

EXPERIENCES OF LATINAS IN MIDDLE AND HIGH
SCHOOLS: INTERVIEWS WITH SUCCESSFUL
YOUNG IMMIGRANT WOMEN

by

DAPHNIE E. JACKSON JONES

DAISY ARREDONDO RUCINSKI, COMMITTEE CHAIR

DAVID DAGLEY
NIRMALA EREVELLES
ROXANNE MITCHELL
ALAN WEBB

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2015

Copyright Daphnie E. Jackson Jones 2015
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

This narrative study examined the perceptions of educationally successful, young Latinas women's experiences as newcomers in middle and high school in northwest Georgia. Data collection included twelve individual interviews and two focus group interviews. Participants were former middle and high school immigrant Latinas who entered schools in the United States for the first time in two districts in northwest Georgia. They have since graduated and are either attending college, have completed a degree and are working on a master's degree, or are working in their chosen profession. The study focused on the retelling of their experiences as immigrant students with limited English language skills and understanding of schools in the U.S.

The study used the conceptual framework of Latino Critical Race to analyze the perceptions of the participants as they recounted their stories. This framework allowed the researcher to see individual educational supports and systematic school failures experienced by this group of participants. Also, drawing on the theory of subtractive schooling, theory of caring, and theory of schools as sanctuaries, the researcher was able to connect participants' experiences with theories that explained the issues uncovered.

Supports participants felt which assisted them in being successful included educator mentors such as teachers and coaches; tailored academic and extracurricular programs to their specific needs as immigrant Latinas; and support for their parents directly related to navigating the educational system in the U.S. Barriers included a lack of school wide processes and procedures for continued support to Latinas throughout high school, and absence of counselor

and other academic supports by general education teachers specifically in relation to college. Participants described this lack of school wide support as felt by both themselves and their parents. Implications for schools is to review their policies and procedures to ensure immigrant Latinas have access to the same resources as the rest of the student population in addition to tailored assistance to meet their unique needs.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those who inspired it and those who have played an important role in making it possible. First of all, I would like to dedicate it to the young immigrant Latinas who I had the privilege to teach their very first year in the U.S and who inspired my interest in learning their stories as middle and high school students. It is dedicated to all those young immigrant Latinas pursuing their education while at the same time remaining true to themselves. Their love for learning and belief in helping others are constantly an inspiration.

Second, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family who have encouraged, supported and believed in me when I doubted my own abilities. In particular to my husband, Phil, your continuous sacrifice throughout the process including traveling with me back and forth to the university center, proofreading my drafts over and over again, encouraging me when I became overwhelmed and wanted to quit, and loving me throughout the process, I am eternally grateful. To my dad Spencer, my mom Bernice, and sister Rachel, you were my cheerleaders. Your unwavering belief in my ability, and GRIT pushed me forward as I did not want to disappoint you.

Finally, I dedicate this project to all those girls out there, such as my step-daughter Kristen and my nieces Mikala and Gracie, who have big dreams, but at times face overwhelming challenges. May you find mentors throughout your life who inspire and show you the way, and may you be able to dig deep down within yourselves and find strength always to rest at times, but never give up on this beautiful journey we call life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are several people who I would like to acknowledge who provided valuable support and feedback during this process. First of all, I owe a world of gratitude to my husband, Phil who spent many hours proofreading my many drafts as I progressed through. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Virginia Foley and Jennie Lopez who served as peer debriefers. Your support and advice encouraged me through this process.

Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members for your belief in me and my topic as valuable to society. In particular, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Arredondo Rucinski for the many hours of work you put in as you guided me through, expecting only my best. I hope I made you proud. Dr. Webb, my methodologist, you gave me the tools and guidance I needed to write a narrative dissertation as well as encouraged me to continue to write beyond the dissertation. My other committee members, Dr. Dagley, Dr. Erevelles and Dr. Mitchell, my deepest gratitude to you all for believing in this topic and being part of this journey.

Finally, I am sincerely indebted to three of the participants who read the final chapters making sure that their voices were represented as intended. Their dedication to supporting the education of young Latinas is an inspiration each day. May God bless and guide you always.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY.....	1
Background and Context of the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Purpose and Significance of the Study	6
Statement of the Research Questions	8
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Methodology and Procedures	9
Data Collection and Analysis	10
Assumptions	11
Limitations and Delimitations	11
Conclusion	12
Operational Definitions	13
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	15
Introduction	15
History of Latinos/as in Southeastern States and in Georgia in Particular.....	16
History of Limited English Learners in Schools in the Southeast U.S. and Georgia.....	18

State Policies and Local System Plans (Conasauga City, Bruin County)	20
Research on Latina Girls, Specific Focus on Immigrant Latina Girls.....	22
Educational Barriers to Latina Success	22
Characteristics of Schools Which Serve Latinas Successfully.....	24
Latino Critical Race Theory (LAT CRIT Theory)	33
Theories That Help to Explain the Issues	35
Subtractive Schooling.....	36
Theory of Caring, An Additive Approach.....	37
Schools as Sanctuaries	38
Cultural Capital.....	39
Summary of Research Reviewed: Characteristics of Successful Latinas.....	39
Conclusion	40
CHAPTER III: METHODS.....	42
Introduction	42
Restatement of the Research Question	43
Setting of the Study	44
Participant Selection.....	45
Method Selection.....	48
Research Design	52
Data Collection.....	55
Data Analysis.....	58
Timeline of the Study	60
Ethical Considerations.....	60

Personal Perspective	61
Conclusion	62
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	63
Introduction	63
Theme One: Comprehensive Mentor Supports Specifically for Immigrant Latinas.....	68
Caring Educators	69
Unsupportive Educators	74
Comprehensive Mentor Programs	77
Theme Two: Academic and Extracurricular Support Programs	79
Academic Programs.....	80
Extracurricular Activities	82
Tailored Academic and Social Support Programs.....	83
Theme Three: Parental Educational Support Programs	86
Family’s Belief is Success Through Education.....	86
Mother’s Support.....	87
Parents’ Lack of Understanding of U.S. Educational System.....	88
Theme Four: Inclusive Environment.....	90
Living with Fathers for the First Time Permanently	90
Knowledge of and Support for Immigrant Latinas in School Programs	91
Theme Five: Latina Identity and Academic Success.....	93
Vignettes.....	94
Loren and Ana	94
Raquel, Delmi, and Lani.....	94

Veronica.....	96
Gaby, Mariana, and Mirna.....	96
Diana, Marilena, and Marina.....	98
Personal Narratives.....	99
Identity crisis	99
Personal responsibility.....	101
Peers and adults who supported their dreams.....	101
Service to others	102
Conclusion	102
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY	104
Answer to Research Question One.....	104
Answer to Research Question Two	107
Answer to Research Question Three	109
Answer to Research Question Four.....	112
Answer to Overarching Question: A View Through the Lens of Latino Critical Race Theory	113
Conclusion	120
Implications for Practice.....	123
Recommendations for Further Study.....	125
Summary.....	126
REFERENCES	127
APPENDICES	133
A. Individual Interview Questions.....	133

B. Focus Group Questions.....	136
C. Face To Face and Electronic Protocol For Individual Interviews	137
D. Face To Face and Electronic Protocol For Focus Group Interviews.....	138
E. Informed Consent Statements	139
F. Telephone/ Facetime/ Skype Consent Form	142
G. Message Recruitment Script.....	143
H. IRB Approval.....	144

LIST OF TABLES

1.	Latino Growth (Both Male and Female) in Area of Study.....	17
2.	Participants' School Biographies.....	47
3.	Thematic Categories.....	68

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background and Context of the Problem

This study examined experiences of middle and high school newcomer immigrant Latina girls. There is a need to examine educational practices, structures and attitudes that support or hinder success for this population. My interest developed as I worked with several Latina immigrant girls for eight years in a medium size town in Georgia. It was during this time that I observed firsthand their struggles and triumphs, and their high hopes, courage, determination and strength as I saw them graduate from high school and go on to college. I argue that their stories need to be told to provide a better understanding of how schools can best serve such a unique and powerful group. As noted by Gándara et al. (2013),

Latinas are faring much more poorly than their White and Asian counterparts, and their progress has been extremely slow. It is also true that Latinas are the linchpin of the next generation- how a child fares in school is highly correlated with the mother's education. (p. 5)

Latinas are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States and have one of the largest dropout rates (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002; National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009), yet limited research has been conducted to assist educators in understanding their strengths, ways to build upon those strengths, and ways to support their needs (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002; Plata-Potter & T. de Guzman, 2012; Wainer, 2004). According to Denner and Guzman (2006), Valdez (2001), and Wainer (2004), those who arrive in the United States in middle and high school face challenges such as a new language, different cultural expectations, and unfamiliar

school processes. As an educator, I argue that it is imperative that schools understand these unique challenges and nurture the strengths of these newcomer Latinas in order to increase the likelihood of their success. Some may claim that the challenges are too many to overcome. From my experience in schools, I know that often these girls come with limited schooling in their native language, a lack of understanding of the process of school in their new country, parents who are unable to help them with specific school assignments, and occasionally limited cognitive abilities.

Critics such as Gonzales (2012) Valdez, (1996, 2001), Villenas and Deyhle (1999) and Solorzano and Yosso (2001) have written that education in the U.S. is based on cultural values and beliefs that are different from the values and beliefs of the newcomer students and families; therefore, the gulf between them and mainstream U.S. education is large. Education in the U.S. is steeped in White middle class traditions and beliefs that sometimes ignore the rich heritage of minorities including their unique needs (Gonzales, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999). I argue there are ways for schools to provide experiences that will assist new immigrant Latina middle and high school girls to achieve personal educational success while simultaneously maintaining their family values and culture. Gonzales noted that Latinas are the largest female minority subgroup in the United States, yet they are also among the least educated group. Therefore,

it is critical to investigate and continue to expose the structural barriers that marginalize this important and growing population, researchers must also celebrate the success that Latinas have captured, tell their stories, and thereby challenge the deficit perspectives that too often frame education policy, programming, and administration. (Gonzales, 2012, p. 125)

Immigrant students in general, including Latinas, who enter U.S. education in middle and high school must acquire social English quickly, as well as, master academic language related to required subject matter (Valdez, 2001). The emphasis on standardized testing and use

of English as the primary language of instruction in Georgia challenges students from the first day of their educational experience in the U.S (Georgia Department of Education- ESOL/ Title III, 2013). Many of these students do not succeed in spite of the best efforts of educators (Valdez, 2001). One in three Latino high school dropouts have acquired most of their primary education outside the U.S., about 80% do not speak English, and most end up in the labor force without an incentive to complete their education (Fry, 2003). Therefore, as an educator, I propose there is a complex conversation that needs to occur with the purpose of finding quality solutions for these immigrant students. Schools can provide support that respects students' culture while providing them with the structures needed to successfully navigate the educational system in the U.S. Educators must be provided with opportunities to understand these students and strategies to build on their strengths and supports, which allow them to overcome academic, cultural, and linguistic barriers. I argue that immigrant girls who are able to maintain family ties and the cultural identity of their native home as well as understand and access school resources are more likely to graduate from high school and to attend college. In general, 76.3% of Latinos between the ages 18 and 24 had a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) degree in 2011; this was an increase from 72.8% in 2010. Among those who graduated in 2011, 45.6% were enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges. In addition, record numbers of Latinos have graduated from college but still lag behind other groups' graduation rates (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

The United States has been and continues to be a home of immigrants. Most recently a shift in places to where immigrants have been drawn has occurred. Now Georgia is the new home of many Latinos, primarily Mexicans, who originally came to this region of Georgia as textile workers but have become a part of the larger work force, including the poultry and service

industries (Jones, Jr., 2008; Kochhar et al., 2005). The Georgia Department of Education reported an increase in Latino student enrollment over the last couple of decades. Some cities such as Atlanta, Gainesville, and Conasauga experienced much of this Latino immigration. For example, according to the 2010 Census Report, from 2000 to 2010, Latino growth in Georgia increased from 435,227 to 853,689, an increase of 96%. As a point of reference, during their study, Kochhar et al. (2005) found that 62% of foreign-born Latinos in the six southern states, including Georgia, had less than a high school education, and only 20% had some college education. Additionally, a large number (53%) spoke limited English or no English at all. The report estimated that male Latinos in Georgia outnumbered females with a ratio of 173 males for every 100 females. This is a typical immigration scenario where males come first to find jobs, and then as they settle, their families join them. Georgia is clearly a state where Latino families are now settling. As a consequence of the large influx, schools have struggled to adapt to their new population. The Georgia Department of Education reported in the 2000-2001 school year a 5% Latino student enrollment and in 2010-2011 a 12% Latino student enrollment. Georgia Public school percentages of Limited English Proficient Students' (LEP) enrollment in k-12 increased from 4% in 2000-2001 to 6% in 2009-2010. Some areas experienced higher concentrations of Latino immigrants, such as Conasauga City Schools with a Latino student population of 67% and LEP student population of 23% in the 2010-2011 academic year (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Considerable research that has been conducted on Latino populations relates directly to historically large immigration states such as California and New York. Limited research on Latina girls is evident in the literature except as they have been included in larger minority

groups (Gándara et al., 2013). More specifically, research on newcomer immigrant Latinas in middle and high school in the geographic area of this project has not been found. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to identify and describe the school experiences of successful Latina students who entered U.S. schools for the first time in middle and high school in Georgia.

This topic was selected because I argue it is crucial during this time of accountability for educators to understand their students beyond their traditional academic needs. It is apparent to me that similar to other parts of the United States, Georgia is one of the areas where accountability and best practices are sometimes on the opposite ends of the pedagogical continuum in schools. Students and teachers from diverse cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds have struggled to understand each other. Igoa (1995) stressed the importance of having immigrant children share their stories as they navigate the uncharted waters of new educational systems, languages, and culture. Additionally, it is clear from my experiences, the pressure from local, state and federal organizations on teachers for students to pass school tests, divert many teachers' energy and time away from truly understanding their students and providing them with needed support. Additionally, I argue that understanding the experiences of newcomer immigrant Latinas will provide valuable information to schools, and allow them to improve future educational services to similar students.

Limited research has been conducted on the education and careers of Latinas (Denner & Guzman, 2006). Most research includes Latinas within the larger group of Latinos: both males and females (Kochhar et al., 2005; Valdez, 1996; Valdez, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). The limited research on the educational challenges of Latinas has focused on those in other geographical areas of the U.S. (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). It is my hope that by

describing middle and high school Latina girls' educational experiences through this study will result in improved services for others who immigrate to the United States from Latin America.

The underlying message is also that classrooms need to change so that teachers can become more than dispensers of information. We need to humanize our classrooms to best teach our students and facilitate the development of literacy, which is the most self-empowering skill a child can gain at school. (Igoa, 1995, p. 9)

Finally, I argue, it is a moral and professional obligation of educators to continuously strive to better serve all students. Federal law, in its truest intent, closely aligns with this moral imperative as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education policies, programs and practices. The law states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (United States Code Section 20). Not providing new immigrant Latina girls with the support and access to what they need in order to achieve success is, in essence, denying them their rights to an equitable education.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

At the outset of any study, the researcher must ask herself questions: why is this study important and who would benefit and care about it? Clandinin (2013) proposed three ways to justify a study. The first has to do with how it matters to the researcher personally. I have personally experienced what Latinas face when they enter American educational institutions as older students and desire to understand their struggles and triumphs more profoundly. A second justification has to do with its practicality. My intent is to provide deeper insight into the experiences of Latinas in a specific area where little or no studies on the topic have occurred. With the themes identified and analyzed, they can then be shared with local educators in an attempt to assist in replicating their success with others. The final justification for a study may be

the social and theoretical understanding that may result in more social justice. I hope the study will bring awareness and change within the middle and high schools with immigrant Latinas.

The comprehensive purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of educationally successful Latina women in middle and high schools as new immigrants in Georgia. I hope to gain an understanding of structures, attitudes, processes and procedures in schools that provided Latinas with experiences that assisted them in graduating from high school and attending college, along with experiences that hindered their progress or had a negative impact. A second goal is to identify trends that can be used by educators and in schools that may then provide improved educational services to immigrant Latinas. This study may also add to the existing professional literature.

This research is important to the understanding of why Latinas drop out of high school. Because one in four Latinas leave prior to receiving a diploma from high school (National Women's Law Center, 2009), it is important to understand the reasons for their leaving school. Although several factors contribute to this lack of success that Latinas face, research does support the fact that Latinas often feel disconnected from their schooling because of current education structures, attitudes and processes. There is a need for additional research in geographical areas where Latina migration has been most recent (Denner & Guzman, 2006) to understand their school experiences. This research may provide additional information; supporting the need of authentic caring schools, where Latinas are actively involved in their own educational processes. Finally, I hope the findings will be used to assist in the improvement of the education of this underserved group.

Statement of the Research Questions

The overarching research question in the study is how do educationally successful, young, Latina women describe their middle and high school experiences as first time immigrant students in GA? This question contains several sub questions as follows:

1. How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe their interactions with teachers and other school personnel (counselors, administrators, coaches, etc.) during their middle and high school years in GA;
2. How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe programs whose intent was to support them while they were in middle and high school;
3. In addition to processes, procedures and supports which were in these new immigrant Latinas' previous schools, what might have been done differently to increase the girls' likelihood of success; and
4. How do young, immigrant, Latinas perceive the characteristics of middle and high schools that effectively serve immigrant Latina girls?

Conceptual Framework

I consider myself to be of the advocacy or participatory philosophical assumption or worldview. Creswell (2007) stated that “the basic tenets of this world view is that research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives” (p. 21). My purpose was to explore the previous educational experiences of Latina girls as new immigrants in middle and high schools in Georgia with the goal of sharing their experiences, opening educators' understanding, and adding to the professional literature. Although no one simple explanation is sufficient to understand the challenges immigrant Latinas face in integration into a new culture, a

focus on educational structures, attitudes and processes was explored as a way to understand those who are continuing to live out such experiences. This does not mean that other factors which contribute to their success are not critical. Latino Critical Race Theory or LAT CRIT was employed because it provides a theoretical framework for understanding the challenges of this group (Creswell, 2007; Manen, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through this lens I explored what subtractive schooling is verses an additive approach to education. The theory of caring and the theory of schools as sanctuaries were reviewed to describe environments where students' culture is respected, their strengths are built upon and their challenges reduced. Finally, my positionality is as an immigrant White Latina research practitioner. As such, I played a role in this study, as I attempted to balance being an objective researcher with a subjective view as an immigrant myself. Also influencing my positionality was my experience working intimately as a professional educator with several of the study participants and those in similar circumstances.

Methodology and Procedures

Because the purpose of this study was to record and describe the experiences of newcomer immigrant Latina girls in middle and high schools in Georgia, a qualitative framework was used. The study was one of a social and human nature of a specific group that I believed was not being addressed adequately through the more traditional educational methods. This study's focus was specific to the middle and high school experiences of the participants. Therefore, a narrative approach was used because it seemed more likely to provide a framework for gathering the data and analyzing it. Additionally, a narrative approach provided the flexibility to gather the data from participants' reflections in such a way that retold their experiences collectively through themes.

Narrative inquiry is described by Creswell (2007) as an approach which explores the lives of an individual or individuals through the use of stories as they retell their experiences. It draws from the humanities primarily using interviews and documents. Data are analyzed in a restorying format, with themes formulated as they emerge from the stories of the participants. These stories are typically not structured, as other forms, thus providing flexibility for participants to share their experiences and the researcher to retell their stories. One form of narrative inquiry is Thematic Analysis with an emphasis on the content. It is all about “what” is being said and less on “how” it is said (Riessman, 2003, p. 2). This approach is appropriate when the researcher is looking for thematic elements across several participants and the experiences they share. In simple terms, “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative research project relied heavily on the data collected through interviews, observations, and documents. This research project used individual interviews of twelve immigrant Latina girls concerning their former middle and high school experiences in northwest Georgia schools. It included two focus group interviews. Individual interview and focus group interview data were transcribed and the data analyzed through an open coding system. In data analysis a two-column system was used where significant statements, ideas and words were underlined and noted in the right column. As individual interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed, the researcher reviewed previous transcripts to continue to look for themes that emerged with additional data analyses. Data were triangulated through analysis, peer review and an audit trail. Data analyses are described in greater detail in chapter three.

Assumptions

Two assumptions were made by the researcher of this study. First, my personal background and school experiences have led me to hold a philosophical paradigm as an advocate for this group. An advocacy paradigm is one in which I believe and act in ways that promote change in the area of concern (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, as the researcher, I assume that all respondents expressed their views truthfully and freely based on their own middle and high school experiences in Georgia.

Limitations and Delimitations

As stated in the introduction, a theoretical frame is a guide that helped me focus the work on a particular aspect I wished to learn more about. It was imperative for me to keep in mind that no framework is perfectly tailored to the particular work; therefore, I did not try to make the findings fit even if I found them in opposition to what I expected, or if they were not found in the literature reviewed. My work attempted to enhance, broaden, and give scope and depth to the theories I investigated. Therefore, it was important for me to bear in mind the many different views of positive school experiences for immigrant Latinas that promoted their success. Negative cases were not ignored or negated, but most were included as these experiences may provide greater depth and width to the study. Likewise, it was important to remember there are many other outside factors which play a crucial role in student engagement and achievement. Another limitation was the fact that this qualitative study focused solely on the self-described experiences of immigrant Latinas in a medium size town during their middle and high school years and may not be generalized to other areas of the country. The experiences of the participants may be in some ways different than others in large urban areas, rural communities, other states or regions in the country. A third limitation is my bias, from having grown up in Honduras and coming to

the U.S. as a college student, where I faced the challenges of being an international student and later working as an educator in a low socio economic, and majority Latino, K-12 school system, and with some study participants when they were middle school immigrant students. I am aware that as an immigrant I viewed established barriers as temporary challenges that I overcame as part of my own journey towards fulfilling my goals in this country (Slavin & Calderon, 2001).

This study was confined to the specific means that successful immigrant young Latina women make of their prior school experiences while in middle and high schools in the public schools of the study area. The study was delimited to interviewing twelve Latinas who attended middle and high schools as new immigrants in Georgia.

Conclusion

Learning more about new immigrant Latina girls' experiences as they entered school in the United States as middle and high school students gives voice to this underserved group. By interviewing new immigrant Latina girls in Georgia, the researcher intended to explore the issues they faced while in middle and high school. The research consisted of interviews of twelve successful Latinas who attended middle and high school in Georgia as their first educational experience here in the U.S. The focus was on documenting their experiences as newcomer immigrant students. Open coding was used to assist the researcher in capturing interviewees' thoughts concerning their experiences. Data were then placed in categories and analytically examined to identify concepts and themes. The goal of this research was for the results to be useful for educators currently working with new immigrant Latina girls, as well as to begin to fill some gaps in the professional literature.

Operational Definitions

Cultural Capital: Values and practices Latinas use in order to assist them in successfully navigating and completing school in the U.S. (Gonzalez, 2012)

Immigrants: Latinas who arrive in the U.S. as middle and high school students with limited or no English and limited prior educational experience in this country.

EL: English Learner

ESOL program: English as a second or other language programs

In Vivo Coding: “Codes that researchers adopt directly from the data, such as telling statements they discover in interviews, documents, and the everyday language used in a studies site” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 343)

Latino or Hispanic: “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011, p. 2).

Latinas: are defined in this study as young women from Latin America and whose native language is Spanish. For this study, the term *Latina* is used to refer to study participants.

LATCRIT Theory: “Branch of Critical Race Theory that considers issues of concern to Latinos/as such as immigration, language rights, and multi-identity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 166)

LEP: Limited English Proficient student

New immigrants and newcomer immigrant Latina girls: Latina girls who entered U.S. schools for the first time in middle or high school. Both terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Subtractive schooling: “It diverts these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3)

Schools as sanctuaries: “A school is a sanctuary when it (a) fosters student-teacher caring relationships, (b) provides a gang-free safe space, and (c) affirms students’ racial/ethnic identities” (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011, p. 77).

Successful young women: Young Latina women between the ages of 19 and 30 who are currently enrolled in college or have completed college and are working in their chosen field.

Theory of Caring: School environment where students’ cultures and identities are supported and nurtured (Nodding, 2005; Nieto, 2003).

CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to review the research and literature which provided background information and a deeper understanding of the experiences of Latinas as new immigrant middle and high school students. Latinas fit into various categories of subgroups. They are usually of Latino decent which places them in a racial minority group. They are females who face unique challenges not experienced by males. In addition, they are immigrant English Language learners facing a new language, culture, and educational expectations and processes. They are from low socio economic backgrounds resulting in limited resources. Finally, the experiences they share are those which occurred during their middle and high school years. The literature review provides an overview of concepts related to the immigration of newcomer Latina students.

First, a brief introduction to the history of Latinos in the new diaspora starts with a focus on their immigration to southeastern states and in particular to Georgia. Second, the review considers the history of limited English learners in schools over the past fifteen years in the southeastern states with a closer analysis of those entering schools in northwest Georgia. The review describes the impact of rapidly growing immigration on K-12 education in Georgia and school districts' responses to such growth. Additionally, two local school system's ESOL programs are described in order to provide a context for the study. The review then shifts to existing literature on Latina girls in the U.S, specifically to studies that examine the educational

experiences of new immigrant Latinas in the U.S. A final section examines Latino Critical Race Theory (LAT CRIT) as a lens through which to analyze the educational experiences of the participants. LAT CRIT will lead into a discussion of educational theories of subtractive schooling, caring, and schools as sanctuaries with the goal of examining characteristics and recommendations for schools to establish a positive culture for immigrant Latina girls.

History of Latinos/as in Southeastern States in General and Georgia in Particular

The history of Latino immigration to the U.S. is rich and complex and has been well documented over the years. This study focused specifically on Latino immigration to the geographical area where the research was conducted. Although I found no specific research on Latinas in particular coming to the area, Latinos (both male and female) have recently immigrated to non-traditional areas, such as the Southern United States. Latinos began immigrating to areas such as the Carolinas, Alabama, and Georgia during the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties. According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, the Latino population in the South rose from 6,767,021 in 1990 to 11,586,696 in 2000 and by 2010, to 18,227,508 or 16% of the population (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). The Pew Hispanic Center prepared a report in 2005 that detailed the growth of Latinos in the South. During that time, most Latinos immigrating to the South were foreign born, lacked legal status, and were unmarried young males who lacked a high school diploma and spoke limited English. Their purpose for coming to the South was primarily to look for manufacturing jobs. The report predicted there would be a shift as they settled in the South and began bringing their families and impacting public services such as education and health care (Kochhar et al., 2005). That predicted impact is seen today in the Southeast as noted in the 2010 U.S. Census.

Because this study’s focus is on a specific region of Georgia, statistics for the state and specific region follow to help frame its context. During the period between 2000 and 2010, Georgia’s population grew by 18%, while the Latino population nearly doubled in size with an increase of 96%. By 2010 the Latino population accounted for 28% of the total population growth in the state. In addition, Latinos comprised 13% of all people under the age of eighteen in Georgia (NALEO Education Trust, 2010). In some specific areas such as Atlanta, Gainesville, and Conasauga, the numbers are much more concentrated. The table below provides additional information concerning the growth of Latinos in Georgia and in one particular region.

Bodvarsson and Van den Berg (2009) highlighted Conasauga as one of the new destinations for immigrant Latinos due to the abundance of job opportunities in large carpet industries. In their study, they provided a historical look at some of the characteristics of the most recent wave of Latino immigration to the U.S., highlighting that in 2002 Latinos passed African Americans as the largest minority ethnic group in the U.S. They also noted that Latinos as an ethnic group are much younger than other non-Latinos, and that most foreign born Latinos are of working age, which supported previous findings by the Pew Hispanic Center (Kochhar et al., 2005).

Table 1

Latino (Both Male and Female) Growth in Area of Study

Year	Conasauga	Bruin Co.	State of Georgia
Population 2010	33,128	102,599	9,687,653
Latino (%) 2010	48%	*32.8%	8.8%
Foreign born persons 2010 (5)	26.5%	17.9%	9.7%
Language other than English spoken at home 2008-2012 (%)	43.5%	30%	13.1%

Source. Quick Facts- from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010

Note. *2012

History of Limited English Learners in Schools in the Southeast U.S. and Georgia

According to Jones, Jr. (2008), Latinos are family oriented people; therefore, they do everything possible to bring their families with them when they emigrate to the U.S. Many of their children are school age and attend public schools in their zoned areas. As a minority group, Latinos have struggled to gain equitable access to education in many regions of the U.S. throughout the last century. Johnson (2013) highlighted the legal hurdles and the differences that exist between the Latino/a struggle and the struggles of other minorities due to their long standing and continuous immigration to the U.S. He noted such landmark cases as *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Keyes v. School District No 1*, and *Plyler v. Doe* as those that advanced the cause of Latinos/as. In addition, he claimed that resegregation of neighborhoods in recent times has resulted in public schools with large minority populations including Latinos. In the Southeast the struggle for an equitable and additive education has been perpetuated as immigration continues in nontraditional areas, which in turn impacts the education of Latino students in the state.

The number of Latino students in Georgia public schools over the past 15 years has increased steadily. Latinos in kindergarten through 12th grade increased from 6% in 2002-2003 to 12% in 2010-2011 school years. Likewise, LEP students and their enrollment in ESOL programs increased significantly. Graduation rate for ELs was 32.1%; Latinos students' graduation rate was 57.6% and White students' graduation rate was 85.5% in 2010-2011. The differences between the groups are also noted in the dropout rate. White students' dropout rate in 2010-2011 was 3.0% compared to Latino students' dropout rate of 4.6% and ELs of 5.6%, almost double that of their White counterparts.

The area of Georgia where the study occurred has experienced a significantly higher immigration rate of Latino students in recent years than other areas of the state. In Conasauga Public Schools, considered a medium sized district in the state, total enrollment was 6,700 students in the 2010-2011 academic year. In the same year, Latino students comprised 67% of the student population; LEP students were 23%, and ESOL program served students were 1,120 or 16% of the district's population. Graduation rate in Conasauga for the 2010-2011 school year for White students was 87.8%, and 76.9% for Latino students. No graduation rate data were available for the EL subgroup because the numbers were below required state minimum subgroup numbers for reporting. The graduation rate is calculated based on the number of students who began in ninth grade as a cohort and graduated together as expected. This is important to understand because the rate appears to not be in alignment with the dropout rate, which is calculated differently by the state department. The dropout rate is based on all students enrolled during a particular school year in grades nine through twelve. It does not include students who moved during the summer and who do not return the following academic year. Therefore, the dropout rate appears lower. The dropout rate in Conasauga for White students was 1.1%, Latino students 1.5%, females, 1.5%, males 1.3% and LEP students 1.4% (Georgia Department of Education graduation and drop-out rate categorized by subgroup data for 2010-2011). The lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates for both Latino and EL students compared to White students suggest to me that there are unique challenges these students face. Some students, however, are being successful, many of them Latina girls. Although there are no public data available concerning the dropout and graduation rate specific to newcomer immigrant Latinas in the geographical area of this study, we can surmise that their numbers are comparable to those in the subgroups of which they are a part.

State Policies and Local System Plans (Conasauga City, Bruin County)

The Georgia Department of Education has provided guidance to navigate the change in demographics brought on by the immigration of Latino students, many of whom have limited English proficiency and have low levels of schooling in their native language (Georgia Department of Education-ESOL/ Title III, 2013). As a state, Georgia mandates English as the language of instruction, with all standardized tests administered in English. Despite this directive and in response to cases such as *Plyler v. Doe*, English Language Learners (ELs) cannot be denied an equitable education because of language. The *Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act* (2001) calls upon schools to provide specialized programs to address the needs of ELs. In response to pressure from school districts to provide them guidance in order to meet requirements in their effort to receive federal funding through Title grants, the state education department created guidelines for serving ELs through the ESOL program. *Title IIIA* federal grants, specifically for ELs, are available to school systems but are distributed through the state sponsored ESOL program. In order to receive the money, school systems have to provide evidence that services such trained teachers in language acquisition for ELs and language assistance to parents are being provided in their schools. The guidance for these services has evolved over the years to meet the needs of systems and students. The GADOE currently uses five distinct elements by which school systems are evaluated. These are outlined in the *Title III/ESOL Resource Guide* updated and provided to districts each year (Georgia Department of Education-ESOL/ Title III, 2013-2014) and are briefly described as follows:

- a. Instructional Programs- Schools are required to identify students who fit the criteria as ELs. They must also provide additional instruction by state certified

- ESOL instructors for specified segments each day using research based strategies and best practices;
- b. Professional Development- Teachers must participate regularly in professional development training to prepare them to meet the specific needs of ELs;
 - c. Parental Notification and Outreach- Schools must give language minority parents the opportunity to participate in their children's education through translators, informational sessions, and parent classes;
 - d. (d) Fiduciary Responsibility- Money assigned to be used for ELs must be used in ways that supplement the core curriculum already in place for general education students; and
 - e. (e) Records and Maintenance- schools must maintain records of their ELs and the support provided to them and to their families.

School systems base their programs on the guidance provided to them over the years. During the years 2000-2010 when the participants entered schools in the study district, guidance from the state department was limited to testing, basic requirements concerning minutes students must be served, and basic teacher preparation. Because of the increase in the number of immigrant students, schools developed local programs to assist them. One system, Conasauga Public Schools, created language academies in both middle and high schools (Jones 2008). Latino students with no English or limited English language skills were assigned to these programs for up to one academic year where they received English language support and content classes in a small group supported by bilingual staff certified to work with English language learners. Students participated with general education students in non-academic classes to provide them with the opportunity to socialize with others students as well as to learn about the

procedures and processes of the schools without the high stress of facing difficult academic subjects without support. Students attending schools in the Bruin School District received instruction in a similar manner. Students entered sheltered content classes made up of approximately eighteen English language learners taught by teachers certified in both content and ESOL. Professional development for both classroom and ESOL teachers was a priority with a focus on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model of instruction (Echeveria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). Parent and student informational sessions about schooling in the U.S. and college application processes were a part of the assimilation process. Study skills classes, tutoring, credit recovery courses and summer help were provided to students as a way to assist them in preparation for education in the U.S. Educators such as ESOL teachers, counselors and administrators became advocates for students connecting them to services at the schools and in the community (A. Haynes, personal communication, June 10, 2014).

Research on Latina Girls, Specific Focus on Immigrant Latina Girls

This section of the literature review examines various studies related to the current study. At the end of the review of such study, I include the recommendations presented by the research and then summarize them at the end of the chapter.

Educational Barriers to Latina Success

In taking a closer look at the challenges of immigrant students, Valdez (2001) conducted a study of four Latino students in three different middle schools in California. She noted that immigrant students entering middle and high schools face many challenges. “If they are to succeed in these schools, they must acquire English quickly. They must acquire enough English to participate in everyday social interactions with their peers and teachers, and they must acquire enough English to allow them to profit from subject-matter instruction conducted exclusively in

this language. Newly arrived youngsters must acquire not only interpersonal communication proficiency in English: they must also acquire academic proficiency” (p. 6). Immigrant students, especially those entering school in the higher grades, have very limited time to develop social and academic skills in order to have access to advanced classes and graduate with their English speaking peers. Two of the four students in the study were immigrant girls from Mexico and Honduras who entered middle school with no social or academic English skills. Valdez used the term “ESL ghettos” to describe programs where students were trapped, preventing them from being on track to graduate. One of the girls from the study who was trapped in such a program dreamed of attending college. Valdez cautioned that there are many students like the ones from her study; therefore, schools must move quickly and carefully as the future of many immigrant students are determined through their school experiences. At the end of the study, each girl faced challenges that Valdez noted could have been either eliminated or reduced if the schools had been better prepared to serve their new immigrant students. Valdez proposed several strategic recommendations for schools to follow to better serve ELs. These were classes to assist English language students in acquiring academic English; inclusive school wide programs for immigrant students; involvement of all school personnel in the education of English learners; removal of barriers which isolate immigrant students; programs which build on academic strengths of English learners in their native language and allow them to participate in academic curriculum while they are learning English; and implementation of policies and procedures with clear guidelines concerning placement and services of English learners across schools, districts and states.

With a focus specifically on new migrant Latinos to Georgia, Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas (2005) conducted a study by exploring the educational experiences including barriers to

higher education of recent immigrants through interviews and focus groups. In addition they documented the challenges faced by educators to adapt to this new student population. The study took place in six districts throughout the state one of which was Bruin County. Participants consisted of a wide range of people including educators, but most had limited formal education.

The study reviewed six major challenges faced by new immigrant Latinos: These are the

- (a) lack of immigrant understanding of the Georgia school system,
- (b) low parent involvement in the schools,
- (c) lack of residential stability among the Latino population,
- (d) little school support for the needs of Latino students,
- (e) few incentives for Latino adolescents to continue their education, and
- (f) barred immigrant access to higher education. (p. 48)

In specifically addressing the challenges of immigrant, Latinas, Bohon, Macpherson, and Atilas (Bohon et al., 2005) found that many Latinas drop out of school because of family responsibilities which may include caring for younger siblings, personal marriages and pregnancies at a young age. They cautioned that one should not label this as the only reason why Latinas dropout of high school, but “it is often the very fact of being caught between two worlds that create the biggest obstacles” (p. 54). They suggested that the future of this population depends on schools changing to meet their needs such as adding bilingual and bicultural staff, diversity training of administrators concerning standards, adult education for parents, additional home-school liaisons, and financial assistance for higher education.

Characteristics of Schools Which Serve Latinas Successfully

Although not specific to immigrant Latinas, Denner and Guzman (2006) compiled a text with several studies specifically dealing with the positive aspects of Latina girls. Their focus was to look at strengths Latina adolescents display. They found that most studies in the past have not focused on Latinas girls specifically, and those few who included them were misleading because they give the impression that Latinas most likely drop out of school, become teenage mothers, or

are girlfriends of gang members. Their goal was to challenge the stereotypes that exist concerning Latinas. One particular study in the book by Rivera and Gillimore posed two questions: “What do Latinas in their middle and high school years expect and want in their career and educational futures? What motivations underlie these goals?” (Denner & Guzman, 2006, p. 124). The participants in the study were thirty-eight girls who were interviewed nine times over a period of time beginning in tenth grade and ending two years after high school graduation. Their study results showed that Latina adolescent girls do want to attend college, have aspirations and goals, desired successful careers, and wanted to give back to their communities. The study suggested that schools provide mentoring programs and role models for Latinas beginning in middle schools. Additionally, they argued that the development of self-efficacy and career guidance in non-traditional subjects and careers such as those that involve math and problem solving was important. Finally, a specific attempt at parent and family outreach oriented towards helping girls to succeed should be part of the plan.

I argue it is important to undertake a historical review of several other research projects and articles completed throughout the years dealing specifically with Latinas and education. One such article written by Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) emphasized the importance of translating cultural wealth into social capital in order to improve the academic success of Latina students. After providing a brief historical context of Latinos in the U.S., educational trends, and institutional and family factors associated with Latina educational achievement, the authors asked the following questions: 1) “What has happened to all the efforts on behalf of Latinos in education; 2) What happened to the work of the White House Hispanic Educational Excellence Initiative on behalf of Latina students; 3) What are the best practices for effective educational systems for Latina students; and 4) What partnerships are required to push for change in their

educational achievement gap?” (p. 47). These questions continue to be asked today in an attempt to understand what structures, processes, and supports are needed in order for Latinas to be academically successful. Zambrano and Zoppi suggested that there should be economic and social structures in place. These structures include better economic assistance to families, expanded educational support for children, and increased community based opportunities for both parents and students. A second set of recommendations focused on public schools and their educational practices that support Latinas and their parents. These included health and mentoring programs such as after school and Saturday programs which improve academic skills, build self-esteem and provide role models.

As noted previously, studies which directly emphasize immigrant Latinas are limited. One specific study (Meador, 2005) in the Southwest focused on this subgroup and was conducted in 1998-1999. It is an ethnography which explored the educational world of immigrant middle school Latina girls as they negotiated the sociocultural context of their school. The demographics of both middle schools in the study were made up of predominantly White students and teachers. In the study, Meador suggested that the perceptions of the teachers were internalized by the students and, therefore, resulted in their lack of success in school. Teachers described good students as intrinsically academically motivated, achievers on assessments, and as possessing good literacy and math skills. Further descriptions included good athletes, socially connected and coming from stable families who supported them. Alternately, they described Latinas as not being academically committed, shy, not being active in sports even though they may be athletic, and being socially isolated from the prominent social groups in the school. Meador concluded

In the case of the students in the present study, the forces of stigmatization and oppression were multiplied. These young Mexicans were not White, not male, not jocks,

not native English speakers, and not middle-class; their perceived deficits defined them in the school setting... Thus, school became a critical arena for the interplay of the multiple forces of oppression that impeded achievement of the Mexicans. (p. 161)

She stated that educators must change their deficit model of thinking of bi-lingual and multi-lingual students as more immigrants continue to enter schools in the U.S.

Another informative study was conducted in California by Sanchez (2007) with three, second generation immigrant Latinas who maintained close ties to their native country of Mexico despite being born in California. The girls traveled regularly to see family and spend time in a world very different from their everyday school experiences. When asked if their school friends or teachers knew of their travels, the girls indicated that very few knew or seemed to care. The form of knowledge gained by the girls as they traveled between very different social worlds is termed “transnational knowledge,” and the girls are considered as “transnational immigrants”; persons who are “steeped in processes connected to global worlds where they are making their own interpretations and experiencing the learning of this phenomenon outside of school” (p. 490). She posed the following two questions: 1) “What are students who are engaged global world citizens already learning in their sphere beyond urban school; 2) And how can we as educators learn from them?” These immigrant girls possessed extensive global knowledge that could have been used by their teachers to engage them with the school setting. The ability to employ this flexibility would have allowed

the young women to respond fluidly to the different social demands each cultural community places on them... They possess a privileged position where their own transnationalism translates into a certain kind of social capital with their networks... Thus, their non-school-based learning rests upon their experiences in engaging and interacting in larger world processes” (p. 503)

Sanchez questioned how this global knowledge could be used to promote the educational success of these girls within the school setting.

A later study conducted by Soto (2012) in the Napa Valley found that immigrant high school Latinas embraced being Mexican upon their arrival in the U.S. more than they did while living in Mexico. She found that the participants in her study used the embracing of their Mexican identity as a way to cope with the discrimination and alienation they felt from teachers, White students and the Mexican American students in their schools. The transnational identities of the girls were complex and challenging, and identifying with their native country helped them cope with the challenges of a complex environment. The general hypothesis here is that students' attitudes towards school are an indicator of their academic success. In an attempt to look into this idea in relation to adolescent Latina girls, a study was conducted in the New York metropolitan area, which consisted of 54 participants. The researchers concluded that there is a direct link between Latina girls' attitude towards school and their relationship with their mothers (Kaplan, Turner, & Badger, 2007). The participants who participated in two community based after-school and weekend programs were all from poor urban neighborhoods. The significance of this study lies in that it contributes to the literature in the area of schools' understanding of mothers' involvement in their girls' academic lives and the provision of opportunities for this to occur. The after-school programs in the study provided mentoring and social programs for the girls and their mothers as well as supported the building of their academic skills. Although there was not a direct link between the programs and the girls' attitudes towards school, the programs did provide parent training allowing for the opportunity for mothers and daughters to build the crucial mutuality between them. This directly linked to the girls' attitude towards school and their success. One such promising after-school program for Latinas is Club Amigas, where Latina college students are paired with middle school Latina girls as mentors (Kaplan, Turner, &

Silber, 2009) in an effort to increase the educational aspirations, build self-esteem and Latino identity in an effort to overcome negative factors faced by adolescent Latina girls.

A recent, extensive study conducted by the National Women's Law Center and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund in 2009 provided timely insight into the barriers faced by Latinas in graduating from high school. This study explored ways that Latinas might overcome the barriers, which prevented them from being academically successful. The executive summary declared that "Latinas are dropping out of school in alarming numbers- a pattern that has serious and damaging repercussions for their future prospects and economic security. Yet little research has been done on the particular barriers that Latinas face or the strategies that might maximize their chances for success" (p. 1). Several clear themes emerged both from their study and from the review of literature: (a) Latinas want to succeed academically, but many doubt their abilities. (b) They face many challenges which create barriers between their dreams and reality such as the impact of poverty on school, their immigration status, limited English proficiency, and lack of parental involvement. (c) Additionally, Latinas face specific challenges related to the intersection of their ethnicity and gender such as stereotypes, discrimination, early pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, caring for younger siblings, and typically limited involvement in school activities. The barriers are then subcategorized detailing specific challenges such as undocumented students facing both language and financial difficulties, as well as, the feeling of instability of not knowing what each day will bring. Latinas in particular face gender and cultural challenges such as stereotypes where Latina women are seen as submissive and underachieving, or they lack role models who inspire and advise them on how to succeed. The study does not end with the barriers but provides recommendations that educators and schools could put into practice to assist Latinas in becoming academically

successful. These include investing in the future of Latinas; connecting them with role models; assisting them in preparing for college; nurturing a culturally inclusive school environment; assisting Latino parents in being involved in their children's education; providing comprehensive sex education classes to reduce the number of early pregnancies; assisting pregnant and parenting Latinas, and promoting school accountability for the success of Latinas. In connecting Latinas with role models and engaging them in setting goals, the study suggested that schools begin talking early to Latinas about their short and long term goals, connecting them to mentors who can provide guidance about post-secondary schooling, and exposing students to the outside educational resources, namely colleges and universities.

McWhirter, Valdez, and Caban's (2013) study clearly described its purpose as to investigate and describe the post high school aspirations of Latinas as well as the barriers and supports they were experiencing or had experienced. This study was particularly significant because the Latina participants ranged in ages from 14 to 20, with fourteen of the forty-one participants having been born outside the U.S. Barriers identified by the participants were a lack of resources, peers and peer influences, school-based barriers, family barriers and individual factors. Additionally, participants were asked about the type of support they needed to succeed. These were divided into support from family and teachers. Teachers, in turn, supported their Latina students in the form of "active engagement" and providing "caring expectations" (p. 44). Recommendations for schools included providing Latinas with advocates. "Latina participants, especially those acquiring English competency, are seeking higher levels of encouragement and caring expectations, greater connection to their schools, increased access to information, and opportunities to contribute" (p. 46). Additional recommendations include integration of parents and other family members, supports for the acquisition of English language for immigrant

Latinas, career guidance within the cultural and relational context of the lives of Latinas, and engaging Latinas in providing critical feedback so that they feel connected to their school and feel that their contribution is of value.

Much of the previously reviewed literature addressed what does not work with newcomer Latina students and provided recommendations about how to change those unsuccessful models. The current study has an established purpose of discovering factors that assisted participants in becoming successful. In other words, what did those who were able to achieve their goals do in order to graduate from high school, attend college and become successful as defined by the majority culture in the U.S? The *Making Education Work for Latinas in the U.S.* project (Gándara et al., 2013) has the most comprehensive data on what works for Latinas, including immigrants. These researchers determined that there are two types of factors associated with students completing high school: individual student characteristics and institutional characteristics. Individual student characteristics are connected to personal characteristics such as the students' socio-economic status, her sense of belonging in school, her English language skills, and personal values. Institutional characteristics correlate directly with the school's student body composition (drop-out rate, segregation), resources, and perceptions of discrimination or stereotyping of students by teachers. Gándara et al. found themes which were common across participants in their study. These included institutions that provided early support for students' educational aspirations; getting them on the right track; involving them in extracurricular activities; hiring Latino educators, providing students with access to college programs; and establishing cross cultural relations and desegregating schools. Additionally, the report suggested several ways Latinas can be supported by schools, so they are able to achieve their aspirations of going to college. These are (a) the provision of preschool which provides the

opportunity to bridge the educational gap for many Latinas; (b) opportunities for early literacy training for parents who are illiterate or have limited skills; (c) parent education on the importance of school; (d) wholesome schooling opportunities with college preparatory classes and other resources; (e) the provision of positive peer support with other high performing students within the academic block as well as during extracurricular activities; (f) the creation of a sense of belonging within the Latina community through both curricular and extracurricular activities; (g) emphasis on math education; (h) access to Latina/o teachers and counselors as mentors and role models; (i) assistance obtaining financial aid to attend college; (j) education on preventing early pregnancy and support for those who become mothers; and (k) encouraging Latinas to seek out and participate in mainstream opportunities.

While the recommendations made by Gándara et al. seem logical, a more significant aspect such as Latino intersectionality and integration with education in areas of language barriers, parent involvement, and cultural differences need to be explored. Gonzalez (2012) wrote,

Policy responses to the current Latino education situation contain these very same elements. Thus, critical scholars argue that today's education policies and practices are crafted in ways that make the schooling experience uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and in some regards hostile to non-majority, non-middle class students. (p. 124)

Deficit thinking that blames the victim and labels the child as having a deficiency has permeated policies that restrict the participation of non-English speakers. The deficit theory promotes the need to repair the families of children from low socio-economic and minority groups, and improve parenting skills of minority children. Gonzalez interviewed thirteen Latina university faculty members in her attempt to learn from their stories what non-traditional cultural capital they employed during their educational experiences. She used the lens of Latino Critical Race Theory to discuss how these women used “compassion, community, selflessness, and a

strong work ethic” (p. 131) developed by their parents to accomplish their goals despite societal and institutional structures. Their ability to employ this non-traditional social capital assisted them in being successful academically; yet many do not succeed because of educational attitudes, structures, processes, and procedures in place in the U.S.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LAT CRIT Theory)

In the previous section, the review of several studies provided insight into the reasons immigrant Latinas have not succeeded at a similar rate as their White counterparts. The studies provided a deeper understanding of characteristics that those who do succeed have in common. As a way to capture and ground this study, the Latina (o) Critical Race Theory will be used as a lens to examine the experiences of new immigrant Latinas during their middle and high schools years. In thinking about Critical Race Theory in general, “the researcher foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; challenges the traditional research paradigms, text, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color; and offers transformative solutions to racial, gender, and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures” (Creswell, 2007, p. 28). Within the Critical Race Theory is found the Latino subcategory with its focus on the experiences of Latinos/as. Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is defined by Solorzano and Yasso (2001) in education as

A LatCrit theory in education is a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that affect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically. Utilizing the experiences of Latinas/os, a LatCrit theory in education also theorizes and examines that place where racism intersects with other forms of subordination such as sexism and classism. LatCrit scholars in education acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower. LatCrit theory in education is conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and draws on many other schools of progressive scholarship. (p. 479)

Velez et al. (2008) proposed that LatCrit theory is a framework which helps to understand the central role race and racism play in a situation such as that which Latinas faced as new immigrants in middle and high school. It challenges researchers to analyze the reality of subordinate groups not only through the lens of race, but also through looking at the intersectionality of immigration, culture, and language (Bernal, 2002). This type of research does not place the blame on the students but on society and the educational institutions whose charge it is to change to meet students' needs. Therefore, this type of research is not just for the sake of research, but it is research for social justice (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). It is a way to remove the subtractive policies implemented in schools created by the beliefs of dominant groups throughout history in the U.S. One example is the use of English only instruction and high stakes testing in schools in the geographical area of the study. Such policies and practices directly affect new immigrants and may not take into consideration the impact on the individual students.

The elements of critical race theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Kim, 2016) and LAT CRIT Theory (Bernal, 2002) were used as a lens to analyze findings. These five elements as presented by Bernal are (a) "The importance of transdisciplinary approaches; (b) an emphasis on experiential knowledge; (c) a challenge to dominant ideologies; (d) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; and (e) a commitment to social justice" (pg. 109-110). The following questions are based on these elements and are used in Chapter V to analyze findings:

- 1) Did immigrant Latinas perceive structures in their schools which give advantages to one group over another;
- 2) Did immigrant Latinas perceive the struggles they experienced as similar to those in their community;

- 3) Did immigrant Latinas perceive that their schools had a commitment to social justice and the empowering of minority groups to reduce racism;
- 4) Did immigrant Latinas perceive that their schools valued the knowledge they brought with them; and
- 5) Did immigrant Latinas perceive their educational experience to be of less quality than that of most of the majority students?

Theories That Help to Explain the Issues

Connected to theories which could provide an explanation for the experiences of new to the country immigrant Latinas in middle and high school is the students' perceptions of the schools they attend in their new country. The theories of caring, subtractive schooling, and schools as sanctuaries provide important information for consideration as well as a way to ground the research. These theories fit within the LatCrit notion of White dominant cultural beliefs permeating educational policies in schools as educators knowingly or subconsciously continue teaching using deficit frameworks or models resulting in students' sense of alienation and withdrawal from the educational process. Researchers such as Nodding (2005), Nieto (2003, 2005) Meador (2005), Valenzuela (1999), Antrop-Gonzalez (2011), and Valdez (1996) explored these topics through their studies. Nodding's theory of caring and Valenzuela's theory of subtractive school research on Mexican students in high schools in the Southwest are important to consider. Additionally, Antrop-Gonzalez's theory of schools as sanctuaries and the exploration of characteristics of teachers who authentically care, addressed later in this chapter, provide additional insight. It is important to explore and review what sanctuary schools would look like for these participants.

Subtractive Schooling

In an attempt to seek out what it means to authentically care in a school setting, Valenzuela (1999) performed an ethnographic study of a large urban high school in Texas. She explored the different concepts of caring from both students' perspectives and the perspectives of teachers whose charge was to educate. She separated caring into two different categories. One embraces and affirms the culture of the students while the other attempts to separate them from their culture and assimilate them into the dominant culture. Valenzuela stated that "caring theory addresses the need for pedagogy to follow from and flow through relationships cultivated between teacher and student" (p. 21). Valenzuela found that U.S. born Mexican students did not have the same concept of schooling and the role of their teachers as was understood by the dominant White students and faculty. These students felt that teachers did not authentically care for them or really get to know or understand who they were. Teachers' concerns were basically about the subject matter and the students' ability to adjust to the policies and procedures of school. This lack of feeling cared for as an individual and a group resulted in students not connecting solidly to their education and their school. Valenzuela termed this as subtractive schooling- schooling which "rather than building on students' cultural, linguistic, and community-based knowledge, schools [...] typically subtract these resources" (p. 62). She suggested schooling needs to be an additive process where education has meaning and connection to students' lives. The prevalence of the dominant culture should be acknowledged and counterbalanced with students' own ethnic identity and language as assets to their learning.

Theory of Caring, An Additive Approach

Nodding's (2005) theory of caring helps us understand the importance of the relationship between teacher and students because those who do not feel cared for experience subtractive schooling as defined by Valenzuela (1999). This may result in students not assimilating into the larger culture and not becoming successfully educated. Nodding challenged educators to care for their students in an authentic manner. She wrote, "A caring relation is, in its basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings- a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15). This sense of authentic caring is being challenged continually by the need to meet academic objectives and standards. Educators sometimes become so preoccupied by meeting the academic needs of students that the aesthetic caring overtakes the authentic caring of students as a whole human. Nodding proposed that schools should include teaching students to care for (a) personal self in the areas of physical, spiritual, occupational, recreational; (b) their inner circle such as family and friends; (c) strangers and others in their outer circle; (d) nature such as plants, animals and the earth; (e) the human made world; and (f) ideas such as academic subjects in school.

Nieto (2003) found that the most caring teachers were able to balance both types of caring.

They believe that supporting and affirming students' identities while at the same time encouraging students to become members of the larger community when they are ready and able is in the long run a better way to help students adjust to school and, ultimately, to find life beyond school. (p. 39)

She reminded us that middle and high school age students' identities are important to them and do not disappear despite being ignored by adults around them. They are continuously wondering about who they are, where they belong, and how they fit in. If school personnel do not address what interests their students, they then in essence cause them to believe that to succeed

academically, they must do away with their inner selves. Nieto (2005) noted that young immigrant people who assimilate prematurely face higher academic failure than those who do so through a more gradual process. In addition, care is important for students of cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are different from mainstream students. It is important because when students feel their teachers care about them, they experience a sense of belonging. Without this sense of belonging, learning is diminished. When students think their teachers believe in their abilities, they connect achievement to their efforts. In an effort to assist educators, Nieto (2005) proposed five qualities of highly successful teachers. These are “a sense of mission; solidarity with, and empathy for, students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge; improvisation; and a passion for social justice” (p. 204). These qualities provide a basis for assisting students in finding success in school.

The idea of schools as caring places is also supported by the research of Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez, and Garrett (2005) with ten working class Puerto Rican high school students. The study found four factors students considered crucial to their academic success. The factors are

the acquisition of social capital through religiosity and participation in school and community-based extracurricular activities; having a strong Puerto Rican identity; the influence of these students’ mothers on their academic achievement, and potential for caring teachers and other school staff to influence high academic achievement. (p. 77)

Schools as Sanctuaries

An additional study completed in a small urban high school founded forty years earlier in an attempt to meet the needs of its community was used to explore the concept of schools as sanctuaries. In this study, Antrop-Gonzalez (2011) described sanctuary schools as those that provide students with a place where they are valued and given valid opportunities to succeed. He delineated four components of a sanctuary school: (a) caring student-teacher relationship; (b)

family-like school environment; (c) physically and psychologically safe space; and (d) atmosphere where students' racial/ethnic identities are affirmed.

Cultural Capital

Throughout the literature review, several studies (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2005; Gándara et al., 2013; Gonzales, 2012; Sanchez, 2007) presented the idea that successful Latinas are able to employ social capital as a way to navigate the educational system in the U.S. Social capital originated with Bourdieu (1977) and is a theory which proposes that those who are knowledgeable in society use this information to access education successfully. Gonzales (2012) proposed that this theory blames the victims and their families for students' lack of success in school.

From this school of thought has come the crafting and adoption of deficit-based policies that silence those who do not speak English; that seek to repair families of children who come from economically poor, minority backgrounds; and that aim to change parenting practices in order to shape better parents. (p. 126)

The resulting deficit policies employed in many institutions hinder the success of many immigrant Latinas who enter U.S. education in middle and high school. Gonzalez presented the reframing of cultural capital by participants in her study which they contributed to their academic success. These include their belief in working hard and beyond personal gain to help others in their communities. It also included the importance and support of family, and managing to balance family obligations and personal success.

Summary of Research Reviewed: Characteristics of Successful Latinas

The literature reviewed revealed six major characteristics present in the lives of successful immigrant Latina girls. They have high academic aspirations for themselves (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gándara et al., 2013; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009) and have support at home despite parents' low socio economic and educational status; especially from their mothers

(Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011; Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gándara et al., 2013; Kaplan et al., 2007; McWhirter et al., 2013; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). They seek out mentors inside and outside the educational setting (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gándara et al., 2013; Kaplan et al., 2007; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) and become involved in extracurricular activities which allow them to connect to their school and reduce their sense of isolation (Gándara et al., 2013; Kaplan et al., 2009). Additionally, successful Latinas are able to move within both worlds in which they find themselves- school and home (Gándara et al., 2013; Sanchez, 2007; Soto, 2012; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) and have academically and culturally supportive school environments (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011; Gándara et al., 2013; McWhirter et al., 2013; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Nieto, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).

Conclusion

In my research study, my intent was to take the notion of subtractive schooling versus additive schooling and apply it as a mechanism for analysis of the response of a medium size school system in the Southeastern U.S. to new immigrant Latinas who entered the country during middle and high school. “Additive schooling is about equalizing opportunity and assimilating Mexicans into the larger society, albeit through a bicultural process” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 269). Valenzuela (1999), Nieto (2003), and Antrop-Gonzalez (2005) proposed that students do not have to choose between being Mexican and American but can be bicultural through a bicultural process. They proposed that educators should recognize openly that although students should master the dominant knowledge embedded in the curriculum, “an additive thought process may supervene to both challenge and counterbalance its undue influence” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 270). In additive schooling such as sanctuary schools, students’ language and ethnic identity are assets and play a crucial role in what it means to be educated in the U.S. It is “especially about the

maintenance of community, which includes improving the home-school relationship, even if this means the discourse gets politicized” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 270).

The literature review presented characteristics that both hinder and assist Latinos in general and Latinas specifically in k-12 education. It also provided general characteristics possessed by successful Latinas. Therefore, the significance of this study was to explore the specific experiences of immigrant Latinas in middle and high school in this specific region of Georgia. Its primary focus was to gather data on supports in the educational system which assisted new to the country immigrant Latinas during their middle and high school years. These supports may be specific people, structures, processes, and programs which made it easier for their transition from school in their native country to the U.S. It may also include educators and other adults who guided and aided them in very specific ways. Negative cases were not ignored as participants shared barriers. They also shared information about being impacted by outside supports such as peer influences and involved parents. With its focus on narrative inquiry and using the lens of LAC CRIT theory, participants’ descriptions of their experiences during this period of time in their lives gave insight into what best works for new immigrant Latinas in middle and high schools.

CHAPTER III:

METHODS

Introduction

Demographic changes of Georgia have placed many immigrant Latina students in local public schools. This change in student population from mainly White to Latino, primarily from Mexico, requires that educational institutions and teachers in particular change in order to respond appropriately to the new immigrant students' diverse cultural values, beliefs, language and educational needs. As indicated in the review of studies, according to Valenzuela (1999), Valdes (1996, 2001), Nieto (2003), Nodding (2005) and Antrop-Gonzalez (2006), this process has been slow, and in certain areas of the country, schools have not responded in a manner which provides an additive school experience. Despite this, some Latinas are being successful in graduating from high school and attending college (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gándara et al., 2013; Gonzalez, 2012). Although there are many studies about Latinos in general, immigrant populations, and a few specifically focused on Latinas, I found no research conducted on immigrant middle and high schools Latinas in this geographic area.

The overall purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of educationally successful Latina women in middle and high schools as new immigrants in Georgia. I conducted individual interviews and focus group interviews with twelve participants concerning their prior experiences, as new to the country students in middle and high schools, with the purpose of discovering common characteristics which assisted them in becoming educationally successful.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote, “Stories function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived” (p. 8). Narrative inquiry was used as a format because its flexibility allows for participants to share their stories in a manner which lends itself to the purpose of this study. LatCrit Theory was used to guide the study because it deals with the intersectionality of Latinas/os and race and racism in schools. The intent is for the conclusions based on the data to be shared with school leaders in the area in order to assist them in providing better services to immigrant Latinas who continue to arrive to the area from other countries.

This chapter describe the methods used to conduct the study. The first section contains the purpose, research questions, a description of the setting for the research, and a description of the participant selection process. The second section focuses on methodology, the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, interview protocols, and timelines. The final section concludes with ethical considerations and the researcher’s positionality.

Restatement of the Research Questions

How do educationally successful, young, Latina women describe their middle and high school experiences as first time immigrant students in Northwest GA? This overarching question can be deconstructed into other questions:

- 1) How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe their interactions with teachers and other school personnel (counselors, administrators, coaches, etc.) during their middle and high school years in GA;
- 2) How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe programs whose intent was to support them while they were in middle and high school;

- 3) In addition to processes, procedures and supports which were in these new immigrant Latinas' previous schools, what might have been done differently to increase the girls' likelihood of success; and
- 4) How do young, immigrant, Latinas perceive the characteristics of middle and high schools that effectively serve immigrant Latina girls?

Setting of the Study

The setting of the study is a medium size town and surrounding rural area in the Northwest region of Georgia, an area historically known for its textile industry. It is strategically located between two large metropolitan areas and adjacent to Interstate 75. What was once a predominantly White working class area changed rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s as factories expanded and owners went to Mexico in search of workers. The area has experienced a large increase in Latino immigration over the past three decades. As a result, all schools the participants attended experienced this same growth of new immigrant students mainly from Mexico. Driving through some neighborhoods and streets in the city of Conasauga may feel to a stranger a little like being in a Latin American country. Business signs are in Spanish and many locals walking around do not look like the "typical" White or Black area inhabitant. The community remains divided to a large extent by the railroad tracks that run in a general north-south direction. The places where both worlds meet are in Conasauga's large middle and two high schools as well as other surrounding county schools. Even with the transition from neighborhood elementary schools to the middle schools and later to the high schools, segregation is obvious in the cafeterias where most students sit based upon their race. Additionally, on any given school day, new to the country Latino students can be seen huddled together at their own

tables separating themselves from others and most likely finding comfort in each other from their uneasiness with their new surroundings.

Participant Selection

The study sample consisted of twelve Latinas who entered the public school systems in the United States for the first time as immigrant middle and high school students. This number of participants was chosen because it fell within the range proposed by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) as that most commonly used in interview studies. During the study, two participants had completed their masters and were working in their chosen professions. Three were working on a masters and another on a second bachelor's degree (BAs) as she had switched careers. One had completed a BA and was working as an educator. The final five were working on BAs at the local college. Their ages ranged between twenty-one and twenty-seven, and their attendance in the local school systems occurred within the last ten years. Participants were selected through the researcher's relationships with them, by recommendations from a colleague who served as a gatekeeper, and by recommendations from the candidates themselves. Emails and Facebook messages were sent to colleagues and other educators in the surrounding area asking for recommendations. The selection of participants for the study was limited to Latinas who entered U.S. schools for the first time as English learners in middle or high school in the area of the study and had graduated from high school and either were attending or had recently completed college. The participants were contacted and the study described to them. Once their consent was obtained, the research protocol was followed.

I had the opportunity to work with seven of the participants as new to the country students when they first arrived in middle school. They participated in a program where they received five core classes with other new to the country 6th through 8th graders for the academic

year they entered. I taught half of the subjects they received during this period of time and was homeroom teacher to four of them. Three participants attended middle or high school in the area and were recommended to the study by a colleague at one of the local high schools. The final two participants attended one of the local high schools and were recommended by other participants in the study. All participants had graduated from high school and seven had moved away, attending colleges and universities around the state, in other states, or were working in other areas of the state. They returned regularly to visit as their ties remain close to the community through their parents and younger siblings who continue to reside in the area. A profile of the participants was developed throughout chapter four with the use of thick rich description used to share their stories.

As a way to help the reader better understand the participants, graduation rates for those who attended the middle school as new immigrant students between the academic years of 1999-2000 and 2006-2007 are being provided. Personal attendance records indicated that approximately 146 Latinas enrolled in the new to the country middle school program during those eight academic years; seven of whom participated in the current study. During a review of the high school records using the school system's data, 45 graduated from the middle school's feeder high school and 101 either dropped out or transferred to other schools, evidence of high mobility, dropout rate and additional challenges Latinas and their families face. Table 2 below provides a brief overview of each participant's school biography.

Table 2

Participants' School Biography

Name	Grade entered U.S. schools	ESOL Program	Advanced Classes in HS	Extra curricular Activities	Major or Field in college	College Scholarships
Raquel	6	Language Academy	Yes	Clubs/ sports	Masters dentistry	Yes
Delmi	6	Language Academy	Yes	Clubs/ sports	Masters social services	Yes
Diana	8	Language Academy	No	No	BA- criminal justice	Yes- state
Mirna	6	Language Academy	Yes	Service clubs	BA- psychology	Yes-state
Veronica	6	ESOL- pull out	Yes	No	Completed BA- education	Yes
Mariana	7	Language Academy	No	No	BA- education	Yes- state
Lani	6	Language Academy	Yes	Clubs-sports	Masters- Biology	Yes
Gaby	8	Language Academy	No	Clubs	Two BAs- hospitality and economics	Yes
Loren	9	Newcomer center	Yes	Service clubs	Completed masters in social work	Yes
Marina	9	New comer center	No	Service clubs	BA-nursing	Yes
Anita	6	ESOL- pull out	Yes	Service clubs/ sports	Completed Master Economics	Yes
Marilena	10	Newcomer center	No	Service clubs	BA nursing	Yes

Method Selection

Qualitative research was selected as the method of study because of its appropriateness for this topic. Qualitative research is

any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations. Some of the data may be quantified, as with the census or background information about the persons or objects studied, but the bulk of the analysis is interpretive. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11)

Three major components of this type of research are data, procedures, and written and verbal reports (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11-12). Its characteristics are a natural setting, the researcher as the key instrument of data collection and analysis, the inclusion of multiple sources of data, an inductive data analysis, a focus upon participants' meaning, an emergent design, the incorporation of a theoretical lens, the use of interpretive inquiry, and the pursuit of a holistic account of a problem or issue being studied (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell, it is a good approach to employ when a problem or issue needs to be explored; no previous studies exist; a specific population merits specific attention; a complex detailed understanding of an issue is needed; specific groups of individuals' voices need to be heard, or an understanding of the context and setting of their world is needed. Also, qualitative research may link causal theories together and may allow for the development of theories.

Qualitative research includes both the social and human sciences. The process begins with the researcher's assumption, her worldview, and her theoretical lens which frames the study. The researcher chooses a topic about which she has some understanding from reviewing the literature or from observations in daily life. Most topics are about social, cultural, racial, and gender issues. Generally, topics are personal, practical and emotional. To accomplish the task of

such studies and to gain a better understanding of the problem, researchers ask questions which require open responses and continuously reframe their understanding of concepts based on participants' responses. Information can be gathered through three basic sources: interviews, observations, physical and electronic documents. As data are collected, they are analyzed in an attempt to search for common categories or general codes or themes. During this process, the researcher may shape the story or narrative taking great care to allow her participants' experiences to show through their own dialogue and careful description. Throughout the process she remains aware of ethical issues that may arise which may bring consequences to the participants. It is equally important to ensure the study is true to telling participants' experiences and not the assumptions of the researcher. A manner in which this is done is through triangulating the data from at least three sources such as participants, review boards, and committee members.

Narrative Inquiry is one of several qualitative research approaches and was chosen for this current study because it lends itself to the descriptive data the study collected. Narrative Inquiry lends itself to retelling the personal stories of the participants as former, new immigrant middle and high school students. It

is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An enquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry contains the flexibility for participants to co-create their own stories with the researcher. Additionally, it allows for the conceptualization of the experience to occur on several levels, providing for growth on the part of both the participants and the researcher. Although the researcher may attend to common themes across the stories being told, the focus

remains on the experiences of participants. The narrative researcher must attend to the experiences of the participants through three commonplaces: temporality, sociality and place. Temporality is the researchers' ability to attend to the past, present and future of their own and participants' lives, places, things and events. Sociality is the attention on both a personal and societal level of conditions through cultural, social, institutional and linguistic narratives. Place is the concrete location where the events occur as experiences are directly linked to a specific, concrete area or areas where they occurred (Clandinin & Huber, in press). Through the study, it is important for the researcher to think narratively about the topic under study in all three areas. It allows the researcher to challenge the dominant thinking and pay attention to the stories being told by participants and the researcher.

A narrative inquiry begins with the participants telling their stories either during an individual interview or in a focus group interview. These can occur in a very structured manner with specified questions or in a less structured way in form of a dialogue. As a group, participants share a common experience with the researcher as they retell their stories of a similar situation. The researcher then creates a text from these told stories analyzing them using multiple frames such as an identity and sociological approaches. Furthermore, the researcher must consider justifying her research in three ways: personal, practical and social. At each level, the researcher must consider in what ways this research is beneficial or justifiable to conduct.

Clandinin and Huber (in press) divide narrative inquiry into four sections. The first section consists of framing the research puzzle where the research questions do not have an expected answer but are formulated and centered in wondering about the outcome. The second section is all about being in the field. This is the time the researcher spends either listening to participants tell their stories or living with them as their lives unfold. The third section is the

composing of the field text. It is the time when the researcher moves away from the field to compose the text into a narrative. It can be a time of tension for the researcher as she engages in narrative thinking by looking at the field notes in their temporality, sociality and place. The final part consists of the composing the research text. During this period, the researcher both shapes the signature and voice of the text. It is crucial that her signature and voice do not overshadow those of the participants.

Because of the nature of narrative inquiry in retelling the stories of the lived experiences of participants, ethical considerations are important. It is important for

narrative enquirers to understand that a person's lived and told stories are who they are and who they are becoming and that these stories sustain them. This understanding shapes the necessity of negotiating research texts that respectfully represent participants' lived and told stories. (Clandinin & Huber, in press, p. 15)

Therefore, it is important to have clear criteria for providing participants with anonymity so that they are able to share their experiences with confidence and comfort. Only through this will the true purpose of narrative inquiry unfold; the production of both personal and societal change. In this study, participant anonymity was respected and maintained through individual interviews in venues that participants choose. Pseudonyms were used in the final work to replace the names of participants. Additionally, they were invited to participate in the focus group interviews, but not required to do so as part of the study. All audios and transcriptions were kept in a secure location in my home and under password protection on my personal computer and zip drives. Access to this information was limited to only those directly related to the study.

A model of narrative inquiry used in this study is thematic narrative inquiry. In this form of inquiry, the emphasis is on the content of what is told and not on how it is told (Riessman, 2003). It was used because it is practical when attempting to find themes across multiple participants and their stories. It incorporates segments of the stories told to the researcher as

participants attempted to make sense of their experiences. It provides a framework that is flexible in the telling of the stories through thick rich description, and allows for the researcher to explore themes which emerge as participants shared similar experiences as new immigrant middle and high school Latinas in the specific geographical area of this study. Although similar to other qualitative traditions such as grounded theory, it differs in the method of coding in four ways. In thematic narrative inquiry, prior theory guides the research while at the same time the researcher watches for additional insights from the data. Secondly, the narrative enquirer attempts to keep the story complete by maintaining long sequences within the work. A third feature of thematic narrative inquiry is that it pays attention to the time and space within which the story or stories occurred rejecting a simple or generic explanation as an answer. Four, it is case centered in that although several participants are included, they are all within one identity group (Riessman, 2003) therefore seen as one case.

Research Design

Understanding the school experiences of successful immigrant Latinas lends itself to a qualitative design as the purpose of the study was to gather data concerning participants' recollections of a previous period of their life. Personal interviews and focus group interviews allowed the participants to share details not quantifiable through the use of numbers. Two sets of interviews were conducted with questions centered directly on uncovering participants' perceptions of their experiences as students during their middle and high school years as new immigrants. Each participant was interviewed. After the first interview, the data were transcribed, and the participants' responses coded. A second round of interviews was conducted with several participants. During the second round, issues were clarified and a deeper understanding of the perceptions of participants was achieved. This second round of interviews

was also used as a time to conduct a member check as a way to clarify and confirm participants' initial statements in the first interview in order to strengthen the validity of the study. Likewise, each follow-up interview was transcribed and coded. Analytical memos were also used to capture the essence of each interview.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) provided detailed information about interviewing specifically related to narrative inquiry by stating that “in a narrative interview the interviewer can ask directly for stories and perhaps together with the interviewee attempt to structure the different happenings recounted into coherent stories” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 180). They advised that the main focus of the interviewer is to be a listener, only speaking when it is necessary to clarify and prompt the continuation of the telling of the story. Jeong-Hee (2016) admonished that the researcher's work is to ask only those questions which promote the continuous telling of a story and to indicate her interest. Questions should be open ended and posed in a manner that invokes the emotions of the participants. This allows for deeper and more meaningful answers. These shared stories allow for “us to explore life experiences as related to opinions, worldviews, contextual elements, and changing interpretation over time” (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 32).

In addition, interviews undertaken with the assistance of technology such as email, Face Time, Skype, live chats have become common and were used in this study because several of the participants no longer reside in the area. These media provide both advantages and drawbacks. They provide the ability to interview participants without the necessity of travel, which in some cases was not practical or possible. The disadvantage lies in the use of the technology itself, which on occasions may not work properly. Email and instant messaging skip the transcription step, which is an advantage, but they do not provide face to face interaction. They are greatly

dependent on the written communication skills of both researcher and participant, and, therefore, were used only to contact and set up sessions.

Two focus group interviews were used to collect data and to further explore participants' perceptions of their experiences. Each focus group interview consisted of several participants and lasted approximately thirty minutes each. Focus group interviews are "characterized by a nondirective style of interviewing, where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic for the group. The group moderator introduces the topics for discussion and facilitates the interchange. The moderator's task is to create a permissive atmosphere for the expression of personal and conflicting viewpoints on the topics in focus. The aim of the focus group is not to reach a consensus about, or solution to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 175). The focus group interview approach was particularly suited to this study as it allowed for participants to share their views in a more natural setting and was often more relaxed than individual interviews. One challenge can be the "power dynamics in the focus-group setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 154) therefore the researcher must be aware of this and be able to facilitate in such a manner as to produce data useful for the research project. As each phase of interviewing occurred, using the open coding analysis, the researcher looked for possible re-occurring themes that either supported or rejected those found in the literature as well as any new ones that applied to the subgroup and that answered the study's research questions. Additionally, it was an opportunity to delve deeper into participants' thinking as new immigrants and their growth as they moved forward in time.

Because several of the participants lived outside the area during the study, application programs such as FaceTime and Skype, were used as mechanisms through which to conduct six

of the individual interviews. Face to face interviews were a priority in this study, but proved to be impossible because of participants' residential status in other cities or states; therefore, they were held electronically. Those held in person occurred in a location chosen by the participant so that she felt comfortable. Participants chose local schools they were somewhat familiar with as the location. Participants were informed that they would be audiotaped and were provided with a consent form prior to the interviews (see Appendix C).

Data Collection

In this research project data were collected through personal individual interviews and focus group interviews. The sampling used was criterion (Miles & Huberman, 1994) because it is purposeful in that participants are chosen based on their knowledge of the subject to be explored allowing them to provide the data which answered the research questions. Standard open-ended questions were used allowing for comparisons between interviews. This research project used individual interviews of twelve immigrant Latina girls concerning their experiences as students in Northwest Georgia middle and high schools. Interviews were conducted in person or through the use of application programs and were recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. The first interview consisted of more generalized questions, where participants shared recollections of their experiences by retelling their experiences beginning with their family's decision to immigrate here. Guided questions (see Appendix A) were used to maintain the focus of the study. The second interview occurred after the first data set had been transcribed and analyzed and delved deeper into the experiences described by the participants. See appendix B for questions for interview two. The study also included two focus groups with several participants in each group.

Each individual interview and focus group interviews followed a specific protocol using the questions presented in appendixes A and B of this document. These focus groups allowed the participants to present their views, discuss them in a manner which allowed for further clarification of their recollections of their similarly lived experiences. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in English with the exception of participants who felt more at ease with the use of Spanish to express a feeling or specific experience. All data were transcribed by the researcher and housed on the researcher's computer and zip drives. Individual interview and focus group interview questions are found in Appendices A and B.

Participants described their recollections of their time as new immigrants in middle and high school candidly despite several stating that they were nervous because of the interviews. The interview questions focused on participants' perceptions of their school experience; specifically on programs and persons who assisted or served as road blocks to them. As the researcher, I was aware of my connection to several of the participants as their former middle school teacher as well as the lack of possible trust between me and five who did not know me personally. I tried to reduce any fear or anxiety by beginning the interview with friendly conversation about their current lives and assuring each that her identity would remain anonymous. Additionally, I assured those I knew that the intent of the study was to gather their honest feedback in order to provide insight to future educators and others serving immigrant middle and high school Latinas. The first round of interview session formally began by asking each participant to recount her experience of leaving her native country and her first impressions of school in the U.S. Interview questions were then used to gain additional information concerning study participants' time in middle and/or high school in the U.S.

Gatekeepers were used with five of the participants not known to the researcher. They consisted of a high school colleague and two of the participants who shared the researcher's phone number and email with those participants. The participants then contacted the researcher using the gatekeepers' names as a manner of introduction. Initially ten unknown immigrant Latinas were contacted, but five did not respond. The other seven participants who were the researcher's former middle school students were contacted through social media; in particular through Facebook. Once contact was made, private messages were sent to them using the message recruitment script (see Appendix G). Consent forms were emailed to participants prior to interviews. Four of the six participants returned the consent forms signed via email; the other two chose to use the Skype/FaceTime consent form (see Appendix F).

Time and medium for interviews and focus groups depended on the place where participants resided during the study. Six interviews occurred personally at two local elementary schools in the town where the participants reside. The researcher proposed these locations because of their proximity to the girls' homes and because of the quiet atmosphere for recording the interviews. Participants appeared comfortable with the locations inside the schools. One occurred in a conference room, one in a classroom and four in a parent resource room. Four interviews were done using FaceTime and two using Skype, media chosen by the participants who currently reside outside the local area.

Data collection began in January and was completed in April of 2015. During this time, each interview was transcribed, coded and analytical memos written soon after each occurred. Concepts began to emerge after a few interviews during the thematic coding process. The constant comparative methods (Boeije, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used, providing for flexibility as themes formed from the concepts.

Data Analysis

For analysis, I used a multi-case design (Miles & Huberman, 1994), treating each participant's individual interview and focus group interview as a separate unit or case. I analyzed each interview separately and then in conjunction with the others. This type of analysis allowed me to review each participant's response in light of what others had said and return to previous interviews with flexibility and ease. Each personal interview and focus group interview was transcribed, and the data were analyzed through an open coding system. First, each transcribed interview was read several times and significant words and phrases were highlighted and underlined. A two-column system was used with transcriptions written in the left column and significant words, phrases, thoughts and concepts noted in the right column. Holistic coding (Saldana, 2013) was used to determine concepts and capture the essence of the participants' experiences. In vivo coding (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2013) was used as a means to provide quoted excerpts from interviews to add validity to the voices of the participants. These quotes were highlighted and some re-written in the right column. These categories later became themes. Additional concepts that did not immediately fit within the categories were included and later either found to not be significant for the study or became a part of it. Analytical interviews included comparing how each participant answered the research question in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two. Finally, any insights gathered from interacting with the data and reflecting upon the process were noted at the end of each memo. As each individual interview and focus group interview was transcribed, the researcher reviewed previous transcripts using constant comparative analysis (Boeije, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to look for themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) that emerged with additional data analyses. The memos

were kept electronically, and they provided ease in returning to them frequently as data were analyzed.

After the initial transcription and coding, analytical memos (Charmaz, 2014; Webb, 2013) were written as a way for the researcher to analyze the words of the participants. These analytical memos were set up in sections following a protocol by Webb (2013). In section one of the analytical memo, concepts related to a specific research question were listed under it. As several interviews were transcribed and memos written, concepts were then placed in emergent categories in a separate document and added to as each interview was transcribed and analytical memo written. As the analysis proceeded, certain repeated categories became larger themes while other became subthemes or discarded. Significant words and phrases were added under themes with the names of participants for easy reference. A table was set up based on each theme and its subthemes. Concepts were added, moved and deleted based on their significance to the study. Themes and subthemes were included in the study in order of their role in the telling of the participants' stories and the order of the research questions. As chapters four and five unfolded, they supported and enhanced each other. Chapter five added to the significance of chapter four by providing theories grounded in the literature review from chapter two.

Data were triangulated (Stake, 1995) through peer review, member check, and an audit trail. Peer review was undertaken by three different reviewers. Two are colleagues and hold doctoral degrees from The University of Alabama. One is a previous principal and central office administrator and is currently a professor in the educational department at a nearby university, and the other is a principal in one of the local school districts. The third holds an Ed.S. in school leadership and is a colleague in the ESOL department. Member check occurred during follow up personal interviews and focus group interviews as participants were given opportunities to either

affirm or negate previous statements. Finally, an audit trail was kept both electronically and with hard copies of transcriptions, coding, analytical memos and rough drafts of the study.

During this time, the researcher bore in mind the structure of narrative inquiry taking great care to record the individual experiences of the participants as they were communicated, and her own positionality (biases) through reflexivity by taking into account how her own “interests, positions, and assumptions influenced her inquiry” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 334). This deliberate reflective thinking allowed the researcher to become aware of her own bias towards listening for positive points participants were sharing and strategically returning to the transcriptions in search of ignored, overlooked or negative cases. This resulted in a more profound analysis of the data. Once final transcriptions, coding and categorizing were completed based on research questions, the data were analyzed to provide findings for chapter five. A LAT CRIT lens was used to review the data to determine how participants’ perceptions of their experiences correlated with the tenets described in Chapter II. Data were analyzed in light of the theories of subtractive schooling, theory of caring, and theory of schools as sanctuaries.

Timeline of the Study

The writing process for the study began in January of 2014 with the prospectus being presented during the spring of 2014. The proposal was presented in late fall of 2014 with IRB approval being granted in January of 2015. Interviews were conducted during winter/spring of 2015. Coding and data analyses were completed during the fall of 2015.

Ethical Considerations

Because the study occurred in the area where the researcher resides and the participants continue to have close family ties with siblings and extended family members attending the educational organizations, names of people were coded and pseudonyms used in the final written

document. Each participant was called by a preferred pseudonym and all materials with her name protected from public view. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) emphasized the importance of ethical behavior throughout the interviewing process:

Morally responsible research behavior is more than abstract ethical knowledge and cognitive choices; it involves the moral integrity of the researcher, his or her empathy, sensitivity, and commitment to moral issues and action. In interviewing, the importance of the researcher's integrity is magnified because the interviewer himself or herself is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. Being familiar with value issues, ethical guidelines, and ethical theories may help the researcher to make choices that weigh ethical versus scientific concerns in a study. In the end, however, the integrity of the researcher, his or her knowledge, experience, honesty, and fairness- is the decisive factor. (p. 97)

Personal Perspective

Research many times transforms the researcher during the process of the study. A valuable study causes the researcher to learn and grow on both a personal and professional level (Arredondo Rucinski, personal communication). This concept became obvious to me deep within the study. At times as I interviewed participants and analyzed the data, it was as if I was reliving parts of my struggles from high school. Similar to the participants' parents, my parents understood that education was important, but they did not fully understand what being educated in the United States meant or truly what it entailed. The responsibility of this level of learning and educational future became my sole responsibility as early as ninth grade. Because of similarities in educational experiences, as the researcher, it was imperative that I carefully and intentionally separate myself from the data in order to analyze it based on the reflections of the participants, removing my personal feelings and biases. The literature review and especially the interviews and the data analysis all impacted and changed me greatly. Through this study I have relived significant and emotional parts of my educational career, have gained a much greater

understanding of and respect for students with whom I worked and have great affection for, and have renewed my faith and confidence in my role as teacher and mentor.

Conclusion

This study provided an opportunity for successful immigrant Latinas to describe their experiences from middle and high school in Northwest Georgia as new to the country students. A qualitative approach, and in particular a narrative method of inquiry, was selected because it allowed participants to share their stories through interviews and focus groups. The study allowed participants to reflect upon their experiences in a semi-structured manner where the researcher was able to, through the process of analysis, extract themes which emerged from their stories. The focus of the study was to discover factors and influences directly related to school experience, especially those that occurred in the educational setting when participants attended middle and high school as newcomer immigrants.

CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, my purpose was to make sense of data collected through the stories told during the individual interviews and focus group interviews. I focused on emergent themes that answered research questions. Because the purpose of the study was to describe experiences of immigrant Latinas during their enrollment as middle and high school students, the first part of the chapter is dedicated to painting a picture of the participants' experiences when they first entered school. Ten of the twelve participants were from Mexico and two were from the Dominican Republic. Eleven of the participants entered the U.S. legally on visas received through their fathers and one through her mother. Ten participants stated their fathers began coming to the U.S. as teenagers to work in agriculture and received their citizenship during the Reagan administration in the 1980s. Their fathers continued to work in the U.S. and traveled to their native country once or twice per year to visit their families. This arrangement placed stress on the family unit as the fathers were not with them in person for long periods of time, leaving the daily task of child rearing to the mothers. During the course of their childhood, their parents made the critical decision to bring all the family to the U.S. in order to unite the family physically, and to search for a better life, which included an education for the participants and their siblings. The process to enter the U.S. legally took the families anywhere from six to ten years by which time, eight of the participants were age appropriate for middle school and four were age appropriate for high school.

Gaby, currently working on a second bachelor's in economics, was placed in eighth grade when she arrived despite being fifteen years old. She described the experience in the following manner:

We just enrolled in school. I was supposed to be in my first year of high school, but I was put back into middle school, so I was totally disappointed and totally lost. I didn't know what had happened. I couldn't ask about anything, so I would just go to school and be like smiling—totally lost and I would ask the kids. I would be like what is the professor [*teacher*] saying? They would be like I don't know. So I was totally lost. I remember I was going from the school to my house and I was crying. I would be like I don't want to go back to school because I didn't know what was happening.

Once here the girls dealt with understanding why they were here. Raquel, currently working on a master's degree in biomedical science with plans to attend dental school, shared the inner turmoil she experienced her first six months or so.

I hated it. I think emotionally speaking I became really depressed in a sense leaving everything that was familiar to me and coming to a place that felt so far from everything that I grew up with. I think it's a transition that although you know and your parents tell you it's for the best, it doesn't feel like it. And it also like it wasn't me- it wasn't me. I couldn't speak English. I couldn't express myself. I couldn't be who I was and am. I went from being an extrovert in Mexico to being an introvert here. It stole my ability to communicate—to really let my personality come through. So at that point—those first six months—I was just really angry. Why we had left everything—and it's also I would say—almost seemed like nothing was going to make it better even if I tried really hard in school. I was always struggling; like I was always spending so much time doing homework. I had to translate everything—like when doing a science problem. I felt handicapped—yea—there you go—handicapped, and that feeling can be very frustrating.

Entering a school that was so different from what these immigrant Latinas were comfortable with caused great stress for them. When they arrived in the U.S., not one of the participants had a command of the English language or was familiar with the educational system. Ana, who currently has a master's in accounting and is working at one of the largest firms in Atlanta, described her first days as frustrating:

I remember when I first started. There were very few people that spoke Spanish, so people couldn't really translate for me, and the few who were there didn't like to translate, so I felt very frustrated. And I remember the first week or so, I felt like crying

every day when I got home mainly because I couldn't even tell them [*teachers*] I wanted to go to the restroom or this is what I wanted for lunch or anything.

These new immigrant Latinas entered schools that were very different from where they had attended in their native countries. Lani, currently working on a master's in biology with plans to attend medical school, shared her awakening:

I remember in Mexico I would watch cartoons or shows to see how high school or middle school kids were, but when I came here, I didn't know it was going to be so hard—so different. Especially you are in a school where you are a small group of people or students who don't speak the language and everyone around does, and you just kind of feel like gosh I could be doing this or joining this sport but I can't.

These schools were larger, used a different language, processes and procedures, and had rules, which the immigrant Latinas did not understand.

Loren, who completed a master's degree in social work and is currently working at a women's crisis center near Atlanta, captured her experience in the following quote:

To be honest, at the beginning it was so overwhelming because like one day—we went to Conasauga High School—It was a two story building and everything was enclosed; everything looked very fast paced compared to our experience in school in Mexico. So, it was all a little bit overwhelming, and I was like I will never catch up.

Marina, who entered high school at seventeen but was placed in tenth grade and is currently working on a degree in nursing, described her first day simply as hard; a term she repeated several times during the first interview.

I mean it was hard. I really don't know how to say it. I don't have words to say how hard it was and how hard it still is. Now that I'm in college it's still hard for me. My first day of school was hard. I didn't know what to do or where to go. They [*counselors*] gave me the schedule, but they couldn't show me around—like where I had to go. It was my first time in a big school. That was the first time, right? Because when I was in the Dominican Republic, I was in school, but it wasn't big like they are here—you know. So that was hard for me to find out where I had to go. When I was walking in the hallways all I was hearing was English. And in my mind I was like what are they saying? I thought I was going crazy. I was like oh my God, what am I going to do? I don't speak English. Where do I go or what do I do? So I was like I'm just going to sit here and wait for somebody to talk to me and then I started crying because I didn't know where I had to go or what I had

to do. So, I was oh my God, what do I have to do? So, at that moment I started crying—you know—I started crying like a baby.

In response to the interview question, how would you describe in one or two words your experience in school in this area when you first came? Study participants used mostly negative terms to describe the first few days and months in their schools. They used *shocking, lost, hard, frustrating, overwhelming, scary, different, confusing, difficult, intimidating, handicapped, and did not like it*. Other less negative descriptive words were, *challenging, different, and change*. Simple daily processes and procedures were confusing and traumatic for them.

Delmi, who entered from Mexico as a sixth grader with solid academic preparation from her home country but zero English, described her first day the following way:

I didn't speak English, so that was scary and frustrating. And the fact that I was in a school that was so big compared to the one I had been in in Mexico. I remember when the bell started ringing and all the kids started coming out—that was scary to me because we didn't have that in Mexico. All those kids and I wasn't able to ask anyone how do I get to ___? Or where do I go? [It] was scary and overwhelming too.

Gaby described her lack of understanding of her new school as simply not knowing anything: “I didn't know anything. I didn't know why the bell was ringing every hour. I didn't know where to go for lunch. I didn't know who was lower class and got free lunch. I didn't know anything.”

Mariana described it simply as being bad:

I just wanted to cry. It was bad. It was bad. I was in a new place, new city, new people. People spoke another language. It was just like—even though I was going to school where we were all Hispanic and everybody was learning English [*language academy for newcomers*], I felt like the people—the kids who had been here for a long time [*general school population*]; they would take advantage of you because you're the new one. So, it was bad- It was bad.

After the initial shock, immigrant Latinas in the study began the process of understanding and adjusting to their school environment in order to navigate their way through it. Some seemed to do so relatively quickly while others continued to struggle despite graduating from high school

and attending college. Raquel felt that by the second semester she “realized that things were paying off and I was getting—you know—a grasp of English better and that’s when I started gradually feeling ok.” After spending a couple of months in a mostly English only environment, Ana said, “I was able to understand and by the end of the year I was able to speak.” For others, it took longer. Loren reflected that; “We did the best we could the first year. Then I think after the first year, it got easier. We kind of got adjusted. We started joining—like Conasauga had an international club—and we also had teachers, in my case, that were very motivating.” Mariana, with her mom and three other siblings, came in 7th grade from Mexico to live permanently with her father. The transition was “pretty hard” for the family. She attended high school for several years and then dropped out. Despite staying out for a year, she returned to complete it and is now working on an early childhood education degree:

When I started high school, I was just frustrated most of the time because of my English... One day—I remember—I woke up and I was just like I didn’t want to go to school anymore. I’m just tired and I didn’t feel like I was getting anywhere. I didn’t know anything and people just made fun of me constantly so I just decided not to show up anymore and I thought working was going to be better- the best way out so I worked for a year.

No matter how complex and diverse the adjustment and success for the immigrant Latinas, they were supported by people in their environments. During their journey, they met people in their institutions who played influential roles in their lives. This next section of chapter four addressed these relationships. Table three below provides a brief overview of themes and subthemes, which emerged during the study.

Table 3

Thematic Categories

Theme	Key Concept	Subthemes
1	Mentor supports for Immigrant Latinas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Caring educators b. Unsupportive educators c. Comprehensive mentor programs
2	Academic and extracurricular programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Academic programs b. Extracurricular activities c. Tailored academic and social support program
3	Parent educational support programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Family's belief in success through education b. Mother's support c. Parents' lack of understanding of U.S. schools
4	Inclusive school environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Living with father for the first time permanently b. Knowledge of and support for Latinas in school programs
5	Latina Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identity crisis b. Personal responsibility c. Peers and adults who support their dreams d. Service

Theme One: Comprehensive Mentor Supports Specifically for Immigrant Latinas

In telling their stories, immigrant Latinas in this study clearly articulated ways educators in their school supported them as students during their time in middle and high schools in the geographical area of the study. It is important to note they did not spend much time during the first interviews talking about those who were not supportive. One participant stated she did not remember the names of those who did not assist her, but could easily remember the names of those who did. During the follow up interview and focus groups, several questions were asked which directly dealt with their experiences with people, processes and procedures which they felt were barriers. Theme one has been categorized into several subsections. Salient quotations are

frequently used throughout chapter four as a way to project the voices of the participants from this study.

Caring Educators

The first subtheme which emerged from the data concerned participants' descriptions of caring educators. They had definite opinions about the educators with whom they interacted during their times as middle and high school students. All twelve participants talked about one or more educators who supported them in very specific ways. Raquel remembered feeling fortunate:

Fortunate for having the motivation of my teachers; their belief in me that I could do something. That's one thing that may seem very simple but makes a huge difference verses you and your family being the only people who believe in you. I would say I had a team—a good team that helped me through my experience.

Each one described an English as a second language (ESOL) educator whose influence made a difference in her life. Other educators mentioned were general education teachers and coaches. These educators supported them in four general ways: caring for them as a whole person; holding high expectations; providing academic and social support, and communicating with parents.

Veronica summed up the type of educator that made a difference in her life as a newcomer immigrant Latina.

Well—he for one let us know he cared; cared enough to teach you [*sic*]. Anything you had a question about—a school assignment or something that someone may have said in the hallway. You know he was always willing to just help you out and translate for you, but not only that but push you because he knew that you had potential. To me that was something great to see that he cared enough to push you to know that you could go further.

Mariana's ESOL teachers influenced her to such an extent that she wants to follow in their footsteps in helping others.

I am looking forward to being an ESOL teacher just like all the teachers I had. I feel since I know how hard it was to come here and not know anything and have people who encouraged me and helped me and constantly push me to get through. I think if it wasn't *[sic]* for that, I wouldn't be here, so I want to kind of set that example too for other students.

One common characteristic these teachers had was they made the immigrant Latinas feel like they cared for them—a caring that transcended the normal student—teacher relationship. These teachers went beyond their role as dispensers of knowledge or even the everyday caring that most students may require because they understand the language, culture, processes and procedures of the school. These students were experiencing a great disruption in their lives—in particular to their educational lives—that required educators to go beyond the everyday interaction with students. Delmi described her first teachers when she arrived,

Teachers of course because they were very understanding and very supportive. They were very aware of our struggles as newcomers; as learners of English. Being aware that I was there, building a relationship with me rather than just seeing me as a student. So I would come into the class and they would acknowledge me as person, and they took initiative to know more about me farther than just in the classroom. They would always ask how I was doing and things like that.

Raquel narrowed it down to what she described as one common characteristic:

I would say that the common characteristic that all those people have that helped me was they cared for students—not just as students but more as people. I think they had the maturity as teachers to see a student as a whole person such as looking at the person holistically instead of just as a student that comes to class, and I am in charge of teaching them. It was more; they were genuinely interested in getting to know me as a person.

Mariana saw her initial teachers as people who went beyond their everyday duties; people who had a calling:

My teachers—not just because they were teachers or that they were being paid to do so. I felt they had that something in them that wanted to help students—especially new students that came to the U.S. be successful. Like if I said I don't know how to say this and just push my book out of the way, they would be like—no! They kept pushing me and pushing me—yes you can. I'll help you. Say it with me. I felt like all my teachers back then had that something. I don't know how to describe it, but they wanted to help their students.

Other supports came from those the participants encountered outside their academic block. Raquel described how her coaches influenced her during high school.

My coaches would also be a part of that group. I would say just the good coaches that I still keep in touch with just saw us as someone who is a whole person—not just my runner—no—you are a whole person that I care for. In order for me to be a good coach and you a good runner, I need to know you as a whole person.

For Ana, a caring educator was one who filled the gap where her parents were unable to.

I think for me it was that they just wanted to know me better. Not just as a student, but as a person and what motivated me and inspired me. In some instances gave me advice on what to do since I did not have that from my parents. Not because they didn't want to advise me, but because they didn't have an idea of how things worked. I think that was the main thing that they took the time to know what I was looking for and what I wanted and gave me advice of what to do—little steps of what to do in each step of the way.

A second characteristic of supportive educators the participants described was that these teachers and coaches held high expectations for them. Ana said that, “It was a big push from the teachers to basically push us to understand and do better outside the classroom; not only to do well in grades, but actually have motivation and move forward to do well in high school and college.” Experiencing a new school environment, culture and language caused these immigrant Latinas to doubt themselves and their abilities. So for them to be successful, they needed others to believe in their success for them. Teachers many times may say they have high expectations for their students, but do students really see it? One of the concepts which emerged from this study was that these participants knew they had one or more teachers who truly believed they could accomplish their academic dreams. Diana described how one of her teachers assured her that she knew, “She used to talk to me and tell me—you have to do this and this to learn English better. And she made me feel that I could do it and that was a big support.” These teachers had the ability to help the Latinas see themselves as successful and challenge them to see it, too. Raquel stated, “Those were the people who not just encouraged you but challenged you. They

challenged you to be more of a risk taker I guess in the sense that they saw the potential that we had as students, and they continued to push us.” All of the participants described their ESOL teachers as having influence by providing both support and having high expectations. Mirna shared her thoughts on one of the first teachers she had as a new immigrant Latina in the area.

Our teachers in the academy even though they knew how very little English we knew, they pushed us. I remember my primary teacher you could say. It was his first year teaching nevertheless he still pushed us very hard. Even though he knew how very hard it was for us, he said, ‘I believe you can do it.’ And that to us showed us his confidence in us and that made us want to try harder (crying).

Other general education teachers also provided the participants with the crucial encouragement they felt they needed. Lani reflected on a social studies teacher: “Mr. M.—although not an ESOL teacher—I always believe that he believed in me, and the fact that you know that someone thinks you can do this is very, very, very rewarding.”

There was a necessary connection between holding high expectations and providing strategic academic and social support. Participants shared stories and provided detailed ways these educators demonstrated their academic and social support from the first days they entered school and throughout high school. These supports were varied depending on the participants’ recollections. Diana talked about two teachers who supported her. “I had two teachers that really helped me. They worked with me after school. They were willing to work with me if I had any questions or any doubts that I had, and they made me feel that they wanted to help me.” Gaby remembered an educator who spent time with her after school during her first year.

Ms. J—she stayed for one hour after class and I would say just to have reading assignments and writing. It was very helpful. Most of the time, I just wanted to finish school and go back home and watch TV or something, or do my homework or play with my friends, but staying one hour after class and having a person who would dedicate one hour after her job was finished was very helpful. I mean that was touching.

High school was a challenging experience for these immigrant Latinas. The need for guidance and assistance seemed even more life changing. Mariana described how one ESOL teacher made the difference for her after she became discouraged and dropped out. “She helped me get back in school. If it hadn’t been for that conversation I had with her, I wouldn’t have found out that there was a way for me to get back into high school and graduate from there.” The result of that conversation is this participant is currently in the process of studying to become an educator herself. She is now inspiring others around her, including her two younger sisters who recently graduated from high school and also encouraging fifth grade Latina students at her younger siblings’ elementary school.

As study participants shared about this period in their lives, it became evident that extracurricular activities were important to several of the immigrant Latinas and helped them stay focused on their goals through high school. Lani in particular saw her coaches as people who provided support on a regular basis.

When I was in high school, I would never see a lot of Latinos or Latina girls doing sports; sometimes if you don’t see a lot of Latinas or people you might know doing something, you get this thing in your head where you say maybe it’s not for me. I remember when we were there, they [cross country coaches] were very encouraging to you and always very supportive so I really liked that. I like the fact they would see us all as equal. And just be like you’ve done awesome and I value that. I remember when I started, I was running really, really bad and at the end of the first season I was awarded the most improved runner. It was something good. Like I said they saw us all as equal and [were] very encouraging. If they saw someone had a good skill, they would work with that person regardless if they were white, Hispanic or Black. My coaches—my cross country coaches have been people who have inspired me.

The participants described the needed support they received from educators as sometimes simple every day and seemingly insignificant. Veronica shared an incident that looking back she remembered with amusement but symbolized the regular assistance she received from an art teacher.

There was my art teacher and we were doing an activity and I had erased the paper so much that it had ripped, and I went up to her and asked, ‘can I have a new sheet, my paper broke.’ She just kind of chuckled a little bit. She got a piece of paper and ripped it and said, ‘this is rip.’ Then she got a ruler and broke it in half and said, ‘this is break.’ After that I learned the difference between rip and break.

Unsupportive Educators

A second subtheme which emerged detailed participants’ experiences with educators who they perceived as not being supportive during their middle and high school years. “I had a couple of counselors [high school] that when I got straight As, they were like it is good that you got straight As because you’re never going to have them again.” A harsh statement for an immigrant Latina to hear, but for Ana it served to motivate her. As indicted by the previous statement, not everyone was supportive of these new immigrant Latinas during their middle and high school experiences. To a large extent, no one mentioned support from counselors, administrators or other support personnel at their schools. Two participants, however, mentioned counselors during the first round of interviews to the questions about supportive educators. When asked as a follow-up question directly about assistance received from counselors or other school personnel, Loren shared this: “I don’t remember a lot of interactions with counselors to be honest even when I was applying to college.” Another mention of counselors was by Marina who shared the trauma she experienced on her very first day and the lack of support she received from her school’s counseling office. “My first day of school was hard. I didn’t know where to go. They [counselors] gave me the schedule, but they couldn’t show me around like where I had to go.” No other participants mentioned counselors or others in similar capacities who may have been of support to them during the first interviews. As an attempt to dig deeper into the lack of involvement of counselors in the lives of immigrant Latinas, I followed up with them during the second interviews and focus groups. Veronica corroborated with the others with the lack of

support she received. “They never called me in and said—these are the colleges with your GPA that you are eligible for. And even in trying to get my GPA, they weren’t very helpful. It was more like you got to see the secretary and she gave you your transcript and you figured it out. That’s the kind of thing that I got.” The limited interactions with counselors may indicate that these new to the country students were unaware that there were others in the school in positions to assist them other than their immediate teachers. Those few who attempted to reach out to their counselors, seemed to be hurt more than helped. Lani, talking from a lab in her university where she is working on becoming a medical doctor, shared one such encounter with a counselor;

I remember that during my junior year, we were in the process of taking SATs and doing all those things about college, and I didn’t have an idea about anything. She asked me what I was interested in as a career, and I told her that I was inspired by my mom because she was really interested in medicine and health, so I felt like I would like to be a doctor. Then she said something like you have to be realistic. The statistics for someone like you being Hispanic are very low to go into this field so you may want to consider nursing or medical assistant or something like that. I hate the fact that I actually processed that, and it actually stayed in my head for a while.

Several participants mentioned teachers whom they considered to be mean or who simply lacked the understanding of who they were as people. Some of the participants felt their teachers saw them simply as students and did not understand the complexity of what they were facing.

Delmi shared her experience with several teachers.

I think one would be that there were teachers who were not aware of some of the students not speaking the language, and they would give us the same assignments as other students who were fluent. They would give us the same assignments which was good because they would push us to practice our English, but on the other hand it wasn’t helpful because it would have been good if they had pushed us while being aware of our limits, but that wasn’t the case.

Raquel referred to these types of educators as having a closed mind; of not having the capacity or willingness to understand their students on a personal level:

Something that is essential as an educator just to be very familiar with who you are working with and very open minded with the people you are working with and I would

say that on the other side the not so great teachers that I had were very narrow minded, or they were almost like wanted to impose their beliefs on us when we came from very different backgrounds than they came from.

Mariana admitted that she deliberately failed the ESOL exiting assessment on several occasions just so she would not be placed in general education classes. She felt secure in her ESOL classes and knew she would be facing a less supportive environment once she exited the program.

So I was scared. I didn't want to. I felt like I wasn't ready. I remember doing the test—probably two or three times, and I failed the test on purpose because I didn't want to get out of ESOL. I knew it was going to be harder in classes with teachers who barely knew you were just learning English; who barely knew you're just getting used to the program or the system or the school. And some teachers can be cruel to you; they can be mean. They don't care that you don't know. They just expect you to do the work and if you don't do it, you get bad grades. So I think that teachers' not knowing—paying attention to their students—like let me see what they need since they don't know the language. They just teach the lesson and if you don't know it, you had to study.

During the first interview, Mirna referred to the fact “that there were always good teachers and bad teachers” So during the follow-up interview I asked her to be more specific about her quote. She described her experience with a teacher in one of her advanced placement classes. “She really didn't pay attention to us. She put us in a corner where we were by ourselves [referring to herself and a Korean EL].” As Mirna continued her story, she began to cry. The hurt and sense of rejection were evident as she talked. Marina described a math teacher who she labeled as mean. “Oh my God. He was so mean for real. I went and talked to him and told him I was in ESOL, and if he could give me some help. He was like nope. I don't give retakes. I don't give help. Try to do it your own way. So I failed that class. What was I going to do?” One particular story summed up the challenges immigrant Latinas have to overcome that may not always be tangible. Delmi recounts her struggle with a teacher in one of her advanced social science classes. This particular male teacher refused to learn how to pronounce her name. She finally gave up trying to get him to even attempt to say it correctly. She shared;

He did absolutely nothing about it and the entire time never learned how to pronounce my name. And it is those little details that I would tell him my name is Delmi and he would say something else. I just got tired of it and said call me whatever. Just the simple fact that he didn't remember my name or didn't do it as best as he could, shows that he didn't have an interest in us [Hispanic students] outside the classroom—or even inside the classroom. I never felt like he had a connection with us. I saw him being friendly with some of the other students [White] but definitely not with me.

Comprehensive Mentor Programs

Data analysis revealed a third subtheme which is a strong connection between things Latinas believed could have been done differently in their schools to better support them (research questions three) and characteristics they perceived should be in school that effectively serves other immigrant Latinas (research question four). In analyzing participants' responses related to what constitutes school characteristics that serve immigrant Latinas effectively, data indicated they saw many of the established processes and procedures as normal for US schools, and they felt it was their personal responsibility to work and overcome them. (In Chapter V, I delve deeper into the theories behind this form of thinking by analyzing it from a LAT CRIT perspective.)

The following major themes emerged continuously throughout the study as characteristics, which schools should have in place in order to successfully support immigrant Latinas. Immigrant Latinas in middle and high school face many challenges as they attempt to explore and make sense of a new school environment without understanding or speaking the school's dominant language. For the participants, having mentors in their lives impacted them positively despite the fact that these mentors were few and typically ESOL teachers who worked with them as new to the country students. Exceptions were two coaches and five content teachers who were mentioned by participants as supportive. Participants put much emphasis on the support they received from educators during their time in middle and high school. These

educators became a significant link for them between their prior schooling and native language to the foreign environment they encountered in their new schools. Specific characteristics of these educators included their willingness to provide assistance outside the normal academic expectations. This assistance included, but was not limited to, working with students after school, providing guidance concerning school procedures and processes, encouraging and believing in students' ability to succeed in their new environment, and helping bridge the gap between home and education that their parents could not have otherwise bridged because of their own lack of understanding. Several of the educators were Latinas or spoke Spanish, but there were others who although they lacked the ability initially to communicate, found avenues to support and encourage these girls. Nodding (2005) referred to these educators as caring, a topic which is further explored in Chapter V. Loren described the importance of having caring educators:

I think it is very helpful to have teachers that respect you. I think that is key because two teachers that I had at the beginning were not Hispanic; they didn't speak Spanish—well one of them did. ... They don't see you as an immigrant coming in to the school trying to use school resources or anything like that; or a challenge or a negative challenge. They see you as person—you're here, you're trying to do that. [*Sic*] I'm going to give you my respect. I'm going to give you my resources; and then it's up to you if you want to use them or not. So I think them being very respectful; being available, and I think the biggest thing is having them as mentors. Because looking back if we didn't have anyone saying you need to take this class next, or don't take this class, or I would suggest you take this other class. I think we might have gone through high school and got discouraged. Coming new, it was hard so I assume that is why a lot of students drop out or say—well if high school is hard, I can't imagine how hard college is going to be. But I think having people expecting more of you and taking the time to say I understand you don't know this process but I'm going to give you information that you need. That's very, very helpful.

Mariana expressed the need for a teacher to assist her when she dropped out of high school for a period of time. "Help outside the ESOL environment—just a teacher that could have been out there to say—you're falling behind; I'm here to help you."

Other participants saw mentors as those outside of the classroom who in some way could identify with them either through similar experiences or gender. So, along with teachers being supportive and mentoring these participants, they believed schools needed mentors who fit in specific categories. Raquel saw a successful mentor as someone who has been through the same struggles as she had,

I would say mentorship. I would say a mentor is different from a teacher because it is someone who has been there before. I think as sympathetic as teachers can be and encouraging as they can be, it is different when you hear it from someone who has been there on the same page as you have, and who understands completely the struggles you are facing.

Loren felt that having mentors of the same sex would be the most beneficial.

As far as females, I think it's very important, and I think is one of the successful things with us is we found a mentor- and in our case, it was a female mentor. So it was that role model- not just as a teacher but as a female. As females, we need to support each other— instead of more—you're a female and I need to compete with you type of thing. It was more of I'm here and I know you're a female and this is hard for you, so I'm going to help you out. And it is easier to identify with another female.

Others saw the role of mentor in a more big sister type of relationship as Delmi proposed,

Something where they could have a role model to look up to; maybe not a role model, but a big sister sort of program where they could have somebody sort of—a connection to somebody they could reach out to if they have any questions or any concerns whether it be personal or about education. Anything because I think girls in that area need somebody to rely on for support.

Although participants varied in their descriptions of the type of mentors they envisioned, each described having someone who would have enhanced their experiences as school-aged immigrant Latinas.

Theme Two: Academic and Extracurricular Support Programs

This second theme emerged primarily from questions related to research question two whose intent was to gather data concerning programs that successfully supported the participants or were roadblocks to them. The questions were intentionally broad so that responses would

include academic, extracurricular, social, and community based programs. As a result, this theme is divided into several subsections, which deal specifically with academic and non-academic supports. The importance of these programs was captured in Ana's response.

I think in high school, when I did fieldtrips. They took us to conferences, and in those conferences it was mainly Latino-Hispanic students. They brought in speakers, and it was people who had similar backgrounds, and they kind of showed us if they can do it, everybody could do it. I think it was very motivational because I didn't have anyone in my family—cousins, aunts—that actually had an education or went through it before, so just hearing somebody's story really motivated me.

Academic Programs

The first subtheme under support programs, which emerged dealt directly with participants' academic programs experienced in middle and high schools. Immigrant Latinas who arrived in the U.S. during their middle and high school years in the geographic area of the study were placed in diverse programs within their school systems to assist in learning English. Although six of the twelve participants entered the same school and program over several years, each retold her experience in a different way. Most saw the program as a period of time where they spent the majority of their days learning both content and English simultaneously at a slower pace and with the assistance of bilingual teachers. Gaby summed it up in the following manner:

The ESOL program was classes designed only for people who didn't speak English. We were like a small group; nobody spoke English and everybody was new to Conasauga. We had classes about phonetics—very basic. At the beginning I was thinking that this is so—I mean it is a waste of time. I was learning calculus in my old school and here I am learning phonetics. So, I was going to my house crying, but nowadays I wish I would have had more phonetics at the beginning of my education.

Delmi saw her time there as a sanctuary away from the chaos of a larger environment where she found herself at a loss to understand during her first months in school.

Having other kids in the same situation that we were in and knowing at that time—while I as in the language academy program--knowing that even though we were going out with

the rest of the student body who were mean—I knew at the end of the day I was going back to the safe place that I knew; where I knew everybody else was in the same situation that I was; where the teachers were aware of us, and they were very supportive of that.

Lani, another immigrant Latina who was placed in the same program described it in this way: “I feel very lucky to be placed in ESOL when I entered middle school. I feel like I was able to grasp all the basics before moving on to the second year, I guess, to the real world.”

Those who entered in high school directly from their native country or after completing their middle school years, experienced additional pressure because of the needs for credits to graduate and the pressure to prepare for college. Similar to middle schools in the area, the high schools offered immigrant students ESOL classes. These classes varied depending on the school, academic level of students in their native language and their level of English proficiency. Gaby described her classes in the following manner:

In high school, they also had this program that was ESOL, and even though it was the same as everybody else [general education] had, it was smaller groups. It was a little bit—it was helpful, but everybody was taking the same classes and it was very advanced for us. I saw many people discouraged because they didn’t understand anything. We were trying but it was kind of self-learning and many people don’t like self-learning. For me it was kind of like I had to do it even if I didn’t want to do it; I had to do it. It was this ESOL program with only Hispanics. It was good because it was a smaller group and the professor [teacher] would have more attention, but it was at the same time a very non-producing because it was only Hispanic people, and we would only speak Spanish all the time so our English wasn’t becoming any better.

Other students saw these classes as special ones whose intent was to help them learn English. Teachers were, for the most part, bilingual, and the materials were presented in a way that assisted them in learning both language and content simultaneously. These special classes were less teacher lecture driven and more student-centered where manipulatives and alternate forms of instruction were used. Three of the participants attended a separate school especially designed to support newcomers during their first academic year in the country. They then transferred at the beginning of their second academic year to their base schools where they

continued ESOL sheltered classes. Participants' ESOL classes during their first few years were where they built relationships with their ESOL teachers whom they credit for making a positive impact on their lives.

Other curricular programs that impacted six of the participants were the advanced classes in which they were able to enroll. Their responses indicated the classes opened up a new world to them. Lani stated, "I was very lucky I got to be in sports and take advantage of advanced classes and AP courses because I feel that that environment—academic environment really inspired me to go to school—go to college." Additional academically focused programs mentioned by participants were outside the daily educational block, such as a summer program three of the participants attended at a local community college. Mariana reflected on her summer program experience:

I know summer school helped me a lot. When I was in middle school and then when I was in high school, they had Steps to College. It was every summer. It was preparing me for the next school year. I feel like those programs were a lot of help because they gave me an idea of what to expect the next year.

Extracurricular Activities

A second subtheme under support programs was with activities outside the academic block. Clubs, community outreach programs, and sports offered and capitalized upon by several of the immigrant Latinas impacted their lives both personally and academically. First of all, this study's participants reported that these activities built their confidence as Latina women to pursue dreams and goals that others did not pursue. Raquel felt that being involved in sports made the difference for her.

When I started doing sports, that's when I started feeling more like the person I was in Mexico—just like more outgoing. I felt like that part of my identity had been stolen for a long time. So it was in 8th grade when I started running that I felt like ooh I missed this feeling of being who I am.

Only four of the participants indicated being involved in sports, and in running in particular, but most of them were involved with other community and outreach clubs, which helped them connect to peers and form friendships. Their concern was for learning about these opportunities later in their schooling experiences and the knowledge that many others of their peers did not know or chose not to participate in them. Lani shared her concern:

Many of the programs or sports are often targeted to student bodies that might not be well represented. That is something that I really didn't like. I think I got to see that in high school. Looking at the majority of the people who were in advanced programs or the AP programs or clubs were not minorities, and the fact that the school didn't do a lot to encourage other people to join those clubs or classes or those sports or try to make them get more engaged in doing those things.

Another extracurricular activity, which made a difference to three of the participants, was the opportunity to attend a convention in a nearby large city, which was sponsored by a Latino association. They were able to see other Latinas who had gone through similar experiences and were able to complete high school and college and were engaged in their chosen professions. Others described a summer program they attended at the local college during several middle and high school years. This program provided them with the opportunity to see a college campus as well as strengthen their academic skills for the forthcoming school year.

Tailored Academic and Social Support Programs

A third subtheme which emerged from the data was specifically about programs which should be tailored specifically for immigrant Latinas. Participants saw support programs as important in contributing to their success, but these programs must be tailored specifically to their needs and unique challenges. As indicated previously in this chapter, while looking at research question two, Latinas described having academic support programs in place that assisted them significantly during their first academic years in the U.S. They also cautioned that these programs should be specific and time sensitive with the purpose of providing scaffolding

support as needed, but not becoming a long-term track which resulted in hindering their success.

Loren commented on their importance but also the possible downfalls of such programs.

So, if you are looking at ESL (English as a second language) classes as a tool for transition, I think they are helpful because you are kind of giving a little room for the person to adjust, but if you're expecting someone to complete the whole high school or the whole middle school just doing ESL classes, I don't think that's very helpful because I think you're sending the message to the student that I expect you to not go beyond this level.

Additional support programs were computerized programs where students were able to work at their own pace. These included E2020, a credit recovery program in high school, which assisted two participants who entered as older students and one who had dropped out for a period of time to be able to graduate before turning twenty.

Additionally, there were times throughout the conversations with the participants in which they shared stories of not participating in certain extracurricular programs or events because they were unaware of them or felt uncomfortable participating. Mariana described not trying out for cheerleading because she felt intimidated,

I remember in middle school, I just thought cheerleading was fun. I wanted to do it, but again most of the girls were White so I didn't feel that I would fit in there. They are not going to help me because they wouldn't know what I was saying. So, I felt that I stayed away from doing any sports or any extra activities after school just because of [the] language barrier. I felt like that stopped me a lot from doing things like that.

Being in advanced classes in high school provided Lani with a perspective and advantages some of the other participants did not have. She related her feeling about the lack of participation of Latinas in activities she counted as opportunities.

I feel that it's really sad that a lot of girls—a lot of us—don't get a chance to do all this because the programs are more targeted to people in advanced classes or the school believes that [they] have students who will succeed. Sadly most of the people who were in those programs were White students—especially boys. There were not a lot of Latina girls. Unfortunately, the girls are not in advanced classes or science or AP. A lot of them do not get exposed to a lot of things.

Ana described the reasons she saw for the lack of opportunities and the need for specific programs geared towards Latinas.

I think mainly in high school is the lack of communication with the counselors. I mean basically they—I was lucky enough that the teachers I had, that they walked me through the process. But the counselors--if people don't have that good communication with teachers and the counselors don't help, so they don't have any idea of what to do. They get to [their] senior year and they don't have everything that is needed for graduation, or things they actually need to go to college.

Raquel emphasized this need for school wide programs that target immigrant Latinas in her own story.

I don't think I even knew how to apply for stuff—I did it at the very end. I forced myself to do the research. I remember my senior year being so stressful because I had to research things on my own. I had to research for scholarships. I had to learn to do this or do that so I would say having more assistance with that.

Lani, a bright young woman working on her masters, who developed a strong determination to become a doctor during high school after her father became ill and was placed on dialysis and medicine for his cardiac condition, told a story of an incident which occurred during her junior year. She entered the U.S. as a six grader and by her ninth grade year, she was taking advanced and AP classes. As a result, she saw more White students in her classes as well as had opportunities others in regular classes did not experience. Here is how she began her story of this incident:

As a science person, I remember in high school there were a lot of science clubs. My junior year, I did not take one of the advanced classes. I decided to take anatomy and physiology—they were not AP or IB. They would do field trips to learn—like to a hospital—things that I now feel passionate about—or to universities where they can take you to see labs and things like that. In normal classes you would not get exposed to things like that. It was more for the people in advanced classes and programs. I feel that if I was not in the advanced program, I would not have been part of those groups. I remember I would ask [*sic*] the girls [in general ed.—anatomy and physiology] and tell them—you should be part of this or that, and they would ask—what is that? How do you get into that? Then I realized that it was just for people who were in the advanced programs.

Theme Three: Parents Educational Support Programs

Family's Belief is Success Through Education

Although this project's original focus was not on the individual attitudes of students and their families, it became evident within the first interview the importance family expectations played in the academic success of these newcomer Latinas. In an effort for me as the researcher to better understand the participants, I asked each participant to share why she thought her parents brought their family to the U.S. Their answers unanimously centered on getting an education as a way to have a better life. Marilena, the eldest of her siblings and 17 years of age when she entered school, felt the pressure from her family. "My dad brought me here. It was really hard. I was the eldest sister and my brothers, they look up to me, and I felt the pressure. As for me I really wanted to succeed in this country." Ana described her parents' expectations in the following manner:

Mainly because they wanted us to study. My mom completed 6th grade and my dad 3rd grade. And basically they said that if we stayed in Mexico, we wouldn't have an opportunity to study. We would be doing the same thing they are doing—hard labor—just working in the factory mills, and they didn't want that for us. They told us that the reason they moved was for us to have a better future. So that was the thing when we moved—they were like, better learn English; better get better because we don't want you to be in the same position as we are. They didn't have the same opportunities to study because of how poor their family was and the resources they didn't have; and they didn't want us to be the same way. So that was a big motivation for my brother and myself [*sic*] because my other two brothers were small. It was a big motivation for us to stay in school, do well, and then continue our education.

Lani described her dad, who had recently passed and whose illness sparked her interest in becoming a medical doctor as a high schooler, in this manner:

My dad just wanted the best for us, and he knew if we stayed in Mexico, we wouldn't be able to go to school. We would probably have continued doing what he was doing in Mexico—work in fields or work in factories in the closest city, so he just wanted the best for us and coming to the U.S. was the best gift—I guess—he could give us for our future. And definitely in Mexico he would not have the chance of sending us to school or doing anything that we have been able to do in this country.

This concept of searching for a better life through an education was echoed through all the interviews. Mariana, one of seven children, described her parents' motivation in the following manner:

I think what motivated them was just to give us a better life. Because my dad had been over here so he knew we could get a better education and I think that's mostly their main [goal]—give us a better life and a better education. Like my mom says—I don't have money to give you all the time. I don't have the resources to give you everything you need, but at least I know I gave you something that will help you for the rest of your life if you know how to take advantage of it. She said—it's giving you an education. For them to be able to come over here and give us an education, that's for a life time—you know- that's like the best gift they could have given us.

Mirna, in describing her parents' plans, clearly knew their purpose in bringing them to the U.S.

One of the reasons my parents wanted to bring us over here was to finish school because over there public school is still very hard. Where we were living after 8th grade there was nothing else. We would have had to move to another town or commute if we wanted to continue to study. And after that if we wanted to continue in college it was a two hour drive and it was very expensive and scholarship opportunities were very limited so our parents decided we had a better chance of actually going to college if we came here.

Similarly, Diana said this about her dad," He wanted me to have a better life; to have a better opportunity; to get a better education."

Mother's Support

A second subtheme which emerged from the data, similar to others' research, dealt specifically with the role of mothers in the lives of these participants (Kaplan et al., 2007). Several emphasized the importance of their mother's role in their success. All participants' fathers were in the U.S. for most of their young lives; therefore, these immigrant Latinas formed strong bonds with their mothers which became even more significant as together they navigated living with their fathers permanently for the first time as well as learning a new language and culture. When asked about supports they had while in school, Diana said, "My dad's wife-she helped me; she really supported me." Delmi stated, "My mom would always comfort me if I

was feeling sad or overwhelmed.” Marina, in contrast to the other participants, was brought to the U.S. by her mom. Her father lives in the area, but is absent from her life. Her mom is the one constant support in her life:

Every time we are down and not going back [to school] she pulls us up. She says ‘I know you can do this. I know you can. I want the best for you and your sister’. Sometimes I feel like no way I cannot do it. I’m going to stop. And then she pulls me up. She’s like ‘you have to do it because you are going to have a better opportunity. You’re going to be better in life.

Mirna’s bond with her mother and younger sister is very strong. She remains at home while attending college and working. She described her mother as the one who has supported and believed in her the most.

My mom and my little sister. Just the fact that she [mom] has never given up on me no matter how hard it is. She never lowers the bar for me. So it makes me want to try harder. And when she sees me having a hard time, she says she understands but she also knows that I can do it. And when I see my little sister, I want her to have a good example and I want her to know if I can do it, she can too.

Parents’ Lack of Understanding of U.S. Educational System

A third subtheme which emerged emphasized the separation between the dream and the lack of educational skills the parents had in assisting their children in navigating the waters of schools in the U.S. Although these participants’ parents had established education as a goal in bringing them to the U.S., their parents’ lack of understanding of schools in the U.S. was a limiting factor for several of them. Marilena felt that if she wanted to go to college, her only option was the local state college. “It was kind of the only option I had because I knew that my parents didn’t want me to go out of town. I was thinking about going to Florida or another state or even Atlanta, but I just stuck to Conasauga State College.” She concluded that her parents’ lack of support was due to their own lack of education. “They weren’t educated. They only went to school for like two years. So they didn’t know about education and how it helps to become a

professional. I mean he [dad] didn't want me to do it because he wasn't educated, and he didn't know the opportunities that are out there [for someone who had a college degree].”

Loren added,

I know that teachers can only do so much, but I would try to do some type of program with parents because the expectations that the parents have affect a lot of the decisions for the students. I have seen peers who I think they had the talent and they had the resources to go to college but they saw their primary responsibility to stay in Conasauga; help their parents out—be of assistance there. And I think it was because of the message that the parents were sending—once you finish high school—because you're bilingual—I expect you to find a job anywhere even if it's at Wal-Mart and help me pay the bills, but stay close by because if I need assistance translating or interpreting for doctor or anything. I want you to be here. I want you to be a resource for me rather than trying to do other options so I think parents understanding, parents motivating their children is very, very important.

Why is it so important for schools to involve parents? In the words of Marina,

Parents need to be more involved in their (children's) education because some of them don't understand. People feel good whenever they feel like they belong to a place- when they belong- in this case to a school. So, I think that would help the students and the parents because they are both learning and that's what will. When I was in high school, I would have meetings and my parents, they [*sic*] never went to one because they were afraid to not be understood. I think I would suggest that the parents would be more involved with the education of the students.

All study participants came from homes where parents' educational levels were low in their native language. One participant shared that her mother's side of her family did have several educated family members, which in itself caused a division between her mom and dad. Her dad's lack of an education initially caused tension because he saw high school graduation as the final step and wanted her to work. It was with her mother's insistence and support that she and her sister attended the local college and are now both beginning their careers as educators. Her dad now is proud of their accomplishments, but initially was unable to envision what a college degree could do for the girls as well as the family as a whole financially. So participants saw parental support as either making or breaking their success in many ways. Veronica

described a Spanish teacher whose assistance made a difference for her mom. “She made it clear to you that you could come in and have her help. She also did tutoring for parents so she helped my mom with her English too. She was always there.” Ana sees parent support programs which assist them in understanding what an education means for their girls as significant for their success.

I think the biggest challenge we have being a girl is our parents. My parents were always very motivating about [*sic*] me going to college, but at the same time they couldn’t understand the idea that if I wanted to go to college, I had to leave Conasauga. So that is why I started there and went there for a couple of years. Because when I graduated from high school, I had scholarships for four other colleges and I declined them because they were like you’re too young; you’re a girl. I didn’t feel comfortable because of the way the culture is. It is just not normal for a girl to be by herself even if you’re 18, 20 or 21. So, I think the biggest challenge is trying to get parents involved. I think [to] understand that if they want their kids to do better, they need to go.

If this support is not available, it is a challenge for Latinas to succeed academically. Ana described this reality as, “Sometimes the students know, but if nobody in their family supports them, then they are not going to do anything because they don’t have the support. It’s challenging enough to be on a college campus where the culture is different and then going back home and not having the support.”

Theme Four: Inclusive Environment

A fourth theme was drawn from participant data, which supports the need for schools to have a more systematic and inclusive environment for immigrant Latinas.

Living with Fathers for the First Time Permanently

Eleven of the twelve participants not only faced a strange environment at school, but were also living with their father for the first time as a family. During their early childhood, their fathers had been living in the U.S. and visiting them once or twice a year for short periods of time. Mariana noted, “When we got here we went from not living with my dad whatsoever—I

mean we would see him once or twice a year—to living with him every day. So it was a change and it was pretty hard.” Mirna noted the struggle it was for her family went beyond school.

We decided to come as a family. It was the first time we were living together as a family because since my parents got married, my dad had been working here and my mom was staying in Mexico with us. So the changes we had were not only because of the language and the cultural barrier but because as a family we had never been together.

Knowledge of and Support for Immigrant Latinas in School Programs

A second subtheme under inclusive environment dealt with the lack of knowledge the participants had about specific programs and the absence of specific supports for immigrant families. The environment they proposed would not only allow them to learn about and participate in school activities such as clubs, sports, field trips, and community outreach programs from the moment of their initial arrival, but also give them the emotional support at school as they built their family relationships at home. Participants in particular who were able to participate in advanced classes, sports and other academic related clubs shared their concern for the limited number of Latinas they saw involved. Lani recommended that schools

...definitely expose them [Latinas] to all the opportunities that are there. Hey, when you go to high school there is this program that you can join [*sic*] or this club that you can get into or do this or maybe do this where you can get experience and maybe put on your resume and maybe it will look good so when you got to college you have an idea of what things look like.

Whether it is Mariana who does not try out for cheerleading because she felt she would not be accepted, Lani’s friends who did not participate in several science field trips because they were unaware of them, Gaby who refused to talk with White students because she felt they would laugh at her accent, or Delmi’s refusal to speak out in class and desire to sit unnoticed in the back of her classroom; each participant expressed her sense of alienation from her school. Marina summed up her feeling of what an inclusive school for immigrant Latinas would look like. “They don’t need to assume that all the students are the same because some learn really quickly, and are

not all at the same level so they need to pay attention to each one.” Marina who sometimes still struggles with the English vocabulary when she wants to express herself, shared how a more inclusive environment would help. She asked me to put myself in her place.

If I would take you to the Dominican Republic, it’s going to be a change; a big change- everything- so I think if they would have helped us with that; to talk about that. Now I am in college, but I didn’t know how that worked. That would have been one of the stuff [*sic*]. Like it’s like this or that; school is like that- because it is different. Over there is different than here. The grades and all that is [*sic*] different so when we came it was different—something new for us. If they would have helped us with how stuff is going; like how schools are here; like when you go to college. I waited a little bit [before going to college]. I graduated in 2013 and I am just going to school now because I was working and all that and because I’m still scared- you know. Like I’m scared of what I went through. I’m like oh my God- I’m scared- like did I pass that test? Did I pass that quiz? So it’s hard sometimes to understand because they [teachers and professors] talk fast. It’s like what are they saying? Do we have a quiz? Do we have a test? Yea. I think that would help a little bit more. More information- more information for us.

A way for immigrant Latinas to feel more connected to their schools is for them to understand how schools work here in the U.S. This is especially significant in high school where students are preparing for college. When Latinas enter high school as new immigrants, they have no knowledge of the way colleges work in the U.S. Gaby expressed how strategically connecting Latinas to this information can make a difference to them.

Probably the misinformation I had about applying to college that I wanted from the high school. By their junior year, the Americans knew what college they wanted to go to and knew how to apply. I didn’t know how to apply to American universities. I didn’t know you had to take the SAT. I didn’t have any idea that you had to apply your junior year or about extracurricular activities. If I would have known that for scholarships to get into university, I would have been—I mean I don’t like sports, but I would have gotten into tennis or something like that. I would be joining more clubs; I would begin to study for SATs, and seeking guidance for my applications to get scholarships for the universities I wanted to get into, but I didn’t know anything about that until one semester before graduating from high school.

Theme Five: Latina Identity and Academic Success

Although personal characteristics fall outside the original intent of the study which was to address institutional characteristics which either support or hinder the success of immigrant Latinas, the theme clearly emerged and I felt it was important to include it in the study. As expressed by Mariana, “I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it; that if I set my mind to something, I would be able to do it.” As shown by their success in graduating from high school and successfully pursuing post-secondary education despite experiencing identity crisis resulting from the cultural, linguistic and educational differences when their families moved to the U.S., these participants continue to push forward with their dreams. They remain motivated to fulfill their personal goals of acquiring a college degree and working in their chosen profession. Diana stated simply what motivates her daily: “I wanted to do something with my life. I wanted to be somebody.” These participants were innovative in seeking out people and resources, especially when it came to searching for college information. They took personal responsibility and were disciplined and possessed a work ethic necessary to push through obstacles and succeed (Gonzales, 2012). Two other characteristics which they said made a difference is choosing friends from their peers who had the same goals and dreams as they had. Finally, these participants all shared a sense of responsibility to give back to others. This sense of service included their parents who they feel have sacrificed very much personally by bringing them to the U.S. so that they could have a better life (Suarez-Orozco, 1989). They also have a sense of service to others (Gonzales, 2012). All twelve participants chose careers where they provide services to others. In addition, they volunteer through their schools and on personal levels in helping others. Following is a glimpse into their personal struggles and triumphs presented in two sections. First vignettes are used to assist the reader in better understanding the individuality

of participants and the second section is a narrative mostly in students' own words responding to the three subthemes reported above.

Vignettes

Loren and Ana. Loren and Ana have both completed master's degrees in their chosen fields and are currently working in those areas. Both did their undergraduate degrees near home, but moved away for their masters programs, taking advantage of academic scholarships offered to them. Loren is the third child of seven, and entered school in the U.S. in ninth grade. She did not participate in sports, but engaged in service opportunities outside of her academic block. She continues with that sense of service working currently as a social worker for a non-profit women's organization where she works regularly with immigrant women and their children. Ana entered the U.S. as a 6th grader and is the second child in her family. She participated in sports and service clubs during high school, and credits the opportunities she has had to travel as important in her personal development. She currently works in one of the largest accounting firms in Atlanta and travels to other countries as often as she can despite her parents' concerns about a single woman alone in foreign countries. She continues to give back to her community through volunteering with service organizations such as schools and Latino groups.

Raquel, Delmi, and Lani. Originally connected by entering the same school in 6th grade around the same time, these three remain close friends and continue to provide support for each other despite living in different areas on the east coast. I have a personal connection to them as I served as one of their ESOL teachers upon their arrival in the U.S. Although losing contact with them during their high school years, we have reconnected as they have grown into adulthood through social media. All three are working on masters' degrees and preparing for continuing their education. During high school, they participated in track and were very involved in service

clubs. They traveled during college on university sponsored trips to other countries in Europe and South America. During their individual interviews, each expressed their gratitude- “thankfulness” for having come to the country legally, and thus not having to face the hurdles some of their other classmates and friends experienced. Raquel is Loren’s sister and is the 4th child in her family. Her other two older siblings in addition to Loren have advanced degrees. One has a Ph.D. in economics and the other is a medical doctor. Raquel said in personal interview one that her sense of purpose in fulfilling her parents’ dreams and the support from her family, friends and mentors has carried her through difficult times being away from home during her university time in Massachusetts and Washington D.C. and two years working in California. She has traveled to Europe on several occasions as part of her studies. She is currently preparing to pursue a degree in dentistry. She described in her personal interviews the importance of having a strong family support system at home and of having various types of mentors such as coaches, peers, and educators in her academic life. Furthermore, she added that it depends on the personal attitude and determination of each individual to push herself farther than she thinks she can go. This is something Raquel practices in her daily life whether she is preparing for a race, hiking a mountain, traveling to an unknown place, studying for a test, or writing an essay.

Delmi is the oldest of three and is currently working on a masters in social work in New York City. She is socially conscious and believes in social justice for all. She is actively involved in helping her community at home when she is visiting and has a sense of duty to her younger siblings. Her sense of purpose stems from her belief in a better tomorrow for those who are marginalized and feels that building “connections” and “relationships” is the key. Her family is her main support and motivation. “The fact that I know my parents came here for a reason; that’s a motivation for me to know that I’m not doing this just for myself, but for them.” Lani is the

fourth of five siblings and is currently working on a masters in biology. Her goal is to become a medical doctor and researcher, a dream which emerged in high school when her father was diagnosed with serious health issues. Although he passed away a few years ago, she is determined to continue to pursue the dream in hopes of helping others avoid what he experienced. She is the first in her family to attend college as her older siblings were not able to attend due to her father's illness. She has a deep feeling of being "blessed" because of what she has been able to accomplish beyond what her older siblings were able to do. Her younger sister is also currently attending the same university. All three participants have had a steady focus on their education not only as a way to help themselves economically, but to support their parents and serve others. This unique sense of gratitude and service was noted in other participants, but seemed more apparent with these three.

Veronica. This participant was unknown to the researcher and recommended by a colleague. She is a first year teacher at one of the local high schools and works with ELs on a regular basis. Although her original BA was in early education, she said the opportunity to work with older immigrant students has been a blessing. She felt that she was uniquely qualified to assist and understand them. She entered school in the area in 6th grade. For a full semester, she received no ESOL assistance and then only two periods a day. There were few Latinos in the school she entered, and they found it difficult to assist her as they were not academically prepared in both languages. She described this as being a blessing in a way because it forced both her and an older sister who entered the 7th grade to learn English and adapt to the school environment faster. She felt that because of being placed in such an environment she was able to become proficient before entering high school, therefore, entering regular and then advanced classes at an accelerated pace. Veronica came to the U.S. academically prepared because her

uncle was her teacher in Mexico, so she saw language as just a temporary barrier to overcome. This belief system she felt supported and propelled her to push herself and succeed. Additionally, seeking out help from those around who were knowledgeable played a large role in her success. This included having friends with similar goals and aspirations as she did.

Gaby, Mariana, and Mirna. These three participants have each struggled to find their place in the community as college students and Latinas. Two are taking a longer time to graduate with their bachelors' degrees than the traditional four years, and one returned to do a second undergraduate degree in a different field from her first degree. I worked with each as first time immigrant students in middle school, but lost contact with them until this research project. Gaby struggled in eighth grade to adjust as she was a year older than most students and felt she should have been placed in ninth grade. She described in her personal interview how she would cry each day at home and was determined to return to Mexico. She almost failed high school because of her sense of alienation from the curriculum and her feeling of belonging with other classmates who were struggling. It was not until her junior year that she realized if she was going to be successful, she had to work at it and change her friends. Gaby has since traveled overseas to work with a nonprofit organization where she had to be removed because of war. She has returned to school to pursue a second BA in economics and plans to continue with a masters.

Mariana entered the U.S. as a seventh grader. She had not lived with her father before other than short visits he took to Mexico. She comes from a large family and is one of the eldest. Her sense of responsibility to be a role model for her younger siblings has been the reason she continues to pursue her education. Mariana said that high school became so difficult for her at one point that she dropped out at age sixteen and decided to work for a year. Seeing what she could earn without a high school education propelled her to return and graduate two years later

than her original date in the same graduating class as a younger sister. Not knowing enough about college, she signed up for a certificate program offered by the local college. She assumed she was enrolled in a regular college program. She soon discovered it was not what she wanted to do but finished the program and began working. During this time, she attempted to return to college, but not understanding the process in filling out the paperwork, she was denied financial aid assistance twice. She finally was able to enter college and as of the time of this writing she is working on a degree in early education. She wants to help other immigrant students just as former ESOL teachers helped her.

Mirna entered 6th grade in the U.S. academically prepared in her native language and is highly intelligent, so learning a new language was not difficult. She became proficient within a year and was mistakenly placed in advanced classes after testing extremely high on an annual state tests. She found her place in high school in the college prep programs with students she referred to as “nerds.” Her struggle remained at home with her father. He had been away most of her life and brought the family to the U.S. for the sole purpose of an education and then returning to Mexico. His expectations were that she and an older brother would get college degrees in business so they could make money to support the family. During the course of their high school and in to college, both Mirna and her older brother decided to switch careers. He went into religious studies and she switched her major a second time to get a degree in psychology. This changed cause great stress on the family unit, but Mirna felt her father understood the importance of being happy in one’s career.

Diana, Marilena, and Marina. Research suggested that the later students enter school, the more difficulty they will experience. These participants faced this challenge as they entered either midway through eighth grade or in high school. Neither had the support of family

members who could assist them as they were the eldest to enter school. Two had the support of only one parent who was working to support the family. They struggled to find the assistance needed in school as there were few educators who could communicate with them outside one or two ESOL teachers. High school for these participants was not about the extracurricular activities or sports. Their focus and energy was taken on academic matters. Marilena and Marina were struggling to graduate before the clock ran out for them as they entered as older high school students with few credits. Although they gained enough proficiency to graduate, the level of academic language in college continues to be difficult for them. In the course of the study, Marilena decided to take a semester off from school and planned to return during the following fall.

Personal Narratives

Identity crisis. Six of the participants addressed the idea of struggling with their identity as a traditional Latinas from Mexico. The expectations of their family for them to hold on to their culture and traditional Latina values sometimes conflicted with the forging of a new identity that would be accepted in their schools and allow them to succeed. It lasted throughout their high school years and only now as adults they are beginning to understand and embrace being a Latina here in the U.S. and their ability to go between the worlds as successful transnationals. In answer to a follow up question as to why it was so overwhelming and confusing when she first arrived, Loren responded,

I think at the age that I came. I was 15. It was that adolescent stage when you are trying to find out who you are, find friends, try to fit in, so since everything was so new. It wasn't like I was transferring from another school in Mexico to another school in Mexico. It was transferring to a different country, a different language, a different educational system. It was overwhelming because I think I kind of had an identity in Mexico and here it was confusing. I think that would be another word. Confusing because you don't know- should I keep this identity? Do I need to change it? Or adjust it?

Loren concluded that she indeed had to give up part of her identity.

In high school, yes. You still kind of- depending on- in the classroom you totally have to let it go. As far as academics, you have to be part of the students in that class. Outside you have Hispanic friends and you integrate that. You talk about the food and traditions, but as far as academics, yes I think you have to let that personality—or in my situation, what worked for me was try[ing] to leave the identity at the door and try[ing] to be another student in Conasauga High School. And if that meant talking about the soccer or the football team- things like that I kind of had to do.

She and other participants, despite being Mexican, felt the necessity to leave some of themselves behind to fit into their new environment despite entering a school where the majority of the students were Latino and from Mexico.

For Marilena, her ESOL teacher made a difference for her:

She was always so supportive and she went out of her way to help me. Not just for me, but all my classmates that came here their teenage years. She would always—you know when you came here [referring to researcher as an immigrant]—or I personally—I felt like—how can I say? Not discriminated, but like as a Mexican, our culture is different from here and I wanted to change some of my traditions or stuff like that, but Ms. R. was one of the- that like she made me think that our culture is different and beautiful and unique. Yea, she made me feel there was a lot of good in our culture. And yes, we are learning a new language, but we don't need to forget where we came from and all of that.

Gaby described how cultural changes affected her identity and the sense of loss and isolation it created.

It was a totally new culture. The language was my biggest barrier ever and like the culture was a lot of like the perfect White guys see you as like not a person here—you don't speak English. How they treat you. I mean it was not that they were bad persons; they were not used to people like immigrants and we wanted to talk to them. For me, I wanted to talk to everybody because I was social and everything. I wanted to say to somebody—oh I like your sweater or something nice, but couldn't say it and they would look at you like—some people would be like empathizing; some would be like get away from me—a lot of crushing emotions. It was like not finding where you belong.

Personal responsibility. Despite the personal struggles caused by entering school as a teen in a new country and limited support by family, these participants possessed the attitude to persevere graduating from high school and attending college. Marilena described her journey this way:

Like they [parents] weren't educated. They only went to school for like two years. So they didn't know about education and how it helps to become a professional. I mean he [her father] didn't want me to do it because he wasn't educated and he didn't know the opportunities that are out there. I think that was one of the big challenges for me. Even my sisters, they were like don't do it; you just graduated from high school; just start working, but I always knew that if you go to college; if you get a better education, you get better pay or a better job. Stuff like that. Even though my family didn't want me to go to college, it was something that I really wanted to do.

Peers and adults who supported their dreams. Peers played an important role in the success of these participants. Their influence was seen both in a positive and negative way. An important factor was that they were able to capitalize on relationships which assisted in their success and overcome negative peer influences. Some of the negative experiences participants experienced came from Latino peers. One of the participants was Loren, a participant with a master's degree in social work and an older sister to one of the other participants, saw the support from her high school teachers as also protecting her from other new immigrant Latino peers who were less than accepting.

Our first teacher who was doing an intensive ESL—she kind of saw—because of our situation we were taking classes and it was just me and my sister and usually a lot of boys- so she kind of I guess took it upon herself to say I know you are struggling because you are the only girls. As a teacher, I think she saw some of the—I don't want to call it bullying—but they would try to—I think we took the class more seriously. I think the guys were like I'm here because my parents want me to be here but once I'm out of high school, I'm probably going to find a job at x place. So we were trying to take class seriously and they would make fun of that so the teacher usually was very encouraging and say—don't take the guys seriously. I'm going to work with you. I think she noted that and she tried to push us.

Service to others. Service to others is an integral part of these participants' lives. It began with service to their parents. Participants believed that their academic success was not only for themselves, but also for their parents. It was a way to pay their parents back for the sacrifices that the family made by coming to the U.S. Eight participants were involved in service clubs during their high schools years. These clubs involved going into the community and volunteering in diverse areas allowing participants to serve others as well as empower them. Mariana described her experience as a college student volunteering for the first time as part of her college requirement. She shared how the experience opened her eyes to so many programs for teens. One in particular that she wished several of her high school female friends who became pregnant would have known about is one which support teen mothers which would have changed the trajectory of their lives. Volunteering helped her see beyond her own personal struggles and find support for others.

With the support from educators and others who authentically cared and the personal grit to succeed, these immigrant Latinas are on their way. They have become transnational immigrants (Sanchez, 2007) who are able to maintain their cultural heritage and close family ties while at the same time successfully navigate the educational and professional life in the U.S. With continued determination to improve and provide a comprehensive multicultural approach to education, schools can provide immigrant Latinas with the supports they need to be academically successful in U.S. schools which results in their influencing their communities.

Conclusion

Chapter IV provided a look into the lives of immigrant Latinas during their middle and high school years in NW Georgia. Its narrative format presented in somewhat of a chronological order weaved through, beginning with when as newcomers they first arrived in school and

finishing up with their senior year in high school. It included participants' current academic achievements in order to allow the reader to better understand their journey. Along the way, it highlighted themes which emerged as an analysis of their experiences was completed. Despite the study's focus initially on institutional factors, the researcher invited the reader to learn about the participants' family's decisions to bring them to this area, and their first impressions of their schools as a way to better understand their unique situations. The reader is then introduced to the first research question through which the themes emerged. This section presented the first major theme about educators and it is divided into several subsections with salient quotes, allowing the participants' voices to be heard and further supporting each sub section. The other three research questions were explored in a similar manner with the participants sharing their beliefs of what characteristics would need to be in place in school to better assist immigrant Latinas in being academically successful in an inclusive school environment. A final theme which emerged from the data concerning the personal characteristics of the participants concluded this chapter. The findings presented in chapter four set the stage for the final interaction between the themes and the existing literature review, conclusions, and recommendations in chapter five.

CHAPTER V:

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The focus of Chapter IV was to identify and analyze major themes that emerged from the participants' interviews and the focus group's responses. It included thick rich descriptions and quotations from data in an attempt to allow the reader to understand the stories of the participants and provide context for the data analyzed. In chapter five the focus is on answering the research questions in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two. The literature review includes a direct link to the theories of subtractive schooling as compared to additive schooling and the theory of caring and sanctuary schools. Additionally, Latino Critical race theory is used as a lens through which data was analyzed. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of findings, conclusions and implications for practice in Northwest Georgia and recommendations for future studies.

Answer to Research Question One

How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe their interactions with teachers and other school personnel (counselors, administrators, coaches, etc.) during their middle and high school years in GA?

Immigrant Latinas in the study described their interactions with teachers and other school personnel both positively and negatively depending on the individual person. The majority of them saw their ESOL teachers as advocates in that they understood, motivated, and supported them in very specific ways. In addition, other educators whom the participants felt supported them were a small number of general education teachers, two art teachers and several coaches.

These educators became mentors for these students helping them to navigate the sometimes very murky waters that was the life of a high school student in northwest Georgia. As noted in chapter four, these teachers helped them academically by staying after school, helping them with their schedules in high school, encouraging them to return to school when they dropped out, and assisting with assignments and guiding them in the everyday processes and procedures of school. Other non-academic support included teachers connecting newcomer students to other people and activities, encouraging them and pushing them to achieve. This support is in line with the work of Noddings' (2005) theory of caring that comes from the relationship between the teacher and the student, and Nieto's (2003; 2013) work on what the beliefs of a caring and supportive teacher are. This includes the educator's ability to affirm her students' cultures, identities and values, while simultaneously being able to prepare them for life in their larger communities. Noddings (2005) stated that "caring teachers listen and respond differentially to their students" (p. 19). This idea is based on the understanding of each student as a whole and responding based on the individual's needs at a particular time. Students experienced authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999) from these educators in that a relationship was developed and nurtured providing students with a sense of safety, acceptance and belief in their abilities.

In addition, this theme included negative relationships the participants experienced with educators during their time in school. These relationships reflected situations which the participants felt their teachers did not know who they were as individual students; therefore, expectations were generic across the class for everyone. They were expected to perform at the same level as students whose native language was English with no accommodations provided based on their limited language. Valenzuela (1999) defined this type of caring as aesthetic caring where educators know their content and expect students to meet certain expectations without

taking into account individual differences. This type of caring is important in conjunction with authentic caring. Meador (2005) emphasized that teachers' perceptions of their students influence the outcomes students experience as they internalize and act upon the beliefs they acquire from their teachers. Therefore, teachers' beliefs and perceptions play a large role in the success (or lack thereof) of immigrant Latinas.

In other cases, participants referred to certain educators as mean or uncaring. In these instances, the participants felt they were treated unfairly or even discriminated against because of who they were. Valenzuela (1999) described in her study this type of schooling as subtractive because it takes away the identity and worth of students who are not part of the majority population. Without the support to participate in school fully, particularly during their initial entrance period, students lose part of themselves as their challenges are unique as ELs (Denner Guzman, 2006; Valdez, 1996; and Wainer, 2004) and in particular as Latinas (Gonzales, 2012; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). They struggle with not only learning a new language and culture but also struggle with who they are as traditional Latinas following their own dreams of becoming educated because that is what their new society is pushing them to do. This results in an identity crisis for these immigrant Latinas as described by Concha (2006) as they attempt to find a place to fit between both worlds.

Finally, the absence of consistent assistance from counselors, social workers, academic coaches or other school personnel is evidence of the lack of a systematic way schools supported these immigrant Latinas. There were no systems in place where these girls felt they could receive support outside of the individual relationships they built with specific teachers. Gándara et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of Latinas having access to teachers and counselors as mentors and role models in order to be successful academically. McWhirter et al. (2013)

corroborated this finding by emphasizing the high levels of encouragement and caring expectations, the need for school information and multiple opportunities to connect to their schools. For this to occur, schools must have a strategic plan in place to support them through mentorships such as proposed by Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2009).

Answer to Research Question Two

How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe programs whose intent was to support them while they were in middle and high school?

The intent of this research question was to explore specific programs in which immigrant Latinas were placed that provided them with supports or hindered their progress in school. The interview questions were broad as the researcher desired for them to describe any program they remembered which supported or hindered their success. Ten of the study participants were placed in some type of ESOL program which intent was to provide language support to them upon initial arrival to the schools. Participants mostly described these programs as “helpful” as they provided a protected environment from the larger unknown school building and student body giving them time to adjust and get to know their new surroundings. Participants stated that it was helpful in that the educators were mostly bilingual and modified their content lessons according to students’ language skills. Two of the ten high school students entered a separate school, specially designed for new to the country immigrant students. Two students were not served in any special program their first semester because their schools did not offer a program. It was not until their second semester that they began receiving two segments of ESOL classes during the day. Three of the participants expressed that the drawbacks of the programs were that students were all Spanish native speakers and entered during different times; therefore, they were at different stages of their language development. Many times, being in this comfortable

environment kept them from pushing themselves to learn English. Valdez (2001) emphasized the importance of language assisted programs which build on students' academic strengths with clear guidelines so students do not become trapped in the programs limiting their ability to graduate and attend college. Based on the participants' accounts and the ESOL district plans from which ten of the twelve participants graduated, the programs are designed so that students are able to graduate despite their ESOL status as long as they were able to pass Georgia's End of Course Tests (EOTCs) and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GAHSGT). Although five remained in ESOL programs for longer periods of time, seven of the participants exited their programs within their second and third years of school. Most research shows that it takes typically five or more years for a person to master the academic language necessary to be successful in school (Cummings, 2000). Mastering the language and processes of schooling accelerated their access to services other immigrant Latinas did not have because of remaining in ESOL programs for longer periods of time. Mastery provided them with the ability to receive college preparatory and advanced classes as high school students. Three exited later in their high school careers and two graduated from high school as ESOL students. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2009) in their essay to President Obama about the needs of Latino and immigrant students in U.S. schools, presented several effective educational strategies specifically for ELs that should be part of any program designed for the sole purpose of meeting their needs. These programs should be "progressive and systematic" (p. 335) and should identify incoming students' academic and literacy skills. Their instruction should be ongoing and paired with other supports such as tutoring, homework help, English language instruction, and other academic supports which help them in transitioning into the mainstream curriculum. According to these

authors, yearly assessments including tests and portfolios should occur in order to inform progress and adjust interventions and supports as students need them.

Other support programs the immigrant Latinas identified were not academic in nature. These primarily dealt with such activities as sports, social and service clubs. These activities helped them to feel connected to their schools and peers. Three of the participants participated in cross country running while most became members of a service or social club. Eight of them attended field trips and or summer programs which strengthened their academic and social skills. Most of all, these support programs assisted them in learning and understanding the processes and procedures of school in the U.S. Finally, the field trips to a convention that featured successful Latinas and summer schools at the local college encouraged them and expanded their understanding of higher education. The importance of Latinas connecting to their schools through extracurricular activities is one of the factors emphasized by Gándara et al. (2013) as well as research conducted by the NWLC and MALDEF (2009) deemed crucial for the academic success and understanding needed to be successful in the United States.

Answer to Research Question Three

In addition to processes, procedures and supports which were in place in these new immigrant Latinas' school. What might have been done differently to increase the girls' likelihood of success?

The purpose of research question three was to explore additional school supports the participants believed would have assisted in making their experiences easier transitioning into middle and high school in the U.S. from their native country. Participants returned to topics previously covered in the first two research questions providing additional support for triangulation of data with their emphasis on educators and programs which specifically supported

them. First of all, participants saw the need for ESOL programs that were more tailored to meet their individual needs. Two participants emphasized the need for programs which looked at the academic preparation of immigrants in their native language and their ability to learn and navigate the content once they are here. It seems obvious from this study that each student's program should be individualized, so she can move into the mainstream at her own pace. This finding is in line with Valdez's (2001) finding in her study and recommendations for supports ELs need when they first enter schools in the U.S., as well as the recommendation of Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2009) noted in the previous section. Secondly, study participants emphasized the importance of mentors who build relationships individually. Participants saw different types of mentors as important. They saw the need for educators whose supports would include regular academic guidance within the everyday activities of school. Another type of mentor emphasized focuses on the role of counselors and academic coaches who would help them prepare for college through informational sessions, individual conferences and field trips to visit campuses and access resources such as scholarships and knowledge about college options. An additional type of mentor described was women peers or adults who have been through a similar experience as the immigrant Latinas or who have a keen understanding of their situation by other means. This mentor would help them build their confidence and maintain their identity as Latinas while still being able to fit into their schools and find success. The findings of Bohon et al. (2005) supported this line of reasoning. They proposed that schools have bilingual and bicultural staff, diversity training for school personnel and school-home liaisons to support students and their families. Third, participants saw a need for a more inclusive school environment when it came to extracurricular activities. Several mentioned they felt disconnected to their schools because their involvement outside of the academic subjects in their school were

limited, especially when they first arrived. At some point, most of the participants participated in a sport or club, and it made a positive difference to them. They saw a need for a specific outreach programs to include immigrant Latinas in school activities which should include language supports. Denner and Guzman's (2006) findings supported the need for specific mentoring and career guidance programs to guide Latinas, so they can develop self-efficacy, knowledge and confidence to develop and pursue their academic goals and dreams.

A fourth issue which created a barrier for the newcomer Latinas was the lack of parent involvement in their schools. Although all of them emphasized that their parents brought them to the U.S. with the specific goal of a better education, they were not involved in their schools. One participant said her parents never once attended any activities at her school including parent-teacher conferences. She concluded that it was not because they did not want to, but they were scared. Participants saw a need for clear and detailed outreach program in parents' native language informing them of the way education works in the U.S. including college. This included educating parents about the opportunities a college degree provides for their children and at the same time the sacrifices that also come with the process. Denner and Guzman (2006) proposed in their study that schools establish family outreach programs with the Latinas being a part of the plan. Participants did not mention the need for English classes for their parents, but more of language support system in the schools so that parents could communicate in Spanish and build relationships. Parents inability to communicate with school personnel creates a barrier between the immigrant Latina's family and her school, resulting in isolating and alienating her from her school, and this barrier should be removed (Valdez, 2001). In particular, several participants mentioned their close relationship and support of their mothers as being crucial to their success. Kaplan et al. (2007) and Antrop-Gonzalez (2011) found that Latina success is

directly impacted by their relationships with their mothers. They proposed schools provide mentoring and social programs where Latinas and their mothers can connect and learn together strengthening their opportunity for success.

Finally, participants saw a need for school wide programs to assist in reducing bullying of new immigrants by other Latino students who were born in the U.S. Although participants all found peers who would assist them, they encountered others who made fun of their accents, refused to translate for them or assist them in classes. When asked about the race of the peers who bullied, the majority were other Latinos, which the students found to be surprising because they were not prepared for this treatment. One participant shared her experience in a beginning ESOL class where she was placed with her sister. They were the only two females in a class with all male students. They experienced bullying even from immigrant Latino males in that program. Buddy and other peer support programs which involve former and other non-EL Latina students could provide additional support and connections to school for immigrant Latinas.

Answer to Research Question Four

How do young, immigrant, Latinas perceive the characteristics of middle and high schools that effectively serve immigrant Latina girls?

Immigrant Latinas were also asked to describe what characteristics a middle or high school who served new to the country immigrant Latinas successfully should have. They returned to the same topics as they mentioned previously (answers to Research Question 3) about what they wished their schools would have had. Their responses reemphasized the importance of these factors to be in place in a systematic way in schools. Aligning with the analysis of data from previous research questions, immigrant Latinas experienced support from individual people and programs, but not a comprehensive approach was in place. These immigrant Latinas'

recommendations were for schools to possess an environment where learning for all students is fostered through a high level of personal acceptance of immigrant Latinas and support programs that contribute to their success. In connecting these recommendations to the literature review, several connections become obvious. The theory of sanctuary schools proposed by Antrop-Gonzalez (2011) provides the type of environment where students' identities are affirmed, they feel physically and psychologically safe and connected to their schools, and their relationships with their teachers are based on caring as proposed by Noddings (2005). A combination of both authentic caring and aesthetic caring (Valenzuela; 1999) would provide for an additive school experience and reduce the more subtractive experiences they encountered in many instances. This multicultural approach to education as described by Nieto (2013) would move schools on the spectrum from tolerance and acceptance to respect, affirmation, solidarity, and critique. In other words schools would move away from monolingual education where "school structures, policies, curricula, instructional materials, and even pedagogical strategies are primarily representative of only the dominant culture" (p. 32).

Answer to Overarching Research Question: A View through the Lens of Latino

Critical Race Theory

How do educationally successful, young, Latina women describe their middle and high school experiences as first time immigrant students in Georgia?

In this section, I considered and responded to the overarching question by looking through the lens of LAT CRIT Theory. It is used in this study as a method of looking at how school is conducted in the geographical area of the study and how it affects the success of new immigrant Latinas. In considering the participants' stories in a holistic manner, the immigrant Latinas in this study primarily described their schools as mostly inclusive. Data indicate that

within the total context of the study, participants found their schools to be mostly accepting of them and described specific unpleasant instances with educators as isolated in nature. This sense of acceptance may be the result of their connection to specific educators and their involvement, although limited for some, in academic programs and extracurricular activities. In addition, learning a new language and new school environments were likely viewed as temporary barriers they needed to overcome to be successful; a point addressed by Slavin and Calderon (2001).

On closer examination of their responses during the coding process, a more conflicting picture emerged. The appropriate question for consideration was: Were there processes and structures in schools that hurt Latinas or detracted from their ability to achieve academic success? Solorzano and Yosso (2001); Bernal (2002) and Kim (2016) provided five elements of Critical Race Theory and LAT CRIT Theory through which I analyzed the experiences of these participants. These elements were presented previously in chapter three. The first element called on researchers to use multiple approaches in understanding the experiences of minority groups. The second element placed specific emphasis on the knowledge students bring with them through their life experiences allowing for their counterstories to be told. A third element required the researcher to question the dominant or general knowledge taught by schools, and to include private or home knowledge in the public realm as a way to better understand students of color, share their experiences, and question the official mainstream ideology. A fourth element referred to the central role that race and racism plays with other forms of oppression such as immigration, language, sex or class. The final element recognized a commitment to social justice. A researcher involved in this type of research does so with a purpose to effect change in educational practice and research. For the purpose of this study, I constructed five questions that reflect these elements. (1) Did participants perceive the presence of structures in their schools,

which give advantages to one group over another? (2) Did participants perceive the struggles they experienced as similar to those in their community? (3) Did participants perceive their schools as having a commitment to social justice and the empowering of minority groups to reduce racism? (4) Did participants perceive that their schools valued the knowledge they brought with them? (5) Did they perceive their educational experience to be of less quality than that of most of the majority students?

The first question- did participants perceive the presence of structures in their schools which give advantages to one group over another? Participants did perceive that inequalities existed in their schools at different levels. They perceived that there were structures in their school which gave advantages to one group over another. The first area was seen within the racial make-up of classes. Newcomer immigrant Latinas were not able to participate upon arrival in advanced classes despite their academic background in their native country. The reason was that all classes were taught in English. They were not able to access the curriculum as no bilingual support was in place to assist them. One participant noted she was enrolled in calculus in her native country, but when she entered school in the area in 8th grade, she was placed in a basic math class. Two participants commented that the advanced classes they were in once language proficiency was obtained contained more White students than regular classes; one class of approximately thirty students at that particular time had only five or six Latino students. On the flip side another participant stated that her general education classes were made up mostly of Latino students with very few White students in them. An additional area where participants noted a difference was in opportunities to participate in academic field trips related to their classes. These trips were reserved for those in advanced classes only, automatically barring most immigrant Latinas from participating since only very few were in those classes. One immigrant

Latina discovered a difference in the knowledge that “American” students possessed about the colleges they were going to attend as early as their junior year while she did not know about it until her final semester. Another noted that the only information she received from counselors was about the local state college. A third immigrant Latina said she enrolled in a program at the local college during one of their visits to her school, but she did not realize exactly what the program was. She only knew it was her opportunity to go to college. Once enrolled, she learned it had to do with something she was not interested in. Gaby stated it best: “Probably misinformation I had about applying to go to college that I wanted from the high school. By their junior year Americans [White students] knew what college they wanted to go to and knew how to apply. I didn’t know how to apply to American universities. I didn’t know you had to take the SAT.” Data indicated that immigrant Latinas perceived that there were structures in their schools which gave advantage to White students over Latino students.

Data were analyzed in light of the second question – Did participants perceive the struggles they experienced as similar to those in their community? Connections were not immediately discovered because there was not a direct question that would lead to such a connection. However, a strong argument can be made that supports a natural connection between a school and the community it serves. When the school is truly part of the community, it reflects the values and aspirations a community holds. As part of the community and with a moral obligation to communicate effectively, schools should provide translators for parents as well as services to help them become knowledgeable of the education their children are receiving. Several respondents noted a lack of communication or miscommunication that occurred between the schools and their parents. Immigrant Latinas noted this as an area that was lacking in their schools and would be a characteristic of a school which would have better

supported their academic achievement. Marina noted that her parents never attended meetings at her school because they were afraid no one would understand them as they could not communicate in English. “When I was in high school, I would have meetings and my parents never, they [*sic*] never went to one because they were afraid to not be understood.”

The third question- did participants perceive that their schools had a commitment to social justice and their empowerment? When data were analyzed, no evidence could be found of an overall systematic plan in place in the schools to support new to the country immigrant Latinas, in spite of large numbers of newcomer students in the area. Participants described particular educators who supported them and pushed them to succeed. One participant described a science teacher at her high school who supported and mentored her. This educator reviewed her schedule each semester and advised her on the best courses to take. On one or more occasions, she overrode the school’s proposed course sequence so this participant could be placed in an advanced class. These supports participants received were all individual and based on the desire of each teacher to help particular students. This teacher took on the role of counselor which was to make sure that all her students were on the right track in courses. Only in isolated situations were these Latinas empowered as were other students in their schools, detracting from their receiving equal opportunities to knowledge of and access to college and other school activities. Marina described her interest in cheerleading in middle school. “I just thought cheerleading was fun. I wanted to do it, but again most of the girls were White, so I didn’t feel that I would fit in there. They were not going to help me because they wouldn’t know what I was saying.” This sense of alienation and lack of empowerment persisted through high school and resulted in Marina dropping out of high school for a year. Only because of the work of one educator, did she return to school and graduated.

Although no direct question was asked concerning participants' perceptions of whether their schools valued their knowledge or cultural capital, participants noted that during their first year in the country, some of their ESOL teachers spoke Spanish and allowed them to use it in class as a way to support their academic progress while simultaneously learning English. After their initial experience as they learned English, they were placed in sheltered ESOL classes and then transitioned to regular and advanced classes where the expectations were for all class business to be in English. Data revealed that two participants who entered high school at the ages of sixteen and seventeen were able to transfer a limited number of credits from their native country allowing them to graduate from high school before they turned twenty-one. They gave credit to one of their ESOL teachers who assisted them in this process. All ten other participants were placed in a grade level based on their age—not their grade level in their native country or based upon the academic knowledge they possessed in their native language. Additionally, several participants talked about teachers expecting them to learn and fit in, but they had not been given the opportunity to share their culture with others in their schools. Loren concluded that in high school, “in the classroom, you totally have to let it go.... What worked for me was to try to leave my identity at the door and try to be another student in Conasauga High School. And if that meant talking about the soccer or the football team [*sic*—things like that I kind of had to do.” Additionally, all classes were conducted in English, and outside of limited native language support from ESOL teachers, immigrant students were expected to complete and turn in all work in English. All classroom and yearly tests were given in English with no accommodations resulting in lower grades for those students until they were able to master enough academic English to be successful. Graduation and end of course tests were given in English as well.

Despite transferring credits, students were still required to pass end of course tests for those subjects in English.

The final question related to the Critical Race Theory and LAT CRIT Theory elements asked whether immigrant Latinas perceive their educational experiences to be of less quality than most of the majority culture. Data showed that six of the twelve participants were able to participate in advanced, AP or IB classes while in high school. Therefore, they received similar quality education as those of the majority culture including access to clubs, field trips, and some college information that the others did not have. The others were enrolled in general education programs. These students lacked the opportunities afforded to those in the advanced classes.

The larger question has to do with the fact that when they first arrived, did they have access to the same curriculum as others? The answer emphatically is no. There was no system in place such as testing in their native language to determine their academic preparation, or bilingual support at schools which would provide them with the opportunity to access the more advanced courses more quickly or even in their native language while they developed English skills. In essence, in many respects under the system they enrolled, which remains in place, students' academic progress was slowed significantly while English skills were being gained. As noted by those Latinas who were able to participate in advanced classes, they were always one of two to four Latinos in their classes. In refocusing through the lens of LAT CRIT and asking the question - were there structures in place or lack of structures in place which hindered the progress of these immigrant Latinas participants in middle and high school? Based on the evidence uncovered in the interviews and focus groups, the answer is yes. There were no system wide supports in place to assist them academically, value and build on their experiential knowledge, and support for their families.

LAT CRIT Theory provided a lens through which to better understand the structures and ideologies which existed in the schools during the time the study's participants attended school. It also became a journey of self-discovery as I attempted to understand what its premise was as I reflected on my own journey. As a White Latina in Honduras I experienced social class, religious, sex and language discrimination living in an area where being light skinned, speaking Caribbean English and being protestant was seen as strange. Living in a world where I was viewed differently skewed my understanding and allowed me to accept the mainstream ideologies of the U.S. Like the participants in my study, I thought I had to learn to be "American" to be successful. This meant learning to speak English in a certain manner, following social customs and norms, and most of all, learning the way school is done in the U.S. That was the road to social and academic success for the immigrant students in my study and for me personally. Using a transdisciplinary approach to view the data has challenged me to question the dominant ideologies my participants and I internalized subconsciously.

Conclusion

The comprehensive purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of educationally successful Latina women in middle and high schools as new immigrants in Georgia. The researcher attempted to gain an understanding of structures, attitudes, processes and procedures in schools that provided Latinas with experiences that assisted them in graduating from high school and attending college, along with experiences that hindered their progress or had a negative impact. A second goal was to analyze participants' responses, seeking to identify trends that can be used by educators and implemented in schools that may provide improved educational services to immigrant Latinas. It is hoped that this study adds to the existing professional literature.

The research method used was a narrative approach. Participants shared their stories in two different formats: individual interviews and focus group interviews. Thick, rich descriptions were developed, in particular in chapter four, as a technique to share their experiences in their own words. As a way to ensure the validity of the study, the data were triangulated through peer debriefing, member check, the creation of an audit trail, and expert analysis as noted in chapter three.

Based on data collected in this study and information reviewed in the literature, the success of immigrant Latinas is dependent on numerous factors, which include both institutional and personal. The focus of this study specifically considered institutional factors which contributed to or hindered their success. Many of these factors are not unique to immigrant Latinas, but they are particular in that these participants fit into several categories. They are ELs and entered school with no English in middle and high school. They are immigrants and as such are unfamiliar with the processes of schools in the U.S. Furthermore, they are Latinas and teens dealing with their identities as both teenage girls and Latinas and the conflict between traditional roles and their dreams of a better life through education. These newcomer Latinas' parents are unable to provide the educational support needed for success because they are usually uneducated and not literate in English. Finally, they come from low socioeconomic homes with limited resources to use towards an education. When these multiple factors are combined, their likelihood of success is diminished unless a combination of school supports tailored to their needs is in place providing them with the support and access systematically and consistently in a caring environment.

This study's unique contribution lies in the data gathered concerning the area schools and their service to Latinas and the implications that can be drawn from them and applied in other

areas where immigrant Latinas are enrolling in schools. Analysis of data clearly indicated that the participants' schools did not have comprehensive support systems in place to serve them. Although schools served immigrant Latinas in ESOL programs, there was no evaluation system in place to determine academic preparedness in native language or bilingual programs in place to support them in content classes as they learned English. ESOL programs varied depending on the school the participant enrolled. One school offered middle school immigrants a language academy with high academic support for a semester to a year while another middle school had no program in place during the students first six month of enrollment. Most schools had ESOL bilingual teachers who supported the immigrant Latinas during enrollment and during the academic year, but once in regular classes, the support was sporadic based on the general education teacher they had for a given content area. No comprehensive mentoring program existed to assist them in navigating the processes and procedures of school and preparing them for college. Participants had limited connections to their school's counselors or other support staff such as academic coaches, social workers or parent liaisons. Immigrant Latinas perceived that their schools made none or limited attempts to affirm their own culture while assisting them in adjusting to their new school. Extracurricular activities were perceived as geared towards students who were in advanced classes and had the economic resources. Additionally parent support programs were limited to ESOL teachers translating, and in one instance offering English classes to parents. Jones (2008) in his study of Conasauga Schools noted that parents perceived that there were educational inequalities in their children's schools. Much of this came from the lack of bilingual staff to assist with communications between them and the schools. No substantial changes in parent support were noted since that study was conducted.

Even though the immigrant Latinas were enrolled in the area schools within the last 10 years including two who recently graduated in 2014, changes are occurring. All schools are required by state and federal law to provide services to ELs as well as services to their parents. Some changes have been implemented in certain schools because of state and federal pressures. Systems now have begun to add bilingual academic coaches to their middle and high schools, bilingual parent liaisons and some bilingual office staff are available at a limited number of schools.

Implications for Practice

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2009) proposed that newcomer Latinos “share optimism and hope in the future that must be cultivated and treasured—they see schooling as the path to a better tomorrow” (p. 338). In assuring that immigrant Latinas continue to be optimistic of their future and fulfill their dreams, and those of their parents, several institutional changes are needed. Antrop-Gonzales (2011) noted that sanctuary schools are those whose attributes include a multi-dimensional form of caring between teachers and students, the importance of a family type environment, the need to feel safe, and the ability to maintain students’ cultural identity. For this type of schooling experience to occur for immigrant Latinas, a comprehensive shift in understanding the needs of immigrant Latinas needs to occur. First of all, staff development for educators and other school personnel concerning a more multicultural approach to education where teachers learn and practice the tenets of an additive or sanctuary school where they not only honor their students’ identities, but believe in their future and assist them in accomplishing their dreams (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011; Nieto, 2013). In addition, the educators learn about the culture and belief system of the families of immigrant Latinas. Noddings found that students “feel alienated from their schoolwork, separated from the adults who try to teach them, and adrift

in a world perceived as baffling and hostile. At the same time, most teachers work very hard and express deep concern for their students. In an important sense, teachers do care, but they are unable to make the connections that would complete the caring relations with their students” (Noddings, 2005, p. 3).

Second, immigrant Latinas need comprehensive mentoring programs which include teachers, counselors, academic coaches, parent liaisons, peers and other Latinas who help them maintain their identities while adjusting to school. These mentors would play various roles depending on the individual needs of the immigrant Latinas, but should include information about school and college, assistance with helping their parents understand education in the U.S. particularly the importance of and processes of college applications, and connections to outside sources such as college and other community resources where they can connect with others who have succeeded academically. Third, schools should adopt multi-tiered ESOL programs based on the academic preparedness of students with regular assessments to determine progress and needs. These programs should include components such as tutors, homework help, bilingual classroom buddies and bilingual support, so students are not limited to lower academic classes because of language, but have the opportunity to access advanced classes if academically prepared in native language while still learning English. Fourth, immigrant Latinas needs access to extracurricular activities to help them feel connected to their schools. As part of the comprehensive services, schools should implement a program which assists immigrant Latinas in learning about the different social and service clubs and sport activities that are offered at the schools and then connect them to members of these groups in which they are interested. Knowledge of and understanding of the processes and procedures of schools and the ability to participate in the curriculum and activities similar to the dominant student body would remove some of the

systematic barriers which exist and allow immigrant Latinas a better chance to graduate and attend college. Finally, economic support systems need to be put in place so that students are able to participate without the added burden of the lack of resources generally experienced by immigrant families. None of these changes will occur effectively unless the counterstories such as those told in this narrative are told to counter the dominant Eurocentric epistemology taught in our schools (Bernal, 2002).

Recommendations for Further Study

The overall purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of educationally successful Latina women in middle and high schools as new immigrants in Georgia. The researcher attempted to gain an understanding of structures, attitudes, processes and procedures in schools that provided Latinas with experiences that assisted them in graduating from high school and attending college, along with experiences that hindered their progress or had a negative impact. A second goal was to analyze participants' responses, seeking to identify trends that can be used by educators and implemented in schools that may provide improved educational services to immigrant Latinas in the area of the study.

One recommendation for future study is to conduct research about the experiences of immigrant Latinas in Northwest Georgia who were not successful in middle and high school and dropped out before graduating. This would provide additional information for schools to use in assisting them in understanding and serving this population. Such a study would possibly identify additional institutional barriers not mentioned by these participants.

A second recommendation would be to research the perceptions of educators, counselors, academic coaches, parent liaisons, administrators, social workers, office workers, and other system support personnel to gain their insights into their work with immigrant Latinas. A focus

could be on what their perceptions of immigrant Latinas are. Are they more apt to assist those who possess certain traits and less likely to work with those who may not display certain academic abilities or personalities traits?

A final recommendation for future study would be to research the perceptions of immigrant Latinas and their families who are currently enrolled in the area middle and high schools to compare with this study in an effort to track current trends.

Summary

The topic, approach and location for this study was important because Conasauga City and Bruin County after twenty plus years continue to receive immigrant Latinas. During the current 2014-2015 school, Conasauga opened a newcomer center at one of the high schools as the influx of Latinos primarily from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras has continued to grow. Included are several Latinas who have diverse cultures, educational experiences and all have limited English language. Although the districts' leaders are taking steps to improve the services offered to these students, the lack of educator understanding and empathy continue to derail students' efforts to succeed academically and become acclimated to their new environment while maintaining their own identities. This need for them to become transnational immigrants is crucial if they are to be successful; therefore, a brief look is taken at several of the personal characteristics participants in this study possessed in order to honor them as well as provide additional understanding of their uniqueness and strength.

REFERENCES

- Anfara, Jr., V. A., & Mertz, N. T. (Eds.). (2006). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Antrop-Gonzalez, R. (2011). *Schools as radical sanctuaries: Decolonizing urban education through the eyes of youth of color and their teachers*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Antrop-Gonzalez, R., Velez, W., & Garrett, T. (2005). Donde Están los Estudiantes Puertorriquenas/os Exitosos? [Where are the academically successful Puerto Rican student?]: Success factors of high-achieving Puerto Rican high school students. *Journal of Latinos and education*, 4(2), 77-94. Retrieved from www.journaloflatinosandeducation.com
- Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Enquiry*, 8(1), 105-126. Retrieved from www.qix.sagepub.com
- Bodvarsson, O. B., & Van den Berg, H. (2009). Hispanic immigration to the United States. In O. B. Bodvarsson & H. Van den Berg (Eds.), *The economics of Immigration: Theory and Policy* (pp. 315-341). Berlin, Germany: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-77796-0_12
- Boeije, H. (2002, November). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality and Quantity*, 36(4), 391-409. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1020909529486>
- Bohon, S. A., Macpherson, H., & Atilas, J. (2005). Educational barriers for Latinos in Georgia. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 4(1), 43-58.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (in press). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed.) (pp. 1-26). Retrieved from <http://www.narrativesig.cahs.colostate.edu>
- Concha, G. Q. (2006). *The color of success Race and high-achieving urban youth*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990, June- July). Stories of experiences and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1176100>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Cummings, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Denner, J., & Guzman, B. (Eds.). (2006). *Latina girls: Voices of adolescent strength in the United States* New York; NY: New York University Press
- Echeveria, J. J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. J. (2012). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners: The SIOP model* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Ennis, S. R., Rios-Vargas, M., & Albert, N. G. (2011). *The Hispanic population: 2010*. Retrieved from www.census.gov/gov/population/www/2010/glance/index.html
- Fry, R. (2003). *Hispanic youth dropping out of U.S. school: Measuring the challenge*. Retrieved from www.pewhispanic.org
- Fry, R. (2003, June 12). Hispanic youth dropping out of U.S. schools: Measuring the challenge. *Pew Hispanic Center*, 1-18. Retrieved from www.pewhispanic.org
- Fry, R., & Lopez, M. H. (2012). *Now largest minority group on four-year college campuses Hispanic student enrollments reach new heights in 2011*. Retrieved from www.pewhispanic.org
- Georgia Department of Education. (2013). <http://archives.gadoe.org>
- Georgia Department of Education- ESOL/ Title III. (2013). [http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/English-to-Speakers-of-Other-Languages-\(ESOL\)-and-Title-III.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/English-to-Speakers-of-Other-Languages-(ESOL)-and-Title-III.aspx)
- Gonzales, L. D. (2012). Stories of success: Latinas redefining cultural capital. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 11, 124-138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2012.659566>

- Gándara, P., Oseguera, L., Perez Huber, L., Locks, A., Ee, J., & Molina, D. (2013). *Making education work for Latinas in the U.S.* Retrieved from <http://www.evalongoriafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Making-Education-Work-for-Latinas-in-the-US-by-the-Eva-Longoria-Foundation1.pdf>
- Humes, K. R., Jones, N. A., & Ramirez, R. R. (2011). *Overview of race and Hispanic origin: 2010* (US Census Bureau C2010BR-02). Retrieved from www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf
- Igoa, C. (1995). *The inner world of the immigrant child*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Johnson, K. R. (2013, October 8). The keys to the nation's educational future: The Latina/o struggle for educational equity. *Denver University Law Review*, 1231-2013. Retrieved from http://www.law.du.edu/documents/denver-university-lawreview/v90-5_Issue5_Johnson_FINAL_ToDarby_100813.pdf
- Jones, Jr., E. P. (2008). *Understanding Hispanic parents' perceptions of the education their children receive using critical race theory* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
- Kaplan, C. P., Turner, S. G., & Badger, L. W. (2007, April). Hispanic adolescent girls' attitudes toward school. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 24, 173-193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10560-007-0080-2>
- Kaplan, C. P., Turner, S. G., & Silber, E. (2009, January). Club Amigas: A promising response to the needs of adolescent Latinas. *Child and Family Social Work*, 14, 213-221. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j/1365-2206.2009.00625.x>
- Kim, J. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kochhar, R., Suro, R., & Tafoya, S. (2005). *The new Latino south: The context and consequences of rapid population growth*. Retrieved from www.pewhispanic.org
- Manen, M. V. (1990). *Research lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario, Canada: State University of New York Press.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- McWhirter, E. H., Valdez, M., & Caban, A. R. (2013). Latina adolescents' plan, barriers, and support: A focus group study. *Journal of Latino/a Psychology*, 1, 35-52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0031304>
- Meador, E. (2005). The making of marginalization for Mexican immigrant girls in the rural Southwest. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36, 149-164. <http://dx.doi.org/1548-1492>

- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- NALEO Education Trust. (2010). *2010 Census Profiles: Georgia*. Retrieved from http://www.naleo.org/downloads/GA_Census_2010_Profile_fin03-11.pdf
- National Women's Law Center. (2009). <http://www.nwlc.org>
- National Women's Law Center and Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. (2009). *Listening to Latinas: Barriers to high school graduation*. Retrieved from www.nwlc.org & www.maldef.org
- Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teachers going?* New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Nieto, S. (2005). *Why we teach?* New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Nieto, S. (2013). *Finding joy in teaching students of diverse backgrounds: Culturally responsive and socially just practices in U.S. classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1992, November). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher*, 21, 5-24. <http://dx.doi.org/http://links.jstor.org>
- Plata-Potter, S. I., & T. de Guzman, M. R. (2012). Mexican immigrant families crossing the education border: a phenomenological study. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 11, 94-106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2012.659563>
- Riessman, C. K. (2003). Narrative analysis. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, 3, 1-7. Retrieved from <http://cmsu2.ucm0.edu>
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Sanchez, P. (2007, June 21). Urban immigrant students: How transnationalism shapes their world learning. *The Urban Review*, 39, 489-517. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11256-007-0064-8>
- Schaafsma, D., & Vinz, R. (2011). *Narrative inquiry: approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Slavin, R. E., & Calderon, M. (Eds.). (2001). An overview of the educational models used to explain the academic achievement of Latino students: Implications for research and policies into the new millennium. In R. E. Slavin & M. Calderon (Eds.), *Effective*

- Programs for Latino Students* (pp. 331-368). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001). Critical Race and LatCrit theory and method: Counterstorytelling. *International Journal of Qualitative studies in Education*, 14, 4, 471-495. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09518390110063365>
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001, Fall). From racial stereotyping and deficit discourse toward a critical race theory in teacher education. *Multicultural Education*, 9(1), 1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/1063844>
- Soto, L. (2012, January). On becoming Mexican in Napa: Mexican immigrant girls negotiating challenges to transnational identities. *Social Identities*, 18, 19-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2012.629509>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Suarez-Orozco, C., & Suarez-Orozco, M. M. (2009). Educating Latino immigrant students in the twenty-first century: Principles for Obama administration. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79, 327-340.
- Suarez-Orozco, M. (1989). *Central American refugees and U.S. high schools: A psychological study of motivation and achievement*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Valdez, G. (1996). *Con Respeto: Bridging the distance between culturally diverse families and schools: An ethnographic portrait*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Valdez, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. New York; NY: Teacher College, Columbia University.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. New York, NY: State University.
- Velez, V., Perez Huber, L., Benavides Lopez, C., De la Luz, A., & Solorzano, D. (2008). Battling for human rights and social justice: a Latina/o student youth activism in the wake of 2006 anti-immigration sentiment. *Social Justice*, 35, 7-27. Retrieved from www.socialjusticejournal.org
- Villenas, S., & Deyhle, D. (1999). Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience and resistance. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 29(4), 413-445. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0362-6784.00140>

Wainer, A. (2004). *The new Latino south and the challenge to public education: strategies for educators and policymakers in emerging immigrant communities*. Retrieved www.trpi.org

Webb, A. (2013). *So you want to do a qualitative dissertation?* Unpublished manuscript, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.

Zambrana, R. E., & Zoppi, I. M. (2002). Latina students: Translating cultural wealth into social capital to improve academic success. *Journal of Ethics & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 11(1/2), 33-53. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J051v1n01_02

APPENDIX A

Individual Interview Questions

Interview 1

The interview questions are broken into two categories: demographic information and research questions. Research questions are listed before each set of related interview questions to assist me in staying focused on that particular information during the interview process.

Demographic Information

A. Tell me little about yourself and your family. (Follow up with below questions not answered in description)

1. How old are you?
2. What year did you graduate from high school? What high school did you graduate from?
3. Have you finished college? If so, where did you attend and what was your major? If not, where are you attending and what is your major?
4. What are you doing now? Are you in school? Are you working?
5. Tell me about your family. How many siblings do you have? Are both your parents here in the U.S.? Describe their decision to bring you to the U.S. and particularly to this area.
6. What year did you come to the U.S.? What school did you first attend?
7. What country are you from?
8. How much English did you know when you arrived?
9. Did your parents speak English?
10. What was your legal status? It is ok if you prefer not to respond to this question.
11. What grade were you placed in? Was this the same grade you were in in your native country?
12. What were some of the goals, dreams, and desires you had when you first came to the US?
13. Do you feel you have reached or are moving towards those goals, dreams or desires?

Research Question: How do educationally successful, young, Latina women describe their middle and high school experiences as first time immigrant students in Northwest GA?

1. How would you describe your schooling experience in this area in one or two words? Why do you describe it as _____? If needed- Describe what it was like in school when you first came to this area?
 - I. **How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe their interactions with teachers and other school personnel (counselors, administrators, coaches, etc.) during their middle and high school years?**
 2. Who were some people who helped you? Describe how _____ helped you?
- II. **How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe programs whose intent was to support them while they were in middle and high school?**

3. What type of program were you put in when you first entered school (Immersion, sheltered, pull out, and push-in)? Please describe your program.
4. What programs helped you? Describe how these programs helped you.
- III. In addition to processes, procedures and supports which were in place in these new immigrant Latinas' schools, what might have been done differently to increase the girls' likelihood of success?**
5. What were some procedures and policies that made it difficult for you to succeed in school?
6. What could have been done to better support you while you were in school?
7. Anything else you would like to add that you feel would have supported you better?
- IV. How do young, immigrant, Latinas perceive the characteristics of middle and high schools that effectively serve immigrant Latina girls?**
8. What kind of support has been the most helpful to you, and where has this support come from? Describe how the support helped you.
9. When you think specifically about overcoming the challenges you faced, what helped you most to allow you to arrive at the point of where you are?

Interview Two (follow-up questions based on first interview)

Question for the second interview will be based upon responses in the first interviews and trends that emerge. The purpose of the second interview will be to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, using their first responses as a building block for the deeper understanding. Likely questions are categorized by major research questions.

Research Question: How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe their overall experiences in schools in northwestern Georgia?

1. In our first interview, you described your schooling experience in this area as _____? Why did you describe it as _____? Would you like to add any more examples?
2. Can you give more details your experiences _____ in middle /high school as a new immigrant?
3. Why do you remember _____ as being significant for you as a limited English student?
4. Can you give more details about why _____ programs or services helped you succeed? Can you provide more details about why _____ detracted you from succeeding?
5. Can you think about any other examples about how people helped you most or made things more difficult for you as a new immigrant student?
6. Why was _____ so frustrating or difficult?
- I. How do young, immigrant, Latina women describe their interactions with teachers and other school personnel (counselors, administrators, coaches, etc.) during their middle and high school years?**
7. In the previous interview, you mentioned that _____ was a valuable help to your success. Can you give me any more examples of how she/he helped? What about _____ made it easy to make a connection with him/her?
- II. How do new to the country, immigrant, Latina women describe programs whose intent was to support them while they were in middle and high school?**

8. You mentioned that _____ (program/ structure/ process/ procedure) was valuable to you. Can you give any more examples of how this helped you?
 9. You mentioned that _____ was a barrier. Can you elaborate on why you feel this way?
 10. In our first interview you mentioned _____ as a way that schools can better serve new immigrant Latinas. Can you think of any other things schools do to support them more and help them overcome any barriers to success?
- III. In addition to processes, procedures and supports in place in new, immigrant, Latinas' schools, what could have been done differently to increase the girls' likelihood of success?**
11. In the first interview, you described _____ as a policy/procedure that made it difficult for you to succeed in school. Can you think of any other policies or procedures that made it difficult for you? What could have been done differently with the policies you mentioned to better support you?
 12. Is there anything else from our conversation in our first interview about which you would like to give more details or examples?
- IV. How do young, immigrant, Latinas perceive the characteristics of middle and high schools that effectively serve immigrant Latina girls?**
13. In the first interview, you said _____ are some characteristics of schools that serve Latinas well. Could you expand on what you meant by _____?
 14. In addition to _____ that you said in our first interview, do you have any additional recommendations for schools serving immigrant Latina girls?

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

(2 groups of 4-6 students)

In your personal interviews, you shared some of your experiences during your time as middle and high school students in this area. Please elaborate on these statements.

- (a) Several described their experiences as _____. Would anyone like to elaborate on this?
- (b) Some participants described their interactions with teachers and other school personnel (counselors, administrators, coaches, etc.) as _____ during their middle and high school years? Would anyone like to add to the conversation with examples of your experiences or your thoughts about this description?
- (c) Some referred to _____ as a program, process or activity that helped them. Would anyone like to elaborate on this or another program that helped them? Why was the program you mentioned helpful to you?
- (d) Several described _____ as characteristics of schools that helped them. Were these characteristics of school also helpful to you? Can you think of other examples of characteristics of schools that were helpful?
- (e) Several also mentioned _____ as barriers. Were they also barriers for you? Can you talk about why these are barriers? Were there other barriers to success?
- (f) Can you think of anything else you think would help schools to better understand how to aid in the success of immigrant Latinas who enter in middle and high school in our area?

APPENDIX C

Face to Face and Electronic Protocol for Individual Interviews

Study Title: *Experiences of Latinas in Middle and High Schools: Interviews With Successful Young Immigrant Women*

A. Procedures for 1st Round of Interview:

1. The researcher will call, Skype, or FaceTime participants who have previously agreed to be a part of the study. The participants will have previously been contacted by phone, Facebook or email with an explanation of the study and a consent form to be completed.
2. The researcher will identify herself and ask to speak with the participant. If the participant is not available, the researcher will leave a message and her telephone number asking for the participant to please return the call at her earliest convenience.
3. Once the participant is reached, the following script will be used.

Hello, this is Daphnie Jones. As you know from our previous communication (email/ Facebook message/ text/ call), I am conducting a study about successful immigrant Latinas' experiences while in middle and high schools in the northwestern area of Georgia. Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. When would be a good time to ask you some questions about your educational experiences while you were a student in this area? Are you available to meet in person?

If the response is "no", ask, "When would be a good time to talk with you by phone, Skype or FaceTime?" The researcher will arrange the time and medium. If the current time is convenient to talk, the researcher will proceed with the interview. (See Appendix A for interview questions)

If the response is "yes" to meeting in person, the researcher will set up a time and place where the meeting can occur and proceed with first interview.

Before beginning with in person or electronic interviews, the researcher will inform participants that their information will be kept confidential. Recorded interviews will be kept on the researcher's personal password protected iPad and computer. All written materials and both electronic devices will be kept in personal home office which will be locked.

B. Protocol for 2nd Round of Interviews

1. The researcher will have called, texted or emailed participants to set up a time to conduct the second interview. If the participant is available to meet in person, the interview will occur in such a manner. If the participant is not available to meet in person, the following protocol will be followed.
2. When the participant is reached by phone, Skype or FaceTime, the researcher will identify herself and thank the participant for agreeing to be part of the second round of interviews.
3. The researcher will then begin the interview (see Appendix A for interview questions).

APPENDIX D

Face to Face and Electronic Protocol for Focus Groups

Participants will be contacted through email, text or phone calls. They will be asked to participate in a focus group of four to six participants. If they are not available in person, they will be asked to participate electronically (Skype or FaceTime). The participant will be provided with two options for becoming part of the focus group.

I. A focus group will be set up in a mutually decided upon place such as the local community center, school, or home where the participants will feel comfortable. Participants will be reminded that the focus group will be audio recorded. They will also be reminded of the need for confidentiality and asked to please respect and protect others' privacy.

II. If there are not enough participants for a second face to face focus group, it will be help electronically using Skype. The technology will be set up so that respondents can participate in the focus group conversation. A computer or an iPad will be used and set up in a way that each participant is able to see and be seen by the other participants in the focus group.

Once everyone is in place, the researcher will thank the participants for their time and input. She will then inform every one of the norms and procedure for the focus group. She will ask the group to respect all opinions. She will also assure them of the confidentiality of their participation in the study within her ability. She will tell them that their information will be stored on a password protect iPad and computer. These devices and all printed materials such as transcripts and drafts will be kept in researcher home office in locked drawers. She will ask them to respect the privacy and confidentiality of other participants in the group.

- a. The researcher will begin the session with questions related to specifically answering the study's research questions. (See appendix B for focus group questions)
- b. All participants will be given the opportunity to respond to each question before the researcher moves on to the next question.
- c. After each participant has had an opportunity to speak, others can clarify or add to the discussion.
- d. The researcher will guide the discussion around the topic of the research questions by focusing the group and following up with probing questions to deepen the conversation and understanding.

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Statements

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study**

Study title: *EXPERIENCES OF LATINAS IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS: INTERVIEWS WITH SUCCESSFUL YOUNG IMMIGRANT WOMEN*

Investigator's Name & Position: Daphnie Jones; Doctoral student at UA

You are being asked to take part in a research study.

This study is called *Experiences of Latinas in Middle and High Schools: Interviews with Successful Young Immigrant Women*. The study is being done by Mrs. Daphnie Jones, who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama.

Is the researcher being paid for this study?

The researcher is not receiving payment.

Is this research developing a product that will be sold, and if so, will the investigator profit from it?

The researcher is not developing a product that will be sold therefore will not profit.

Does the investigator have any conflict of interest in this study?

The investigator knows some of the candidates as former middle school students.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?

This study is being done to find out about the educational experiences of successful Latina young women as immigrants middle and high school students. *The study seeks to uncover those things which aided in your educational success.*

Why is this study important or useful?

This knowledge is important/useful because *it will provide additional understanding concerning things which assist young, immigrant Latinas in being academically successful. This information can be used by schools to assist current immigrant Latinas in middle and high schools in the area.* This study is significant because its results will assist educators understand better ways to help immigrant Latinas in middle and high school be successful academically.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because *you attended either middle or high school as a new immigrant Latina in the area of Northwest Georgia successfully; graduated from high school, and is either in college or completed at least a four year degree.*

How many people will be in this study?

About ten to eleven other people will be in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews and one focus group. The interviews and focus groups will be audiotaped and transcribed. If you do not wish to be audiotaped, you will not be able to participate in the study.

How much time will I spend being this study?

You will spend approximately three to four hours being in this study. Approximately one hour per interview and one to two hours for the focus group.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is *your time*.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

Can the investigator take me out of this study?

As the investigator, I may take you out of the study if I feel that *the study is upsetting you or something happens that means you no longer meet the study requirements, etc.*

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

Little or no risk is foreseen. The chief risk is that you may get tired from the interviews, bored by the study activities, upset by thinking about your former years in middle and high school. The research will attempt to minimize or avoid these risks through breaks, rescheduling the interview, or removing the person from the study, etc. Another risk to you is to your privacy and confidentiality. All precaution will be taken to minimize this as much as possible. (See section on privacy and confidentiality.)

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you. Although you will not benefit personally from being in the study, you may feel good about knowing that you have helped other Latinas experience success in school as educators gain a deeper understanding and learn how to improve their services to them.

What are the benefits to science or society?

This study will help middle and high school educators to be more helpful to immigrant Latinas. Society will benefit from higher number of educated Latinas if we can do a better job of assisting them in being successful in school and college.

How will my privacy be protected?

Privacy will be protected in several ways. Interviews will occur in a private room or a site of your choosing and you will know in advance what you will be asked about. Additionally, do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. You are not required to participate in the focus groups if you wish not to.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

Confidentiality refers to data and how it will be safeguarded. Yours will be protected by such actions as separating signed consents from datasheets, using pseudonyms for records. Home office drawers and door will be locked to protect study's hard copies of interview/focus group transcripts and study's drafts, and storage of iPad and computer when not in use by researcher. Additionally, restricting the number of people who can access data, and destroying raw data or identifiers after data have been used will be done. iPad and computer will be password protected during the study.

During focus groups, I will request people to keep the discussion confidential, but I cannot guarantee this will happen.

Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded at your consent. Data will be stored on my iPad. Once the study has been completed, the information will be erased from the device.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

There are no other choices. The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama. The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (“the IRB”) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review this study records from time to time to be sure that you are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call Mrs. Daphnie Jones at 706-537-2769.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Yes. I consent to having my interview recorded and focus group audio recorded.

No. I do not consent to having my interview and focus group audio recorded.

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX F

Telephone/ Facetime/ Skype Consent Form

I am calling in regard to a research study being conducted at the University of Alabama. Your telephone number was provided by _____ (*or, depending on researcher's relationship with participant*) I remember you during your middle school years in _____ School which is located in the study area. I am contacting you because you qualify as a potential participant because of your success as an educated, immigrant Latina who entered school in the area during middle or high school. This research study examines the school experiences of Latinas who entered as new immigrants during middle and high school in this area. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as a student during middle and/or high school, which will take about 30 minutes of your time. If you agree, you may be asked to participate in a second interview of approximately 30 minutes and a focus group of approximately 30 minutes for a total time of 90 minutes between all three. Your answers will be kept confidential. Your participation will help provide insight into the experiences of immigrant Latinas resulting in improved services for those currently in schools, with the only risk being that some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. However, answering these questions is voluntary. That means you may refuse to take part in this study or, if you decide to participate in the study, you may decide not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or to stop the interview at any time. I also plan to audio record the interview. The information will be stored on my personal password protected iPad and computer for the duration of the study. Once the study is completed it will be erased. Additionally, both devices and all written materials such as transcripts and study's drafts will be securely stored in my personal home office which will be locked when I am not present. Do you consent to have the interview audio recorded? I have an informed consent form that I would like to email or mail though regular post? Would you like me to do so? If so, which way is best? Please provide me with your email / home address to mail it. Would you like to begin the interview process now or wait until you have received the consent form? If you would like to proceed, may I ask the first question? Begin interview...

If participant wants to wait, set up another time to interview once the consent form has been received, read, signed and returned by the participant.

APPENDIX G

Message Recruitment Script

I am sending you this message in regard to my research study being conducted at the University of Alabama. Your name was given to me by _____ (*or, depending on researcher's relationship with participant*) I remember you as a student during your time in middle school. You qualify as a potential participant because of your success as an educated immigrant Latina who entered middle or high school in the area. This research study examines the experiences of successful Latinas who entered public schools in this area during their middle and high school years. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences during your middle/high school years as a student. It will take approximately thirty minutes of your time. Additionally, you may be asked to participate in a 2nd interview and a focus group of approximately thirty minutes each. They may occur in person or electronically. Your participation will help provide additional understanding to educators who are currently working with immigrant Latinas in middle and high school in the area. Your participation is voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential. Your only risk is that some of the questions may make you uncomfortable, but answering them are voluntary. May I count on your participation? If so, how could I contact you to set up a time, medium and place for the first interview?

APPENDIX H

IRB Approval

Office for Research
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
R E S E A R C H

January 20, 2015

Daphnie E. Jackson Jones
ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870302

Re: IRB # 15-OR-013, "Experiences of Latinas in Middle and High Schools:
Interviews with Successful Young Immigrant Women"

Dear Ms. Jones:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval
for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part
46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined
below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including,
but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity,
language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior)
or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program
evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on January 19, 2016. If your research will
continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB
Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete
the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot
be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate
apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please
complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this
proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Director of Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama



358 Rose Administration Building
Box 870127
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127
(205) 348-8461
fax (205) 348-7189
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066