afraid to ask her mother “permission” to disappoint her by becoming a teacher. Rivera’s narrative was grounded in her faith. God meant her to become a teacher and so eventually that came to be. Fuentes was so angry that her teachers and classmates thought she was dumb, that she became a teacher to prove them all wrong. While I honor these narratives, I find them to be frustrating at a deeply personal level. Latina women and women in general should be able to write very different stories. It took years and years for the three women to value their own opinions and desires and dreams. What I’m suggesting here is that we need to amplify more stories of Latinas who follow their dreams of becoming teachers and send them to schools, and churches, and families so that other types of narratives might be imagined. Becoming a teacher shouldn’t be so hard.

Finding #3: The Prism of Latina-ness

Castillo, Rivera, and Fuentes were all Latinas. However, that category is intricate and intimate. Castillo and Rivera were born in the mainland United States and Fuentes in

Costa Rica. However, Castillo and Rivera identified Puerto Rico as their homeland and the source of their ethnicity, culture, and values. They were Puerto Ricans first, Latinas second, and in third position, Americans. Fuentes, a naturalized U.S. citizen, explained that she too would always be Costa Rican even if she had become American. All three women were intensely aware of their roots and especially connected to where their parents came from. But, simultaneously, they were all American women.

As Latinas, we are racialized and our language and culture are suspect. Castillo remembered being ridiculed as a child for her broken Spanish. Castillo explained that she was, nevertheless, proud of her Latina culture, "And what it meant to be a Latina." Rivera and Fuentes discussed their language and how they participated in ESL classes to learn English, their experience as language learners was a factor in their decision to pursue teaching. Fuentes was fluent in English by second grade. She learned English quickly, but her mother made sure she held onto her home language, the Spanish language. Fuentes recalled how difficult it was initially to switch between English and Spanish and shared, "I remember walking in the house and my mother saying in Spanish that she didn't understand what I was saying in English. She made me communicate with her only in Spanish." Fuentes described, her neighborhood as a place where no one used Spanish and indicated that it was not a language associated with success. In Rivera's family, her language and culture were equally important. Her mother demanded on Spanish in the home and her father insisted that she learn and speak English. Mr. Rivera made sure she read every night in English and stated it had to be perfect. As she reflected, she remembered the expectations of her parents and realized it was because her parents wanted her to maintain and more importantly understand her culture. Rivera stated that

there was so much history that many Latinas do not know about their culture and her mother made sure she educated her and her siblings. Rivera expressed, “Our history and culture tends to be taken away from us. We need to be cognitively aware of our history and share our culture and traditions.” Language and culture are intertwined and were part of their everyday lives.

Rivera frequently moved schools also and was rarely in one school for more than a year at a time. However, she remained in the same high school for a couple of years. She was asked by another student, ‘what are you?’ Rivera, proud of her culture stated, “Soy Boricua.” [I am Puerto Rican].

Moreover, we are women—daughters and sisters and wives and mothers. Central to Castillo’s experience was the mother-daughter dynamic that I described in Chapter 4. Castillo’s parents divorced when Castillo was very young. Castillo had an older sister too. For Castillo, her mother was both mother and father. Castillo eventually married a Puerto Rican from New York City and had two children. So, she was a mother and a wife too—but always a daughter. Rivera grew up in a two-parent household in New York State. Rivera had two brothers and a sister. She married a Puerto Rican from New York State and had two children—one born in NY and one in NC. After bringing the family to New York from Costa Rica, Fuentes’ father left his wife and four children, and returned to Costa Rica. Fuentes was the third child and her mother and brother struggled to provide for the family. Fuentes eventually married an African-American and they had three daughters together. The three women carried all these gendered roles into their careers.

Final Thoughts

I began this dissertation study thinking about my personal journey into K-12 teaching and my own lived experiences as one of a few Latina teachers in my district. The disparity between the numbers of K-12 Latina/o teachers and K-12 Latina/o students is larger than any other population category (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). As a profession, we must do better at recruiting Black and Brown professionals to engage new generations of schoolchildren. This dissertation aimed to address from a LatCrit lens of "storying" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), how we might do so. Nationally, we know that the educational attainment of Latina/o students remains stubbornly low with high dropout rates. This is one potential explanation for why Latina teachers are relatively hard to find (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Gándara, 2017). There are critical junctures such as finishing high school, getting into and graduating from college, and persisting through a teacher education program that Latinas struggle to overcome (Ocasio, 2014; Pérez Huber et al., 2015).

This study focused on a trio of Latina teachers. Moving forward, future efforts might also focus on the same women—teaching in their classrooms and understanding how their lived experiences interact with their pedagogical practices. Future research might also focus on the narratives of Latino (male) teachers. Teaching is overwhelming seen as "women's work," and this is especially true within the Latina/o community. We need to also explore the gendered narratives of Latinos/as and how the intersection of femininity/masculinity and ethnicity mediate their choices to (not) teach. Likewise, this study was limited to the representation of the racialized experiences of three Latina teachers in metro Charlotte. There are additional possibilities to explore the lived and educational experiences of Latina/o teachers in the New South, including the replication

of this study in other districts or areas, with a larger sample size of Latina teachers, or with a combination of Latina and Latino teachers. Notably, none of the teachers in the study self-identified as Southerners, therefore, more work might be done to understand how regional identity interacts with Latina teachers' trajectories.

Stories matter. As North Carolina's Latina/o population grows, so too does the need for more Latina teachers and for courageous telling and deep listening. There is much to learn from Latina teachers' lived experiences and how their stories can support other Latinas/os interested in teaching career. Documenting the narratives of Latina teachers may bring an awareness to teacher education programs. Latina/o teachers make a difference in the lives of their students as they connect and inspire students (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017). The numbers of Latina teachers have increased over the past few decades; yet, the gap between student and teacher demographics remains significant. To substantially improve the number of between Latina/o students and teachers, we must continue exploring how and why Latina teachers (do not) enter the profession. We must listen. The women in this study shared their extremely personal lived experiences. As a teacher and Latina, I embraced the complexity and richness of their stories, and their determination to succeed despite the barriers they encountered on their educational journeys. For all these reasons, in the ensemble of these chapters I have documented and theorized a trio of Latinas' journeys to K-12 teaching and the critical incidents that shaped their choices and the meaning they assigned to their careers. Across their testimonios, the women talked about their dreams of teaching. They had dreams; those dreams came true.

This study provides rich insights into three Latina teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding their journey into teaching and provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and issues facing Latinas throughout their educational trajectory. The research process has led me "to appreciate the complexities of the participants' experience, the struggles they face, the way they experience life, and the meaning they make of it (Seidman, 2019, p. 149). Throughout the lengthy process it took to complete the analysis and writing process, I often wondered how I would validate what the woman shared with me. I am grateful to the teachers who made time in their hectic lives to participate in this dissertation research journey with me. It is with pleasure that I share this work and their lived experiences and how their experiences shaped their careers as teachers that can inform efforts to improve the educational outcomes and schooling experiences for Latinas/os.

My final hope is that those who dream of becoming teachers will find inspiration in the stories of these three brave women and the category of "Latina teacher" that they represent.

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