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How We Got Here: Testimonios of Secondary Latina Educators

Leila Little
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

How We Got Here:

Testimonios of Secondary Latina Educators

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By Leila Little

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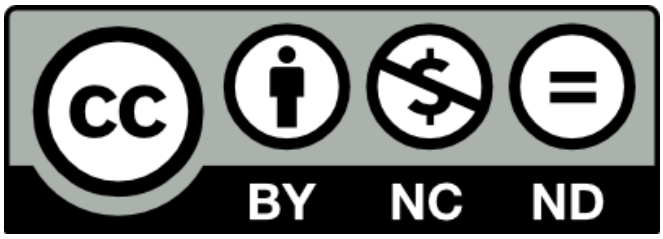

This Dissertation for the Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching and Learning Degree

By Leila Little

has been approved on behalf of the College of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Amber Jean-Marie Pabon, Committee Chair

Dr. Helen S. Hamlet, Committee Member

Dr. Amy Pfeiler-Wunder, Committee Member

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Abstract of the Dissertation

How We Got Here:

Testimonios of Secondary Latina Educators

By

Leila Little

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Directed by Dr. Amber Jean-Marie Pabon, PhD

In Pennsylvania, the disparity of Teachers of Color in relation to Students of Color is three times higher than the national disproportionality rate (Stohr, Fontana, Lapp, 2018). Fontana and Lapp (2018) suggest this makes Pennsylvania "one of the most disparate states in the country" (p. 2). Specifically, for the Latinx community, the disparity is even greater. In the context of this study, the percentage of Latinx students is more than 70%, while the percentage of Latinx educators is less than one percent. This context provided an opportunity to gain knowledge from educators who learned and worked in spaces where they were both overrepresented and underrepresented. This qualitative research study explored the experiences of five Latina educators as they traversed educational institutions and followed their career pathways into the field of education. A multilayered data analysis utilizing the lenses of Critical Race Theory, Latinx Critical Race Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth uncovered how the participants lived experiences related to family, education, motivation, support networks, language, career pathways, encounters with injustice, and work as educators. Additionally, the *testimonios* exposed counternarratives, which highlighted the participants' strengths and silenced realities. The findings suggest the need for social change, targeted professional development, social justice education, and increased efforts to attract and recruit Latinx educators in secondary schools.

K*eywords: Latina Educators, Secondary Education, Testimonios*

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Maria.

My love for learning began with you.

Acknowledgements

My educational journey is not complete without the people in my life who supported, challenged, and motivated me to become who I am today.

To my participants — thank you for bravely sharing your *testimonios.* I could not have done this without the power of your words.

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To my mother-in-law, Julie — thank you for supporting our family whenever we needed you. To my family and friends — thank you for listening to me and helping out in all the ways that you did. You made this time move quickly. Melinda, now it's your turn.

To my father, in heaven, Raul — I lost you in the middle of this journey, but I wanted to let you know… you can call me Dr. Little now.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

I was meeting with my high school guidance counselor, and I was excited to tell him all about my plans for college. I felt good. My long, dark, curly hair was perfectly gelled. I was wearing my Karl Kani baggy jeans, oversized Nautica shirt, and black Jordan's. My big, bright, white smile gleamed through the red lipstick I was wearing, as I walked to my guidance counselor's office. When I entered, I was greeted with a cold, stern expression. He asked me very harshly why I was there. I replied, "I want to talk about college!" He smirked and said, "College?!" I said, "Yes!" He then proceeded to ask me, "How many children do you have now?" Before I could respond, he said, "You can't do that." He continued with a list of reasons why college wasn't for me and how I would never be successful. As he spoke, he never looked at me. He just shuffled through the papers on his desk as he rambled on. If he had looked up, he might have seen the dramatic change in my body language. My smile quickly turned, I slumped down in my chair, and my eyes gazed into the white abyss of cluttered papers on his desk.

As I sat there waiting for him to stop talking, I couldn't fathom why he said these terrible things to me. I didn't have any children. I didn't get into trouble. I got straight A's. I was a varsity athlete. I had a job. I cared for my sisters while my dad was at work. I was smart and on track to go to college. At that moment, I questioned everything I did, who I was, and who I wanted to be. Eventually, he stopped talking. I quickly blurted out, "I don't have any children, and I want to go to college!" He finally looked up at me, saying, "Well, I guess you could try community college, but why would you want to do that?" I don't remember what he said next, but I remember how I felt. I wasn't good enough and never would be. I was so emotionally overwhelmed; I could not articulate what happened. I never wanted to relive this experience again. So, I never spoke about it, and I never told anyone what happened. NO ONE!

Introducing this research with part of my *testimonio* is intentional. I am choosing to: 1) take readers on a journey describing my experiences with injustice (Brabeck, 2003); 2) share my experiences which allows me to transform the past into a new present and enhance the future (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983); and 3) create knowledge through highlighting the significance of personal experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). *Testimonios* are based on peoples' experiences with injustice and marginalization by forces, groups, institutions, and people who believe their dominant norms supersede and displace those of the Latinx people (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983; Delgado, Burciaga, Flores, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). I am a Latina educator, beginning scholar, mentor, wife, mother, daughter, friend, colleague, and U.S. citizen who will no longer keep her *testimonio* to herself. Through this research, with the *testimonios* of other Latina educators, I bear witness to injustice, document first-hand experiences, describe transformative journeys, highlight Community Cultural Wealth, and add to the body of research surrounding Latina educators.

This research begins with a description of the Latinx population growth in the U.S. and explains how the Latinx people are marginalized despite their growth and value as a group (Gist, 2018; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012; Valencia, 2010). Overall, this study describes the need for Latina educators' experiences to be documented, explored, and added to educational literature. Understanding Latina educators' experiences and educational journeys provides insight into how and why they chose to become educators. Additionally, it will value Latinas educators' collective voices while highlighting their assets, wealth of knowledge, and contributions to education. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the underrepresentation of

Latinas in the field of education, describes how their experiences contribute to this underrepresentation, and addresses the need for more Latina educators.

Overview

According to the U.S. 2010 Census, more than half of the U.S. population growth was due to the Latinx population. By the year 2050, one-third of the U.S. population will be of Latinx descent (U.S. Census, 2010). Currently, the Latinx population in the U.S. has grown to more than sixty million (Rumbaut, 2019). The Latinx community is, therefore, one of the fastest-growing demographics in the United States (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora 2014; Gandara, 2015; Hill & Torres, 2010; Perez Huber et al. 2006; Sciarra & Whitson 2007; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Consequently, one in five women in the U.S. is Latina, and by the year 2060, Latinas will make up one-third of the female population (Gandara, 2015). Despite the expanding population and continued contribution of the Latinx community, as a group, they battle with injustice through experiences which center their cultural attributes as deficits and prevent them from achieving in various settings (Gist, 2018; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012; Valencia, 2010).

Currently, with the growing population of Latinas in the U.S., one in four female students in public schools is Latina. “Thus, the future of the nation is very much tied to the future of these women and girls” (Gandara, 2015, p.5). As leaders, activists, mentors, and Latinx community members, Latinas play an inspiring role navigating through injustice while advocating for change and social justice (Mendez-Morse, 2003; Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, & Hernandez, 2016; Murakami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse, & Byrne-Jimenez, 2015). Despite the many strengths and contributions of the Latinx population, the community encounters a multitude of barriers spanning an extensive range of issues including racism, oppression,

marginalization, bias, educational attainment, deficit perspectives, and poverty (Diaz, 2018; Gist, 2018; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012; Valencia, 2010). As contributing members of the Latinx community, Latinas' strengths and experiences are often missed, misunderstood, and marginalized (Borovicka, 2015; Diaz, 2018; Martinez, 2016). Therefore, their experiences and Community Cultural Wealth need to be intentionally added to the body of knowledge in education and must be used to mitigate the underrepresentation of Latinas in education (Gandara, 2015; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gist, 2018).

This research used the *testimonios* of Latina educators to document the social injustices they encounter and describe how their experiences relate to life choices, educational journeys, career paths, and employment in educational institutions. Like Borovicka (2015) and Diaz (2018), transformative narrative *testimonio* methodology was used to explore the participants' lived experiences navigating through life, injustice, and educational institutions. The participants in this study were a purposefully selected group of Latina Educators who work in urban Latinx Serving Secondary Institutions. Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) frameworks were used as analytical lenses to identify themes of resistance, cultural wealth, and resiliency. The participants' *testimonios* are used to construct counterstories to dominant norms, ideologies, perspectives, and practices. Overall, the *testimonios* add to the existing body of knowledge surrounding Latina educators and serves as a call for social justice.

Statement of the Problem

Based on demographic data, when Students of Color[1] enter a classroom, they are often met by White teachers who have socially constructed presumptions that Students of Color lack key characteristics required to support academic and social success (Brown, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Gist, 2018; Matias, 2012; Milner, Pabon, Woodson, & McGee, 2013; Ochoa, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Valencia, 2010). Deficit thinking empowers an educational culture that supports categorizing students by what they lack. This bias promotes social injustice and the unequal treatment of Students of Color in the educational setting (Borovicka, 2015; Brown, 2016; Diaz, 2018; Dixson, Anderson, & Donner, 2017; Ochoa, 2007; Valencia, 2010). Furthermore, this practice encourages educators to unconsciously link failure with Students of Color. Similar to Pabon & Basile (2019), I do not

> … suggest here that this description is applicable to all White people, White teachers, or White teacher candidates. This example offers one possible scenario to underscore the salience of the racial-cultural mismatch between much of the U.S. public school teaching force and the student body population.

However, many Students of Color experience educational settings where they are presumed to fail because they occupy a space that is outside of the normal (Brown, 2016; Delgado Bernal, et al., 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Valencia, 2010).

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[1] I employ the capitalization/use of the terms such as *Teachers/Persons/Students/Youth/Communities of Color* to refer to Black, Latinx, First Nations, Asian American and other persons from racial and ethnically diverse groups." (Huber, 2009; Pabon & Basile, 2019).

Although, not all educators view Students of Color from a deficit perspective, their experiences with educators who do play a role in their educational journey. These experiences are often undocumented and left out of educational research (Gist, 2018; Sleeter, 2017; Villegas et al., 2012). Additionally, Educators of Color voices, perspectives, experiences, and knowledge are historically overlooked and not recognized for their strengths or value (Gist, 2018; Sleeter, 2017; Villegas et al., 2012). Although there is a rising trend to intentionally include Teachers of Color lived experiences in education, their narratives as both students and teachers continue to be marginalized and omitted from dominant discourse (Gist, 2018).

As members of the community of Educators of Color, Latina educators' experiences are similarly overlooked, marginalized, and left out of educational scholarship (Borovicka, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012; Diaz, 2018; Hernandez-Scott, 2017). Overall, Latinas' *testimonios* of strength, Community Cultural Wealth, resistance, and resiliency, which include their encounters with oppression, racism, and bias are left untold. This research included Latina educators' voices, strengths, and encounters with injustice as they journeyed through educational institutions.

Research Questions

To truly understand the role social injustice and the underrepresentation of Latinas in educational institutions play, scholarship about Latina educators must include their lived experiences and *testimonios*. This knowledge: 1) builds upon the body of research surrounding Latinas in educational institutions; 2) identifies areas that can improve the experiences of Latinas in and out of the classroom; and 3) illuminates the need for increased representation of Latinas in education. The aim of this research was to document the experiences of Latina educators and

explore how their educational and cultural experiences shaped their career pathways. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What experiences have shaped the educational journeys of Latina educators?
2. How do these experiences relate to their career pathways and inform their work as educators?

Background and Context

Throughout my journey in educational institutions, most of my teachers were White. This means, in my K-12 academic experience attending both public and private schools having more than 50 teachers, I never experienced a Latina educator. Similarly, in my attainment of a bachelor's degree, three master's degrees, and now an educational doctorate, all but five professors were White. Therefore, in forty years of traversing more than ten educational institutions and sitting in more than 100 classrooms, I have only experienced six Teachers of Color in the front of the classroom. However, I have never had the privilege of learning from a Latina educator. The underrepresentation of Teachers of Color, especially Latinas, is still pervasive today (Gandara, 2015; Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

Latinas in Education

According to The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH) (2015), "One in five women in the U.S. is Latina. One in four female students in public schools across the nation is Latina …by 2060, Latinas will form nearly a third of the female population of the nation" (p.5). While the number of Latinas is growing significantly, they face many educational challenges. Latina students are less likely than their White peers to attend preschool and more likely to attend economically disadvantaged schools (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2014; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Hill & Torres, 2009). Additionally, Latinas are less

likely to complete high school, attend a four-year college institution, and obtain an undergraduate/graduate/terminal degree(s) (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

Specifically, as reported by Gandara and WHIEEH (2015) of Latinas ages 25-29, more than 20% did not complete high school, only 19% obtained a college degree, and a mere 4% earned graduate degrees. Furthermore, Latinas were only awarded 6.2% of all female doctorate degrees given by U.S. universities in 2015. Despite the growth of the Latina population and the increasing number of Latinas enrolling in college, there is still an underrepresentation in the field of education. This continued disparity creates a significant lack of Latina mentors and role models in educational institutions (Cortez-Covarrubias, 2015; Diaz, 2018; Martinez, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Sanchez-Hucles, 2010). The absence of Latina mentors in education and leadership roles can negatively affect Latina students by creating deficit social capital, reinforcing deficit thinking, and decreasing the availability of Latinas to emulate. (Cortez-Covarrubias, 2015; Diaz, 2018; Martinez, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Furthermore, the growing number of the Latinx population creates a larger gap in the underrepresentation of Latinx educators (Gandara, 2015; Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

Pennsylvania's Lack of Teacher Diversity

The participants in this study are Latina educators currently employed in the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, understanding the current state of Pennsylvania's population and educator workforce is essential to this study. In 2018, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) acknowledged that the state has a significantly low number of Teachers of Color in their educational institutions. The lack of teacher diversity is not just a local problem affecting schools in Pennsylvania; it is a national issue. However, PDE reports its schools are one of the lowest

ranking statistically in the nation. According to national data, 18% of teachers are Persons of Color, compared to only 4% in Pennsylvania (Stohr, Fontana, & Lapp, 2018).

The disparity is even greater when considering student population demographics. According to the data presented by Stohr, Fontana, & Lapp, (2018), "18% of public-school teachers across the nation are Persons of Color, compared to 48% of students, a disproportionality rate of 2.62 (i.e., the percentage of Students of Color divided by the percentage of Teachers of Color)" (p.2). In Pennsylvania public schools, 29% of students and 4% of teachers are Persons of Color, which yields a disproportionality rate of 7.34. Fontana and Lapp (2018) suggest this data makes Pennsylvania "one of the most disparate states in the country" (p. 2). Specifically, for Latinx students, the disparity is greater: "11% of Students are Hispanic compared to only 1.0% of teachers, a disproportionality rate of 11.0" (Fontana & Lapp, 2018, p.2). In the context of this study, the percentage of Students of Color increases to more than 90%. Therefore, the disparity of Teachers of Color is more than ten times the number of students (Stohr et al., 2018). Furthermore, in Pennsylvania secondary schools, Latinas make up less than one percent of Teachers of Color (Fontana & Lapp, 2018).

Although the number of Teachers of Color is well below the national average, PDE recognizes that Teachers of Color have a positive influence on all students. Specifically, Stohr et al. (2018) state Teachers of Color have been shown to:

1. Promote higher expectations for Students of Color;
2. Contribute to positive academic & non-academic outcomes for Students of Color, such as reduced absenteeism, increased admission to gifted programs, and lower dropout rates;

3. Minimize chances that Students of Color are subjected to discipline that removes them from school;
4. Lead to positive long-term outcomes for Students of Color, like a decreased probability of dropping out in high school and an increased likelihood to aspire to enroll in a four-year college;
5. Mitigate implicit bias in all students (i.e., preconceived attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect people's understanding and decisions);
6. Improve school climate for all students; and
7. Reduce teacher turnover in hard-to-staff schools (p. 2).

While Teachers of Color generally have a positive influence on Students of Color, Latinx students report that Latina's traditions and ability to convey messages of hope, pride, ambition, and success play a significant factor in shaping life experiences (Borovicka, 2010, Diaz, 2016, Gandara, 2015; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Martinez, 2016). Therefore, the growing number of Latina students in the nation and the disproportionate number of Latinas in education makes the experiences of Latina educators important to the success of not only the growing Latinx population, but the entire student population.

In the school district where this study was conducted, the Latinx student population is over 70%, with the total Student of Color population reaching more than 90%. Additionally, almost 90% of the total student population was economically disadvantaged (PDE, 2018). The percentage of Teachers of Color was similar to PDE statistics reporting less than 4% of teachers were Persons of Color (Stohr et al., 2018). As a result, the participants in this study continued to traverse spaces where they are underrepresented. This study explored how the experiences of

Latina educators as former students and now professionals influence their encounters with injustice, life choices, career pathways, and work as educators.

Significance of the Study

Centering the voices of Latina educators in academic research created an opportunity for their *testimonios* to challenge dominant discourse and become funds of knowledge. Highlighting Latina educators' *testimonios* removed their stories from the margins and brought them into the spotlight of educational research, resources, preparation, practice, and reform (Gist, 2018). This research uncovered the experiences of Latina educators during their academic journeys and discovered how they relate to their life choices, the pursuit of educational careers, and work as educators. The *testimonios* collected are used to acknowledge Latinas' experiences and add to the body of research surrounding equity in education, the underrepresentation of Latinas in education, and the growing need for a diverse educational workforce. Additionally, the *testimonios* give Latina educators a platform to share their experiences that are historically underrepresented in literature (Borovicka, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012; Diaz, 2018; Hernandez-Scott, 2017; Huber & Cueva, 2012; Martinez, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Villegas et al., 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this *testimonio* research was to document and explore the experiences of Latina educators as they traversed institutions which were designed to sort them into subordinate groups (Valencia, 2010). The goal was to gain understanding into the role oppression, deficit perspectives, and bias play in shaping Latina educators' responses to injustice, educational decision making, career pathways, and work in educational institutions. Therefore, understanding the environments Latinas enter when they navigate educational institutions is critical. This study used a theoretical framework undergirded by Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latinx Critical Race

Theory (LatCrit), and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). These frameworks support the use of a critical lens to explore counternarratives gathered through the *testimonios* of Latina educators.

In her opening statement, introducing research conducted using LatCrit to explore intersectionality in educational experiences, Perez-Huber (2010) says:

> One of the most powerful elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education is that it provides critical researchers with a lens not offered by many other theoretical frameworks-that is, the ability to examine how multiple forms of oppression can intersect within the lives of People of Color and how those intersections manifest in our daily experiences to mediate our education (p.1).

Following in the theme of Perez-Huber's statement, this study used a CRT and LatCrit to examine how multiple forms of oppression and deficit perspectives intersect with the lived experiences of Latina educators as they traversed multiple educational institutions.

Critical Race Theory

Like Yosso (2006), this research drew on Critical Race Theory (CRT) "to address the historical and contemporary realities of race [and] racism" (p. 6). Critical Race Theory began in the 1980's as a group of law scholars sought to examine and challenge race and racism in the United States legal system and society. This group believed the experiences and histories of People of Color were overlooked, undocumented, and devalued (Yosso, 2006). "Scholars such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman asserted that without analyzing race and racism, critical legal scholarship could not offer strategies for social transformation" (Yosso, 2006, p. 6). While the foundation of CRT is based in legal studies, it informs educational studies by challenging and acknowledging how race and racism shape educational structures.

Critical Race Theory in education is a framework that examines how race is intertwined with inequality. CRT recognizes racism as a social construct, whereby power structures are

dominated by White normative culture. In this context, People of Color are marginalized and treated as subordinates. Racial inequality is eminent in education and the effects span all levels of educational systems (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, Pabon, Woodson, & McGee, 2016; Pabon, 2014; Yosso, 2006).

In this research, CRT was used as a tool to confront deficit thinking that "blames" academic failure on Communities of Color presumed lack of knowledge, desire to achieve, linguistic short-comings, motivation, and immoral behavior (Delgado Bernal, et al., 2017). Deficit thinking materializes in educational institutions by creating spaces which derail educational pathways through racism, inequity, bias, and cultural unresponsiveness. Challenging pervasive dominant norms in educational institutions centers experiential knowledge of Communities of Color, recognizes injustice and provides opportunities for change (Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005).

Overall, CRT has five central tenets that apply to education. As defined by Yosso (2006) they are the: "1) intersection of race and racism; 2) challenge to dominant ideology; 3) commitment to social justice; 4) centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5) interdisciplinary perspective" (p.7). This study sought to understand how Communities of Color, specifically Latina educators respond to oppression, racism, deficit perspectives, and other forms of subordination in educational institutions and systems. Understanding the intersections of Latina educators' lived experiences using CRT framework will aid in the production of counternarratives described through their *testimonios.* Additionally, like Hernandez-Scott (2017), it can be used to understand issues in schooling such as bias, deficit thinking, power relations, and how knowledge is constructed and validated.

Critical Race Theory challenges dominant ideologies and uses storytelling, counter-storytelling, and the analysis of narratives to document the lived experiences of marginalized groups (Dixson & Rousseau, 2017b; Yosso, 2006). Recognizing and recounting the experiences and perspectives of racially and socially marginalized people challenges majoritarian histories and identifies the stories for their value, valid data, and knowledge (Yosso, 2006). For example, counternarrative storytelling is used to provide first-hand accounts of inequity as experienced by Students of Color (Alonso, Anderson, Su, & Theoharis, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2017a; Pabon, 2014). These stories are used as analytic tools to assess and document various experiences of racism and uncover the legacy of People of Color who endured injustice. Using CRT as a lens to analyze the narratives collected through *testimonio* can provide insight, knowledge, and understanding the role of racism, bias, and deficit thinking in the educational systems.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

Due to the specificity of this research focusing on Latina educators, this study also used LatCrit framework to provide an additional layer of intersectionality which examines the experiences unique to the Latinx community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. The use of LatCrit provided opportunities to navigate the educational journeys of Latina educators and "better articulate the experiences of Latinas specifically, through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters" (Perez-Huber, 2010, p.3).

Although Latinas historically are victimized, Latinas and their communities are not victims (Irizarry, 2016). They have, however, faced school-based institutionalized thinking and inequities. While traversing educational institutions, Latinas have used their social, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural assets to wade through injustice. Reflecting on these experiences provides

modes of analysis that merge a collaborative view of knowledge and academia to promote social change (Delgado Bernal, et al. 2017).

Community Cultural Wealth

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), draws on CRT and seeks to identify unrecognized forms of cultural capital that Communities of Color possess (Yosso, 2005). In doing so, CCW describes a set of assets, skills, abilities, and resources Communities of Color engage in and with to manage and resist multiple forms of oppression they encounter daily. There are six forms of CCW, as described by Yosso (2005):

1. Familial Capital: those cultural knowledges nurtured by *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.
2. Aspirational Capital: one's ability to embrace high expectations for their future.
3. Resistance Capital: knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.
4. Linguistic Capital: strength gained from the ability to communicate in different forms, styles, and languages.
5. Navigational Capital: the ability to maneuver through social institutions that were not created with Communities of Color in mind.
6. Social Capital: the connections and relationships maintained with others that provide emotional and social support for persistence through adversarial times (p. 79).

Like Borovicka (2010), Diaz (2018), and Martinez (2016), CCW is used in this research to examine the experiences of Latina educators as they maneuver through educational institutions

as both students and educators. The multi-layered analysis of these experiences highlighted the strengths and value Latina educators add to their Latinx, student, and professional communities.

Overall, CRT, LatCrit, and CCW provide four central tenets which are highlighted in this study. Similar to Diaz (2018) this research focused on the: 1) role race plays in Latina educators experiences; 2) value of experiential knowledge voiced through Latina educators *testimonios*; 3) assets, skills, abilities, and strengths developed and employed navigating various systems of oppression in educational institutions; and 4) commitment to social justice which is evident in the participants' commitment, passion, and desire to create change, transform society, and empower the Latina community.

Definition of Terminology[2]

1. *Latina* in this study refers to a woman of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American origin; this term can also refer to a woman of any other Spanish-speaking culture or origin, regardless of her race (Borovicka, 2015; Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).
2. L*atino* similarly refers to a man of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American origin; this term can also refer to a man of any other Spanish-speaking culture or origin regardless of his race (Borovicka, 2015; Humes et al., 2011).
3. *Latinx* for the purposes of this study, was used rather than Latina/o, Latin@, or the use of the masculine form, Latino which refers to persons of both genders. The term *Latinx* promotes gender neutrality and respects individuals who do not conform to traditional gender binaries (Gutiérrez, 2013).
4. *Hispanic* or *Latino* is used in the present study when referencing the pan-ethnic category used in U.S. statistical surveys. The U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanic or Latinos/as:

[2] Terminology in this section is drawn from similar work and the terminology used by Borovicka (2015, pp 24-30).

> those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2010 questionnaire “Mexican,” “Puerto Rican,” or “Cuban,” as well as those who indicate that they are “another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.” People who do not identify with one of the specific origins listed on the questionnaire but indicate that they are "another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” are those whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, or the Dominican Republic (Humes et al., 2011).

It should be noted that race is a social construct and that these categories of race and ethnicity have been developed by U.S. Federal reporting agencies for statistical uses (Borovicka, 2015; Humes et al., 2011).

5. *Teachers of Color, Educators of Color, People of Color, Students of Color, Youth of Color, Communities of Color* denote teachers, educators, students, groups and communities respectively, who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Latinx, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or Mixed-Ethnicity. As used in this study, these terms mean individuals, groups, or communities that share a historical legacy of being targeted and oppressed by racism in the U.S. society and in majority-culture schools. These terms are socially constructed and imply inclusive social relationships, although they may have different meanings outside of the U.S. (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008). Despite their limitations, these terms are used in this study in an attempt to move away from terms such as minority or racial and ethnic minorities; such terms are problematic, as they can imply lower group numbers or even subordination (Borovicka, 2015). I capitalize these terms as other scholars like Huber (2009); Pabon & Basile (2019).

6. *Deficit thinking, deficit perspectives, deficit models* place the blame for student failure on the student and the student's lack of the traits that are valued and necessary for academic success in majority-culture schools. "This type of thinking leads to policies designed to instill those desirable traits/behaviors in students or in students' parents." (Cooper, 2014, p. 1). The use of a deficit perspective in research suggest groups that face challenges as having weaknesses or problems, often fails to highlight community strengths and societal factors (Gonzales, 2012; Mertens, 2009; Ochoa, 2007). *Deficit thinking* in the present study also relates to biases and assumptions in the dominant discourse (Borovicka, 2015).
7. *Testimonio*s according to Huber (2009) have no universal definition. However, *testimonios* are: authentic narratives of urgent conditions (Yudice, 1991); verbal journeys describing experiences with injustice (Brabeck, 2003); experiences that allow individuals to transform the past and personal identity into a new present and enhancing the future (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983), and create knowledge and theory through highlighting the significance of personal experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The traditions of *testimonio* as a method come from a place where people have experienced persecution, injustice, and marginalization by forces, groups, institutions, and people who believe their dominant norms supersede and displace those of the Latinx people. In the present study, *testimonio* is used as a research methodology and provides a platform for centering the analysis on Latina educator's voices, experiences, and for voicing a collective discourse for social justice (Borovicka, 2015; Yosso, 2005).
8. *Counternarratives, counterstories* are narratives that recount the experiences and perspectives of racially and socially marginalized people. They reflect on the lived experiences of People of Color to raise critical consciousness about racial and social injustice

redress or stand in opposition to majoritarian stories or racist, sexist, classist narratives. *Counternarratives/stories* are based in the tenets of Critical Race Theory and used to allow the narratives to challenge racism and other forms of subordination (Yosso, 2006, p.10).

9. *Latinx Serving Institutions* is a variant of the term Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and it is traditionally used to refer to colleges and universities with a Latinx student population of 25% or more with 50% of that population meeting low-income criteria (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). However, in this study, I used the term to also refer to secondary institutions with Latinx student populations greater than all other student population subgroups.
10. *Community Cultural Wealth* as defined by Yosso (2005) is the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that are developed within communities of color and enable them to persist, succeed, and pursue social mobility. Like Borovicka (2015), this study used CCW to highlight the forms of cultural capital Latina educators used to resist inequities and strategies employed to navigate oppressive systems.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

To help guide and build an understanding of this research, the literature review explores the use of CRT, LatCrit, and CCW to examine the relationships between counternarratives, testimonies, and *testimonios* of Educators of Color and Latina educators. In addition, the literature presented in chapter two highlights how other researchers have used narrative storytelling to document injustice, build funds of knowledge, empower Communities of Color, and call for social justice. The literature includes research completed within the U.S. and examines various aspects of how Educators of Color traversed educational institutions and reflected on their experiences related to encounters with injustice, career pathways, and work as educators.

Teachers of Color Narrative Storytelling

Several studies have used narrative storytelling, testimonies, and life history methods to explore the experiences of Teachers of Color as they relate to education. For example, Pabon (2016) used life history methodology to access the lived experiences of Black teachers. Utilizing the life history method, this study captured "the sociohistorically situated experiences of the participants in their own words" (p. 923). This method enabled Pabon to engage the participants in a dialogue, which provided them with an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of their world and identify who they were on their own terms. In doing so, she was able to uncover that "although discourse among educational stakeholders has recently suggested Black male teachers are key to helping Black male students in urban schools" (p. 915), Black male teachers felt they were pushed out of the very schools they were "key" to helping because they expressed concerns with the relevancy of the curriculum as it related to Students of Color.

The Black male teachers in Pabon's (2016) study exposed counternarratives as it related to the expectations of educational stakeholders and the lived experiences of Black male teachers. She argued that the participants were devalued as intellectuals and marginalized in their settings, which led the Black male teachers to question their ability and feel they were unable to continue to work in their urban setting. The finding suggested that Black male teachers were pushed out of their classrooms in a process Pabon named "schooling out." Two main experiences uncovered in the counternarratives that led Black male teachers to be "schooled out" were "a) being under-prepared in teacher education programs and b) being pressured to standardize curriculum in teaching" (p. 972). The evidence exposed in this study called for teacher education programs to include mentoring programs for "Black male teachers who are likely to face stereotypical expectations to become Black Supermen" (p. 935). The mentoring programs should focus on the intersectionality of race, gender, racism, and patriarchy to support Black male teachers in the resistance of the "schooling out" process.

Similar to Pabon (2016), Lapayese, Aldana, & Lara (2014) used in-depth interviews to capture the narratives of Teachers of Color in predominantly White Teach for America (TFA) programs to explore their experiences with racial marginalization and discrimination. The in-depth interviews conducted in this study captured Teachers of Color experiences as they relate to: "1) knowledge and beliefs about race, power, and education; 2) information on the participant and his/her experiences in the program; and 3) perception of the program's impact in the economically disenfranchised Communities of Color" (p. 13). Using this process, Lapayese et al. (2014) uncovered through the counternarratives of Teachers of Color how TFA addresses issues of racism and supports its teacher corps.

The counternarratives collected explained how Teachers of Color in the TFA program feel: 1) their voices are not acknowledged when they make recommendations specific to corps Members of Color; 2) concerned that TFA will misuse their recommendations to further mask the corps' racial nature as opposed to advancing a more critical approach toward how they handle racial discourse; and 3) TFA will silence any real critique about their organization, especially on the subject of race (Lapayese et al., 2016). These experiences are all counter to the TFA public image of inclusion, promotion of diversity, and providing service to low-income Communities of Color. Overall, the study revealed that Teachers of Color in TFA programs believe they are not sure they are making a difference in the schools they serve because their positionality, knowledge, and value were silenced. The researchers also argued that TFA exists and flourishes because it benefits White racial and economic interests. They recommend further research on White educational organizations to spotlight the masking of educational solutions that seemingly benefit Communities of Color but primarily benefit White dominant culture and economic interests. In addition, the researchers suggest that TFA listen to research findings and allow for institutional and programmatical change with regards to race and the recruitment of more Teachers of Color (Lapayese et al., 2014).

Like Pabon (2016) and Lapayese et al. (2014), Gist (2018) utilizes the voices of Teachers of Color to analyze their testimonies and bring their experiences and strengths to the forefront of educational discourse. In doing so, this research "creates an opportunity to understand frequently overlooked ways in which they [Teachers of Color] navigate racial hierarchies in their quest to teach and thrive in school settings" (Gist, 2018, p. 518). The goal of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Teachers of Color and how they: 1) related to educational aspirations; 2) navigated non-dominant positioning in their academic and professional pursuits; 3) experienced

self and systemic tensions as students and professionals; and 4) created and experienced solidarity. Unlike Pabon (2016) and Lapayese (2016), Gist (2018) participants engaged in six testimony workshop sessions and drafted written testimonies about their educational experiences and aspirations.

The goal of Gist's (2018) study is "understanding the strengths of Teachers of Color, and the lessons they have taught the profession is in the common interest of all committed to eradicating educational inequality and creating a rigorous and respected teaching corps" (p. 518). The findings suggest that when teachers experience "racial isolation and discomfort in their academic and professional pursuits, Teachers of Color battle, persist to believe, and work to belong" (p.535). In addition, participants in this study encountered tension with personal commitments and self, as well as systemic tension with educational institutions, which complicated the pursuit of their aspirations. Finally, participants' experience with barriers, tensions, and battles to attain aspirations caused them to use collective solidarity resources and practices (i.e., participation in community/racial/geographic/school-based organizations and self-affirmations) to offer reprieve as they navigated systems in pursuit of their aspirations. Overall, Gist (2018) study calls for further research which: 1) values the voices of Teachers of Color; 2) promotes the dissemination of the expertise, knowledge, and insights Teachers of Color provide to the education profession; 3) advocates for social justice, the development of alternative routes to teaching, and develops coursework and professional development grounded in the experiences of Teachers of Color; 4) builds partnerships with and between educator preparation programs, community organizations, and school districts who strive for social justice; and 5) allocates state funding for Teachers of Color to lead advocacy groups addressing communities educational needs.

Latina *Testimonios* in Education

In recent years, Latina scholars in the U.S. have focused their research on the experiences of Latinas in the field of education (Borovicka, 2015; Cortez-Covarrubias, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012; Diaz, 2018; Hernandez-Scott, 2017; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Martinez, 2016). This body of research used *testimonios* to: 1) challenge silence and reclaim space for people and issues not part of dominant discourse; 2) explore the process of change and empowerment; 3) offer an opportunity for a collective understanding of similar experiences and subordination; and 4) present experiences in a manner that is accessible to larger audiences beyond the academy (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Career Attainment *Testimonios*

Borovicka (2015) and Hernandez-Scott (2017) used *testimonios* and narrative inquiry to study the trajectory of Latinx teachers. Both studies uncovered counternarratives that document educational inequities, experiences with deficit thinking, the shortage of Teachers of Color, and the need to recruit more Latinx educators. Additionally, both focused on asset-based attributes which identified participants' Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and other strengths that enable Latinx teachers to successfully navigate through educational institutions and gain employment as teachers in schools. Borovicka (2015) focused on Latina teachers in rural Oregon, and Hernandez-Scott (2017) focused on Latinx teachers in Midwestern urban elementary school. They both agree that Latinx teachers experience deficit perspectives in education and conclude that there is a need to hire/recruit more Latinx teachers to serve the growing Latinx communities across the nation.

Latina Principals Testimonios

Like Borovicka (2015) and Hernandez-Scott (2017), Diaz (2018) used *testimonios* to explore the educational journeys of Latina principals. Diaz (2018) also utilized Community Cultural Wealth to identify strengths that significantly influenced both the educational trajectory and professional role of Latina principals in a large southwestern city. Similarly, Cortez-Covarrubias (2015) used *testimonios* to document the educational experiences of Latina principals working in low-income urban schools in Southern California. Specifically, the research highlighted the leadership roles the participants utilized while implementing dual-language immersion programs. Both Diaz (2018) and Cortez-Covarrubias (2015) documented cultural wealth and the strengths Latina principals draw on in their educational and leadership experiences. Additionally, both studies agreed that Latina principals serve as role models and use leadership skills and cultural wealth to advocate for social justice in their settings.

Summary

The work of Borovicka (2015), Cortez-Covarrubias (2015), Diaz (2018), and Hernandez-Scott (2017) use testimonios to offer an opportunity for: 1) collective understanding of Latina educators and scholars experiences in educational institutions and how their personal and professional identity was shaped by occurrences of racism, deficit perspectives, bias, and lack of educator diversity; 2) Latina educators to reclaim cultural wealth and renounce deficit discourse; 3) Latina educators to explore the process of change required to increase diversity in education and increase the number of Latina role models in education; and 4) Latina educators to create funds of knowledge which can be used to facilitate the transformation of educational institutions.

This research study used *testimonios* to build upon the current body of knowledge surrounding Latina educators' lived experiences and the roles they play in navigating educational

institutions as students and professionals. Furthermore, this research expanded on the explanations for the underrepresented of Latinas in the field of education and provided recommendations for improving the educational experiences of Latina students and decreasing the growing disparity of Latina educators.

Testimonios are rooted in people's experience with injustice and marginalization by other forces and people who believe their dominant values and norms are superior to those of the Latinx people (Delgado, Burciaga, Flores, & Carmona, 2012). Like Diaz (2018), Cortez-Covarrubias (2015) Hernandez-Scott (2017), and Borovicka (2015), the research in this study: 1) described authentic narratives of urgent conditions (Yudice, 1991); 2) takes readers on a journey describing Latina educators experiences with injustice (Brabeck, 2003); 3) shared experiences which allow Latinas to transform the past into a new present and enhancing the future (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983); 4) created knowledge through highlighting the significance of personal experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), and 5) calls for action and social justice in educational settings (Valencia, 2010).

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This research study used the lenses of CRT, LatCrit, and CCW to examine the experiences of Latina educators as they maneuvered through educational institutions as both students and educators. Positioning this research within these frameworks employs the use of *testimonio* as both a method and a methodology. Perez-Huber (2009) suggested aligning *testimonio* to CRT and LatCrit provides a methodological approach that captures the complexity and power of Latinas' experiences. This chapter describes the research design, researcher positionality, research questions, context, participants, methods of data collection, analysis, validity, and limitations.

Research Design

The experiences and voices of Latinx educators/students are often overlooked, ignored, and marginalized (Delgado Bernal, 2017; Gist, 2018). In educational settings, Latinx people are historically viewed as intellectually inferior and lacking the motivation and skills required for academic success. Viewing the Latinx population from a deficit perspective has become the norm in educational institutions (Valencia, 2010). However, many scholars and educators reject deficit models and choose to view the Latinx community from an asset-based perceptive (Borovicka, 2015; Cortez-Covarrubias 2015; Diaz, 2017; & Martinez, 2016). Following an asset-based model, critical methods and theories were used to uncover how deficit thinking affects Latinx educators.

Specifically, qualitative narrative *testimonios* were used to study the lived experiences of Latina educators. Using this in-depth oral story interview process enabled the experiences of Latina educators to be explored through their narratives. Through their *testimonios,* the participants' shared their world as they remembered it, which led to an understanding of how

their personal, social, and educational experiences influenced their encounters with injustice, academic journey, and career pathways. Overall, this process used Latina voices to provide an account of how deficit thinking has influenced their lives.

The use of *testimonios* began in Latin American studies as a method to document the injustices experienced by oppressed groups (Booker, 2002). Huber (2009) describes how *testimonios* are used in "other fields such as anthropology, education, ethnic studies, humanities, psychology, and women studies" (p.643). Huber (2009) suggested that there is no universal definition of *testimonios*. However, *testimonios* are: authentic narratives of urgent conditions (Yudice, 1991); verbal journeys describing experiences with injustice (Brabeck, 2003); experiences that allow individuals to transform the past and personal identity into a new present and enhancing the future (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983); and create knowledge and theory through highlighting the significance of personal experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

The traditions of *testimonio* as a method originated from places where people have experienced persecution, injustice, and marginalization by groups, institutions, and people who believe their dominant norms displace those of the Latinx people (Delgado, Burciaga, Flores, & Carmona, 2012). This is the case of Latinx educators' journey through educational institutions. In recent years, Latina scholars in the U.S. have focused their research on the experiences of Latinas in the field of education (Borovicka, 2015; Cortez-Covarrubias, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012; Diaz, 2018; Hernandez-Scott, 2017; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). This body of research uses *testimonio* to: 1) challenge silence and reclaim space for people and issues not part of dominant discourse; 2) explore the process of change and empowerment; 3) offer an opportunity for a collective understanding of similar experiences and subordination; and 4) present

experiences in a manner that is accessible to larger audiences beyond the academy (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Therefore, *testimonios* served as a critical tool to further understand the experiences of Latinas throughout their educational journeys. This provided their experiences to be seen as they lived them and provide knowledge and understanding, which can elicit change. The use of *testimonio* in this research was designed to document the assets and the actions that Latinas engage in to navigate, challenge, and transform educational settings. In this study, *testimonios* served as a way to document, explore, understand, and reflect on the educational journeys of Latinas. Therefore, the following questions are employed to examine the experiences and educational journeys of Latina educators.

Research Questions

1. What experiences have shaped the educational journeys of Latina educators?
2. How do these experiences relate to their career pathways and inform their work as educators?

Setting Context

The participants in this study were drawn from a public Urban School District (USD) in Pennsylvania. Students of Color in the USD make up more than 90% of the student population, 72% of whom are Latinx. The choice of this site was purposeful because the percentage of both Teachers of Color and Students of Color is higher than the state average. In turn, the disparity of Teachers of Color in relation to Students of Color is ten times higher than the national disproportionality rate (Stohr et al., 2018). The underrepresentation of Latina educators and the overrepresentation of Latinx students in this context provided an opportunity to gain knowledge from the lived experiences of Latinas who have both learned and worked in spaces where they have been both overrepresented and underrepresented.

Research Participants

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling method drawn from Pabon's (2016) method of recruitment by contacting a known group of Latina Educators. Participants were directly contacted by phone or email using the script in Appendix A. A specific group of five participants was selected using the purposeful sampling procedure as described by Patton (2002), which would produce an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Latina educators. Using a small specific group of participants allowed the researcher to sample Latina educators who all experience similar structural and social conditions. This gives their stories enormous power and provides the opportunity to understand the relationships between their experiences (Seidman, 2013) and the educational institutions they navigated.

The participants selected for this study met the following criteria: 1) hold a valid teaching/school counseling certificate in Pennsylvania; 2) currently employed in a predominantly Latinx serving public school; 3) identify as Latina/Hispanic/Chicana; 4) attended secondary and post-secondary educational institutions in the U.S.; and 5) have a desire to share their *testimonios*. This study focused on the educational journeys of Latina educators, and therefore the participants must have experiences which relate to the context of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012; Seidman, 2013). Specifically, the participants must be familiar with navigating public-school systems and other educational institutions personally and professionally. Prior to the first interview, participants read and signed the consent form in Appendix B.

Researcher Positionality

Like the participants in this study, I am a Latina educator working in a large Latinx serving school district in Pennsylvania. I have encountered injustice and successfully navigated

educational institutions in the United States. I recognize the: marginality in our voices, knowledge gained by sharing our *testimonios,* value our stories hold in academia, and power we have to transform the future of education. Overall, I am a Latina educator, beginning scholar, mentor, wife, mother, daughter, friend, colleague, and U.S. citizen who will no longer keep her *testimonio* to herself. Through this research, together with the *testimonios* of the participants, we bear witness to injustice, document first-hand experiences, describe transformative journeys, add Latina voices to academia, and work together to change the future of education for the Latinx Community.

Methods of Data Collection

The qualitative data collection method of *testimonios* was selected to share the experiences of Latina educators and expose the injustices they encountered while highlighting the asset-based strategies they used and the actions they engaged in to navigate through educational institutions successfully. The use of *testimonios* places a sense of urgency to communicate how the continued practice of deficit thinking may influence the career pathways of Latinas.

I adapted Seidman's (2013) three interview series to collect the *testimonios* of the participants. Seidman's three-step interview process includes one 90-minute interview each for gathering the life history, details of experiences, and reflections. In this study, three 90-minute interviews were used to collect how the participants became educators. Interview one focused on the history, details, and reflections of their family and life outside of educational institutions. Interview two focused on the history, details, and reflections on how they navigated educational institutions. Interview three focused on the history, details, and reflections on how they got into the field of education and their work as educators in Pennsylvania. The interviews in this study

were conducted in locations that were convenient for the participants. The purpose of the semi-constructed interviews was to understand how participants' lived experiences and encounters with injustice influenced their educational journey, life choices, and career pathways. See Appendix C for the interview protocol.

Data Analysis

The *testimonios* collected during interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then narrative analysis was used to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Saldana, 2016; Riessman, 1993). The interviews were read through and listened to several times, which provided opportunities for close and repeated listening of the audio recorded *testimonios* (Riessman, 1993). During the close and repeated listening, analytical notes and reflections on key elements were documented. These notes included any points of interest which stood out during the interview (Saldana, 2016). Repeated listening to the *testimonios* allowed the researcher to focus on what was being said conceptually as a whole rather than precise words. This supports the analysis of *testimonios* as a whole story (Delgado, Vernal, et al., 2012).

Using Saldana's (2016) coding techniques, two rounds of coding were used. The first round utilized in-vivo coding and the second descriptive coding. The transcribed *testimonios* were reduced by chunking the data into manageable pieces with common codes. The first round of coding reduced interviews into smaller pieces of key responses, which are related to the experiences that have shaped the educational journeys of Latina educators and how do these experiences relate to their life, encounters with injustice, career pathways, and work as educators. The second round of coding highlighted the most significant descriptions. The highlighted texts were then cut out and categorized into common themes. Once each participant's

series of interviews were individually coded, codes were reviewed across each participant to determine overlapping themes (Seidman, 2013). Finally, the chunks were analyzed by each participant and regrouped to create individual narratives for each Latina educator. The collective *testimonios* are shared in chapter four.

Validity

To ensure the research is valid, I openly addressed my positionality and possible bias as a Latina educator who experienced educator's deficit perspectives in educational institutions. Given my experience as a Latina student and to assure my bias does not affect the research, the interview process was scripted, and procedures were uniformly conducted in each *testimonio*. I also kept a reflective journal to document personal reactions and reflections on the research process. The use of reflexivity and disclosing my positionality adds to the validity and trustworthiness of the data (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, I provided participants with an opportunity to review the common themes, findings, and their narratives. This allowed participants to member check the research to ensure accuracy, provide feedback, and further insights (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Security of Participants

Interviews were recorded using a digital device kept in the researcher's possession. The interviews were transcribed using pseudonyms to identify the participants. The researcher created a key to the pseudonyms. The transcribed interviews and pseudonym key were stored using a password-protected document on the researcher's personal computer. At the conclusion of the study, files were permanently deleted from the recording device. Additionally, pseudonyms are used throughout the analysis for participants' names, places, and other markers that may identify the participants.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are similar to qualitative studies in that the sample size is small, and the findings are not generalizable to the experiences of all Latinx educators, Educators of Color, or contexts. Maxwell (2013) states that generalization "refers to extending research results, conclusion, or other accounts that are based on other individuals, settings, times, or institutions than those directly studied" (p. 136). Although the findings are not generalizable, the *testimonios* provided an account of the lived experiences of Latina Educators, illuminated encounters with injustice, highlight Community Cultural Wealth, and contributed to the body of knowledge in education surrounding the underrepresentation of Latinas.

Chapter Four: Testimonios

This chapter begins with the five participants' *testimonios*: Zilkya, Alejandrina, Celia, Mercedes, and Maria. Each *testimonio* introduces the participants and describes their parents, cultural background, and life experiences, which led them to the field of education. The *testimonios* include the participants' view of education, encounters with injustice, pivotal life experiences, and their desire to share their stories. While pseudonyms are used throughout the *testimonios,* the participants' current state of employment and cultural background are used to understand the participants' context, experiences, perceptions, and educational journey.

Despite many encounters with injustice, the participants' *testimonios* share their resiliency traversing life and educational institutions. Their *testimonios* reveal how the participants resisted negative forces by utilizing their Community Cultural Wealth. Additionally, each participant's *testimonio* shares with the readers what education means to them and how critical moments in their journey unexpectedly lead them to a career in the field of education. Ultimately, through reflection and speaking their truths, the participants share how their experiences brought them to where they are today and how their desire to counter injustice supports the educational needs of the Latinx community.

The following *testimonios* are presented in the participants' own words as they were shared during audio-recorded interviews. In some places, edits have been made to maintain the fluency of the story and to preserve the confidentiality of the participants (i.e., names of places and people). However, each participant was given their *testimonios*, to verify content and check for accuracy. The five Latina educators presented in this chapter are successful secondary educators who bravely brought to life the stories they have often kept hidden. Together they allowed us to partake in their journeys to become educators. In the traditions of *testimonio*

research, the participants' collective memories, experiences, and histories are used to bear witness to the transformative journeys and empower their voices to elicit change (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Huber, 2010; Alarcón, W., Cruz, C., Jackson, L. G., Prieto, L., & Rodriguez-Arroyo, S. 2011; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Zilkya

When I came to Pennsylvania from Puerto Rico, I lived on Livingston Street… you couldn't get any more ghetto than that. I lived in front of Junior's Bar. When I looked down from the third-floor window, I looked straight down into the bar and their parking lot. Two doors down was the church, and to my right was the police substation. Let's face it, the two houses in between were a crack house and a prostitution house. It was dangerous just to sit on my porch.

I didn't know I was poor growing up. I never thought about it really… because I was living it; I didn't even think about that. But as you grow older, you reminisce about things. I think, I started to realize it more when I went to college. The discrepancy was clear… if we went out, I was very conscious of how much I spent. Even eating out was budgeted. My mom didn't give me a hundred-dollar allowance. Like the other kids. Whatever money I had, I worked for. I knew I needed to stretch my money for gas to go home or books or whatever I was saving up for next. So, I had to work two jobs in college. I did that actually through college and my master's degree.

My mom would say, if you want the finer things, you need an education. That's the only equalizer… no one can take it away. She made it very clear. Even though she only had a high school diploma, she knew that she wanted something more for us. My mom was a no-nonsense parent. If you're sick you go to school. There was no staying at home for any reason. It wasn't an

option in my house. If we wanted a better life, the only way to do that was to get an education. Education was the only equalizer no one could take away.

My whole goal in life was to help even the playing field for Latinos. Although we didn't have much, one thing was clear, mom knew education was a way to get more. With that in mind, I went to college to be a lawyer. My interest in law was to fight for social justice. However, during an internship my junior year, it became clear to me that it's very difficult to be both a Christian and a lawyer. Giving up my faith was not an option. What other way could I stand up to social injustice?

In my other job, [at the social service agency], I worked with kids during an after-school program. In the program, I enjoyed working with kids, helping them with homework, and watching them grow into young adults. Seeing them grow and experiencing with them their "ah-ha" moment when they realized education was important, was incredible! When they got accepted into college, it was amazing, not just for them, it was also for their families. When you get an education, you just don't change your story, you change the story of those closest to you. I go back to that [education] being the equalizer. Helping kids get their high school diploma. Helping them achieve further. How do I make that happen? It's through education. That's where I was supposed to be.

Alejandrina

My mom came here [U.S.] from the Dominican Republic at the age of 16. Not knowing any English, she and her siblings were able to advance their education and go to college. She eventually worked in social services. My mom had three girls and decided to raise us on her own. As a single mother, her priority was raising us right. She made a lot of sacrifices, putting three girls through Catholic School on one income. Things were forfeited, and our economic

situation was definitely hampered. We didn't have all the latest things and luxuries like the other kids in my building. [However,] we had what my mother and grandmother would say was better, an opportunity to get a good education and go to college. [My mom] stressed education to the umpteen percent, and she always told us that it was going to lead to success. She drilled this into my head incessantly.

Education to me is the tools you use to develop the skills that help you navigate life's journey. Aside from God and your children, if you choose to have them…education is the second most important thing…because with it, the possibilities are endless. Without it, the limitations are endless. Education is literally the foundation for your entire life, it can take you to new heights and open the gates to a new life. My whole life, I valued education, but in high school, I could not deal with the hypocrisy of the Catholic School and their teachings. I told my mom I didn't want to keep going there. So, she said, then you're going to have to go to your zone school. My zone school was the worst school in the city, nobody wanted to go there. But…I was stubborn, and I was angry at the world. I totally rebelled my junior and senior year. No one could handle me. I was the Tasmanian Devil.

Yep, I was so bad, they picked me to visit a maximum-security correctional facility. You know, like the TV show… Scared Straight. The TV show was nothing compared to the real thing. When we got there, they [the inmates] were all up in my face yelling, "Do you want to end up here? Do you want to end up dead? You think you're cute and all that!" I said, "NO! I will never end up here! Please… I'm not a loser like you! I'm going to college! I'm going to have a future!" I was mad and mouthy, with a nasty attitude. I escalated saying, "I don't know why you are all up in my face you ain't 'gonna do nothing! I ain't scared! There are two cops behind me right now!" It got so bad 15 people descended on the premises and removed the inmates. They

swooped us all out of there too. Everyone was mad at me. They couldn't believe I put all their lives in danger. But I argued, "That guy was all up in my face! You can't intimidate me! I wasn't going to crack! They got some kids crying… but not me!" [Although,] I didn't show it, I learned something that day and it was the end… I had to get my head together… It was a turning point.

Through a lot of arguing, fighting, and me being stubborn, I managed to graduate from high school and ended up going to college too. My aunt convinced me to move to Pennsylvania to finish my degree and I graduated with a bachelor's in business. After that, I was working two full-time jobs and something happened, someone blocked my educational path. Instead of using the block as motivation, like I normally did. I let it stop me in my tracks and never did anything else [with my education]. [After that,] there was a void in my life. The void lasted for eight years. Eventually, I realized the seed [of education] my mom and grandmother planted a long time ago was still there. It was growing on the inside and my curiosity and love for learning never died. I finally decided to go back to school and get my MBA.

When I started the program, as God intended, I was accidentally placed in the wrong class. They placed me in an educational best practices class. [Although,] I was in the wrong class, I decided to stay because it would count for credits in my program. While in this class, I remembered, I was the single most important investment I will ever have. I could not continue to grow without continuing to build my education and guess what? Once you have it, it can never be taken away. Everything else can be, but your education could not. It's like a foundation. To build a solid foundation you need education. So how do we build this up… It starts with people like us [Latinas]. We have to continue going to school. We have to continue getting educated. I knew then, I could make a difference in someone's life. I decided to stay in the education

program. I want to be a Latina who shares her experiences with students like me and helps guide them on their educational journey. I can help build their foundation.

Celia

My mother and biological father were born in Mexico. I was born in the U.S., but I grew up in Mexico. I returned to the U.S. when I was seven. When I started school, I was in second grade, but they put me back in first grade because I didn't speak any English. I was the only ESL student in the school, so they put me back in first grade because there was a bilingual teacher, Mrs. Pizarro, in that class. She was great, she helped me a lot, and I picked up English rather quickly.

In Mexico, my mom worked for the government, she had a technical degree which enabled her to be employed in the public works sector. She didn't go to a four-year college, but knew education was important. Her dad was a doctor and her mom a nurse. My mom taught me that the one thing you can do for yourself is get an education. It will get you further in life, and it will always stay with you. Whereas anything else, especially material things, could be taken away, but never your education.

When we moved back to the U.S., we struggled financially. My dad [my stepfather, the only dad I knew] was the only one working. I remember receiving packages from my aunt in Mexico, which had the essentials like rice and toilet paper. The first few months, I remember struggling and rationing food. We lived off of ramen noodles and had very little in the house. You know… the common struggles of a low-income family. Even when my mom got a job, we didn't live a luxurious life. We did live in a nicer neighborhood. It was dominated by White families. Everyone around me was White. [At the time,] all my friends were White, no one spoke

Spanish. The first year in the U.S. was hard, but after that I assimilated to the new culture very well.

My family life was challenging. My dad was an alcoholic and abusive, so I stayed away [from home.] He didn't stop drinking until I was thirteen, but it was hard to watch. So, I wasn't around much of the time. I was fifteen when I moved out. I had a job and my own apartment. I got married at sixteen. I don't even remember why my mom let me do that, but she did. I then had a baby when I was seventeen. The marriage only lasted a year and a half. I managed to finish school and I was the valedictorian of my high school. I got a full ride to college, but I left after only one semester. It was my biggest regret. When I started again, I was pre-med and then changed to pharm [pharmacology]. I wanted to work in nuclear pharmacology and work with cancer patients.

During this time, I got married again and had two more children, but I was divorced after only five years and a single mother to three girls. I just wanted to finish school, so I ended up going to school part-time and graduating with a degree in biology. I ended up working for forestry in the northern U.S., I moved up there for another boy, he was in the military. We were married and moved back to my hometown after he retired with 21 years in the military. After that, we moved to Pennsylvania to be closer to his family. While I was up north, I started to take online classes for a degree in education. I knew with a degree in only biology, I wasn't going to find a job that paid more than fifteen or sixteen dollars an hour. I needed something more. When we came to Pennsylvania, I finished my degree in secondary education because I wanted to teach biology.

Education to me is everything you learn on your way through life. There are different kinds of education. Like the education you get through life experiences and the education you get

through books. Education is very important. It enabled me to get where I needed to be or where I wanted to go. I knew all of my experiences, my language, culture, dropping out, teen pregnancy, teen marriage, divorce, the struggle through college, and even dealing with a parent addiction could help students like me. Sharing my experiences and letting students know they can succeed, no matter their circumstance is invaluable. Education was the right place for me.

Mercedes

My mom is Italian and was born here [U.S.]. Her father started a construction company while in high school and became super successful. My dad moved to the U.S. from Argentina. When he entered school, he didn't know any English and [although] he was in middle school, they put him in elementary school because he only spoke Spanish. His family was really poor. At one point, he had to sleep in a maintenance shed because there was no room for him in the apartment. I was born [in the U.S.] on a missile-launching base in the middle of nowhere. [At the time,] my father was in the military. I only lived there for a year and a half, then my parents moved back to Pennsylvania.

Nobody in my family, until my parents had gone to college. They were the first people to maybe even surpass tenth grade. To most people in my family, education was not important. My mom's family all worked for my grandfather and were the most successful people I knew, and none of them graduated high school or went to college. But my parents told me I had to go to college, and I have to get an education to get a good job and be successful. At the time, I didn't understand given my family's success. As I got older and started to see the world as it was, I realized my parents are hard workers. They both went back to school at night, and they raised a family. Now, my mom is a teacher and my father is a VP at a banking company.

I went to college to become a nurse. I realized my first semester while volunteering at a hospital, nursing wasn't for me. Growing up, I knew education was really important to my parents, and I saw how education transformed my mother and father, I wanted to help. So, I told my mom I wanted to be a social studies teacher. She said, "No. I am not paying for you to be a social studies teacher. You'll never get a job. If you are going to be a teacher, you will be a Spanish teacher." Spanish was my culture and I always wanted to learn more about it so, I got my degree in Spanish and education with an ESOL endorsement.

Education to me is the gateway to a more successful future. It expands your horizons. It doesn't mean you have to go to college. It could be anything like being trained to be a plumber or an electrician. You can never have too much knowledge. I want to be an advocate for my students. I want to share my family's experiences. I want to help them be more than they are told or think they can be. I am here [in education] because my parents pushed the boundaries, pushed the limits, pushed other people's expectations of them. They taught me to do the same. I want to help my students push the limits.

Maria

I was born in the Dominican Republic. My parents weren't around, so I grew up with my maternal grandmother. Growing up we didn't have a lot. My grandmother always said education was very important. She paid for private school because the public school was rotten and very disorganized. She wanted nothing but the best for me. She was very strict, there were no excuses. School was a top priority. She believed that you could move up in society with an education. So, you always went to school even if you were sick. I loved to learn, education was my escape, I couldn't get enough knowledge. I excelled in school, I was the smart one, so smart I skipped two grades.

I think education is life. It's the refinement of yourself. You are born with this raw knowledge, and then you go to an educational system and you refine it. Through education you better yourself and then you gain status. Overall, education equals higher status. I don't necessarily mean more money. That can come with education. I mean a higher status that separates you from others who don't have it. I believed that if I educate myself, I would better myself and in turn have a better life.

When I was fifteen we found my mom. She was living in the U.S. with her husband and new family. My grandmother asked if I wanted to go and I did. So, me and my sister moved to the U.S. with my mom. When I arrived, I knew very little English. When we went to the school to enroll, they wanted to put me down a grade because I spoke Spanish. I learned later this was common practice for people who came from other countries and English was not their first language. I refused, I wasn't going to let them put me down a grade just because they felt like it or because they felt that I wasn't equipped to succeed. The assumption that they thought I wasn't going to be successful, really got to me. I was not leaving that room until they put me in the grade I earned the right to be in. Eventually, they did, and I graduated on time.

After graduation, mom wanted to move up north, I wanted to go to college where we lived, but she said, "no." So we moved. It didn't work out much longer with mom, and I eventually moved back in with my grandmother who also came to live in the states. I went to the local community college and graduated with an associate degree. I then went to a four-year institution and graduated with honors with a degree in psychology. When I was finished, I wanted to do research and get a graduate degree in neuropsychology. Because I could not enter the [neuropsychology] program until the fall semester, I enrolled in a different course and began to research at the school. Eventually, I was told by the head of the department I would never get

into [his] program. This was devastating. But as I walked out of his office crying a professor from the education department, who I did not know asked me if I was okay. I explained and she said you should come to my department.

I went home and thought about it, and I remembered, I always loved to teach. I had been teaching since I was a small child in the Dominican Republic. I tutored my classmates in college, and I was good at it. I also remembered I had previously met the superintendent of a local school district at a job fair, and he told me if I was ever interested in teaching, at the time I was not, I should give him a call. I did and it turned out that the school district and the university had a partnership and I was able to teach while going to school. This would count as my student teaching and I would go to class at night. I didn't really know then, but it was perfect.

I'm a believer that situations happen for a reason and sometimes the plan you laid out for yourself was not the path you were supposed to take or even be on. I believe there's a stronger force on our Earth and in the world. Some things are meant to defer or to deviate you and you don't realize it until later. I say this because it wasn't until many years later, when I moved to Pennsylvania with my husband that I knew teaching was where I was always meant to be. I had this greater force leading me to education and then specifically to Pennsylvania. I am here to inspire these kids and make a change. I am here so they can see someone who looks like them in the front of the classroom. I am here to help them find a career path and help them get where they are supposed to be. I want to be the variable that contributes to their lives and opens their eyes to the world of possibilities.

Summary

The five participants' narratives presented in this chapter represent portions of their unique journey. Although they all identify as Latina, their families' origins begin in Puerto Rico,

Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Argentina. Despite the geographical differences in where each participant grew up, what age they entered the United States, or how they came to Pennsylvania, each participant: 1) valued education; 2) encountered injustice 3) successfully navigated educational institutions; 4) indirectly chose the field of education as their career pathway; and 5) desired to positively contribute to the Latinx community. The following chapter describes and examines the central themes, findings, and Community Cultural Wealth, which emerged throughout the participants' *testimonios.*

Chapter Five: Analysis and Results

This chapter focuses on the five themes in relation to the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) revealed through the participants' *testimonios*. This is done by providing an explanation of each finding and identifying the forms of CCW the participants utilized to navigate life and educational institutions successfully. Excerpts of the participants' *testimonios* are used to document the first-hand experiences, recognize the participants' voices, and highlight the assets Latina educators possess, which contribute to their on-going success and influence their work as educators. The detailed analysis of the *testimonios* revealed the participants attributed their successful navigation through educational institutions to:

1. family and the power of education;
2. their motivation fueled by experiences with injustice;
3. support from Latinx educators;
4. alternative pathways to careers in education; and
5. the desire to positively support the Latinx community.

Utilizing an asset-based analysis of the findings, the following section layers CCW, with the participants' *testimonios* to identify often unrecognized forms of familial capital, aspirational capital, resistance capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, and social capital the Latina educators in this study possess (Yosso, 2006). Like Borovicka (2015) and Martinez (2016), this research uses CCW to examine the experiences of Latina educators as they maneuver through educational institutions as both students and educators. The multi-layered analysis of these experiences documented the strengths and value Latina educators add to the Latinx community, educational institutions, professional communities, research, and academia.

Family and the Power of Education

The participants' *testimonios* described how family members, specifically their mothers, laid the foundation for their understanding of education and what it would mean for their life's trajectory and future success. This theme is significant because each participant described how education afforded them the opportunities to improve their social status and challenge dominant discourse, which places the Latinx community in low-income, uneducated, and marginalized categories (Brown, 2016; Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2017). The forms of CCW highlighted in this theme are aspirational and familial capital. Familial capital is knowledge nurtured and imparted by *familia*. Aspirational capital is one's ability to embrace high expectations for their future (Yosso, 2006).

Familial capital was uncovered by the description of the participants' mothers who instilled the importance of education and its transformational power. Additionally, the participants described how many of their families believed if they "wanted a better life," they needed to further their education. This belief placed value on educational attainment and laid the foundation for the participants' aspirational capital in which they embraced high expectations of going to college and increasing their opportunities for success.

In Zilkya's *testimonio,* she described how her family grew up poor, but she did not realize it because her mother provided what they needed and instilled a core value that anything was possible with an education. Specifically, her mother would go out of her way to make sure her children had the educational opportunities that would provide for their future. For example, Zilkya explained:

> She [my mom] even drove 30 minutes each way to take him [my brother] to school…that is how dedicated she was to education. For me, it meant she would provide me with what

> I needed in college. She even purchased an old beat-up minivan so she could transport me and all my belongings to school.

Zilkya further described specifically how her mother instilled the importance of education. She said:

> My mom would say, if you want the finer things, you need an education. That's the only equalizer… no one can take it away…. Even though she only had a high school diploma, she knew that she wanted something more for us...If we wanted a better life [than the one we have], the only way to do that was to get an education.

Zilkya's familial capital gained through her mother's wisdom, words, and actions nurtured the value of education in her life. Additionally, Zilkya's aspirational capital was planted by her mother's view of education and the future opportunities it would provide. Overall, her mother provided life lessons that would carry her through obtaining a bachelor's degree, choosing to be an educator, and completing her master's degree.

Similarly, Alejandrina had a mother and grandmother who valued education and made sacrifices, so that the next generation could have the best opportunities. She remembered:

> It [my zone school] was riddled with gang activity and students had to go through metal detectors and the whole nine to get in. So, my mom refused to have us go to public school and made sacrifices for us to go to Catholic School… My grandmother…saw the kids that graduated from Catholic School were in a better position than those that were not. She just knew if we were going to put our feet down and live here [the U.S.], then we were going to have to fight, and a good education would help us do that.

Alejandrina's familial capital was evident in her mother and grandmother's commitment to foster educational values. They made sacrifices so their children could attend better schools. They also

recognized education was essential for a successful life in the United States. The foundation built by her mother and grandmother instilled aspirational capital in Alejandrina.

Like Zilkya and Alejandrina, Celia, Maria, and Mercedes had similar experiences. Celia explained how much education meant to her mother by sharing:

> My mom taught me that the one thing you can do for yourself is get and education. It will get you further in life and it will always stay with you. Whereas anything else, especially material things, could be taken away, but never your education.

Maria also described how her grandmother instilled the value of education from a young age:

> My parents weren't around, so I grew up with my maternal grandmother. Growing up, we didn't have a lot. My grandmother always said education was very important. She paid for private school because the public school was rotten and very disorganized. She wanted nothing but the best for me…School was a top priority. She believed that you could move up in society with an education.

Overall, each participant's mother or grandmother laid the groundwork for them to believe education is essential to better their life, gain higher status, and become successful. The familial and aspirational capital nurtured through their experiences and relationships with their mothers and grandmothers were critical to their motivation to complete high school and graduate from college. This directly contradicts dominant deficit discourse, which presumes living in a single-parent home, having a low socioeconomic status, and being children of immigrant parents whose first language is not English, are traits of students who lack the key characteristics for success (Brown, 2016; Delgado Bernal et al., 2017; Delpit, 2006; Gist, 2018; Matias, 2012; Milner, Pabon, Woodson, & McGee, 2013; Ochoa, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Valencia,

2010). However, as described in Yosso (2006), they all displayed aspirational and familial capital, which proved to be assets used to further their education and to reach professional goals.

Motivation Fueled by Experiences with Injustice

The participants' *testimonios* described experiences with injustice, many of which could potentially stifle the participants' educational growth and detour their career pathways. However, determined to reach their goals, the participants used their experiences with injustice to fuel their motivation for success. This theme is significant because the participants expressed how their encounters with injustice motivated them to move forward. Historically, Latina educators' experiences with injustice are overlooked and not included in educational research (Gist, 2018; Sleeter, 2017; Villegas et al., 2012). Eager to contribute to educational research and advocate for social justice, the participants in this study expressed their collective desire to share their *testimonios.*

As the participants shared their *testimonios,* they all described engaging in behaviors that resisted subordination and challenged dominant norms. Yosso (2006) defined these behaviors as a form of CCW identified as resistance capital. Resistance capital is the knowledge and skills fostered through behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2006). The participants used resistance capital to successfully navigate injustice without hindering their educational success.

While Alejandrina was going back to school to obtain her MBA. She was accidentally placed in an education course. Although Alejandrina had no experience in education, she decided to remain in the program. While in her first education course, she described an encounter with the professor like this:

> Now… you have to remember; I have no prior knowledge of educational best practices and I was the only Latina in the class…She was the director of the program and in front

> of the whole class she was condescending and said you should really reconsider your options here. You're not going to do well [in the education program]. She was very clear and very nasty…. [From that point forward], I was like…you watch and see…who is she…telling me I can't do this!

At that moment, Alejandrina described how embarrassed she was to be put in that situation and briefly questioned her choice to stay in the program. However, after some thought, she knew she could not allow anyone to limit her potential. She was determined to prove the program director wrong. Alejandrina used this experience as motivation to complete the education program and clear her pathway to her career in education.

Maria shared two pivotal moments with injustice during her *testimonio,* which could have derailed her educational pathway. The first, she recalled, when enrolling in school for the first time in the United States. She described the encounter like this:

> …we went to school to enroll and they wanted to put me down a grade because I mostly spoke Spanish… I refused, I wasn't going to let them put me down a grade just because they felt like it or because they felt that I wasn't equipped to succeed. The assumption that they thought I wasn't going to be successful, really got to me. I was not leaving that room until they put me where I was supposed to be.

Maria's second story was similar to Alejandrina's experience. Maria also encountered a professor who tried to derail her goal to attain a graduate degree. She recalled her experience:

> The meeting was with the head of the department I sat down in front of his desk and he said, "I am going to tell you the same thing I told my wife years ago, women are not meant to be neuropsychologists…Women are good for social work or family psychology…" I turned around, walked out of his office, and started to cry… as I walked

> out of his office humiliated… I knew… I couldn't stop [my education]. My grandmother worked too hard for me.

Maria's initial experience with an educational institution in the United States was to hold her back because they viewed her native language and prior education in the Dominican Republic as a deficit. Therefore, the school system decided she was ineligible to retain her academic status. Years later, despite the passage of time, increased English Language acquisition, and academic success, Maria was still viewed from a deficit perspective when the head of the neuropsychology department determined she was unqualified for a graduate program based on her appearance, femininity, brown skin, and accent. Unfortunately, in both cases, like many other Latinas in educational institutions, she was being viewed from a deficit perspective (Diaz, 2018; Gist, 2018; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012; Valencia, 2010). However, the aspirational and resistance capital, nurtured by her grandmother, pushed her to continue her education and not allow someone to hinder her academic growth.

Like Zilkya and Alejandrina, Celia faced injustice. However, her story included additional factors that may have hindered her educational growth. She illustrated her experiences with injustice, beginning with high school:

> I started skipping school in ninth grade. I wasn't feeling challenged, there was a lot going on at home and I just didn't go [to school]. No one noticed…no one bothered to ask me why I was missing school. No one called home. No one checked up on me. I fell through the cracks... I was in higher-level classes and I was classified as gifted. They should have noticed something was wrong. Eventually, I dropped out in tenth grade…

Although no one explicitly told Celia she would not finish school, she felt disregarded and left behind because the teachers never considered reaching out to find out what was going on. She

was in a gifted program at a predominantly White school and she fell through the cracks. She later reflected and wondered, “Would this have happened if I was a White student in a gifted program..” Despite what happened. she fought back against the negativity and the low expectations of a Mexican teenage mom. After a period of time, she went back to school and graduated with the highest honors as the valedictorian of her class. Celia knew, despite what people thought, she could do anything with an education.

Overall, the participants in this study share resistance capital; they resisted dominant deficit discourses and challenged others’ perceptions of them. Without this asset, they may have submitted to a dominant normative culture that had low expectations of Latinas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2017). Like the participants in Diaz (2018) and Martinez (2016), the Latina educators in this study displayed assets which are often not acknowledged by academia. However, they utilized their aspirational and resistance capital as strengths that fueled their desire for success and motivation to further their academic journey.

Support from Latinx Educators

Each participant described educational institutions as places dominated by White educators. They struggled to remember any Latinx educators or any Teachers of Color in their entire educational experiences. Within their collective experiences attending different U.S. schools, they encountered less than ten Teachers of Color and even lower numbers of Latinx teachers. Mercedes recalled, “I think I had two Latina teachers in high school. They both were Spanish teachers, and in college, I had three, but I majored in Spanish and they all came from other countries.” Celia said, “I only remember the one who helped me in elementary school.” Zilkya couldn’t recall any. She said, “I really can’t remember any [Teachers of Color] who actually taught me.” Maria said, “When I think about it, they were all White. Except for one, but

I never really thought about it until now." Alejandrina couldn't remember exactly but did say, "…in college, I think I had one." Although they all went to schools in different states, it appears they experienced Teachers of Color at a lower percentage than the national average of 18% (Strohl et al., 2016).

Despite experiencing low numbers of Latinx educators, the participants specifically recalled at least one Latinx educator who helped guide them through their educational journeys. Most attributed their success to a Latina educator who served as mentor, role model, and guide who helped them navigate educational institutions. The relationships and connections the participants built with these Latina educators helped guide and support them through times of struggle, need, and success. These relationships, as described by Yosso (2016), are forms of social capital. Social capital consists of the connections and relationships maintained with others that provide emotional and social support for persistence through adversarial times (Yosso, 2016). Each participant possessed the ability to build relationships with people who helped them navigate educational institutions. This is significant because not only did this highlight the ability of the participants to build relationships; it describes the importance of Latina role models in the success of Latina students and future educators. Serving as role models and mentors, Latina educators who share similar experiences to their students are more likely to recognize the needs of Latinx students and are in positions where they can offer navigational, academic, social, and emotional support (Garza, 2019; Stohr et al., 2018).

While sharing her college experiences, Alejandrina specifically remembered Mrs. DeJesus, a Latina professor, in her graduate education program whom she described as her guiding light:

> She would tell me exactly what I needed to do, and exactly the way she told me… was the way I did it. … she was like…listen…people are going to bring you down regardless of what you do or say … They can't harm you. You got to rise above it and people all the time. I've been doing this [education] for years, I know how it works. Whatever you need, you call me… She was a success. Her children were success stories and you know, she walked them all through their life. She knew my mom died, and she was like… don't worry, I got you.

After having a terrible experience with the head of the graduate education department, Alejandrina found Mrs. DeJesus and attributed her success in the education program to her. She helped Alejandrina navigate an unfamiliar program when the head of the department identified her as not suitable to continue in the graduate education program. Mrs. DeJesus also provided a light in the darkness surrounding the death of Alejandrina's mother.

Similar to Alejandrina, Zilkya also described a Latina educator who served as a mentor and quickly became family. While discussing her college experience, Zilkya described Dr. Cora:

> She was that one person you could go to for everything. She would tell me exactly what I needed to do…and helped me navigate the university. I didn't have someone like that at home. We became so close she let me stay at her house one summer because I had to take a summer course and could not afford to live on campus. She even had a graduation party at her house for me. My own family didn't have a party.

Throughout her *testimonio* Zilkya, explained how important Dr. Cora was to her. The connection transcended typical student-faculty relationships and served as an integral part of her educational journey. Zilkya was more than four hours away from home and did not have someone to help guide her. Even if home was closer, no one in her family had the experience Dr. Cora had. In

what could have been a challenging time, Zilkya cultivated social capital through a lifelong relationship with a Latina educator who not only helped her navigate through a very large university but became family.

Maria similarly found a Latina educator in her darkest hour. As she described the encounter again, she remembered, “Dr. Nieves was there as I walked out of his office crying, she asked me what was wrong, and I told her. She said we have a place for you in the education department.” Maria might have never realized the field of education was an option for her if she had not met Dr. Nieves. During a very emotional time, Dr. Nieves was there and helped comfort Maria through her darkest thoughts. This relationship put her on the path to find her calling as an educator. Additionally, conversations with Dr. Nieves led her to remember another connection she made during her educational journey. Specifically, one with a superintendent of a school district who helped her find a school where she could work full-time while pursuing her degree in education. Maria’s connection with Dr. Nieves altered her original career pathway and led her to the field of education.

The participants described here each encountered “someone like them:” a Latina educator with a similar culture, life experience, and background who helped them through struggles and times of need. These relationships cultivated new learnings and strategies which enabled the participants to successfully navigate educational institutions that were not built with them in mind. Although these specific Latina Educators were not the full extent of the participants’ social networks, these role models and mentors were instrumental to their educational success. This research, like the work of Diaz (2018) and Martinez (2016), identified the integral part Latina educators play in helping Latinx students navigate through injustice and educational institutions while advocating for change and social justice.

Alternative Pathways to Careers in Education

Each participant began their post-secondary degree attainment in a field other than education. However, they all experienced a life event that changed their career path and ultimately led them to a career in secondary education. As the participants described how they entered the field of education, they each remembered a pivotal time, place, or event which revealed a clear path towards education. Zilkya recalled:

> My interest in law was to fight for social justice… I took my LSAT and did very well. Then the summer after my Junior year, I began an internship at a local law firm… it quickly became clear to me that it would be very difficult for me to hold on to my beliefs [as a Christian] and to be a lawyer… After graduation, I was working … with a small group of teenagers getting them to reach their post high school positions, careers, or whatever. I really loved it. I thought, how else can I do this for a greater number of kids? It was a natural transition [to education.]

She continued to describe how important education is and why she was supposed to be in a secondary school:

> When you get an education, you just don't change your story, you change the story of those closest to you. I go back to that [education] being the equalizer. Helping kids get their high school diploma. Helping them achieve further. How do I make that happen? It's through education. That's where I was supposed to be.

Zilkya always wanted to fight for social justice in her community. She wanted to equal the playing field for the Latinx community, which in her experience was not given the same opportunities as their White peers.

Similar to Zylkia, Alejandrina started her career with a degree outside the field of education. Alejandrina graduated with a degree in business and was working in the finance industry when she decided to go back to school and earn her graduate degree. During her first class in a graduate program at a local university she recalled:

> As God intended, I was accidentally placed in the wrong class... [Although,] I was in the wrong class, I decided to stay because ... I could not continue to grow without continuing to build my education and guess what? Once you have it, it can never be taken away. Everything else can be… but your education could not. It's like a foundation. To build a solid foundation you need education. So how do we build this up? It starts with people like us [Latinas]. We have to continue going to school. We have to continue getting educated. I knew then, I could make a difference in someone's life. I decided to stay in the education program. I want to be a Latina who shares her experiences with students like me and helps guide them on their educational journey. I can help build their foundation.

Alejandrina was accidentally placed in an education program; she describes this "mistake" as God's plan. The plan was purposeful and led her to begin a new journey into the field of education. She believed it was always her path; she just didn't know it.

Celia's path to education was full of twists and turns that took her in and out of various educational institutions. However, furthering her education was not only important to her, but her daughters as well. She described her path to education like this:

> When I started, I was pre-med…I left school and when I started again, I changed to pre-pharm. I wanted to work in nuclear pharmacology and work with cancer patients.

> During this time, I got married again and had two more children, but I was divorced after only five years and a single mother…I just wanted to finish school, so I ended up going to school part-time and graduating with a degree in biology...but I needed something more. At first, I thought being a teacher would be great, the schedule would fit with the girl's school schedule and I could be home when they were home. So, I started to take online classes for a degree in education…

Later, Celia added how important education was to her and said:

> Education to me is everything you learn on your way through life. There are different kinds of education. Like the education you get through life experiences and the education you get through books. Education is very important it enabled me to get where I need to be or where I wanted to go. I knew all of my experiences, my language, culture, dropping out, teen pregnancy, teen marriage, divorce, the struggle through college, and even dealing with a parent addiction could help.

Celia eventually moved to Pennsylvania, had another daughter, and completed her degree in secondary science education. She loved science and wanted to share her love for it with students like her. She found a job in a middle school and never turned back.

Mercedes began college as a nursing major. She was one of only 60 students who were accepted to the program. It was a highly coveted spot, and she was excited to be there. However, once she began her course work and volunteered in a hospital, she found out rather quickly, nursing was not for her. She described the experience like this:

> For the first time, I was in classes and I didn't do well. I took chemistry and failed, I took anatomy and only got a 'C.' I was not off to a good start. Then…I had to volunteer at a

> hospital, and it was horrible. I don't know exactly what it was, but I was squeamish, everything was gross to me... I realized then nursing wasn't for me.

Mercedes struggled at first to find her new path but explained her realization like this:

> Growing up, I knew education was really important to my parents and I saw how education transformed my mother and father, I wanted to help...Education to me is the gateway to a more successful future. It expands your horizons… You can never have too much knowledge. I want to be an advocate for my students. I want to share my family's experiences. I want to help them be more than they are told or think they can be. I am here [in education] because my parents pushed the boundaries, pushed the limits, pushed other people's expectations of them. They taught me to do the same. I want to help my students push the limits.

Mercedes grew up watching her parents work and go back to school to further their education and provide a better life for their family. She saw education as the gateway to her parents' success. Education provided them with opportunities to be financially secure. Mercedes knew if she wanted to do the same, she would have to work hard. She always wanted to help people. She just found a different way. She found a place where she was able to bring more people with her.

Maria was ready to begin her graduate program in neuropsychology when the head of the department told her someone "like her" would never be in "his" program. When she left his office, she met someone from the education department who told her she would be a great teacher. Maria described what happened next:

> I went home and thought about it and I remembered, I always loved to teach. I had been teaching since I was a small child in the Dominican Republic. I tutored my classmates in college, and I was good at it…

She later realized:

> I am here to inspire these kids and make a change. I am here so they can see someone who looks like them in the front of the classroom. I am here to help them find a career path and help them get where they are supposed to be. I want to be the variable that contributes to their lives and open their eyes to the world of possibilities.

Although it was not part of their educational plan, life experiences altered each participants' career pathway and led them to careers in education. Their aspirational and resistance capital motivated them to find a way to reach their potential, despite encounters with injustice. Their navigational capital enabled them to traverse educational institutions, shifting programs, schools, and career paths. Additionally, their social capital enabled them to build relationships that transformed potentially derailing experiences to ones of resilience, strength, and growth.

Desire to Positively Support the Latinx Community

Each participant's journey was different, but they were led by what most would say was an outside force. They did not have a straight and easy path; each participant was met with various forms of injustice as they traversed educational institutions. However, they used their Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2006) to successfully navigate institutions that were historically designed to marginalize them (Diaz, 2018; Gist, 2018; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012; Valencia, 2010). Through their journeys, they realized one of their purposes was to give back and serve the Latinx community as educators who challenge deficit thinking, advocate for their students, and support them on their journeys through educational institutions.

In their current positions in secondary schools, the participants each utilized their experiences and CCW to prepare their students for injustices they will inevitably face. Mercedes

described how she prepares her students for negativity and reassures them they can do anything. She explained it as follows:

> Something that I've tried to convey to my students is that you can be proud of your background and be proud of your culture… because I think a lot of them in some of their other classes, are made to feel like…I don't speak English, so…I'm not good enough. But I think one thing that I've really tried to work on with them is to let them know that they are good enough…They are smart enough and to just keep pushing forward, never giving up because eventually they're going to prove people wrong.

Mercedes is familiar with how students whose native language is not English are made to feel inferior. She intentionally prepares her students for this. She often recalls her father's stories of how he was an immigrant and was made to feel the same way. She said, "I never want my students to feel stupid because they come from another country and they don't speak English. They are smart and they need to know it. So, I say it loud and clear." She also wants to ensure they understand communication in multiple languages is linguistic capital (Yosso, 2006), and they should value that asset.

Alejandrina described a time one of her students was affected by deficit perceptive in her school:

> One of my students walked in one day and said, Miss, I no longer want to be a screenwriter and I said why…Because up until now, we've been here for seven months and you've been writing exceptionally. So, I sat down and spoke with her and you know, just completely rebuilt that foundation of hope … I said, you cannot allow one person's, thought of you… one person's idea of what you should become to hamper who you were

> meant to be. So, you have to follow your calling…you're what, lights that fire for you, don't ever…ever …let anyone take that away from you.

Later Alejandrina added:

> I am a Latina. I have a lot in common with them. I can relate. I went to a school where the people didn't put much stock in me either. They didn't feel that I was capable of being successful. I have a first-hand account of what these kids are going through and I tell them… you ain't alone, were going to do what we gotta do, so no one can hold us down. I navigate these treacherous waters and I can help them navigate the waters that were meant to crush them.

Alejandrina builds resistance and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2006) in her students and has high expectations. She uses her experience to teach her students how to identify and respond to deficit perspectives they encounter in school. She also helps build navigational and social capital by providing support and guidance during adversarial times (Yosso, 2006).

> Zilkya also recalled an encounter with a student while she was out at a restaurant:
> He tapped me on my shoulder and said, "I knew it was you." Then he turns to my daughter and says, "your mom is an angel." At that moment, it all came back to me. He was homeless for two years. He came from a very dysfunctional background and family. He had made some poor choices, and then turned it around, graduated, and got accepted to a local university. I remember I had to fight with the university to declare him independent for financial aid purposes. I fought, and I fought. He was homeless, he didn't have access to his parent's financial information... He now has a master's degree and he is married. This reminds me why I do what I do because the stars changed for that kid because of an education, not only for him, but for his family.

Zilkya was an advocate for this young man. When the educational system failed him, she stepped in and helped him navigate his way into college. She modeled resistance, navigational, social, and aspirational capital. She was a Latina educator that helped this young man reach his educational goals.

Unlike the others, in her *testimonio,* Maria revealed two instances where she had to call out teachers for their deficit perspectives. She described how she fought for her students like this:

> I was in a professional development meeting and I overheard a woman complaining about the quality of the school. She was saying how when she first started to work at the school it was good and then she goes on to say that was before we got brown children…She further explained by saying a couple of years ago, there was an increase in the behavioral problems, and it was because we had more brown children with different cultural backgrounds... I had to call her out and I said, "I'm brown please explain exactly what you mean!"

Maria fought for her students even when they were not in the room. She could not stay quiet in a room full of White educators that were saying all Brown Children were bad. What would have happened if she was not in the room. Maria also recalled a time when a White educator did something similar, but this time in front of students:

> I was in the testing room with a White male teacher, and a student who was finished taking the test started kind of drawing on the scratch paper. He drew the Puerto Rican flag on it. The male teacher in front of a room full of kids says… "Oh, you see they're artistic, and they're creative when they draw their little flag. They have no respect. They come to this country and they have no appreciation for our flag. Look at him, he is drawing his little flag and he probably flunked the test."

In this instance, she did not speak up in front of the students because she did not want to further disrupt the state test or escalate the situation, but she immediately went to report the situation. She was not going to let it go.

Each of the Latina educators shared their current experiences with injustice and voiced their desire to stand up for their students. Their *testimonios* documented the bias and social injustice still prevalent in educational institutions. They each acknowledged their purpose was to develop the assets, skills, and strategies that will help students respond, resist, and navigate through injustice they encounter in and out of school. The participants continue to use their familial, aspirational, social, linguistic, resistance, and navigational capital to help their students successfully navigate educational institutions. They do this by: 1) sharing their experiences; 2) fighting for social justice; 3) being role models and mentors to the Latinx community; and 4) advocating for students.

Summary

This chapter described the five themes, and the CCW revealed though Latina educators' *testimonios*. This study purposefully focused on the strengths and strategies the participants used to successfully navigate educational institutions and enter the field of education. By highlighting their CCW represented by the five themes, this research documented the assets Latina educators possess, which contribute to their overall success and influence their work as educators.

Through their *testimonios,* the Latina educators took readers on a journey that explored their experiences through educational institutions. Together they shared how their experiences influenced their career pathways and informed their work as educators. The use of CCW provided a foundation to highlight the various assets each participant has and to understand how each was cultivated throughout their educational journeys. Overall, sharing their *testimonios,*

provided the participants with an opportunity for their voices to be heard and to be proponents of change.

Chapter Six: Findings

The purpose of this *testimonio* research study was to explore and examine the experiences of Latina educators as they traversed educational institutions and followed their career pathways into the field of education. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What experiences have shaped the educational journeys of Latina educators?
2. How do these experiences relate to their career pathways and inform their work as educators?

The participants in this study are a part of the one percent of Latinx educators who are currently working in secondary schools in Pennsylvania (Fontana & Lapp, 2018). During this study, the participants were employed in a school district where more than 90% of the teachers are White, and more than 90% of the student body were Students of Color, 72% of whom are Latinx. In a school setting like the context of this research, the disparity of Teachers of Color in relation to Students of Color is ten times higher than the national disproportionality rate (Stohr et al., 2018).

The underrepresentation of Latinx educators and the overrepresentation of Latinx students in this context makes the lived experiences of the participants meaningful and rich in knowledge of encounters with learning and working in spaces where they have been both overrepresented and underrepresented. This study used *testimonios* as a tool to gain deeper insight into the participants' life stories and progressions through these educational institutions. Using t*estimonios* in this educational research empowered participants to share their Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and the efforts they made to challenge oppression, bias, deficit perspectives, and injustice they encountered in educational spaces. The *testimonios* were collected during three 90-minute interviews focusing on life: (a) at home and outside of school,

(b) as students in educational institutions, and (c) in schools where they are employed as educators.

Overall, the *testimonios* in this study explored the journeys of Latinas educators who successfully navigated educational institutions and chose to enter the field of education. Through their *testimonios,* the participants reflected on their journeys and shared how they made sense of their lives, choices, and career pathways. The data collected uncovered how the participants' experiences related to family, education, encounters with injustice, motivation, support networks, language, career pathways, and work as educators. By using the participants' *testimonios* their stories, counterstories, and CCW are moved from the margins to the center of educational research where they are given a platform to share their experiences which are often overlooked and historically underrepresented (Borovicka, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012; Diaz, 2018; Hernandez-Scott, 2017; Huber & Cueva, 2012; Martinez, 2016).

In doing so, the collective voices of Latina educators are used to reclaim their experiences and use them as sources of strength, which enabled them to succeed. Similar to previous research, using the lenses of CRT, Lat Crit, and CCW, the *testimonios* exposed counternarratives, which highlighted silenced realities, the need for social change, and participants' strengths instead of deficits. Furthermore, the collective experiences of the participants can be used to build capacity for change, social justice, educational equity, shifts in thinking, and the need to increase the attraction and recruitment of Latinx educators in secondary schools.

Researcher Reflection

In each interview, I found myself re-living my own educational experiences. I connected with each participant in a manner that validated some of my own experiences and the need to

share our *testimonios* in academia. Prior to describing the findings, I share a portion of my *testimonio*. I did so to be transparent in my positionality. Just like the participants in this study, I am a Latina educator who works in a secondary school. I recognize the: 1) marginality in our voices; 2) knowledge gained by sharing our *testimonios;* 3) value our stories hold in academia; and 4) power we have to transform the future of education. Together our *testimonios* are vehicles that construct and share knowledge across generations. Like *testimonialistas* before us, we become a part of the research, and the "I's" in our stories stand for collective 'we's' as we use our voices to empower change and advocate for social justice" (DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015; Elenes, 2001; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

My *testimonio* was assembled from audio and hand-written reflections after participants' initial interviews and while listening to audio recordings and re-reading transcriptions. In sharing my *testimonio* here, like the participants, I am again choosing to: 1) take readers on a verbal journey describing experiences with injustice (Brabeck, 2003); 2) transform the past into a new present and enhancing the future (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983); and 3) create knowledge through highlighting the significance of personal experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Through this research, together with the *testimonios* of Zilkya, Alejandrina, Celia, Mercedes, and Maria, we bear witness to injustice, document first-hand experiences, describe transformative journeys, add Latina voices to academia, and work together to change the future of education for the Latinx Community.

Leila

My father was born in Puerto Rico and my mother was born in the U.S. but returned to PR shorty after. Spanish was their first language. When they enrolled in school, they both were placed in lower academic classes because English was not their first language. I remember my

mom specifically telling me she was placed in special education classes just because she could not speak English. I believe my mom saw this as an injustice and wanted to change the educational system and therefore became a teacher. My parents were married when she was in college in Pennsylvania. I was born a week after her graduation. My mother was the only one in her family who graduated with a four-year degree. My father was in the Navy and went to technical school. He was a machinist by trade.

My parents only wanted the best for me and never wanted me to feel the way they did in school, so they made sure I knew English well. In fact, my mother made sure I knew everything well. I remember reading and doing math problems before I was in kindergarten. I don't remember my mom ever explicitly saying education was the key to success, but I knew through her actions it was what I needed to be successful. However, I do remember her saying no one can take your education away from you. It will always set you apart.

As far back as I can remember, I loved science and I wanted to help people. Everyone said I was going to be a doctor, so I told myself I was going to be a doctor. Through high school and college, I told myself I was going to be a doctor. It wasn't until my senior year in college I discovered I was meant to be a teacher. I remember it so vividly… I was watching TV, and a commercial came on, and it was a bunch of children saying what they wanted to be when they grow up, and they all said prestigious professions like lawyers, doctors, engineers, and professional athletes. The last little girl said, "I want to be a teacher," and the boy next to her asked, "Why would you want to do that when you could be a doctor?" She replied, "Where do you think doctors come from?" I knew then where I was supposed to be. It was like a flashback in a movie, and scenes of my life story flashed through my head. I could not take it back. Every

tutoring session, every phone call, every time I helped my sisters, friends, and their friends with homework was etched in my brain permanently. I couldn't un-see it.

I went to school the next day and told my advisor I was not going to medical school. I was going to be a teacher. I could see the look of disappointment in his eyes. He tried so hard to convince me to change my mind. But he couldn't. In fact, everyone tried to change my mind. It didn't work, I was going to be a teacher. However, it was too late to change my major, so I graduated with a degree in biology and minor in business. After graduation, I signed up to be a substitute teacher. I did that while taking classes at night to get my biology certification.

In December, I received a phone call from a high school principal asking me to fill in for a science teacher who was out on medical leave. Of course, I said, "yes." She was a member of the board for an organization I participated in during college, and she heard I changed my career path and immediately tried to contact me. She told me she always knew I would be a great teacher. Somehow, she knew this before I did. That substitute position led to a full-time position the next year. Although I did not have my certification yet, I was able to use my emergency certification to teach, and because I taught science, I was able to use it as my student teaching experience. Everything from that point forward fell into place. I found my way to a secondary school where 80% of the students were Latinx. I reflected and thought, I never had a teacher who looked like me. In all my education, not one Latina. I had so much to share.

Findings

The findings of this research can be used to support the need for targeted professional development, increased recruitment of Latinx educators, and social justice education for students. The findings also add to the body of research surrounding equity in education,

professional development for educators, the underrepresentation of Latinas in education, and the growing need for a diverse educational workforce.

The following presents the findings from this study that emerged from the participants' *testimonios*, common themes, and research questions. The findings like Borovicka (2015), Martinez (2016), and Hernandez Scott (2016) address the links between 1) family and the foundation of education; 2) experiences with injustice and the motivation to succeed; 3) the roles Latina educators play in educational institutions and Latinx students successfully navigating these institutions; 4) educational experiences and becoming educators; and 5) the desire to become an educator and work in institutions that largely serve the Latinx community.

Family and the Power of Education

The first major finding from the study was that the participants had a strong familial grounding. Their mother or grandmother instilled in them a sense that education was critical for future success, and once obtained it could never be taken away. Furthermore, the value placed on education by their *familia* laid the foundation for the participants' aspirational capital in which they embraced high expectations of going to college and increasing their opportunities for success. Overall, this desire to be and do better was launched by the presumed power of education and its ability to positively affect one's life trajectory.

Motivation Fueled by Experiences with Injustice

The second major finding was how the participants used their experiences with injustice to fuel their motivations for success and reach their goals. Each participant described engaging in behaviors within educational institutions that resisted subordination, challenged dominant norms, and rejected deficit perspectives. These behaviors illuminated the participants' resistance capital

and their collective desire to share their *testimonios*. Overall, they used their resistance capital to successfully navigate injustice without hindering their educational success.

Support from Latinx Educators

The third major finding was that most of the participants attributed their successful navigation of educational institutions to a Latina educator who served in some capacity as a role model or mentor. The relationships and connections the participants built with these Latina educators helped guide and support them through times of struggle, need, and success. Each participant possessed navigational and social capital and the ability to build relationships with people who helped them navigate educational institutions. This asset not only highlighted the ability of the participants to build relationships, it also described the importance of Latinx role models in the success of Latinx students and future educators.

Alternative Pathways to Careers in Education

The fourth major finding was each participant began their post-secondary degree attainment in a field other than education. However, they all experienced life events which changed their career pathways and led them to a career in education. This is significant because not one participant had a desire or the foresight to view education as a viable career choice. Each began the career pathways in fields they believed were more prestigious such as medicine, neuroscience, nursing, law, and business. Although their original intent was not to become an educator, once the participants determined education was the field they were supposed to enter, they obtained a teaching certificate using an alternative pathway. These experiences again highlighted the Latina educators' aspirational, resistance, navigational, and social capital.

Desire to Positively Support the Latinx Community

The fifth major finding was each participant, through their experiences and journeys through educational institutions, realized their purpose was to give back and serve the Latinx community. They wanted to become educators who give voice to the voiceless, challenge deficit thinking, resist injustice, advocate for their students, build Community Cultural Wealth, and support them as they navigate through educational institutions. Additionally, the participants described encounters with injustice, which at the time of the study, were occurring in their current places of employment. This, coupled with their own experiences with injustice, continued to fuel their desire to develop the assets, skills, and strategies that will help their students respond, resist, and navigate through injustice they encounter in and out of school. Overall, the participants used their familial, aspirational, social, linguistic, resistance, and navigational capital to help their students successfully navigate educational institutions. They do this by: 1) sharing their experiences; 2) fighting for social justice; 3) being role models and mentors to the Latinx community; and 4) advocating for students.

Implications

The problems of practice presented in this dissertation were: 1) the presumption that many White educators view Students of Color as lacking characteristics required to support academic and social success (Brown, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Gist, 2018; Matias, 2012; Milner, Pabon, Woodson, & McGee, 2013; Ochoa, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Valencia, 2010); 2) educator bias which promotes social injustice and the unequal treatment of Students of Color in educational settings (Borovicka, 2015; Brown, 2016; Diaz, 2018; Dixson, Anderson, & Donner, 2017; Ochoa, 2007; Valencia, 2010); 3) the voices, perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of the Latinx community being overlooked, marginalized, and left out of dominant discourse

(Borovicka, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012; Diaz, 2018; Gist, 2018; Hernandez-Scott, 2017; Sleeter, 2017; Villegas et al., 2012); and 4) Pennsylvania's large disproportionality rate of Teachers of Color to Students of Color (Stohr et al., 2018). The data collected from this research reveals the participants experienced similar problems of practice. However, the remainder of this chapter suggests how professional development, social justice education for students, alternative pathways to certification, increased interest in the field of education, and the strategic recruitment of Latinx educators can be used to mitigate the problems of practice.

Professional Development

In the context of this study, current professional development is based on the school district's strategic framework that is centered on equity and meeting the unique needs of every student. The current plan focuses on special education students and English Language Learners to improve state standardized test scores. According to the participants, there have been very few meaningful professional development sessions focused on culturally responsive teaching, teacher bias, and or deficit thinking. In this setting, the teaching staff is over 90% White, and many may not be aware of their bias, deficit thinking, and how it unconsciously influences their teaching practices. Despite the need for more culturally responsive practices, the participants suggested their school district had no plans to implement professional development, which addresses the aforementioned topics. Therefore, the faculty and staff need to engage in meaningful professional development, which addresses bias and deficit thinking. The example presented here is one option that can be easily implemented within Professional Learning Communities (PLC), which currently exist in many school districts.

Research suggests providing educators with opportunities to become aware of their social position through critical analysis, self-reflection, and deconstructing ideology will

provide opportunities for them to identify the relationship between their position and knowledge (Gay, 2002; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Additionally, providing educators with a safe place to become aware of socially constructed and institutionalized deficit thinking will provide opportunities for them to identify the relationship between their status and perceptions of Youth of Color (Brown, 2016; Jenson & Fraser, 2016; Mirci, P., Loomis, C., & Hensley, P., 2011; Nelson, 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Providing professional development opportunities that enable teachers to reflect on their social positions and institutionalized deficit-thinking, educators can become aware of their implicit bias and unconscious deficit thinking. Doing this will facilitate the ability of educators to shift their thinking from a deficit-model to an asset-based model.

Social Justice Education for Students

The findings suggest in the context of this study, Latinx students may not understand the injustices they face or how to identify, resist, and navigate through encounters with injustice. While the participants in this study openly describe how they build Latinx students' capacity to appropriately respond to their experiences with injustice, further research can be done to identify injustices current students encounter and how they can address injustices which may potentially limit their educational growth and overall potential.

Similar to Cammarota (2016), this research can be done within the context of the participants' social studies classes or afterschool programs. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) described by Cammarota (2016) was conducted with high school students who wanted to examine the problems and injustices in their school, social, and economic context. Through their research, they conducted a critical analysis of social justice problems and presented their findings to parents and community members with the aim to initiate change. The students in this study

used qualitative data collection methods such as observations, field notes, and interviews with peers and educators. Additionally, they created visual and creative media through photography, videos, and theatrical productions to present the keys patterns, themes, and findings of their research (Cammarota, 2016).

While this is only one example of what can be used to obtain students' encounters with injustice, it can be modified to suit the needs of a future researcher. For example, Cammarota's (2016) research was conducted as PAR, a researcher may modify it to work with a smaller group of students in a qualitative action research study. This could reduce the time required to conduct the study and include students in more than one class. Overall, further research should be conducted to identify the current perspectives of students in this and other educational contexts.

Alternative Pathways to Certification

The findings in this study identified participants completed non-traditional education certification programs. Specifically, most obtained bachelor's degrees in other fields and sought Pennsylvania teacher certification while they were in the workforce. This experience for many of the participants was difficult as they had to work full time and complete their student teaching during the school day. While research suggests more Teachers of Color complete traditional programs, more than 27% of teachers in alternative teacher certification programs are Teachers of Color (Stohr et al., 2018). Further research can be conducted to determine the percentage of secondary Teachers of Color, specifically Latinx teachers who obtain their certifications via alternative pathways.

Additionally, further research can be conducted on teacher residency programs in secondary schools. Offering more residency programs would enable Teachers of Color to work with a mentor teacher in a classroom for a full academic year while earning a stipend and taking

graduate coursework from a partnering university. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has already indicated residency models can be used to encourage a more diverse teacher workforce (Stohr et al., 2018). However, the district in the context of this study does not utilize this type of program. Nationally 45% of graduate students enrolled in residency programs were Teachers of Color (Stohr et al., 2018). If the school district in this context and others like it would offer more residency programs, they could potentially increase the number of Latinx educators.

Increase the Interest in Education

The findings in this study suggest the participants did not choose education as their initial career pathway. More research can be conducted to determine why Latinx educators are not choosing to enter the field of education. The PDE has acknowledged only ten percent of Students of Color who complete four-year degree programs graduate with a degree in education (Stohr et al., 2018). Furthermore, PDE has proposed implementing programs that would increase Students' of Color interest in the field of education, such as "grow your own" educator programs, teacher academy magnet schools, and educators rising organizations. Bianco, Leech, Viesca (2011), Gist, Bianco, Lynn (2019), Rodgers-Ard, Knaus, Bianco, Brandehoff, Gist (2019) suggest "grow your own" programs offer opportunities to diversify the teacher workforce by developing teacher preparation programs that are culturally responsive and community-rooted.

Each of the aforementioned programs suggested by the PDE can be utilized in school districts similar to the one in this study. They are designed to build interest in careers in education by providing students the opportunity to explore opportunities in education prior to high school graduation. Students in these programs would also participate in activities that cultivate the skills required to become educators. Additionally, these programs offer financial

incentives, scholarships, mentors, university partnerships, and job placement, which facilitates and promotes “the long-term development of a diverse and talented workforce” (Stohr et al., 2018). While PDE has identified these programs as viable options to increase the attraction of Teachers of Color, many school districts like the one in this study have yet to build the partnerships to implement them successfully. Offering programs like those suggested by PDE could increase the number of college-bound students interested in the field of education and provide a source for additional research.

Increase the Recruitment of Teachers of Color

The findings in this study suggest Latinx educators play an essential role in the participants’ successful navigation of educational institutions. Latinx educators also provided emotional and social support for persistence through adversarial times. This is significant because it highlights the importance of Latinx role models in the success of Latinx students and future educators. Serving as role models and mentors, Latinx educators who share similar experiences to their students are more likely to recognize the needs of Latinx students and are in positions where they can offer navigational, academic, social, and emotional support (Garza, 2019; Martinez, 2016). Therefore, school districts similar to the context of this research setting should actively recruit more Latinx educators. Doing so would decrease the disparity between Latinx Educators and Latinx Students and provide opportunities for further research. Currently, there are no publicly shared efforts of the school district in this context to directly recruit more Latinx educators or Teachers of Color.

The PDE suggests that Teachers of Color have a positive influence on all students and suggest school districts in Pennsylvania should proactively seek out Teachers of Color during the hiring process. They also suggest school districts include Teachers of Color who already serve in

their schools to be active participants in developing and implementing strategies to hire a teacher workforce that reflects their student population (Stohr et al., 2018). Creating and implementing programs that include current Latinx educators in the recruitment and hiring process would provide critical insight and potentially increase the overall recruitment of Latinx educators.

Conclusion

Historically, Latina educators' experiences are overlooked and left out of educational scholarship. In this study, through their collective *testimonios*, the experiences of Latina educators are brought to the center of academic research. In doing so, the participants' *testimonios* of strength, resistance, and resiliency, which include their encounters with oppression, racism, and bias, are documented in academia. Through their own voices, Latina educators share their journeys through educational institutions and how they chose to become educators. Their stories and counterstories can be used to build capacity for change, social justice, educational equity, shifts in perception, and the need to increase the attraction and recruitment of Latinx educators in secondary schools. The findings in this research can be used in similar contexts as well as throughout educational institutions to support the need for targeted professional development, social justice education for students, and increased recruitment of Latinx educators. Additionally, the findings add to the body of research surrounding equity in education, professional development for educators, the underrepresentation of Latinas in education, and the growing need for a diverse educational workforce.

Stohr et al. (2018) have acknowledged the need for Pennsylvania's school districts to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce. Additionally, Stohr et al. (2018) strategically outlined the strategies and steps to decrease the growing disparity of Teachers of Color in relationship to Students of Color. The PDE's policy brief not only indicates the benefits of a

diverse teaching staff but specifically states the “success and well-being of students of color” is directly related to a workforce that represents the growing diversity of the student population (Stohr et al., 2018).

The research in this study and the PDE identified professional development, increased attraction of Teachers of Color, alternative pathways for teacher certification, and active recruitment of Teachers of Color as viable methods to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce. However, without actively engaging in activities and strategies which are designed to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce, the numbers of Teachers of Color in Pennsylvania will remain stagnant. To successfully increase teacher diversity in Pennsylvania and other educational institutions, schools must make coordinated efforts by providing the resources necessary to build a teacher workforce that reflects the student population.

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Appendix A

Script

"My name is Leila Little, and I am a doctoral student in the Secondary Education Department at Kutztown University.

I am working on the research for my dissertation which is focused on Latina educators who are currently employed in the secondary setting. I am looking for educators who might be interested in being interviewed. You would be compensated $50 for your time.

Please let me know if you are or are not interested by _____. I can be reached via email at_____ or by cellphone at _____.

Thank you for your time.

Leila Little

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted through Kutztown University. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement if you choose to participate.

This study is being conducted by Leila Little a doctoral student in the Secondary Education Department at Kutztown University.

Title of the Study: How We Got Here: Testimonios of Secondary Latina Educators

Purpose of the Study:

This study intends to examine the experiences of educators who self-identify as Latina and who currently are employee by a secondary U.S. public school. This study seeks to understand how Latina educators understand their academic and social experiences as they relate to their current positions.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to participate in three 90-minute audio recorded interviews. Each interview will be approximately three days to two weeks apart. The full participation of this study is not to exceed five hours and six weeks.

All interviews will be recorded using a digital device kept in the researcher's possession. The interviews will be transcribed, and participants will be identified using pseudonyms. The researcher will create and store a key to the pseudonyms. The recording, transcribed interviews and pseudonym key will be stored using a password-protected file on the researcher's personal computer. At the conclusion of the study all files will be permanently deleted (All records and recordings will be emptied into the desktop trash and then deleted from the trash file of the researcher's personal computer.).

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

According to HHS regulation, this study poses minimal risk. This means that the risks of harm anticipated in this proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, then those ordinarily encountered in daily life or in the performance of routine medical or psychological examinations. The minimal risk is related to participants' engagement in an interview.

Benefits to participation may come from discussing and reflecting upon your school experience.

Compensation:

You will receive a $50 gift card emailed or mailed to you within a week of the last interview.

Confidentiality:

All information will be handled in a confidential manner to the extent provided by law, so no one will be able to identify you when results are recorded. The records of this study will be kept private. In any report or presentation, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a research study participant.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You may discontinue your participation and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Leila Little, doctoral student in the Transformational Teaching and Learning EDD program. Leila Little can be contacted at _____ or _____. Leila Little's dissertation advisor is Dr. Amber Pabon and she can be contacted at _____ or _____.

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later regarding the research study, you may contact the researcher listed above. If you have any questions or concerns about the rights of research participants, please contact the IRB Committee at Kutztown University at 484-646-4167.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the information described above and have received a copy of this information. I have asked any questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant Date

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

The purpose of each interview is:

1) To learn about the participant, where they lived, their community, their family, their friends growing up; their life outside of school. To learn how their experiences as a Latina influenced their life.

   Sample Prompt:

   Tell me about your childhood outside of school.

   1. Where did you grow up?
   2. What was the neighborhood like?
   3. Describe your parents.
   4. How would you compare the neighborhood you grew up in, to the neighborhood your parents grew up in?
   5. What was your family like?
   6. Who were your friends?
   7. Do you remembered being treated different?
   8. How did this experience make you feel?
   9. Why do you think you were treated this way?
   10. Do you think being Latinx influence the way others in your community view or interact with you?

2) To learn about the participants, experience as a student in educational systems. To learn how their experiences as a Latina influenced their educational choices and education as a whole.

   Sample Prompt:

   Tell me about elementary school

   1. What was the school like?
   2. How was your experience?
   3. Who was your favorite teacher and why?
   4. What was your favorite part of elementary school?
   5. Do you remember a time where you were treated different?
   6. How did this experience make you feel?
   7. Why do you think you were treated this way?
   8. Do you think being Latina influence the way others in your school viewed or interacted with you?

Tell me about middle school.

1. What was the school like?
2. How was your experience?
3. Who was your favorite teacher and why?
4. What was your favorite part of middle school?
5. Do you remember a time where you were treated different?
6. How did this experience make you feel?
7. Why do you think you were treated this way?
8. Do you think being Latina influence the way others in your school viewed or interacted with you?

Tell me about high school

1. What was the school like?
2. How was your experience?
3. Who was your favorite teacher and why?
4. What was your favorite part of high school?
5. Do you remember a time where you were treated different?
6. How did this experience make you feel?
7. Why do you think you were treated this way?
8. Do you think being Latina influence the way others in your school viewed or interacted with you?
9. How did you go about making the decision to go to college?

Tell me about your post-secondary experiences.

1. What was the school like?
2. How was your experience?
3. Who was your favorite teacher and why?
4. What was your favorite part of school?
5. Do you remember a time where you were treated different?
6. How did this experience make you feel?
7. Why do you think you were treated this way?
8. Do you think being Latina influence the way others in your school viewed or interacted with you?
9. How did you go about making the decision to become a teacher?

3) To reflect on participants educational journey and learn about the participants experience as an educator in the educational system. To learn how their experiences as a Latinx influenced their employment choices and approach to their position/students. To learn how the participants, view their educational experience now and how those experiences influenced their personal/professional experience/growth.

Sample Prompt:

Reflecting on your experiences

1. What do you attribute to your success in high school, and undergraduate/graduate degree attainment?
2. What experiences lead you to the field of education?
3. What experiences lead you to work in a secondary school setting?
4. How have you experienced deficit-thinking?
5. How do these experiences relate to your identity, post-secondary interests, education, and teaching style?
6. What role does your culture play in your experiences?
7. What experiences have shaped your educational journey?

Tell me about your experiences as an educator.

1. How long have you been at your current position?
2. Describe the school setting.
3. How is your experience so far?
4. Have you worked anywhere else? If so what are the differences?
5. How do you feel your educational experiences influenced your position(s) in education?
6. Do you remember a time where you were treated different?
7. How did this experience make you feel?
8. Why do you think you were treated this way?
9. Do you think being Latina influenced the way others in your school viewed or interacted with you?

Probing questions include:

1. What do you mean by _____?
2. Can you tell me more about _____?
3. In what ways did _____ influence _____?
4. How do you understand/connect/make meaning of _____?
5. What was that experience like for you?