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CAREER AS TEACHERS

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RONALD L. GRANT JR.
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WHY EDUCATION? AN EXAMINATION OF WHY LATINOS/HISPANICS PURSUE A
CAREER AS TEACHERS.

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Dr. Robin Starr Minthorn, Chair

Dr. Beverly Edwards

Dr. R.C. Davis-Undiano

Dr. J. Anthony Luevanos

ABSTRACT

Supported by research on urban education, teacher shortages, and ethnic representation, this qualitative case study seeks to explore the motivations behind Hispanics and/or Latinos pursuing careers in education and the paths they take to achieve this objective. Conducted through semi-structured virtual interviews with ten current educators in the Oklahoma City metro area, the study employs Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory to analyze their lived experiences. From these interviews, five key themes emerged: adverse high school experiences, lack of college knowledge, financial obstacles, language barriers, and strong connections with students. These findings illuminate the hurdles encountered by Hispanic and/or Latino individuals in the education field, emphasizing the necessity for systemic support and representation. The insights gleaned from this research provide valuable direction for educational institutions and policymakers, offering strategies to overcome barriers and foster a more inclusive environment. By prioritizing diversity and representation, the goal is to inspire and empower more Hispanics and/or Latinos to pursue careers in education, thereby enhancing the profession and benefiting students and communities alike.

Keywords: Hispanic educators, Latino educators, LatCrit, Oklahoma City metro area teachers, representation

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Having spent nearly two decades as a Hispanic educator, my journey into this profession was anything but conventional. Despite achieving excellent grades in school, attending college was never actively promoted to me. Although academically successful, I didn't fit the stereotypical image of a straight-A student, leading to misconceptions about my potential by teachers and principals.

It was only through my qualification as a National Hispanic Scholar Finalist based on my PSAT score that college became a realistic possibility. The recognition came with a full ride and without it, I doubt I would have ever pursued a college degree. Upon enrolling at the University of Oklahoma, I initially opted for electrical engineering due to my background as an electrician in high school, coupled with the allure of potential financial success associated with engineering careers. However, after navigating through various majors, I ultimately graduated with a Bachelor's in Business Management after six years.

My personal narrative, elaborated further in Chapter 3, delves into the specifics of how I transitioned into a career in education. What remains striking throughout my journey is the absence of encouragement towards pursuing higher education, let alone a career in teaching. Despite this lack of guidance, my unwavering conviction in the importance of education has been a constant. Reflecting on my path, I often wonder why I never actively pursued a degree in education, considering my passion for it.

Background of the Study

Hispanics and Latinos constitute the largest minority group in the United States, with their proportion expected to continue growing indefinitely (Zong, 2022). This trend can be

attributed to two primary factors. Firstly, Hispanics and Latinos, on average, have larger families compared to non-Latinos (Livingston, 2015). Secondly, there is a consistent influx of migrants from Hispanic and Latin American countries into the United States (Schumacher et al., 2023). Additionally, a third contributing factor, related to the first two, is the significant increase in birth rates since 1970 with over 60 percent of these births attributed to mothers of Latino or Hispanic origin (Livingston, 2016).

Nationally, Hispanics and Latinos make up 19.1 percent of the total population. However, they represent 27.1 percent of the school-age population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Consequently, the higher percentage of Hispanics and Latinos in schools should be mirrored in their representation in college attendance and graduation rates, as obtaining a college degree is a prerequisite for entering the teaching profession.

The largest district in the Oklahoma City metro area is Oklahoma City Public Schools, OKCPS. According to the most recent OKCPS Statistical Report, 57.3% of the students they serve are Hispanic and/or Latino (OKCPS Statistical Report, 2023). This percentage is over twice the national average. Compared to last year, this figure is relatively unchanged from 57.6% (OKCPS Statistical Report, 2023). Data from the 2020-2021 school year was not used because COVID-19 affected the reliability of the data collected.

Statement of The Problem

While Hispanics and Latinos are increasingly enrolling in college (Mora, 2022), there's a concerning trend: fewer than two percent of them choose education as their major (Hinrichs, 2015). This poses a significant issue because Hispanic and Latino educators play a crucial role for several reasons. Research indicates that both Hispanic and Latino students, as well as white students, perform better academically when taught by Hispanic and Latino teachers (Villegas &

Irvine, 2010; Benner and Crosnoe, 2011). These educators also serve as mentors and positive role models for Hispanic and Latino students (Antrop-González, & De Jesús, 2006), help mitigate disproportionate disciplinary actions (Shirrell et al., 2023), and assist families in navigating the complexities of language and education while advocating for their community (Griffin, 2018). Denying Hispanic and Latino students and families access to these benefits by not having Hispanic and Latino educators in schools exacerbates educational disparities.

Ethnic matching, or the alignment of a student's ethnicity with that of their teacher, yields educational advantages. Reflecting on my own experience as a Latino from San Antonio, I recall a notable presence of Hispanic teachers in my middle school, including the Assistant Principal, Mrs. Evola. However, upon transitioning to a business-focused magnet high school in a more affluent side of town, encounters with teachers of color were rare. Despite a student body of 5,000, there was only one Hispanic teacher, Mr. Gonzalez, who taught Spanish, and I never had the opportunity to be in his class. Even if there were ten others like Mr. Gonzalez, the percentage of Hispanic teachers would have been 5.5 percent assuming a 25 student to one teacher ratio. This contrasts starkly with the national average of 9.4 percent Hispanic and/or Latino teachers (NCESa, 2022). Among all the school's leaders, Ms. Garza stood as the sole Hispanic representative.

Hispanic and Latino educators not only educate students but also inspire, counsel, and guide them. While non-Hispanic and Latino educators also provide support, the impact is amplified when there's an ethnic match (Seah, 2021). Teachers of color foster a "growth mindset" among students, resulting in sustained socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic development (Blazar, 2021). Moreover, students of color taught by teachers of color exhibit higher high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Gershenson et al., 2022). Coupled

with a strong teacher/student relationship, this may inspire the students to be teachers themselves. For students lacking a confidant at home, ethnically matched teachers frequently fill that void (Brockenbrough, 2018).

Disproportionate disciplinary actions and suspensions affect Hispanic and Latino students (Gordon-Ellis et al., 2016; Castillo, 2013). Moreover, students of color tend to receive lower behavioral and academic ratings from white teachers compared to their white counterparts (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). However, students matched with teachers of the same ethnicity demonstrate greater socio-emotional awareness and improved externalized behaviors (Wright et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The growing body of research highlighting the positive impact of Latino and Hispanic educators is significant. Considering that Latinos and Hispanics are surpassing the growth rates of all other ethnicities a pressing need emerges: more Hispanics and Latinos are needed in the field of education. Yet, Hispanics and Latinos encounter obstacles in navigating the K-12 school system and accessing higher education. This dissertation seeks to explore the factors influencing the career choices of ten current Latino and/or Hispanic educators in the Oklahoma City metro area. By gaining insights into these influencing factors, the study aims to provide valuable guidance on how to encourage and support other Hispanics and Latinos in pursuing careers in education.

Research Questions

The essential research question of this dissertation is: "Why do Latinos and/or Hispanics pursue a career in education?" During the interviews, a secondary question emerged and that is "What was their path to a career in education?" These questions serve to provide insight into the

lived experiences of Hispanic and Latino educators to identify key moments that can then be leveraged to encourage other Hispanics and Latinos to pursue a career in education. This research may also help inform best practices in recruiting Hispanic and Latino educators to help address the teacher shortage and have a more diverse teacher workforce.

Overview of Methodology

A qualitative case study design employing semi-structured interviews was conducted via video conference with ten Hispanic and/or Latino teachers from the Oklahoma City metro area. Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as the theoretical framework for this study, recognizing racism as pervasive and enduring in various forms, contrary to the "colorblind" approach often professed by educators (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020, p.6). Nested within CRT is Latino Critical Theory, or LatCrit, which provides a lens for examining how Hispanics and Latinos experience multi-dimensional racism and racist actions across different contexts (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

The case study methodology is used to investigate and analyze the complexities inherent in the subject of study (Stake, 1995). This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the issue or phenomenon under examination (Crowe et al., 2011). The choice of this method is appropriate, given that the interviews were crafted to elicit a comprehensive understanding of each participant's unique journey into the teaching profession. Responses were meticulously analyzed for both commonalities and distinctions, with particular emphasis on the participants' identities as Hispanic and/or Latino, to discern recurring themes and patterns.

Limitations

Limitations serve to highlight factors that could potentially impact the study's outcomes (Viera, 2023). This study specifically focuses on Hispanics and/or Latinos in education,

requiring participants to self-identify as such to proceed with the interview portion. However, a limitation arises from the lack of qualification, questioning, or verification of participants' claims regarding their Hispanic and/or Latino identity. I trusted them without verification.

Furthermore, the study refrained from imposing a rigid definition of what constitutes Hispanic or Latino identity. This decision was deliberate, recognizing that identity is deeply personal, particularly for individuals of color. Hispanics and Latinos encompass diverse racial backgrounds but often face scrutiny regarding their ethnicity and identity if they don't look a certain way or fit certain stereotypes. Thus, I opted not to create a situation where participants felt compelled to "prove" their ethnicity.

Another limitation stems from the time required for each interview, which impacted the sample size of the participant group. I could not get a comprehensive understanding of the total number of Hispanic and/or Latino teachers in the Oklahoma City metro area, which spans approximately 5,512 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). But Oklahoma City Public Schools is by far the largest district, and it employs 321 Hispanic teachers (OKCPS Statistical Report, 2023). I interviewed ten total Hispanic and/or Latino teachers and would have done more if time was not a factor.

Researcher bias is a limitation. In an interview, like any other form of communication, the receiver of the information may filter, misunderstand, or not receive all of the messages the speaker is giving. To mitigate this, I endeavored to be fully present during interviews, maintaining eye contact and actively listening. Additionally, I meticulously transcribed the video recordings and reviewed them multiple times to ensure accuracy. However, my interpretation of the information is confined to what was captured during the interviews.

Definitions

I interviewed ten Hispanic and/or Latino educators. To be able to participate in the study, they had to self-identify as Hispanic and/or Latino. The following are definitions to distinguish between someone who may identify as Hispanic and/or Latino.

Hispanic -Someone from, or whose origins are from a Spanish-speaking country. This term includes the following countries; Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Corujo, 2023).

Latino - Someone from, or whose origins are from a Latin American country. This term includes the following countries; Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Martin, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Corujo, 2023).

Although the term "Latinx" is used by some to allow for a gender-neutral form of the word Latino, I use the terms Latino or Latina. This is a personal preference and has nothing to do with being gender biased. Later, as I present brief bios on the participants, I use Latino or Latina to correspond with their gender.

Educator - All participants in this study are labeled as educators. For this dissertation, educator means a classroom teacher.

Assumptions Inherent Within the Study

Assumptions are fundamental beliefs taken to be true, silently underpinning the study.

Firstly, it was assumed that all participants were entirely truthful in their disclosures, including their identity as Hispanic and/or Latino teachers. Secondly, the assumption was made that my shared ethnicity with participants facilitated deeper and more candid responses, although it's acknowledged that ethnic matching doesn't always guarantee uninhibited comments. Another assumption is that the pathways into a career in education for Hispanics and/or Latinos differ from those of non-Hispanics and/or Latinos. Undoubtedly, there will be some differences in paths, but there is also a possibility that non-Hispanic and/or Latinos traverse almost identical paths into the profession. Lastly, it was assumed that there is a shared belief about the importance of diversity within the teacher workforce, forming the foundational premise for advocating for the increased representation of Hispanics and/or Latinos in education.

Professional Significance of the Study

The United States faces a widespread shortage of teachers, compounded by the underrepresentation of people of color within the profession (Carothers, et al., 2019). As elaborated further in subsequent chapters, students stand to gain numerous advantages when their teachers reflect their racial or ethnic background. By delving into the paths and motivations that led the participants in this study to pursue careers in education, school districts, universities, researchers and policymakers can refine their strategies and initiatives to more effectively tackle the teacher shortage while concurrently striving to enhance diversity and representation within the profession. Understanding the nuanced narratives and experiences of these educators offers invaluable insights into addressing systemic barriers and fostering a more inclusive educational landscape.

Summary

This dissertation embarks on an in-depth exploration of the diverse lived experiences of

current Latino or Hispanic educators, unraveling the intricate journeys that have shaped their paths towards becoming teachers within the Oklahoma City metro area. Employing a qualitative case study design informed by a LatCrit framework, the study seeks to delve into the multifaceted narratives of these educators, illuminating the pivotal moments and influences that steered them towards the teaching profession. By unraveling shared experiences and identifying common threads among participants, the research endeavors to uncover underlying motivating factors that can serve as catalysts for inspiring more Latinos and Hispanics to embark on careers in education, thereby addressing the persistent underrepresentation within the field.

Next is a literature review that delves into the formidable challenges confronting Hispanics and Latinos on their educational journey, from high school graduation to college attainment and eventual entry into the teaching profession. By examining the barriers and obstacles encountered by Hispanics and Latinos at various stages of their educational endeavors, the literature review provides critical insights into the systemic inequities and disparities that hinder their educational advancement.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

According to research dating as far back as the late 1800s, school reform has been deemed essential in establishing a system of "normal" education in the United States (Harris, 1896). Subsequently, every aspect of public education has come under public scrutiny in each successive decade. For instance, teacher quality (Eide et al., 2004; Flanders, 1965; Hampton, 2000; Winters, 1927), school curriculum (Dawson, 1931; Heyl & Young, 1945; Schwab, 1969; Henderson, 1992), and principal quality have all undergone thorough examination (Martin-Reynolds & Reynolds, 1983; Miller, 2013; Ornstein, 1991; Wey, 1964). Despite this extensive scrutiny and research, our schools continue to face challenges and are perceived as failing (MacChiarola & Gartner, 1989; Tyack & Cuban, 1997; Wolk, 2011).

School leaders and reformers have primarily focused on enhancing learning outcomes, typically measured by improved test scores. Numerous studies have demonstrated that better teacher preparation programs lead to increased learning (Boyd et al., 2009), improved curriculum enhances learning (Reys et al., 2003), formative assessments promote learning (Hutchings, 2003), and a conducive physical environment fosters learning (Choi et al., 2014). However, the abundance of research on enhancing learning outcomes has left practitioners overwhelmed and uncertain about where to commence. Consequently, schools continue to struggle, leading to demoralization among teachers when students fail to perform better, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of teacher attrition (Dunn, 2022).

Undoubtedly, a quality secondary education serves as a significant predictor of college success. However, access to quality education remains unequal, with individuals from marginalized communities, particularly people of color and those from lower socio-economic

backgrounds, often attending urban schools characterized by higher teacher turnover rates and lower-quality education (Carter et al., 2017). Despite these disparities, there has been a notable increase in college attendance among Hispanics and Latinos (Llagas, 2003). However, the desire to major in education appears to be waning, as evidenced by the declining percentage of education degrees awarded in recent years (NCESb, 2022). Given the challenges associated with attaining quality education and the diminishing interest in majoring in education, it begs the question: why do some Latinos and/or Hispanics opt to pursue careers in education?

This chapter will begin by examining scholarly literature on the challenges faced by Hispanic and Latino students in urban schools and institutions of higher education, drawing upon both national and Oklahoma City metro area data for support. Subsequently, research shedding light on the teacher shortage and its likely causes will be reviewed. Finally, the benefits of ethnic matching in education will be explored. Together, these bodies of research underscore the difficult yet crucial journey for Hispanics and/or Latinos to become educators.

Challenges in Education

Hispanic students encounter two primary sets of challenges within the education system. Firstly, they are predominantly enrolled in urban school districts (Pew Research Center, 2005), a factor that presents a myriad of obstacles. Secondly, Hispanics contend with challenges common to people of color, such as disproportionate discipline rates (Skiba et al., 2011; Welch & Payne, 2010), as well as those unique to their ethnic background, namely documentation/immigration issues and navigating bilingualism. These challenges give rise to a series of consequences that further compound the difficulties in obtaining a quality education.

Urban School Challenges

Urban school districts typically exhibit lower performance compared to their rural and suburban counterparts. A report by researchers at the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that "Urban students and schools compared less favorably to their nonurban counterparts on many measures even after accounting for the higher concentration of low-income students in urban schools" (Lipman et al., 1996, p. xi). Districts with a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students face challenges not only in recruiting but also in retaining teachers (Allensworth et al., 2009; Hanushek et al., 2004). The issue of teacher shortage will be further explored later in this chapter.

Urban school districts have a more diverse student population compared to their rural and suburban counterparts (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). While diversity is often viewed positively, school performance is found to be correlated either positively or negatively with the percentage of Black and Hispanic students (Schneider et al., 2021). The crux of the issue lies not in diversity itself, but rather in the lack of teacher training and understanding necessary to establish trusting relationships and effectively educate students who may not share similar backgrounds or experiences (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Teacher expectations significantly influence the rigor of instruction, serving as the primary predictor of student academic achievement (Barton, 2003), a topic that will be further explored in the Ethnic Match section later in this chapter.

Marginalized communities in the United States often exhibit common characteristics such as high population densities, low socioeconomic status, and racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007). Furthermore, the effects of low socioeconomic status and educational attainment are believed to be underestimated (Powers et al., 2016). Compounding these challenges, high-need schools are less likely to have effective

principals and teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Grissom et al., 2018). Urban school districts, like Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), experience higher rates of teacher turnover compared to suburban schools. From 2018 to 2020, urban schools witnessed a teacher turnover rate of 11.9%, surpassing the rates of suburban (8.4%) and rural (7%) schools (Lazarte Alcala, 2021). Newer teachers often lack the skills and knowledge of their veteran counterparts (Mehrotra et al., 2021), predisposing their students to inequitable classroom experiences. Consequently, urban students of color face substantial hurdles in accessing high-quality education. A high-quality education is crucial for equipping students with the academic skills necessary for success in college or university. Research from 2023 by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) revealed that the percentage of students from Oklahoma City Public Schools attending university was lower compared to those from suburban, private, or charter high schools in Oklahoma County (OSRHE, 2023).

Latino Student Challenges

In addition to navigating the complexities of an urban education environment, Latino and/or Hispanic students confront a distinct set of obstacles linked to their identity. This segment delves into these challenges and their ramifications for academic outcomes and educational accomplishments. Latino and/or Hispanic students often contend with a myriad of socio-cultural factors that intersect with their educational journey, shaping their experiences in profound ways. These challenges encompass linguistic diversity, cultural adaptation, and socio-economic disparities, among others, which can significantly impact their academic performance and overall educational attainment. By delving into these unique hurdles, we gain insight into the intricate dynamics at play within the educational landscape and underscore the importance of addressing the specific needs of Latino and/or Hispanic students to foster equitable and inclusive

learning environments.

Latino students exhibit the second-highest dropout rate among all ethnic groups (NCES, 2021). In 2010, their dropout rate was 16.7%, double the rate of all students at 8.3%. By 2021, although these figures improved significantly to 7.8% and 5.2%, respectively, Latinos still face a dropout rate 50% above the national average. This is particularly concerning considering the growing Latino population, comprising 28% of the school-age demographic, making them the second-largest group (Civil Right Data Collection (CRDC), 2023). It is projected that by 2050, Latinos will constitute one-fourth of the total U.S. population (Llagas, 2003), resulting in a sizable number of Latinos without a high school diploma if these statistics remain unchanged.

It is worth noting that Hispanic students encompass both foreign-born and U.S.-born individuals. The high dropout rate for Hispanics includes foreign-born Hispanics who never enrolled in school, thus inflating the overall dropout rate. But, even after factoring out foreign-born Hispanics, the Hispanic dropout rate remains higher than that of Whites and Blacks (Fry, 2003).

The birth rate among Hispanic teens is more than twice as high as that of White teens (Martin et al., 2021), contributing to increased dropout rates. Approximately 50% of teen mothers graduated high school compared to 90% of their childless peers (Perper et al., 2010). Moreover, children born to teen mothers are more likely to perform poorly in school, drop out, and become teen parents themselves (Hoffman, 2008), perpetuating the dropout cycle due to teen pregnancy.

Despite increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the United States, instances of discrimination and racism toward ethnic communities are on the rise. Latino students experience discrimination and racism in school settings, with a significant proportion of educators reporting

hate or bias incidents (Costello and Dillard, 2019). Racism appears to be the primary motivator behind these incidents, yet they often go unaddressed by school leaders, undermining efforts to maintain an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Polarizing remarks further marginalize communities. Following are some anti-Hispanic and Latino quotes from former President Donald Trump from USA Today with a little context. "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" in response to Haiti, El Salvador and African immigrants (Estepa, 2018). "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Korte & Gomez, 2016). This was during his announcement speech, where he further said he'd build a wall between the United States and Mexico. Unfortunately, there are many more instances of now presidential candidate Donald Trump making remarks to ridicule, disparage, and berate other races and cultures too. Further, when presented with an opportunity to reword his statements, he often doubled down on the hateful rhetoric. This sets an example that it is ok to say and act on these types of beliefs. His remarks likely inspired a group of Idaho teachers to go to school dressed up as "Mexicans" and the border wall for Halloween (Rosenberg, 2018). "Threats to ethnic/racial identity compromise specific social identity needs (belongingness, esteem, control) which relate to motivation for academic engagement and performance" (Verkuyten et al., 2019, p. 2). Hispanic students will not be able to perform to their highest level if they feel negatively about who they are.

Documentation, which refers to possessing lawful paperwork to reside in the United States, poses a significant barrier for many Latinos. Approximately one in ten Latino children live in what's termed a "mixed-status" household, wherein some family members possess legal

documentation and others do not (Urban Institute, 2001), while approximately one-third of all Hispanics in the US are undocumented (Millet & Pavilon, 2022). It is worth noting that statistics for undocumented Hispanics can vary due to differences in sources, methodology, and definitions (Kamarck & Stenglein, 2019). Not being a permanent resident or US citizen presents a series of hardships. Without documentation, individuals cannot legally work, often leading to longer hours at physically demanding jobs for lesser pay (Garcia Quijano, 2024). Being undocumented also results in paying much higher interest on mortgages and car loans due to perceived financial risk by lenders (Kagan, 2021), exacerbating financial stress on the family unit and creating a greater motivation for children of immigrants to drop out and enter the workforce to help financially.

For Latinos who are undocumented, another hardship is not qualifying for financial aid and most other scholarships. FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, helps over 10 million students every year, but undocumented students do not qualify (About Us, n.d.). Private scholarships are the only scholarships undocumented students can receive in Oklahoma. This severe restriction on access to funds for post-secondary education creates another obstacle for undocumented Hispanics to overcome if they want to go to college.

Navigating two languages is another challenge Latinos face. Thirty-nine percent of first-generation Latinos are bilingual, and this increases to 50% for second-generation Latinos (Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015). While bilingualism is often viewed as an asset, it can present challenges in educational settings where teachers and administrators may not understand the language and cultural differences. This can result in the inadvertent assignment of students to remedial classes and programs. A study showed that elementary teachers underestimated literacy skills for Hispanic children due to the perceived lack of mastery of the English language

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(Reardon and Galindo, 2007), while another study revealed that these students were placed in special education classes (Schmid, 2001). At best, these students are given educational assistance that supports and enhances their linguistic and scholastic development. On the other hand, they may receive inappropriate supports that have insufficient impact on these skills and miss out on learning due to a less rigorous curriculum.

Teacher Shortage

There are two general reasons for the teacher shortage. One is a pipeline issue, meaning there aren't as many students enrolling in college to become teachers. The other reason is that teachers are leaving the profession. Combined, these factors contribute to the situation where education job openings outpace hiring (Pelika, 2022). Over the past decade, the majority of teachers leaving the profession have been quitting, as opposed to leaving for other reasons, with a few exceptions (Pelika, 2022).

Education is not a popular career major, as evidenced by the significant decline in awarded college education degrees (Schaeffer, 2022). Between 2001 and 2018, Oklahoma saw an 80% drop in enrollment in university education programs (Wallis, 2023). This decline led Oklahoma City University to suspend its early childhood and elementary teacher preparation programs, and Southeastern Oklahoma State University to suspend its special education program (McDonnell, 2022). Alternative pathways to becoming a teacher have also seen decreased numbers. In the 2011-2012 school year, 621,898 individuals enrolled in a teacher prep program, with 203,997 completing a program that year (Title II Report, 2013). A decade later, in 2021-2022, enrollment dropped to 600,011 individuals, with 156,089 completing the program (Title II Report, 2023). This represents a 3.5% decrease in enrollments and a 23.4% decrease in completions. Not having appropriate certification was specifically identified by 66% of school

districts as a challenge in filling vacant teaching positions (NCES, 2021).

Demoralized teachers leave the profession (Dunn, 2022), contributing to the national teacher shortage. Like most other states, Oklahoma has experienced a teacher shortage for years (Nguyen et al., 2022; Will, 2024). According to the US Department of Education's website, Oklahoma has faced a teacher shortage in all core subjects (Math, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies) and Special Education since the 2017-2018 school year (TSA, n.d.). This shortage has led to a growing need for emergency-certified educators. In the 2017-2018 school year, 1,840 teachers were reported as emergency certified on the personnel report (OSDEa, n.d.). In the first six months of the 2023-2024 school year, 4,676 emergency certification requests were submitted (Martinez-Keel, 2024), marking a 154% increase expected to continue to rise.

The 2022-2023 school year saw a teacher turnover rate of 24%, the highest in a decade (OSDEb, n.d.). In response, the Oklahoma legislature allocated a record-high $5.7 billion investment in education during the same school year (Schambaugh, 2023). This funding increase went towards salary raises, increased per pupil funding, and six weeks of paid maternity leave, among other initiatives (Palmer, 2024). Of these, the salary increase has been the most popular among educators. However, its impact on recruitment and retention may not align with expectations, as similar pay increase initiatives across the country have yielded mixed results (Balter & Duncombe, 2008; Clotfelter et al., 2008). A poll found that a disproportionate percentage of Black (62%) and Hispanic/Latino (59%) educators, who are underrepresented in the teaching profession, were considering leaving (Walker, 2022). Teachers of color play a crucial role in the success of students of color, a topic that will be further discussed in the following section.

Ethnic matching

According to the most recent Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC, 2024), students in the United States were 50% white, 24.8% Hispanic, and 15.5% Black. The National Center of Education Statistics 2019 Digest of Education reports that 80% of teachers are white, with 9% Hispanic and 7% Black. This stark contrast highlights the ongoing shortage of diverse teachers in American education (Bond et al., 2015; Kena et al., 2016). Ethnic matching is the idea of matching the race/ethnicity of two groups. With this data, it's easy to see that for students of color, there usually is not an ethnic match in school for them. Various studies help provide context and reasoning for the benefits and importance of ethnic matching.

Teachers' perceptions of classroom behavior vary based on ethnic matching (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). Research investigating whether Black students exhibit more disruptive behavior with white teachers, or if white teachers unfairly evaluate Black students due to implicit biases, reveals insights. Drawing from oppositional culture theory, which suggests that oppositional behavior arises from an oppressed position, the study indicates that such behavior is more pronounced among Black students with white teachers. In both kindergarten and eighth-grade tests, white teachers rated Black students as less effective classroom citizens. However, when a racial match was present, Black students received more favorable evaluations.

Ethnic matching can trigger a trusting biological response (DeBruine, 2002). In an experimental setup where participants engaged in a monetary distribution game with individuals who were either facial morphs of themselves or others, participants exhibited greater trust when they were interacting with morphs of themselves. Given that individuals within the same ethnic group have a higher likelihood of sharing similar facial features, this finding suggests that individuals are more likely to trust those who are ethnically similar to them. Consequently,

students are more inclined to trust teachers who not only share their skin color but also resemble them physically.

Examining the impact of racial/ethnic composition in elementary schools, Benner and Crosnoe, 2011, explored how diversity influences academic and socioemotional functioning. Analyzing data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, they found that while neither school diversity nor racial/ethnic matching independently predicted changes in reading or math achievement, their combined influence was significant. Interestingly, white students benefited more from attending diverse schools and interacting with peers who resembled them ethnically. Conversely, minorities did not experience similar benefits, indicating complex dynamics at play in diverse educational environments.

A teacher's background and their similarities with their students' backgrounds are crucial (Rosen, 1972). In a study monitoring and interviewing thirty-seven women during their student teaching assignments, participants wrote autobiographical essays about their childhood before three teaching assignments. Advisors monitored classroom placements and rated teachers in meetings. The study identified dominant themes in three age groups and revealed which teachers were rated most effective by advisors. For those most effective with 2-5 year olds, themes of love, security, and childhood satisfaction were dominant. The 5-8 year olds faced early pressure toward mastery and assumed more adult roles. Teachers effective with 8-11 year olds often recalled inspirational teachers and intellectually active home environments. These findings suggest that teachers are more effective when their personal experiences align with the needs of their student groups.

"Workers felt most positive toward and most competent in working with children whom they described in ways that were very similar to the ways in which they described themselves as

children" (pg. 411).

Ethnic matching also influences teacher retention. Teaching in a school where the teacher's race does not match results in lower satisfaction for white teachers (Renzulli et al., 2011). Kochanek (2005, p. 9) emphasizes the importance of social similarity (ethnic match) in initial trust formation but adds a caveat: "Unless social similarity is accompanied by respect, competence, integrity, and personal regard, the initial bond created by social and physical characteristics will fade away." This underscores the need for ethnic matching to extend beyond mere demographic representation and emphasizes the importance of educators demonstrating trust-building behaviors. Fostering a culture of trust is essential, particularly in diverse school districts like urban schools, where competent, respectful, and integrity-driven educators are needed.

This dissertation aims to synthesize three distinct research areas, shedding light on their intersectionality. The first body of research shows there are challenges present in urban schools, particularly their inadequacy as learning environments for students of color. Latinos encounter additional hurdles specific to their ethnicity within these already challenging urban settings. The second area of research demonstrates the beneficial impact of ethnic matching for students of color. The last area contends with the consequences of the current teacher shortage crisis.

These areas intersect, emphasizing the critical role of Latino and/or Hispanic educators in the Oklahoma City metro area. Through interviews with ten current Hispanic and/or Latino educators, I aim to explore their motivations and lived experiences that led them to pursue a career in education. This endeavor simultaneously contributes to all three bodies of research. By delving into their school experiences, we gain valuable insights into public urban education. Additionally, by identifying significant experiences and interactions in their lives, we may

uncover instances of ethnic matching with teachers or administrators. These findings may offer insights into strategies for removing obstacles and creating more opportunities for current Latino and/or Hispanic students to consider a career in education, thus addressing the teacher shortage issue.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed as a framework to address racism in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Ladson-Billings and Tate introduced CRT to education studies to explore "the role of education in reproducing or interrupting current practices" (Ladson-Billings, 2022).

Latin Critical Theory, or LatCrit, is a subset of CRT that emerged due to the underrepresentation of marginalized groups within the CRT framework. While CRT primarily focused on issues between white and Black communities, LatCrit provides a platform to examine issues and disparities through a Latino lens. This study adopts LatCrit as its theoretical framework.

LatCrit encompasses four functions relevant to this study. Firstly, it involves the production of knowledge (Valdes, 2012). This dissertation aims to generate knowledge specific to Latino and/or Hispanic educators in the Oklahoma City metro area. Secondly, it advances social transformation (Valdes, 2012). Implementing the recommendations or conducting future studies suggested by this research could encourage more Latinos to enter the teaching profession, thereby diversifying the workforce. Thirdly, LatCrit fosters community building and coalition (Valdes, 2012). The narratives and themes explored in this dissertation can resonate with other educators, especially Latino educators, fostering a sense of connection and solidarity. Although the lived experiences of the ten participants vary, the identified themes likely resonate

with many Latino educators. Finally, LatCrit promotes the expansion and connection of antisubordination struggles (Valdes, 2012). Antisubordination advocates for legal reforms to address social inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups (Wiktionary, 2022). By sharing their stories and research findings, this study aims to inspire action to reform structures that perpetuate inequities faced by Latinos pursuing careers in education.

Conclusion

The teaching profession has undergone continuous scrutiny, with reform efforts typically emphasizing improvements in test scores. However, education is a multifaceted endeavor, requiring a nuanced understanding of teachers and students as unique individuals rather than mere inputs or cogs in a machine.

Urban schools confront challenges both common and distinct from those of other educational settings. Extensive research has explored these challenges, highlighting the pivotal roles of teachers, students, and their families in navigating them. Of particular significance are teachers of color, whose presence has been shown to positively impact all students they engage with.

Amidst the national teacher shortage, there's a growing recognition of the barriers preventing people of color from entering the teaching profession. Yet, little attention has been given to understanding the motivating factors driving current Latino and/or Hispanic teachers to work in urban school districts. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap in research, shedding light on the unique experiences and motivations of these educators. Through this exploration, it aims to contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on teacher recruitment and retention in urban education.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

As a Hispanic educator with two decades of experience, I've often wondered why I never initially considered pursuing a career in education. This study seeks to shed light on the motivations of individuals like myself who have chosen to become a teacher. Specifically, it aims to identify the driving factors and pivotal experiences that influenced the career trajectories of ten Hispanic and/or Latino educators within the Oklahoma City Metro area.

As outlined in the preceding chapter, this research draws from three primary areas: urban education challenges, the teacher shortage, and the concept of ethnic matching. Latinos encounter hurdles unique to their community, compounded by the complexities of urban public schooling. Moreover, access to higher education, including scholarships and financial aid, remains limited for many Hispanic students. The teacher shortage is fueled by high rates of attrition among educators and a decreasing number of college students selecting education as their major. Additionally, research underscores the benefits of ethnically matched teacher-student relationships, emphasizing the need for greater diversity, including Hispanic representation, within the teaching profession.

The insights gleaned from this study hold significance for those interested in increasing the representation of Hispanic and/or Latino educators. By examining and reflecting on the study's findings, others can endeavor to cultivate similar experiences and motivations among current Hispanic students. Furthermore, aspiring or current Latino educators who may feel isolated or undervalued in their profession stand to gain support and validation from this study's findings. By exploring both commonalities and differences, individuals can gain valuable perspective and recognize that they are not alone in their experiences.

Employing Critical Race Theory and LatCrit as theoretical frameworks, this study adopts a case study methodology. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually with ten educators purposefully selected based on their self-identification as Latino and/or Hispanic, current teaching roles, and location within the Oklahoma City metro area. The qualitative design was chosen to facilitate a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach allows for rich and nuanced insights into the multifaceted factors shaping the career paths of Hispanic and/or Latino educators in urban educational settings, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the field.

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

As mentioned in Chapter 1, becoming an educator was not my plan. In fact, the mere notion of attending college seemed like an improbable feat given the circumstances of my upbringing. Yet, against the odds, I defied expectations and ultimately ended up in this amazing profession.

I grew up in the projects on the west side of San Antonio with my mom, dad, and two younger sisters. My dad, a Vietnam veteran, grappled with PTSD, and did not work. Consequently, my mom, who had been a nurse in Guadalajara, Mexico, had to step up as the sole provider for our family. The Lincoln Courts, my projects, were probably about 75% Hispanic, 25% African-American and 100% of us were below the poverty line.

One summer day, I witnessed a change in my mom's demeanor. She returned home from work with an uncharacteristically defeated expression, a stark contrast to her usual strength and pride. She revealed that the nursing home where she worked was shutting down, leaving her

uncertain about our family's financial future. Faced with the realization of what this meant for my family, I took it upon myself to secure employment. I had taken electrical trades at school and was able to join an electric company. That summer, I juggled two jobs—working as an electrician during the day and as a busser at Olive Garden at night. From Monday through Saturday I worked at least 16-hour days, and on Sundays, I worked at least 6 hours. I took public transportation everywhere, so I was only able to sleep 2 to 3 hours except on Sundays where I'd sleep around 8 hours. I paid all the bills for the family that summer and my mom got a job at another nursing home a little before school started back up.

This experience profoundly impacted me, leading me to consider dropping out of school for the first time. As a Hispanic, the eldest son, and the only male in the family, I felt an immense obligation to provide for my loved ones, even if it meant sacrificing my own well-being. However, the pivotal moment came when my dad, in a fit of rage, held a gun to my head during an argument. In response, I made the difficult decision to move out and live independently with my best friend. We lived in our own place and as two 16 year olds and did whatever we wanted to do. Luckily, school was always easy for me, and I didn't consider dropping out again.

Despite the challenges I faced, I excelled academically and was recognized as a National Hispanic Scholar Finalist after taking the PSAT. This achievement presented me with a full scholarship to the University of Oklahoma—a prospect I had never considered. However, as I grappled with the decision to leave San Antonio for college, I received news that my girlfriend was pregnant. This unexpected turn of events intensified my internal struggle, but ultimately, I resolved to pursue higher education as a means of securing a better future for my family.

As the first in my family to go to college, I learned almost everything about college the hard way. Initially majoring in Electrical Engineering, I later switched to Management of

Information Systems (MIS), and finally settled on Business Management. I chose my first college major because I thought it would be similar to my experience as an electrician, but I was very wrong. I changed to MIS because a couple of my fraternity brothers were pursuing that major and said it was pretty easy. I switched again almost out of desperation to make use of the college credits I earned, and to major in something as flexible as possible. I still didn't know where I wanted to work when I graduated and did not want to limit myself into a specific field. Throughout this time, I remained steadfast in my commitment to building a better future for myself and my family.

The summer before my second senior year I purchased a car from my little sister and was looking for a job. I talked to my pledge brother Greg, and he told me I could go to his interview for a job that kind of landed in his lap. Greg is a bit of a jokester, so I told him I was "serious serious" about getting a job. He told me that he couldn't take the job because he was leaving the state to pursue a graduate degree at Columbia and that he was "serious serious" about me interviewing in his place. Against my wishes, he called the principal and explained the situation. The principal agreed and asked if I had time to meet with him "right now". I told him I was not dressed for an interview, and did not have any printed resumes to give him. He said we would just talk, so I drove up to Oklahoma City from Norman in shorts, sandals, and a polo shirt and interviewed to be an alternative school teacher at a new charter school with only the 20-minute drive up there to prepare myself. After a two-hour interview that felt more like a conversation with an old friend, I was offered the job on the spot. Despite this very strange entrance into the profession, twenty years later, I am still in education.

"This can't be normal, right?" I've asked myself a million times. My high school experience, my path to college, my teaching interview, and everything else can't possibly be

normal! As I've served as a teacher and administrator in various schools in the Oklahoma City metro area, I've learned that there is no "normal" path into education. Each teacher has a unique story that has shaped their journey into the classroom. This study seeks to explore the motivations and lived experiences of other Hispanic and/or Latino educators in the Oklahoma City metro area, shedding light on the diverse paths that have led them to the teaching profession.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated from legal scholars as a strategy to confront racism within society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), offering a framework that examines the intersection of critical theory, race, racism, and the law (Crenshaw et al., 1995). In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced CRT to educational, presenting it as an "interdisciplinary approach that seeks to understand and combat race inequity in society" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 1). Given that this study investigates diverse teachers, it necessitates a critical examination of how race influences interpersonal dynamics and societal structures.

Although CRT lacks a singular definition, scholars have outlined various tenets, one very applicable to this study is the "experiential knowledge of people of color," asserting that individuals from marginalized communities possess unique insights to advocate for others within their group (Yosso, 2005). This principle aligns with other researchers' tenets, such as Delgado & Stefancic's concept of revisionist history and Kumasi's emphasis on validating people of color's experiential knowledge (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Kumasi, 2015). Bearing these tenets in mind before each interview ensured that the data gathered valued each participant as the expert on their lived experiences. CRT is characterized as an approach that integrates lived experience with racial realism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). In each interview, I explored the role that their race/culture/heritage played a role in their life, and how it led them

to where they are today.

As detailed in Chapter 2, Hispanic students encounter numerous educational challenges not faced by their white counterparts. CRT illuminates how race, rather than ability, can constrain post-secondary opportunities for these students, underscoring the crucial role of education in addressing systemic inequities (Crenshaw, 2002).

Latino/a Critical Theory, LatCrit, emerged in 1995 as a response to the underrepresentation of Latinos in CRT scholarship (Valdes, 2005), emphasizing four primary functions: the production of knowledge, the advancement of social transformation, the expansion and connection of antisubordination struggles, and the cultivation of community and coalition (Valdes, 2012). Each of these functions is evident in this study.

The overarching framework for this research is CRT, with a specific focus on LatCrit, given the study's emphasis on Latino experiences. These frameworks facilitate an exploration of how participants' racial identities intersect with their experiences in urban schools, language, immigration status, and other factors. Through the lens of LatCrit, it becomes apparent that racially charged rhetoric, such as that employed by former President Trump, perpetuates racial stereotypes, leading to discrimination and disparate treatment, ultimately affecting educational outcomes.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design employed for this study was a qualitative case study, chosen for its ability to explore, explain, or describe events within their everyday contexts (Yin, 2009). Stake (1995, p. 237) defines a case study as both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning. Qualitative studies aim to provide meaning and explanation for phenomena (McEwan & McEwan, 2003), offering flexibility in design while prioritizing

context and meaning (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Interviews serve as a primary method for data collection in qualitative studies (Gill et al., 2008), functioning as a form of consultation where the researcher seeks insights from individuals (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017, p. 3).

Qualitative studies seek to explore or justify the reasons behind phenomena (Stewart et al., 2008), making them suitable for examining the lived experiences of individuals, particularly considering their identity as Latinos. Among interview types, structured interviews afford the interviewer greater control but may lack richness due to their rigid structure (Consalvo, 2023). Conversely, unstructured interviews may yield unrelated streams of consciousness and provide minimal control (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). Semi-structured interviews strike a balance by posing the same set of questions while allowing flexibility for follow-up and clarifying inquiries (Alshenqeeti, 2014), making them the most commonly utilized type in qualitative studies. In this study, a semi-structured interview format was employed, wherein all participants were asked the same 13 questions, with the interviewer interjecting follow-up or clarifying questions as needed to ensure comprehensive exploration of topics raised during the interview and to capture participants' voices fully.

This dissertation documented the narratives of ten Hispanic and/or Latino educators, tracing their journeys from high school through college to their current roles as teachers. Through this exploration, their past educational and family experiences were scrutinized to discern the motivations behind their career choices.

Participant Sampling

Selection of the participants for a qualitative study is a crucial step, as it significantly influences the study's outcomes. The primary aim of this research is to uncover the motivating factors and experiences that have driven current Hispanic and/or Latino teachers to their careers.

A secondary objective is to gain a deeper understanding of the career paths they navigated. Given the specific focus on Latino and/or Hispanic educators, only individuals who self-identified as such were selected for participation in this study.

Selecting an appropriate research site was critical to ensuring access to a sufficient number of Latino educators for interviews. Initially uncertain about securing even five participants, I set a goal of conducting interviews with ten teachers. While Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) stands as the state's second-largest district, my personal experience within it left me unsure about garnering sufficient participants solely from OKCPS. Consequently, I opted to expand the scope to encompass educators from the broader Oklahoma City metro area, including various other school districts and approximately a dozen charter schools.

To procure the intended ten participants for interviews, I compiled a spreadsheet listing all known Latino teachers, with assistance from my wife, who has 14 years of experience as a classroom teacher. To my surprise, the list quickly expanded to 13 with minimal effort. Recognizing that these individuals were all educators my wife and I had worked with, I deemed it prudent to create a separate list to mitigate any potential influence of personal relationships between them and either of us.

Given the challenges with submitting a formal request to all the school districts and charter schools in the OKC metro area to send an "all employees" email, I turned to social media as a means to recruit participants. I posted a Facebook message that said,

"I need a little bit of help friends.

My dissertation will examine reasons Latinos/Hispanics get into education as a career and I need to interview OKC metro area teachers for my study.
If you know of any Latino/Hispanic teachers who would be willing to participate in a one hour

interview, please DM me their email address, or tag them below and I'll follow up with them.

Thanks!"

Over the next few days, this post was shared 13 times, received 70 comments and 34 reactions. Ultimately, I was able to create a spreadsheet of 53 Hispanic educators in the OKC metro area. I needed to get an email address for most of them, so I sent Facebook messenger messages to all educators I didn't have an email address for. After following up with everyone at least twice, I had a list of 37 Latino educators and their email addresses. The next step was to email the recruitment document (Appendix A) and have them schedule a time for the interview. Of the 37, 11 scheduled an interview with me. One participant did not show up for her scheduled time, so we rescheduled. She missed that time slot too, and we never rescheduled.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was comprised of four fundamental steps. First, I designed the research questions. Second, I determined the methods and logistics for conducting the interviews. Third, I conducted the interviews. Lastly, I transcribed the interviews.

The primary objective in designing the interview questions (see Appendix B) was to foster a conversational atmosphere. Following the initial questions to gather their name and demographic information, I posed an "easy" question to initiate dialogue. Asking them to share about themselves served as a low-pressure prompt, enabling me to jot down pertinent information for follow up questions while also assessing their nonverbal cues and overall comfort level. Additionally, I structured the questions chronologically to make them feel they were giving me a narrative of their lives rather than answering a series of formal research questions. We discussed their high school and college experiences, delved into their family dynamics, and explored the support they received during their academic journey. Given the

semi-structured nature of the interviews, I took advantage to ask follow up questions to obtain more context and a deeper understanding as deemed necessary. The last series of questions captured information on their college major or majors, reasons why they might have changed majors, and the attitudes of friends and family when they decided to be teachers. The final question, "Do you have anything additional you want to tell me…," provided participants with an opportunity to share any missed information they deemed significant.

After formulating the interview questions, I had to determine the logistics for conducting the interviews. In the recruitment letter, I offered the option of in-person or virtual interviews. Despite my preference for the intimacy of face-to-face interviews, all participants opted for virtual sessions. This choice appeared to stem from convenience, as in-person interviews require travel and formal arrangements not needed for virtual meetings. Health concerns did not seem to influence this decision, particularly given that we are beyond the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To streamline interview scheduling, I utilized Calendly to share my availability and enable participants to select a convenient time, coupled with Zoom for hosting the virtual meetings. Calendly's features allowed for automated reminder emails and consent document sharing. However, these functions did not consistently operate flawlessly, requiring me to personally email or message participants prior to our scheduled interviews and discuss the consent document at the beginning of each session. Although Calendly's integration with Zoom functioned smoothly on several occasions, I supplemented with direct email communication to ensure all participants received the Zoom link. Consent to record the conversation was obtained at the beginning of each interview, and the closed caption feature was used to aid transcription.

Following the interviews, Zoom automatically provided a video file and a separate transcription file. I meticulously reviewed the transcription while simultaneously watching the corresponding video, pausing and rewinding as needed to ensure verbatim accuracy. A verbatim transcription captures every utterance, including stutters and filler words (Feller, 2023). Remarkably, Zoom's transcription was approximately 90% accurate, mostly encountering challenges in accurately transcribing Spanish -including names- and with one participant's accent.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process was done in four steps. Firstly, I ensured the accuracy of all transcripts. Secondly, I reviewed the printed transcripts and made notes in the margins to begin identifying codes or patterns observed. Then, I revisited the interviews to refine the codes and patterns and began organizing codes into initial themes. Following this, I entered the data into a spreadsheet to formalize the codes and themes.

Ensuring the accuracy of the data was crucial as the interviews constituted the sole data source. Each participant's words had to be transcribed with 100% accuracy. To achieve this, I printed the transcripts generated by Zoom and carefully edited them while watching the corresponding interview videos. The pause and rewind features were invaluable during this process, with most transcriptions requiring a few hours of editing to attain complete accuracy. Upon finalizing the transcription, I watched the video again in its entirety to confirm its accuracy.

Although I had preliminary ideas for potential themes, I aimed for the coding process to be inductive, or "ground up." Inductive coding involves deriving codes directly from the data rather than imposing preconceived notions of what the codes should be (Thomas, 2003), making it preferable for exploratory research. As I reviewed the transcriptions, I made margin notes

such as "dropped out" or "very involved in school" to capture key elements of the participants' narratives.

After completing this process for all transcripts, I repeated it, this time grouping the codes into themes. For instance, codes like "dropped out," "didn't feel accepted," and "no high school teachers looked like me" were categorized under the theme of "adverse high school experiences." Given that the interview questions provided a chronological account of the participants' lived experiences, it facilitated specifying the timing or context of their narratives. Some participants reported negative high school experiences followed by more positive college experiences.

Following the identification of themes, I organized them in a spreadsheet. I began by listing the names of each participant and filled the columns adjacent to their names with their pseudonyms and corresponding codes. Subsequently, I color-coded the codes based on the themes identified during the transcription review. This color-coded spreadsheet enabled me to visualize the themes and extract the major research findings.

As the sole researcher in this study, investigator triangulation was not feasible. Investigator triangulation involves involving two or more researchers in the same study, allowing for diverse perspectives and ideas, and ensuring the accuracy of findings. Consequently, I conducted all data analysis independently.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process provided essential guidelines to ensure the ethical standards of research were upheld. The details of my IRB application are included in Appendix C. Risks associated with the study can be categorized into two main areas: those specific to participants and those related to data.

One potential risk specific to participants, as outlined in the IRB application, is the possibility of COVID-19 exposure during in-person interviews. Although all participants ultimately opted for virtual interviews, precautionary measures such as mask-wearing and adherence to social distancing protocols were outlined in case of in-person interactions.

Several risks pertain specifically to data, primarily concerning participant privacy. To mitigate the risk of deductive reidentification, I selected a broad geographic area—the OKC metro area—which encompasses numerous teachers from various schools and school districts. Additionally, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. Furthermore, to safeguard participant privacy, I retained the interview videos only until the transcription process was completed with 100% accuracy. School identifiers were redacted from the transcripts, and pseudonyms were used. After coding and theming the interviews, the data was entered into a spreadsheet, and the paper copies of the transcripts were securely shredded. These measures significantly minimize the risk of participant identification.

Another ethical consideration is my positionality and reflexivity, as they could influence the study outcomes. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my own lived experiences strongly influenced my interest in researching this topic. Throughout the study, I remained mindful of the potential impact of my personal experiences on the interpretation of themes and codes. This process of self-awareness and critical evaluation is known as reflexivity. Reflexivity involves continuous self-examination by researchers to assess how their subjectivity and context may influence the research process (Olmos-Vega, et al., 2023). The rigorous measures to check for accuracy described in the data analysis section further ensured that the coding and themes remained inductive and objective, rather than subjective.

Limitations

Limitations serve to shed light on factors that could impact the outcomes of a study (Miles, 2019). This study delves into the experiences of Hispanics and/or Latinos in education. One limitation worth noting is the lack of formal validation or verification of participants' self-identified Hispanic and/or Latino status. Acknowledging the deeply personal nature of identity, I refrained from requiring participants to provide documentation or other evidence to substantiate their ethnicity.

Additionally, time constraints present a significant limitation. While there is a considerable population of Hispanic teachers in the Oklahoma City metro area, the time-intensive nature of conducting interviews, transcribing them, and analyzing the data imposed practical constraints. Each interview lasted approximately an hour, with several additional hours dedicated to transcription and subsequent coding and theming. Although the inclusion of more interviews could have enriched the study, the urgency of meeting dissertation deadlines necessitated a more pragmatic approach to participant recruitment and data collection.

Lastly, researcher bias poses a noteworthy limitation. Despite efforts to mitigate bias, it remains a pervasive concern. Aware of the potential for unconscious biases to influence data interpretation, I actively guarded against this to minimize their impact. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent risk of personal bias and its potential to subtly shape the research process and findings. Ongoing vigilance and reflexivity were employed to counteract bias, but complete elimination is very difficult.

Conclusion

As a Hispanic educator with twenty years of experience, I've often questioned why the thought of pursuing a career in education didn't occur to me earlier. This study endeavors to shed light on the motivations behind individuals, like myself, who have chosen the path of education. Specifically, it aims to uncover the driving factors and pivotal experiences that have shaped the journey of ten Hispanic and/or Latino educators within the Oklahoma City Metro area.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the groundwork for this study is laid upon research spanning three reserach areas: urban education challenges, the persistent teacher shortage, and the significance of ethnic representation. For Latino students, the road to educational attainment is fraught with unique hurdles, compounding the already existing difficulties encountered in urban public-school systems. A high school diploma or GED is a prerequisite for college enrollment. For those who graduate, numerous Hispanic students still face formidable barriers in accessing essential financial aid and scholarships for higher education. Furthermore, the ongoing teacher shortage stems from both high attrition rates among educators and a dismally low percentage of college students opting to pursue education majors. Research underscores the tangible benefits of fostering an ethnic match between students and teachers, highlighting the importance of increasing the representation of teachers of color, including Hispanics, within the profession of education.

The findings gleaned from this research hold substantial value for individuals invested in increasing the numbers of Hispanic and/or Latino educators. By delving into and reflecting upon the insights garnered from this study, stakeholders can strive to extend similar forms of support or incentives to current Hispanic students, thereby influencing their trajectory towards a career in education. Additionally, this research serves as a resource for aspiring or current Latino educators

who may have grappled with feelings of isolation or insignificance at various stages of their careers. By embracing both the commonalities and differences present in these narratives, individuals are able to reflect and gain a deeper understanding of their own circumstances.

Employing LatCrit and Critical Race Theory, as its frameworks, this study adopts a case study methodology. Through individual virtual semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected educators, each self-identifying as Latino and/or Hispanic and actively engaged in teaching within the Oklahoma City metro area, the research endeavors to provide a nuanced exploration of their lived experiences. The ensuing chapter will delve into the narratives shared by the participants, offering a comprehensive examination of their journeys.

CHAPTER FOUR

Participant's Journey into Education

Each participant in this study offered a wealth of insights and experiences, each uniquely shaping their journey into the field of education. It's essential to provide a glimpse into their individual paths to contextualize the subsequent findings. While the following section does not constitute a comprehensive biography for each participant, it offers a concise overview of their high school and college experiences, as well as their entry into the teaching profession. Additionally, it delves into the crucial role of family support, which played a significant role in shaping their educational and career trajectories.

Araceli

Araceli is Mexican-American and was born and raised in Oklahoma City. Currently in her fifth year of teaching, she serves as a middle school ELD teacher, having previously taught fourth grade for three years before working at her current school for the past two years, including this year. Despite her parents' desire for her to attend a magnet school, Araceli opted to remain in her neighborhood school. Her parents' desire stemmed from her older brother's unfavorable school experiences at their neighborhood high school. Looking back at her high school experience as a mother, she realizes what her mom was trying to protect her from. She recounted a story of a conversation she heard at a soccer game. A parent of the opposing team was on the phone and said "I can't believe I'm here. What if I get shot?" She now realizes that there were "dangerous things" happening at her high school. She knew they were happening, but never believed they would happen to her.

Actively engaged in extracurricular activities and advanced coursework throughout high school, she played volleyball for four years and managed the soccer team, graduating with

twelve college credits.

Driven by a desire to excel, Araceli enrolled in concurrent and AP classes under the encouragement – or perhaps insistence – of an assistant principal, who she felt targeted her and her group of friends. She appreciated the opportunities these classes provided, she also felt professors were very lenient in their grading. Her close-knit group of friends from high school, who now work together in community-oriented roles, influenced her decision to pursue higher education. Her parents' limited knowledge of the process didn't stop them from providing moral support, but they couldn't tell her about scholarships or financial aid, so she had to learn on her own. She was the first in her whole family, extended family included, to go to college. One of her *tias* (aunts) bought her a MacBook for college because she was proud of her.

In college, she started as a psychology major because it was her favorite college course in high school. She didn't like it and switched to Criminal Justice and then to Human Relations. Because she switched majors, and because financial aid was running out, she graduated with a degree in multidisciplinary studies because that allowed her to graduate in four years. After graduation, she worked for a professor and decided to work in human relations. She saw a school district was hiring in HR and went to apply. While there, she saw a sorority sister who had gotten a promotion and needed someone to take the spot she vacated, so she applied and got it. The position had her going to a lot of schools, and she recalls hearing student's names get "butchered" by their teachers. This stayed with her because her last name "was always butchered" when she was in school. This motivated her to pursue a teaching position, and she thought she could "get her feet wet" in elementary because it would be easier. She quickly learned she was wrong! She then transferred to middle school as another friend encouraged her to be an ELD teacher because she had done so for a few years.

Her mom has supported her 100% as an educator, but her dad hasn't really been on board with her career choice. On the day of our interview, her dad tried to talk her out of teaching! He always tells her that she works too hard and is not getting paid enough. She doesn't disagree and says she probably wouldn't be a teacher if it wasn't for her husband's ability to take care of the family finances with his job. She stays in education because she knows and is a part of the community. She wants to give back and make a difference but admits to considering quitting when things get hectic at the beginning of each semester and during testing in April.

Azucena

Azucena, a Venezuelan immigrant who has been in the United States for the past five years, teaches English Language Development (ELD) classes to middle school students. Her educational journey began in Venezuela, where she attended an all-girls Catholic school but took advantage of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and spent a year in Seattle, Washington, as a foreign exchange student. During her time in Seattle, she fondly recalls staying with a host family who nicknamed her due to the difficulty of pronouncing her first and last names, a practice that has continued with some of her students and colleagues, who often refer to her by Miss "the first initial of her last name."

In Venezuela, Azucena's school emphasized the importance of learning English alongside another language, given the prevalence of English in her hometown, an "oil city." Despite the cultural and institutional differences between her Venezuelan schooling and her time in a Seattle public school, she found both to hold similarly high academic standards.

Upon completing high school, Azucena aspired to pursue a career in teaching, but her parents' expectations -and insistence- steered her towards studying law so she could follow in their footsteps. Despite her desire to teach, she acquiesced to her parents' wishes and obtained a

law degree. However, her passion for education persisted, leading her to secure a position as an adjunct law professor after graduation.

The deteriorating situation in Venezuela prompted Azucena's migration to the United States, where she eventually found employment at her current school following the pandemic. Driven by her experiences as an immigrant and a desire to empower students like herself, Azucena pursued further education and will be graduating with a master's degree in Bilingual Education and Teaching English as a Second Language in May 2024.

Her journey reflects a steadfast commitment to her students and her belief in education as a tool for empowerment and social change. As she continues her career, Azucena endeavors to serve as a role model for immigrant students, embodying the potential for a brighter future through education and perseverance.

Elisa

Elisa's journey begins in Oklahoma City, where she was born and raised. She now proudly serves as a dance teacher in her 12th year at the high school she graduated from. An application-based school became her alma mater thanks to recommendations from friends who recognized her talent and passion for dance. Growing up with her aunt's dance studio as a second home, Elisa's transition into the school's dance program was a natural progression. She was further encouraged by older classmates who urged her to audition. The school went from 6th through 12th grades and rigorous course options. The "regular academic classes" were honors classes and they had more advanced options like International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Despite initially underestimating her chances, Elisa successfully secured her place in the school and began a seven-year journey, majoring in dance while also taking advanced coursework.

Reflecting on her high school experience, Elisa fondly recalls the supportive environment

fostered by dedicated teachers who challenged and inspired her to excel. She "loved everything about high school." She fondly remembers volunteering to teach sixth-grade dance as a senior, a greatly fulfilling experience that ignited her passion for teaching. Encouraged by her Mexican-American mother, an OBGYN nurse practitioner, and her father, a skilled handyman freelancer from Mexico, Elisa was driven to pursue higher education despite financial challenges. Her father's encouragement was verbal as he reminded her periodically that he came to the US so she can take advantage of all the opportunities. Even though she was supported, she had to figure out a lot of things on her own and find a way to pay for school. Her mom had gone to college but said it had been a long time ago and couldn't help navigate the process. With her mother's commitment to covering the first year of tuition and her father's verbal encouragement, Elisa navigated the complexities of college enrollment and financing, ultimately relying on loans to fund her education.

In college, she actually started as a dance performance major, but after her first semester, a dance education degree was created. She and two others were the "guinea pigs" for that degree. She took all the classes a dance performance major had to take and all the classes an education major had to take. For her student teaching experience, a long-time family friend was her mentor teacher. She recalls dancing at her mentor teacher's wedding, and her mentor teacher dancing at her quinceañera. The experience is one she will never forget and the reason why she taught there for eight years before moving to teach at her alma mater. It opened her eyes and heart to the lives of these students who looked like her but didn't grow up the same way. This high school was not an application school, and she remembered stark differences in the facilities. For three years, she taught dance in the cafeteria while the auditorium was being renovated and remembers syrup, and food on the floor during first hour. Students had to change in the restrooms. People would

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walk through "her classroom" to get breakfast if they were late.

She also incorporated different music to keep the students' interest. They weren't fond of jazz and ballet, and instead wanted to dance to Daddy Yankee, so she adjusted her expectations to be able to connect to them. She's thankful for this experience and felt she learned more about her identity as a Latina. When she left this school, one of her former students who went to college to major in dance education took her position.

Fabian

Fabian, a 30-year-old Mexican-American born in Mexico. His two older siblings were born in Mexico, while his youngest sibling was born in the United States. He currently teaches English Language Development to high school students. He attended the same high school where he now teaches, recalling it as "very Mexican." He categorized his teachers into two groups: the experienced ones who effectively engaged with students, and the "white savior" types who seemed to have a patronizing attitude towards students of color like him.

Reflecting on his high school experience, he vividly remembers a period marked by frequent fights and even instances where guns were brought onto campus, necessitating lockdowns. The student council, unphased during these trying times, sold T-shirts with "I survived lockdown" as a fundraiser. Despite dropping out in his senior year to pursue work and help provide some financial stability for his family, Fabian's trajectory changed when a coworker inspired him to pursue his high school diploma. While on break, his coworker was reminiscing of when he started working there, and how much the company had grown. He reflected on that statement and said "I don't want to be here 20 to 30 years."

Another pivotal moment occurred when a friend working in education encouraged him to apply for a job at a school. Opting for the role with the fewest qualifications, he became a

security specialist, stationed at the school's entrance near the office. His natural rapport with students caught the attention of the instructional coach and principal, who both encouraged him to go into teaching. Learning about a program that offered assistance for his bachelor's degree, he seized the opportunity.

Throughout his college journey, Fabian remained committed to his work in the school district. While initially majoring in education, he made a strategic switch in his final semester to expedite graduation, opting out of student teaching.

Jaime

Jaime is of Mexican descent and was the first in his family of 10 to be born in the US. He lived in two other towns before his mom moved them to Oklahoma City to escape a domestic violence situation. He remembers him, his mom, and eight siblings living in their van surviving on bologna sandwiches and water.

His high school years began on a rough note when he was jumped by fellow students in his first week at his neighborhood school. Concerned for his safety, Jaime's mom swiftly transferred him to another school in the district, where he encountered a more diverse student body composed of Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians. With the mix of cultures, racial tensions occasionally boiled over, leading to two riots. Later, Jaime noticed a divide within the Hispanic community, between those who, like him, grew up in the area, and newer arrivals to the U.S.

Throughout high school, Jaime found himself in English Language Development (ELD) classes, which he found frustrating and senseless. He questioned the relevance of the curriculum, recalling absurd assignments like identifying a picture of a king among nonsensical options like a library, fish and a book. Frustrated by what he saw as the unfair treatment of ELD students, Jaime spoke out against the overidentification of students in these classes at a school board

meeting. His passion for advocacy even led him to attend activism events, like the National Council of La Raza conference in Houston, determined to fight for his community.

Despite the challenges he faced in school, Jaime discovered a sense of belonging and purpose playing soccer. Excelling both for the school team and a traveling club, he found success on the soccer field. However, while he thrived athletically, academic achievement proved to be more difficult, and Jaime graduated with a GPA below 2.5. Yet rather than allowing his grades to define him, Jaime now uses his own story as motivation for his students, demonstrating that determination and perseverance can overcome any obstacle.

After high school, Jaime initially continued working at a call center, dodging questions about college by lying and saying he was going to join the military. However, a candid conversation with a coworker spurred a change in his plans. His coworker told him, "You're gonna be like me, 35…working with teenagers who get paid more than you…" Feeling a sense of urgency to chart a better path for himself, Jaime made the decision to immediately enlist in the army. He gave his mom less than a day's notice of when he needed to be at the recruiting station to start his commitment.

During his time in the army, Jaime worked on getting his associate's degree. But he had a lieutenant who would take him out of his night classes to play soccer to ensure the win. Jaime didn't think much about it at the time, assuming the lieutenant had some pull with the college. But it turned out he didn't, and Jaime struggled to catch up on those missed classes. Then, September 11th happened. Suddenly, Jaime found himself in Afghanistan with some other soldiers protecting themselves from IEDs that were hitting the bunker they were in. It was terrifying, and he thought he might not make it out alive. They thought they were going to die and started confessing to each other. He confessed that he regretted never attempting to go to the

University of Oklahoma. He thought it was "a huge unachievable thing" but promised himself that if he survived, he would enroll. Once he got back from Afghanistan, he did not apply for OU. Instead, he kept going to the community college.

After his son was born, Jaime felt a stronger drive to climb the ranks in order to provide for him. He shifted his focus from the tactical aspects of the army to the technical side, seeking more education along the way. Around this time, his mom's cancer resurfaced. During his mom's hospital visits, she made her children promise that one of them would go to college. It was literally her dying wish. Given Jaime's military benefits, his siblings insisted it had to be him. He applied and got into OU, joining the ROTC program.

His siblings were very proud of him, and treated him like a hero. They supported him in every way possible, from cooking meals to looking after his son, to ensure he graduated college. Despite facing financial hurdles, Jaime completed his coursework. He faced a dilemma when his diploma was withheld due to owing a large sum. Too ashamed to tell his family, he sold all his DJ equipment to clear the debt and receive his diploma.

During his time in ROTC, Jaime discovered his passion for teaching military science. He also coached the girls' soccer team at his old school. When asked by the principal's secretary if he would consider teaching after leaving the military, he eagerly agreed. Since retiring from the military, he's embarked on a fulfilling second career as a teacher.

Josefina

Josefina is a first-year 3rd grade teacher and was born in Oklahoma City to her parents who are from Guatemala. She is the middle child and has two brothers. Her parents met in Guatemala and reunited when they came at separate times to the United States.

She attended her neighborhood school for elementary and said she "fell in love with

reading" there. Encouraged by cousins who attended a charter school and said good things about it, her parents enrolled her older brother in 6th grade and she followed a year later when she entered 6th grade. The school was very strict, but she liked not worrying about what to wear because the uniform policy was extremely strict. Plus, the school was very close to where they lived and that made it easier on her family to take her and pick her up.

In high school, she played soccer and accepted a full ride to play at an out of state college. It was a tough decision, but her older brother had gotten a full ride to play twice as far away out of state, so it made it easier for her parents to support her. Also, an older cousin attended a community college, and she remembers that made her want to go to college too.

In college, she started as a liberal arts major. She said her parents were both supportive and she never felt alone in the process, except when it came to knowing which classes to take, and other college related decisions. They didn't know about college processes, so she learned on her own. She came back to Oklahoma after two years and attended a public university for one year and majored in psychology there. The experience was "boring" at that university, so she transferred to a different public university in Oklahoma. There, she took intro to sociology and loved it, so she changed her major to sociology and graduated after two years.

During this time, she worked various jobs including a hardware store, a lay (non-teaching) soccer coach for two different high schools, and had an internship at a non-profit. She continued working at the non-profit after graduation. The experience was amazing, but she soon realized that she wanted to do something else. A coworker told her that a school was looking to hire bilingual people, so she decided to apply and got an interview. She liked coaching the soccer teams and felt this would be a similar good experience. The school served students who were just like her, so it was an easy decision to accept the offer to teach. She believes in being a role model

to her students and in helping them see that they too can go to college.

Julieta

Julieta is a Spanish teacher to students across multiple middle and high schools via an online platform provided by her district's online learning department. Born in Tacoma, Washington, she grew up with two siblings, an older sister and a twin brother, and is the youngest, "by 10 minutes." She describes her high school experience as being in a "primarily white" environment where she felt somewhat isolated due to frequent moves caused by her parents' divorce. "I didn't feel very accepted," she recalls.

Despite these challenges, Julieta found fulfillment when she took Advanced Placement (AP) and concurrent courses, where she encountered greater diversity. She fondly remembers, "Those classes were in a different city, and the student makeup was more diverse." Despite the vibrant school spirit and emphasis on athletics at her high school, Julieta notes that there were only "ten other Hispanic students," with whom she formed close bonds. She particularly reminisced about her Spanish teacher, describing him as "more than a teacher," someone who was "like family."

Her mom always encouraged her and her siblings to go to school and study. When Julieta decided to go to college, she asked for help picking a major, but her mom told her she'd have to pick one for herself. Julieta decided she wanted to be "a Spanish teacher that makes good relationships with the students." With her father's more laid-back support, she pursued her dream, obtaining an associate's degree before relocating to Oklahoma to be closer to family. Opting for a private university as it allowed her to avoid an additional year of schooling, Julieta pursued a major in Spanish education. She went to a private university because she would have had to go to school an extra year if she had chosen a public university.

Her first teaching job was a negative experience, and she left and took a job working in the front office at another school. At this school, there was high teacher turnover and she told her administrator a few times that she had a teaching certificate and would fill one of the vacant teaching spots, but the principal did not seem to care. She said she felt that they needed her more as a translator in the office, and held her back from being a classroom teacher. While in this position, she was recruited to her current position by a friend who was vacating it. She is thankful for the job because it is the first time she feels appreciated for what she does. She almost cried and shared her positive observation notes with her mom. This made her want to "stay in education even longer."

Marisa

Marisa is the first US-born member of her family. They briefly returned to Mexico before settling back in Oklahoma. She attended her neighborhood elementary and middle schools but transitioned to a magnet high school. However, her education was interrupted when she became pregnant and dropped out during her sophomore year. Her boyfriend at the time, now her husband, didn't want her to go back to school. She got her GED and worked a few different jobs, but decided that she didn't want to keep doing that. She tried a technical school, but didn't like that either. During this time, she had worked as a paraprofessional and a coworker helped educate her about college. She asked that coworker "a thousand questions" and decided she was going to go to college herself.

As a full-time mom, wife, and employee, Marisa could only manage two classes per semester. Opting for a Spanish major over education to skip student teaching, she navigated the challenges of balancing academics with motherhood and work responsibilities. It took her ten years to earn her degree, facing skepticism from family members who doubted her collegiate

pursuits until her graduation celebration made them believers.

During her studies, Marisa found a program that would pay for a master's degree in bilingual education. Encouraged by her husband who said, "might as well keep going, we're already used to not seeing you at home anyway." when she asked him if she should pursue it, she enrolled and graduated.

Her son also went to college and has a master's degree. He told her that he made college a goal after a conversation with her one morning. They were both getting ready for work, and he said something mean to her and she responded "look at the way I'm dressed, and look at the way you're dressed." She was dressed professionally, and his clothes were dirty and raggedy. He said that interaction made him realize the power of education. Through perseverance and determination, Marisa defied expectations and paved the way for her family's educational success.

Melina

Melina, born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, grew up in a Mexican immigrant household with both parents actively involved in her education. Despite initially not speaking English, she quickly adapted and tested out of ELD classes by third grade. For high school, her parents were adamant about her attending a "good school" in Tulsa, and she vividly recalls the school interviews and her parents' involvement in her educational path. Accepted into a charter school focused on college preparation, Melina thrived academically, excelling in AP classes and extracurricular activities while maintaining straight A's. Initially drawn to a broadcasting major in college after a suggestion from her Spanish teacher, Melina later switched to public relations upon realizing the limited earning potential in broadcasting.

Melina's family had varying views on the importance of college, with her parents being

the main advocates. Extended family mainly voiced financial concerns about the cost of college and the "good money" they were making without a college degree. Melina pursued her broadcasting degree at a public university, only to switch to public relations when she had an assignment to look up the earning potential for her degree. Following graduation, she worked at a mortgage company but found the job unfulfilling, prompting her to accept a teaching position offered by her former principal, despite not knowing any details about the job. All she knew for sure was that she was not happy or fulfilled in her current job.

Transitioning from an unsatisfying job to teaching, Melina found fulfillment in connecting with her students, particularly as a Latina educator. Through teaching, she has connected with the parents and sees the importance of believing in her students and supporting them, and now acknowledges the privilege she had growing up. However, she also mentioned that she feels this year or next year may be her last year in the classroom. Her plan is to graduate with her master's in special education so she can be a family planner at a hospital. A family planner helps families who have children born with down syndrome or special needs to know what to expect and prepare them for possible upcoming challenges. She's happy for her "luck" in getting a teaching position and will never forget the experiences she's had there.

Sonia

Sonia is a first-year elementary teacher. Initially assigned to teach first grade, she found herself in a different role when class numbers didn't make. Instead, she was tasked with being a special education inclusion teacher for pre-k through 2nd grades, providing vital support within regular classrooms. Describing her role similar to that of a teacher's aide, Sonia ensures that students receive the necessary assistance without being separated from their peers.

She came from Mexico to the United States at the age of two, and is currently a DACA

(Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipient. This legal status allows her to work in the US, yet she remains neither a permanent resident nor a citizen.

Choosing to attend school in a suburban, predominantly white district was a strategic decision made by her parents, who believed Sonia would receive a better education there. From an early age, they instilled in her the value of education, envisioning a future for her as a doctor or nurse. Throughout high school, Sonia was actively involved as a student council officer for three years, demonstrating her commitment to campus engagement. It was her AP English teacher who encouraged her to share her story and advocate for DACA recipients and others facing similar challenges. This advocacy took Sonia to district principal's meetings and even to Washington D.C. to advocate for DACA.

Reflecting on her high school experience, Sonia fondly recalls the impact of the only Latina teacher she encountered, who happened to be her Spanish teacher. This connection provided a sense of familiarity and comfort, serving as a "piece from home" among the predominantly white students and teachers.

Apart from her parents, Sonia drew inspiration from her cousin, who became the first family member to attend college. Described as the one who "opened the door" for her, Sonia's cousin played a pivotal role in guiding her through the college application process and securing scholarships. Attending events like Latinos Without Borders and the Tomás Rivera Educational Empowerment (T.R.E.E.) conference further fueled Sonia's aspirations, culminating in her receiving her first scholarship at the T.R.E.E. conference.

Scholarships covered her first year's expenses but the following years required her to work and ask for financial support from her parents. Opting to commute to college to save money on housing expenses, Sonia initially pursued a nursing major under the influence of her

parents' desire for her. However, her experiences working with the Boys and Girls Club, where she was the first bilingual hire, sparked a realization that her true passion lay in helping others, leading her to switch her major to education.

Navigating this transition wasn't without its hurdles. When Sonia decided to change her major, she faced the daunting task of informing her parents, fearing disappointing them. Yet, their initial reluctance turned into support as they witnessed her dedication and eventual graduation. Sonia's father, once skeptical about the teaching profession, underwent a change of heart.

When asked about her motivation to persevere in education, Sonia's response encapsulated her journey: "I'm being the teacher I never had growing up." Her experiences, challenges, and triumphs have shaped her into a dedicated educator, driven by a desire to make a difference in the lives of her students.

Conclusion

In summary the lived experiences of the participants, demonstrate notable differences some similarities. Despite their diverse backgrounds, each participant navigated their own unique journey through high school and college. Some attended traditional public schools, while others got a GED or participated in international exchange programs. Then, some went to college out of state, others a public four-year university and others a private college. Despite these varied beginnings, they all converged on a common destination: the field of education.

What is particularly striking is the resilience and determination exhibited by each participant in overcoming obstacles and challenges along the way. Whether it was navigating financial constraints, familial expectations, or personal doubts, they all persevered.

There is a sense of camaraderie and shared experience that emerges from their narratives.

While each individual story is unique, there are threads of commonality that bind them together. Whether it's the support of family members, the influence of inspirational teachers, or the transformative power of education itself, these themes resonate across their diverse journeys.

These shared experiences hold valuable lessons and insights for the broader education community. By examining the paths taken by these educators, we can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that shape career choices and inform best practices in teacher recruitment, training, and retention.

In the subsequent chapter, the key themes and takeaways that emerge from their collective journey into the field of education will be examined. Through this exploration, the hope is to glean valuable insights that can inform and inspire future generations of educators.

CHAPTER FIVE

Study Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to delve into the underlying motivations and pivotal moments that have placed ten Hispanic and/or Latino educators into their career as a teacher. Through a thorough thematic analysis, this study seeks to unveil the experiences that have shaped their professional journeys, shedding light on both the commonalities and unique nuances that describe their paths.

Structured around five overarching themes, a couple comprising a set of sub-themes, this chapter serves as a cumulative exploration of the participants' lived experiences. By organizing the findings in this manner, the aim is to provide an understanding of the multifaceted factors that have influenced their decision to pursue a career in education.

As each theme and sub-theme is explained, the diverse mix of influences, challenges, and triumphs that have shaped the participants' trajectories are brought together. From the pivotal role of family support to the impact of educational experiences, these themes offer valuable insights into the complex interplay of factors that have shaped their professional identities.

By examining the intersections of these themes across the participants' narratives, a deeper appreciation for the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts that have shaped their career paths is gained. Through this exploration, the underlying motivations and aspirations that have driven these educators to dedicate themselves to the noble pursuit of shaping young minds and fostering positive change within their communities are discovered.

In the subsequent sections, each theme will be described in detail, drawing upon excerpts from the participants' narratives to illustrate key points and provide context. Through this process, valuable insights into the diverse array of factors that inform career decisions within the field of

education is offered, while also honoring the richness of experiences that define the journeys of the participants.

Participants

The ten participants in this study are all self-identified Hispanics and/or Latinos who currently teach in the Oklahoma City Metro Area. Of the ten participants, eight were of Mexican descent, one of Guatemalan descent and one was of Venezuelan descent. Two of the participants graduated from a private university and the rest from a public university. Six of the participants had less than 5 years of teaching experience, two had five years of experience and two had over eleven years. Three of the ten were first-year teachers. Of the ten teachers, five teach English Language Development (ELD), two teach special education, one teaches Spanish, one teaches 3rd grade and one teaches dance. Four of them teach high school students, five teach middle school students and two teach elementary students. There was one participant who teaches middle and high school students. Seven of the participants were born in the United States, and the other three were not. Two of the three who were born outside of the US are DACA recipients. Lastly, of the ten, three graduated with a degree in education. The other seven are alternatively certified teachers.

Table 5.1
Participants

Name	Teaching experience (year/s)	Grade/s taught	Subject taught	Degree
Araceli	5	5-8	ELD	Multi-disciplinary Studies
Azucena	4	6-8	ELD	Law
Elisa	12	9-12	Dance	Dance Education
Fabian	First	9-12	ELD	General Studies
Jaime	5	9-12	ELD	Sociology/ Criminology
Josefina	First	3	3rd Grade	Sociology
Julieta	2	5-12	Spanish	Education
Marisa	19	6-8	ELD	Spanish
Melina	3	6-8	SPED	Public Relations
Sonia	First	PK - 2	SPED	Education

Thematic Analysis

The primary aim of this study was to address the question: "Why do Latinos and Hispanics choose to pursue a career in education?" Through in-depth interviews with ten participants, a secondary question naturally emerged: "What factors influenced their journey towards a career in education?" To explore these questions, the study employed the LatCrit framework, chosen for its recognition of the unique challenges faced by Latinos and Hispanics within the broader context of racial inequality.

Understanding the motivations and pathways of Latinos and Hispanics entering the field of education is important. It not only sheds light on individual experiences but also informs strategies

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for recruiting and retaining diverse educators. By unraveling the intricate web of factors influencing career choices within this demographic, we can better address systemic barriers and create more inclusive pathways to the teaching profession.

The data collection process involved virtual interviews, meticulously recorded and transcribed for analysis. From these transcripts emerged a series of codes, which were systematically analyzed to identify overarching themes. Through this process, five main themes emerged, each offering valuable insights into the complex interplay of factors shaping the career trajectories of Latino and Hispanic educators.

The first theme that surfaced was "adverse high school experiences," highlighting the profound impact of educational experiences on their lives. Participants shared narratives of overcoming challenges such as discrimination, lack of support, and cultural disconnects during their high school years. These experiences not only shaped their perceptions of education but also fueled their determination to effect positive change now that they are a part of the system.

A lack of college knowledge emerged as another significant theme, underscoring the importance of access to resources and mentorship in navigating the higher education landscape. Many participants expressed facing uncertainties and barriers in pursuing higher education, lacking guidance on college applications, financial aid, and academic planning.

Financial constraints emerged as a prevalent challenge, with many participants citing economic hardships as a significant barrier to pursuing a degree in education. From student loan debt to the high cost of tuition, financial considerations often weighed heavy in their decision-making process, highlighting the need for increased financial support and scholarship opportunities for aspiring educators.

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Language barriers also emerged as a prominent theme, reflecting the challenges faced by bilingual and multilingual individuals in navigating academic and professional spaces. Many participants shared stories of overcoming language barriers, in educational settings.

Finally, the theme of "connection to students and the community" highlighted the profound sense of purpose and fulfillment that many participants derived from their work as educators. From fostering meaningful relationships with students to serving as advocates for their communities, participants emphasized the power of education in creating positive social change.

In the subsequent sections, each theme will be explored in greater detail, accompanied by relevant quotes and narratives that offer deeper insights into the lived experiences of the participants.

Themes

Adverse High School Experiences

Participants shared accounts of their high school experiences, with many encountering significant challenges. Fabian and Marisa, for instance, faced obstacles that led to them dropping out. Fabian described his school as "rough" and "very Mexican," recounting incidents where guns were brought to school, resulting in lockdowns that were trivialized by the Student Council by selling "I survived lockdown" shirts. Reflecting on the lack of understanding from teachers about Hispanic and immigrant experiences, Fabian eventually dropped out to support his family but later returned to graduate at the age of 24. Similarly, Marisa attended a magnet school but dropped out due to pregnancy. After working for a couple of years, she told her boyfriend, now husband, that she "didn't want to work like that for the rest of her life." Motivated by a desire for a different future, she obtained her GED at 18.

A few other participants described not fitting in. Julieta said she "didn't feel accepted."

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Her school had a lot of school spirit and the community came out to support the sports teams, but she was one of very few Hispanics in the school and felt like she did not fit in. Sonia went to a predominantly white school and also commented, "I never saw teachers like me. I never really saw students like me." This changed over time as more Hispanics moved into the district, but then created a situation where she had to translate for new students. Elisa went to a magnet school and recalls that not many other students looked like her.

Jaime was jumped the first week at his home school by some other students, and his mom transferred him immediately. Although he didn't get jumped again, his new school wasn't a lot better. He remembers two racial riots at school and recalls people hitting other people just because of the color of their skin. During his last two years of high school, the creation of a new gang brought on "Hispanic versus Hispanic" fights. One gang was made up of "more Americanized" Hispanics and the other gang was made up of newly arrived Hispanics. When he talked about one of the teachers, he said "...she was a teacher… not really out there to change anybody's life."

It's worth noting that four of the ten participants attended a charter or magnet school to avoid going to their neighborhood school. This speaks to their parents' low perceived quality of education at their home schools. Melina's parents enrolled her in all the magnet and charter schools and she was accepted into a specialty charter school. Elisa went to a magnet school for dance. Josefina went to a charter school. Marisa went to a magnet school but dropped out. Araceli would have gone to a magnet school, but plead with her parents until they let her attend her neighborhood school. She had cousins and an older brother who had gone to the neighborhood school, and they didn't do well behaviorally, or academically. Reflecting on her high school experience, Araceli said, "Dangerous things were happening at my school." As the

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soccer team manager, she recalls overhearing a visiting school parent on the phone saying, "I can't believe I'm here. What if I get shot?"

Lack of College Knowledge

For all participants, immediate family members did not have an understanding of the process to go to college or apply for scholarships. Two participants had parents who had graduated from college. Azucena's parents are both lawyers, but they got their degrees in their home country and they could not help her navigate the American college system. Elisa's mother went to college to be an OBGYN nurse practitioner and said, "I need you to go to college, but I don't know any of the steps. It's been so long since I've been."

Support provided by some of their parents was described by the participants as "blind." Araceli said, "...support, like, for applications or scholarships…I didn't have that from my family." Melina's mom encouraged her by saying, "If you go to college, we'll help you… but if you don't go to college, then that's it, like, you're cut off." Melina voiced her concern with the blind encouragement and insistence for her to go to a four year university, "The only thing is, they didn't know how to get me into college… and she said community college wasn't good enough!" Fabian said his parents were "happy but didn't understand" when he decided to go to college. They did not know how to help. When I asked Marisa about her parents' support for college, she said they said, "You're already married, you already belong to him, not us anymore." They were "old school" and didn't want to interfere with her relationship.

Melina's mom would sometimes take her and her sister with her when she'd clean houses, and she remembers the day she told her, "*Pesa mas una escoba que un lapiz.*" (A broom weighs more than a pencil.) very clearly. It encouraged her to continue her education but provided nothing in the form of a roadmap to help her navigate the necessary steps. This is

similar to the phrases of encouragement brought up by other participant's parents, "*echale ganas*" (literally means 'throw it desire' but means 'try hard') and "*ponte las pilas*" (literally means 'put the batteries on yourself' but means 'work harder') The encouragement was well received, but left the participants lost on what to actually do to get to college. Fortunately, those who attended magnet and charter schools, all had support from their school, and those who didn't had a cousin, coworker or friend to help.

Several had to rely on other family members to help navigate the steps to go to college. Julieta had an older sister who went to college, but she moved to a different state and felt like she had to start over. Sonia's cousin walked her through all the steps and was the reason she got her first scholarship. "…we don't even know the college process, like, I remember, like, filling out that application. I was like, I have no idea what I'm doing…she helped me with my application, like, she was on top of it all the time…" Josefina had an older brother go to college, but he was over seven hours away on a full-ride soccer scholarship trying to figure things out himself. Fabian and Marisa got help from coworkers to learn about the steps to go to college.

Araceli and Marisa both voiced that they are now the person in their family who helps others fill out scholarships and get to college. A couple of siblings followed Marisa to college and her son has a master's degree.

But not all extended family were supportive. Melina's extended family members made comments about doing well without a college degree. Even now, uncles tell her "What's the point of going to school if you guys are still working all the time?" When they discuss their current jobs, they say "If it's good enough for me, it's good enough for my kids."

Even though there was a lack of college process knowledge, family stepped up to help. Fabian said, "The only thing that he felt like he could offer was money, so he bought me a

MacBook." about his dad. Jaime's sisters stepped up to take care of his son and provide him with food and lunch. He said, "It was always blind support." Marisa said her mom helped her take care of her son while she was in college and working full time.

Jaime said something that I think captures part of what the other participants alluded to as they told me their stories. "When I was in college, I was so green to it. And I think that's also like a cultural thing, right? Like you don't wanna raise a fuss, you don't wanna draw attention… I'd rather just suffer in silence in the shadows than ask questions." To be clear, the other participants didn't say this, but when I asked them about support and what their family did or said, I could sense discomfort. I feel it's related to them not wanting to be a burden to their families. Because their families didn't know the college process, they had to allow themselves to be vulnerable to get help and that is not easy.

Finances

Money came up in the following sub-themes by the participants; paying for college and teacher pay. Most of the participants had no financial help from family to pay for college, and all received negative comments about teacher pay.

Paying for college

Elisa's mom is an OBGYN, and was paid well, but it worked against her when she applied for FAFSA. She earned over the amount to qualify for Pell Grants, but not enough to cover her college expenses. Her mom told her, "I'm only paying for your freshman year via credit card and then you're on your own so you need to figure it out." When her dad found out she was a dance education major, "he was quite upset with me. I definitely had brought shame to the family…" He said she was, "...paying money to become an entertainer…" He always wanted her to be an immigration lawyer.

Marisa was a teen mom and worked full-time while she went to college. Her husband worked to take care of the family expenses, and she worked to cover her school expenses. This limited her ability to take classes, and it took her going to school part-time for ten years to get her degree. Sonia's parents encouraged her to go to college but said "We can only do so much to help you. If you wanna go to college, then that is something you're gonna have to, like, essentially pay for." Several of the participants worked while they were in high school and a majority worked while they were in college. Sonia had earned enough scholarships to pay for her first year but worked while in college to cover her costs. She also stayed with her parents to not incur living expenses.

Josefina was offered a full ride to play soccer out of state and accepted it because it was the best offer she received. Even though she had a full ride, she told her parents that she was going to work "to make them feel better." When she transferred to a college in Oklahoma, she worked to pay for college. Fabian worked in high school and kept working when he dropped out. A major reason he was able to graduate from college was that he enrolled in a program that would pay for his education if he committed to teaching for the school district after graduation. After our interview, I learned he was recently accepted into a program that will pay for his master's degree. Similarly, Marisa enrolled in a master's program because she got it for free through a teacher scholarship. When asked how her husband felt about her continuing school after being an undergrad for 10 years she said he sarcastically said, "We're already used to not seeing you at home anyway, so might as well keep going." Jaime was part of a large family and was raised by a single mom. He joined the military and used the GI Bill to cover college. Even with military assistance, he still had to pay off a substantial bursar balance to get his diploma. He sold all of his DJ equipment to do so and didn't tell his family why. They thought he didn't

want to do that anymore since he was a college graduate. Fabian, Araceli, and Marisa all got to a point where they made the conscious decision to not major in education to avoid student teaching. Doing so would have required them to leave their regular job, and they couldn't afford to do so.

Teacher pay

Most participants had parents warn them or express concerns about teacher pay. Melina said, "My dad talked a lot about pay" when she was going to quit her job with the mortgage company to be a teacher. She was making "good money" and was taking a significant pay cut to teach, but she was "miserable" at her job. Azucena's mom told her "...*no te voy a mantener...*" (…I'm not going to take care of you…) when she expressed interest in becoming a teacher. Now, her stance has changed and she says "...now it's, like, just do whatever makes you happy… you're old[er] now." When Sonia told me about telling her parents she was going to change her major to education "I wouldn't say they were excited about it…" Her dad said "They don't make a lot of money…" Her dad's dream was for her to become a nurse. Araceli's dad has tried multiple times to get her to change jobs to get paid better. "You work too much and you're not getting paid enough." In fact, she said that earlier the day of the interview her dad talked to her about her getting a job that paid better. She said that she's fortunate that her husband does well and can take care of most of the family expenses. Without his help, she wouldn't be teaching. Melina does not have a family, but said, "I cannot imagine being a mom and teacher at the same time. That sounds awful." She said she would "definitely not be teaching" when she starts a family. Marisa was a mom while in college and said her family would ask her, "Why a teacher? They don't pay very much." she replied, "I'd rather do a job that I love than do a job that I don't and get paid more." Jaime was also a parent while in college. He was getting

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pressured by his spouse to "stay in [the military] a little longer and make big bucks." when he was eligible to retire. He didn't because he felt he was "at peace with the boys" his sons. He feels that finances played a role in his divorce, and deciding to teach instead of staying enlisted affected his finances. Fabian's family didn't really say anything to him, but his friends would frequently tell him "Just come to Paycom [a payroll processing company], you'll make double!"

Language

Language came up as a theme, with four sub-themes. The first sub-them is a majority of the teachers are ELD teachers, and many were EL students themselves. A sub-theme of mispronounced names emerged. The last two sub-themes were translating and communicating with families. All participants are bilingual in English and Spanish. Azucena was required to learn a third language while in high school in her home country.

English Language Development

Of the ten participants, five are ELD teachers; Araceli, Azucena, Fabian, Jaime, and Marisa. It is worth noting that a student who was learning English in school used to be called an ESL (English as a Second Language) student and was then called ELL (English Language Learner). Now he or she is referred to as EL (English learner). Although it was not brought up, I believe half of them are ELD teachers because they are bilingual and most ELs in the Oklahoma City metro area are Spanish speakers. As a former ELD teacher myself, best practice does not require teachers to speak the same languages as the students who are learning English. Their placement in these classes is probably done because second language acquisition best practices are not implemented with fidelity in the schools, so it's easier to place a teacher who can translate English to Spanish in these classes.

Marisa was born in Oklahoma but went to grade school for a couple of years in Mexico.

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When she returned, she was in ELD classes and remembers her teachers helping her. "They made me feel like I belong there." This is where she got the dream to be a teacher. That "pushed her to take the jump and go to college." Melina had a positive EL experience too. She was in ELD through 3rd grade. She remembers that she "loved her ELD teacher."

Jaime's experience with the ELD class was not so positive. He was placed in Level I ELD classes when he was transferred to his new high school. Level I classes are for students who are new to the United States. But he had been in the US school system his whole life. He recalled an assignment in that class. "And I will never forget, it was a picture of a king…and it said 'what is this?' A book, a fish, a king, or a library." From that class, he would go to his honors or AP classes; it made no sense to him. He thinks it was to get more funding because there are supplemental funds for schools based on their bilingual count. He actually protested and spoke up at a board meeting about the over-identification of EL students.

Name pronunciation

The pronunciation of names came up strongly for a some of participants. Azucena's first and last names are challenging for non-Spanish speakers to pronounce correctly. When she participated in the International Baccalaureate foreign exchange program, she was placed with a Japanese family in Seattle. They said "We need to find something easier for you, so they baptized me as (Americanized shortened version of her first name)." This is a nickname she still uses and doesn't "feel uncomfortable with it." I asked what her student call her, and she said "Miss (last initial) or Miss (full last name) if they are Hispanics." Her justification was "I think that's somewhat common with Hispanics especially because some last names are difficult to pronounce so they're Americanized, right?" Furthermore, colleagues and administrators call her

by her Americanized nickname, or by her last initial.

Before Araceli started as a teacher, she had a job with the school district that had her visiting many different schools. During those visits, she would hear student's names get "butchered" by teachers and staff and it reminded her of her last name getting mispronounced in school. She said, "There are some names, right, where when they're mispronounced, they get made fun of, right, and so even kids who can pronounce it correctly…it becomes what everybody's calling him." Azucenas turn into Suzies. José is Ho-zay. Aide is I.D. Ms. Juarez becomes Ms. War-ezz.

Translation

Another sub-theme of language was translation. Julieta had taken a front office job at a school after her first year as a teacher. She had a bad teaching experience and wanted a change of pace. While at this new school, there was quite a bit of teacher turnover, so there were a few vacancies. Her administrator did not allow her to leave her front office job to replace one of the teachers, even though she had a teaching degree. She said, "It's almost like they needed a translator but rather than hire one they said 'Hey, we got you!' and I felt like I was getting more and more work because I spoke twice the languages." When Sonia started high school in a suburban school district, she was one of very few Hispanics. As more Spanish speaking families started enrolling at her school she said, "I was always helping translate." She would show the new students around and would even translate for the new student's family.

While talking about working through college, Sonia said she, "Was the first and only Spanish speaker at a job at an after-school club." They relied on her to translate and converse with the Spanish speaking students and their families there too. Knowing Spanish was the reason Josefina was told of a teaching job. While working at a non-profit, a friend told her "There's a

school looking for bilingual people." Since she had coached high school soccer while in college, she thought she'd apply and loved the sound of the job when she interviewed. If it wasn't for her knowing two languages, her coworker may have not told her about the job, and she may not be a teacher.

Connection to the students and community

This theme was expressed passionately by every participant. When I rewatched the videos to translate, these were my favorite parts to watch because everything changed. Their faces shined with pride, lit up with joy and their voices expressed more emotions. It's hard to describe in writing, but imagine someone talking about something they truly love. That's where these quotes came from; a place of love.

When asked about why she teaches, Azucena said, "[They are] immigrants that are learning English like me. They came to the US for a better future so I wanna be like a model for them." Sonia said, "What I'm doing is being the teacher that I didn't have growing up…I'm kind of being a light for them." During her student teaching experience, Elisa found that she was able to allow the parts of her identity that she held back because of the makeup of her high school to shine. She said, "My family life, my weekends, my birthday parties, you know, it was all there in one building." "The students taught me that it was okay to be me, my identity, my culture, who I am, who I didn't get to be as a high schooler..." Marisa commutes one and a half hours to two hours roundtrip every day. She said, "I wake up every day with a desire to come to work. "They [the students] turn your head upside down, but I still enjoy it." "They remind me [of] when I went to school. They remind me of my culture and I connect with them…" Julieta said, "I wanted to be the Spanish teacher who makes relationships with the students." because she remembered her high school Spanish teacher who had great relationships with his students

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including her. He was the only teacher she could speak Spanish with.

Statements were also made about connecting with the students. Josefina said, "I think I can relate to these kids. I can definitely relate and I think I can bring some good stuff to the table for them…I try to understand them and I kinda can see from their point of view and I, like I don't necessarily see them as troubled kids" Fabian said, "I understand what it is like to not have legal status, and the time in my life where I didn't speak English, where I wasn't bilingual." This is why he chose to be an ELD teacher to students new to the country. He's been in their shoes. Jaime teaches at the high school he graduated from. When I asked him why he chose to become a teacher after retiring from the military he said, "Somebody helped my mom out when she got to this country." That fact keeps him grounded and motivated to be a support for his students every day. Melina described her rapport with the students, "seeing how much, like, the kids reacted well to me and would trust me and it was just like, I was doing something right…I love the families and the kids!"

Araceli and a group of friends from high school were "forced" to take concurrent and honors classes by an assistant principal, and they all graduated and are working on the side of town they grew up in. She said, "We're all in our own way trying to bring something back to our community." Azucena said, "[I'm] finishing my master's in education to work with students with disabilities who are bilingual." She sees a need for educators to be able to appropriately determine if a student needs language support, learning support, or both. She felt this was not a service provided in her school, and wants to do something about it.

Implications

This study took three strands of research and tried to "braid" them together to support an inquiry into why Latinos and/or Hispanics pursue a career in education. The three strands of

research are; challenges in urban schools, the teacher shortage, and ethnic matching. Latinos across the United States attend urban schools, and urban school systems present challenges to attaining a quality education. Furthermore, Latinos face challenges unique to them, like language and legal documentation. This further complicates their pursuit of a quality secondary education that will prepare them to enter college. These national issues exist in the Oklahoma City metro area as presented in Chapter 2. The teacher shortage is nationwide, but also a concern in the metro area. This shortage is more concerning if one examines the number of teachers of color in the profession, and is further compounded when the benefits of ethnic matching are taken into account. By considering these three strands of research, it is easy to see that Latinos do not have an easy path to college, but there is a need for them in education.

CRT and more specifically LatCrit were the theoretical frameworks for this study and helped the research center on Latino and/or Hispanic identity. This is evidenced by the themes above. They all were specific to Hispanic issues, concerns, feelings, and thoughts. Existing research has not adequately captured the voices of Hispanic educators, among others (Fernández, 2016). By viewing the themes through a LatCrit lens, racial microaggressions and discrimination based on perceived ability or language are apparent in the lived experiences of the participants.

Given the general agreement on the importance of diversity, this study helps shine a light on the vast diversity that exists within the Hispanic and Latino communities. We are not a monolithic group, and "one size fits all" approaches geared towards any Hispanic or Latino effort will inevitably miss some of the community. We speak fluent, broken and zero Spanish. We go to community, private and public colleges. We go to comprehensive, public, private, charter, and magnet schools. We come from many different countries. We have varied support from family and extended family. We don't all graduate in four years. We don't stop our pursuit

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of education once we have a family, when a parent passes away, when we change colleges, or when we move to a different state. And just like the educators who participated in this study, we connect with our community through dance, shared lived experiences, and language.

Summary and Conclusion

This dissertation was designed to answer two questions; Why do Latinos and/or Hispanics pursue a career in education?" and "What was their path to a career in education?" The intention behind these questions was to provide findings that others would be able to use and leverage to have more Hispanics pursue education as a career. By identifying their paths, others could work to remove obstacles and provide more opportunities.

The themes found by analyzing the interview transcripts and listening to the videos many times do not answer the first question. There were not enough similarities in their lived experiences to provide a reason or set of reasons for their "why." Some knew very early on because they had a great teacher in their life. Others had terrible teachers and still became teachers. For a few of them, they didn't major in education and got a job because they were fed up with their current job, or they had a friend who suggested they apply or a coworker told them that a school is looking for bilingual people. Their "whys" are really because of special circumstances - Luck, fortune, fate, or divine intervention- provided an opportunity, and they took it. They happened to be at the right place at the right time both physically and emotionally.

If I had to make a recommendation, I would encourage Hispanic teachers to motivate everyone in their circle to teach. I would encourage them to talk about the change they are making on a daily basis to everyone. I would encourage them to tell others about their "why" for as long as they'll listen, because they may be the person who plants a seed for someone who may not have plans for their garden.

The themes provide great insight into their lived experiences and some of the obstacles the participants overcame to be where they are. The themes, and subthemes, discovered were: adverse high school experiences, finance (paying for college and low teacher pay), language (ELD experience, mispronounced names, and translating), connection with their students and families, and lack of college knowledge. These themes can help lead to a plan to remove obstacles to facilitate the path.

Underlying the themes are the personal sacrifices made by some of the participants to stay in education. They more than alluded to the self-negotiations they undergo to substantiate or qualify their decision to be teachers. Melina said she will "definitely not be teaching" when she decides to have a family. Araceli stated that she's "fortunate her husband does well." so she can stay in the classroom. Marisa's husband told her "We're used to not seeing you at home anyway, so might as well keep going." when she told him she had a scholarship to pursue her master's degree. These sacrifices are counterbalanced by the difference they make in the lives of their students and in their community.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

Latino and/or Hispanic students must overcome a myriad of obstacles to become teachers. First, Hispanic students are predominantly enrolled in urban schools (Pew Research Center, 2005), and urban school districts are lower performing than rural or urban school districts, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Lipman et al., 1996). Hispanic students also face a set of challenges that further compound their secondary education. Latinos have the second-highest dropout rate of any ethnic group (NCES, 2021). Latinos are teen parents at twice the rate of Black and white students (Martin et al., 2021), and only 50% of teen mothers graduate high school compared to 90% of non-mothers. Additionally, Hispanics face racism in the form of hate or bias incidents at school according to a study by Costello and Dillard in 2019. No one was disciplined in 57% of these incidents. Lack of legal documentation poses a significant barrier to achieving post-secondary goals, as it limits access to Pell Grants and most state as well as all federal aid for college tuition.

Education job postings are outpacing hiring (Pelika, 2022). If more Latinos would become educators, then it could help address the teacher shortage. Many benefits have been associated with matching a student's and teacher's ethnicity. Ethnic matching has been shown to elicit a trusting biological response (DeBruine, 2002). Teachers perceive classroom behavior differently when a match exists (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). However, an ethnic match will not automatically address these issues by itself. Kochanek, 2005, p, 9, found that an ethnic match helps with initial trust formation, but must be accompanied by "respect, competence, integrity and personal regard." or the ethnic match effect "will fade away."

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify why ten current Hispanic and/or Latino teachers in the Oklahoma City metro area became teachers. A secondary question that came from the interviews is, "What path did they take to become educators?" In answering these two questions, a plan can be made to increase the number of Hispanics in education. This would help address the teacher shortage, and provide the benefits of ethnic matching for the students so they can have a better urban education and school experience.

Methodology

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is "an approach to scholarship that integrates lived experiences with racial realism." (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). CRT allows for critique of the role of race and racism in education (Crenshaw, 2002). Latino Critical Theory was formed to allow focus on race and racism specific to the Latino community. LatCrit can be used to better examine how Hispanics and Latinos experience multi-dimensional racism and racist actions in various environments (Solorzana & Bernal, 2001). Since this dissertation focuses specifically on Latinos and/or Hispanics and how they perceive their lived experiences, it was the natural choice for a theoretical framework.

A qualitative case study method was designed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Latino and/or Hispanic teachers from the Oklahoma City metro area. All interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom meeting platform. A benefit of this platform for data collection was the available closed caption feature. It provided me with approximately a 90% correct transcription of the conversation, and greatly reduced the amount of time necessary to ensure accurate transcripts. The transcripts underwent individual coding. This was followed by the grouping of codes into thematic categories. Five major themes developed, and a couple had sub-themes.

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The first theme was adverse high school experiences. The experiences ranged from not fitting in to getting pregnant and dropping out of high school. Several participants made comments of teachers being in two categories, some cared and others did not. Also, many stated that they did not see Hispanic or Latino representation in their high schools. Those who did, had a Spanish or ELD teacher who was Hispanic. Lastly, four of the ten participants attended a school that was not their neighborhood school. Instead, they attended a magnet or charter school, which speaks to the low perceived quality of education their parents had for their neighborhood school. One participant literally begged her parents to let her go to her neighborhood school. This theme aligns well with the research presented on the challenges in urban schools.

The second theme was the lack of college knowledge. Of the ten participants, none of them expressed support from their parents in the form of guiding them through the steps to get to college. Their support came in the form of "generic" verbal encouragement, like 'echale ganas' and 'ponte las pilas.' Their support included actions like providing a laptop, covering the first year of tuition on a credit card, and assisting with childcare to enable them to work and attend school simultaneously. While some participants had extended family members and friends aid in navigating the college application process, most participants had to navigate the steps independently. This could be because, I believe, all participants are first-generation college students -in the United States. Azucena and her parents, all have law degrees, but they got them in their home country.

The third theme was that of finances. This was broken down into two sub-themes. The first was financing to pay tuition, and the second was conversations they had with others about low teacher pay. Two participants are undocumented and that limited the types of aid they could

receive. Fortunately for Fabian, he was able to enroll in a program at the school district he was working for that paid for his bachelor's degree, but he had to commit to teaching in the district for a certain amount of time. Sonia had enough scholarships to cover her first year but stayed home to not incur a living expense and worked throughout college. Jaime used his GI Bill while he was active in the military, but still had to sell his DJ equipment to cover costs. Most of the participant's fathers expressed concern about teacher pay. Araceli's dad had tried a few times to convince her to quit including the day of our interview. Melina's dad was upset when she left a very good-paying job, that made her miserable, to become a teacher. I believe this is because most immigrants come to this country to work and have a good life. Their dream revolves around working to make the best wage possible to provide for their family. It does not make sense to work as hard as a teacher, just to make what a teacher makes.

The fourth theme was how language played an important role. Of the 10 participants, six of them were English Language Development teachers. LatCrit would have us examine the role of race in this statistic. Since Spanish is the second most spoken language in the Oklahoma City metro area and the participants are all bilingual, administrators are predisposed to want to place them in ELD teaching spots. It is easier to have bilingual teachers translate than it is to equip a non-Spanish speaker with the correct language acquisition best practices to teach English language learners. It is also less expensive than hiring translators.

Several participants discussed their frustration, or acceptance, of their names being "Americanized" or mispronounced. This could be considered a microaggression when viewed from the LatCrit framework. Mispronouncing, or not even trying to get it right, shows a lack of care on behalf of the perpetrator. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for someone with the last name Hinojosa to be called Mr. or Ms. H, or for Jorge to become Hor-hay or George. Lastly,

others using them as translators was a sub-theme of language. Some were used as translators in high school, which is probably a FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) violation, especially if it was done during parent-teacher conferences. Julieta was not allowed to fill a vacant teaching spot, even though she had a teaching degree and certificate, because she was the only bilingual person in the front office. This is more than a microaggression.

The last theme was that of connections with the students and community. Every participant showed a lot of emotion in their face and with their words when they described why they love teaching. They want to be the teacher they never had. They want to be a role model to the students. They want to help them the way their family was helped in the past. They drive up to two hours round trip every day to serve the students. Of all the themes, this is the one that came closest to answering the main question of this study. This is the "extra" that makes ethnic matching work for students. Because of the ethnic match, students are more predisposed to trust the teachers, and when the teacher demonstrates the care and love that all ten participants expressed in this theme the impact is profound.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are responses to the themes of this study. The first four themes were negative in nature. They were; adverse high school experiences, lack of college knowledge, financial constraints, and language barriers. Recommendations will be made to minimize these. The last theme was positive, connection to students and the community, and the recommendation will be to expand the connection and tell others about their experience and love of teaching.

Minimize adverse experiences

All educational institutions must prioritize efforts to minimize adverse experiences, as

highlighted by the lived experiences of the ten Hispanic teachers examined in this study. It is important to recognize that not everyone possesses the resilience demonstrated by these participants. For instance, not all individuals who drop out of school, like Fabian, are able to re-enter and graduate successfully. Similarly, not all teenage parents, like Marisa, are able to attain their GED while juggling the responsibilities of managing a family. Additionally, not all students have the benefit of supportive administrators like Araceli, who advocated for her enrollment in advanced classes while in high school.

These stories emphasize the need for schools to address and mitigate the challenges faced by their students. Educational institutions should consider implementing strategies to eliminate barriers and provide support to all students. This could involve targeted professional development initiatives to address issues such as microaggressions, as well as comprehensive programs aimed at identifying and addressing unintentional biases among staff. Furthermore, schools may benefit from developing individualized support plans for teachers combined with coaching to minimize the negative impact of biases on student success.

By acknowledging and actively working to address adverse experiences, schools can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students. This not only enhances educational outcomes but also fosters a culture of equity and belonging where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Outreach, storytelling and lobbying

Colleges and school districts stand to gain significantly from incentivizing students to pursue careers in education by either offering or promoting existing tuition assistance or forgiveness programs for those who graduate with an education degree. Despite the existence of such benefits, they often remain relatively unknown. By promoting these programs through

targeted advertisements or presentations at high schools, featuring graduates who mirror the student body, recruitment efforts could be greatly enhanced. Moreover, while school districts do offer incentives through their foundations, low participation rates suggest that outreach efforts to inform everyone about these programs are insufficient. Notably, the Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation has been proactive in establishing various "pipelines" to support aspiring educators, including the Aspiring Administrator Pipeline, OKCPS High School to Teacher Pipeline, Bilingual and Diversity Teacher Pipeline, and Teacher Pipeline (Dunn, 2024).

This study also sheds light on the challenges associated with student teaching, which can act as a barrier for students aspiring to become teachers. Among the ten participants in this study, seven are alternatively certified. Of these seven, three specifically mentioned that they opted not to major in education to avoid student teaching due to the inability to take time off from work. One recommendation could be to pair these alternatively certified teachers with experienced mentor teachers who can provide guidance on lesson planning, classroom management, and other skills typically acquired through student teaching. Alternatively, colleges could explore options to provide more flexibility in their student teaching requirements to accommodate students who are working full-time or have other commitments that limit their availability.

Addressing the issue of low teacher pay requires action on multiple fronts. While it may be an unpopular opinion, it is worth noting that teacher pay is often sufficient to provide a comfortable life for a family. As someone who has been an educator alongside my wife for our entire careers, we have successfully raised three sons and enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle on teacher salaries. While we acknowledge that our circumstances may differ from others, we believe it is important to counter the prevailing narrative of the "broke teacher" by sharing our own experiences of financial stability. While teachers may never receive the compensation they

truly deserve, it is essential to advocate for increased educational funding and, more specifically, higher teacher pay. Despite recent pay raises for teachers in Oklahoma, the state still ranks low in terms of average pay compared to neighboring states, coming in at 34th in the nation (Oklahoma Education Association, 2024). Continued advocacy efforts are therefore necessary to address this disparity and ensure that teachers receive fair compensation for their invaluable contributions to society.

Professional development

Professional development initiatives can be implemented to address the sub-themes identified within the language theme. Among the ten participants, six are English Language Development (ELD) teachers, and many possess experience in ELD classes. Offering professional development opportunities in second language acquisition for all educators would ensure the implementation of appropriate language supports in every classroom, benefiting all students. By involving all teachers in this practice, the need for ELD isolation teachers would decrease, allowing Hispanic educators to teach subjects beyond ELD. This approach is in line with the research presented in Chapter 2, which demonstrates that all students benefit from having diverse teachers.

Furthermore, professional development efforts could focus on the significance of pronouncing students' names correctly and refraining from assigning nicknames to make it easier for themselves. As educators, it is our responsibility to honor students' names by pronouncing them correctly. Additionally, it is essential to remind school staff of the importance of utilizing professional translation services if they are unable to hire a translator. As the sole bilingual administrator in every school I have worked in, I understand the strain of being called upon to translate for every "important" meeting. This responsibility often diverted my attention

from my primary duties, resulting in increased workload due to being bilingual.

In addition to the these areas, professional development sessions could also explore strategies for creating inclusive classroom environments that celebrate linguistic diversity. Educators could learn techniques for incorporating students' native languages into instruction, fostering a sense of pride in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, training modules on culturally responsive teaching practices could equip educators with the tools to effectively engage students from diverse linguistic backgrounds and create an inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and supported.

Furthermore, providing ongoing support and resources to bilingual educators is crucial to their success and well-being in the education system. Offering mentorship programs, networking opportunities, and access to professional development tailored to their unique needs can help alleviate the challenges faced by bilingual educators and enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. By investing in the professional growth and development of bilingual educators, schools can help ensure that they are equipped to meet the needs of diverse student populations and promote equitable outcomes for all learners.

Community outreach

In addressing the issue of lack of college knowledge, both the Hispanic community and the broader community share a responsibility. Individuals who have navigated the college experience themselves can play a crucial role in empowering their families with the necessary information and guidance. However, the effort should extend beyond familial circles. Collaborating with local churches, community organizations, and other social groups can facilitate the dissemination of college-related information to a wider audience. By proactively sharing knowledge and resources, we can collectively demystify the college application process

and ensure that it is accessible to all.

Similarly, the broader community can contribute by organizing informational sessions and providing access to resources that offer guidance on various aspects of pursuing higher education. These initiatives serve to remove barriers and dispel misconceptions surrounding college, ultimately making post-secondary education a viable and achievable goal for everyone. Through grassroots efforts and community engagement, we can foster a supportive environment where individuals receive the support and guidance they need to navigate the complexities of scholarship applications and college admissions. By working together, we can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their educational journey and unlock opportunities for personal and professional growth.

More storytelling

The final theme revolves around actionable steps primarily within the control of the participants themselves. It pertains to their deep-rooted connection to the community and the intrinsic motivations that drive their commitment to the field of education. As previously noted, this was my favorite part of the interviews, evoking a sense of admiration for the passion and dedication shown by each participant. The enthusiasm and dedication displayed by these educators can serve as a source of inspiration for others considering a career in education. The positive impact of their stories and insights extends beyond the confines of the interview, offering encouragement to individuals to explore the possibility of entering the field.

<div align="center">

Future Research

</div>

One of the limitations inherent in this study was its exclusive focus on Hispanic and/or Latino educators. While this deliberate choice allowed for a deep exploration of the experiences within this specific demographic, it also raises questions about potential commonalities across

different ethnic groups. For instance, how might the themes identified for Black educators in the Oklahoma City metro area compare to those uncovered in this study? Similarly, what parallels exist between the experiences of LGBTQI+ teachers and the themes here? By narrowing the scope to Hispanic educators, there's a risk of overlooking broader themes that could foster a sense of unity among individuals with seemingly different identities.

If adverse school experiences emerge as a recurring theme for these diverse groups, it prompts reflection on what proactive steps school districts can take to foster inclusivity across various demographics, rather than focusing solely on targeting Hispanic communities. Exploring themes of intersectionality among individuals who identify with multiple groups could further enrich our understanding of the complex interplay between identity and educational experiences.

Another assumption inherent in this study was the assumption of participants' honesty and the accuracy of their recollections during interviews. An interesting avenue for future research could involve interviewing family members to gain additional perspectives and insights into the participants' lived experiences. Their accounts could help corroborate or challenge the information provided by participants, offering a valuable layer of validation to the study's findings.

Furthermore, investigating the perspectives of family members of current teachers, either with or without the teachers' participation, could shed light on the phenomenon of "lack of college knowledge" among parents. This could inform targeted efforts to educate parents about the intricacies of scholarships, college applications, and the college matriculation process, ultimately empowering them to support their children's educational aspirations more effectively.

Expanding the scope of research to include Latino and/or Hispanic administrators could

offer valuable insights into the career trajectories and experiences of educational leaders. By examining how administrators navigated challenges encountered during their tenure as teachers, this research could provide guidance for aspiring principals as they chart their professional paths.

Additionally, future studies could explore the experiences of teachers of color in rural and suburban school districts, complementing the existing body of research on urban educational challenges. Understanding how these educators' lived experiences and career trajectories compare to those in urban settings could illuminate the unique dynamics at play in different educational environments.

Finally, extending research efforts to other urban metro areas within Oklahoma or to different states altogether could uncover regional trends and variations in educational experiences. By carefully selecting diverse geographic locations, researchers could identify patterns and insights that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping the educational landscape.

Final Thoughts

So, what drove these participants to pursue careers in education? I would say they had the right experiences at the right times in their lives. What's remarkable is the absence of a uniform trajectory among them. The paths they followed to reach their current positions are as diverse as the individuals themselves. Reflecting on their narratives, it's interesting to imagine how different circumstances might have led to entirely different outcomes for each of them. For instance, had Melina encountered the challenges faced by Azucena, her career path might have veered towards law rather than education. Similarly, had Marisa experienced Jaime's life, she might have pursued a different avenue, perhaps opting to re-enlist in the military.

The secondary question examined their journey toward becoming educators, revealing once more the absence of a singular path. Each narrative is a testament to their unique and diverse lived experiences. Just as the Hispanic community encompasses a broad spectrum of backgrounds and perspectives, so too do the stories of these educators reflect a kaleidoscope of individual journeys.

Initially, this study was fueled by the hope of identifying commonalities between my own experiences and those of others, seeking to uncover similarities and differences in the pathways to education. However, what emerged from this exploration is the realization that there is no such thing as a "normal" trajectory. Each educator I had the privilege of engaging with, much like every educator I've encountered, is unique and special.

I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to learn about the lives of these passionate educators and to glean insights from their experiences. My hope is that this dissertation allows others to reflect on their experiences, inspires readers to connect with the stories of the ten participants and, perhaps, with my journey as well.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

<u>Recruitment Document</u>

"I am Ronald Grant from the College of Education at the University of Oklahoma, and I invite you to participate in my research entitled "Why Education?". This research is being conducted in the Oklahoma City metro area. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Hispanic and/or Latino educator. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this research.

This research aims to identify factors that may have pulled or pushed Hispanics/Latinos into a career in education.

If you agree to be in this research, you will meet with me in person, or virtually and I will ask you some questions. For research and reference purposes, I will record our conversation.

Your participation will take approximately one hour.   You may stop or discontinue your participation at any time with or without giving justification or notice.

Do you have any questions about the study? Are you interested in being a participant?

If you are, I will send you a consent form to fill out so we can continue. If not, I appreciate your time."

Appendix B

<u>Interview Questions</u>

1. Please tell me your name, and spell it for me.

2. Please share with me your demographic information, including race/ethnicity, age, and
3. Please tell me about yourself, where you grew up, number of siblings
   and that type of information.
4. Can you describe your high school experience?
   a. What were the teachers like?
   b. Were college classes offered?
   c. How would others describe the reputation of the high school?
5. When did you make the decision to go to college?
   a. What influenced your decision?
6. How would you describe the level of support from your family when you
   decided to go to college?
   a. Can you provide an example?
7. How would you describe the type of support you received from your family
   while you were in college?
   a. Can you provide an example?
8. What was your major in college?
   a. Did you plan to graduate with a different degree?
      i. If so, what was it?
      ii. Why did you change?
9. Given your college experience, how did you decide to become an educator?
10. What did your friends think and say about it?
11. What did your family think and say about it?
12. Is there anything that you feel is unique about your journey to become an educator?
    a. If so, please describe it for me.
13. Do you have anything additional you want to tell me about your experience
    in college, or in choosing to become an educator?

Appendix C   Norman Campus Application (Version 1.4)

Information

*Enter the full title of your study::

Why Education? An investigation of push and pull factors influencing Latinos to become teachers.

*Please enter the short title that you would like to use to reference the study:

Factors that lead Latinos to become teachers.
* This field allows you to enter an abbreviated version of the Study Title to quickly identify this study.

1.0   Add departments

1.1 List departments associated with this study:

Is Primary?	Department Name
⊙	**NC** - *NC* - Education

2.0 ▪ Assign key study personnel(KSP) access to the study

2.1 * Please add a Principal Investigator for the study:

Name	Role	Training Record
Grant, Ronnie L	**Principal Investigator**	🎓 **View Training Record**

2.2 If applicable, please select the Research Staff personnel:

A) Additional Investigators

Name	Role	Training Record
No Additional Investigators have been added		

B) Research Support Staff

Name	Role	Training Record
No Research Support Staff have been added		

2.3 *Please add a Study Contact:

Name	Role	Training Record

Grant, Ronnie L	Study Contact	🎓 View Training Record

The Study Contact(s) will receive all important system notifications along with the Principal Investigator. (e.g. The project contact(s) are typically either the Study Coordinator or the Principal Investigator themselves).

If you are a Graduate Student PI, please list both yourself and your Faculty Advisor as Study Contacts.

3.4 If applicable, please add a Faculty Advisor::

Name	Role	Training Record
No Faculty Advisor has been added		

4.0   25 - Type of Submission

4.1 Select the type of submission you wish to complete:

- ◉ Study Application/Research Application
- ○ Protocol Development Application
- ○ Determination of Human Research Worksheet

5.0   50 - Primary Focus / Nature of Research

5.1 The primary focus/nature of the research is:

- ○ Bio-Medical/Clinical
- ◉ Social/Behavioral

5.2 Does your study involve any of the following? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Interactions with participants who have a medically diagnosed condition
- ☐ Procedures involving ionizing radiation
- ☐ Procedures involving blood-flow restriction
- ☐ FDA controlled substances, supplements, and/or devices
- ☐ The use of human cell line(s) and/or human cloned DNA/RNA
- ☐ The administration or transfer of recombinant DNA, microorganisms, viruses, or biological toxins to humans
- ☐ The review/analysis of pre-existing data/records

5.3 Does your research ONLY involve the review and analysis or pre-existing research records/data? If so, you may respond N/A to any questions regarding interactions with participants.

- ○ Yes   ◉ No

6.0   100 - Participant Information

6.1 In this section, you will need to add rows for each participant group you will include in your research design. For example, you will need to add two rows if your study involves interviewing both children and adults. If you are having only one, broad group participants complete an online survey, you would only add one row. Click the "Add a Row" button below to begin.

Type of Participant Group	Age Range & Gender	Vulnerable/Protected Population	Racial/Ethnic Origin	

Provide a brief description of this participant group:		Is this participant group being **specifically** targeted because they fall into one of the following protected populations? If you are not specifically targeting members of these populations, do not check any of the boxes.	Is this participant group being **specifically** targeted because they fall into one of the following racial/ethnic groups? Check all that apply. If you are not specifically targeting members of these racial/ethnic groups, but your study may include members of the groups - do not check any of the boxes.	Do these participants speak /read/write in English?
Latino Teachers in the OKC metro area	From 18 To	☐ Children (under 18)	☑ Hispanic or Latino	If not, you must submit all translated documents that have been reviewed by a native speaker to their language. You must also submit a signed Translator Statement (found on our website, here: **http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx**)
What is the maximum number of participants from this group to be recruited into the study? 10	Gender: ○ Male ○ Female ○ Transgender or Gender Fluid ◉ All	☐ Pregnant Women ☐ Elderly (65 & older) ☐ Decisionally Impaired (unable to consent) ☐ Intellectual /Developmental Disability (able to consent) ☐ Prisoners ☐ Fetuses ☐ Specific Native American Tribes and/or Tribal Organizations ☐ Other Vulnerable /Protected Populations If **OTHER**, describe:	☐ Native American or Alaskan Native ☐ Black or African American ☐ Caucasian ☐ Asian ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ Other If **OTHER**, describe:	◉ Yes ○ No

6.2 **If you noted above that any of the participant groups will be specifically targeted due to their inclusion in a certain vulnerable population or racial/ethnic group, please use the text box below to describe the additional safeguards included in the research design to protect their rights and welfare.**

I am targeting Hispanic/Latino participants to add to the knowledge of why they as a racial/ethic group specifically are teachers.

Safeguards put in place will include, but not be limited to, the option to opt out of the interview, at any time and without the need for an explanation. Further, I will fully disclose my intention to draw insight from this particular ethnic/racial group from the beginning of the study. Lastly, once the interview is over, I will give them the option to opt out if they so choose to, without explanation or reason necessary.

6.3 Does your study include OU/RSU/Cameron faculty, staff, students, or affiliated researchers as research participants?

Please check all that apply.

☐ OU/RSU/Cameron Students (being recruited from a Departmental Research Pool)
☐ OU/RSU/Cameron Students (being recruited outside of a Departmental Research Pool)
☐ OU/RSU/Cameron Staff
☐ OU/RSU/Cameron Faculty
☐ OU/RSU/Cameron Affiliated Researchers

7.0   150 - Research Design

7.1 Provide a description of the purpose of your study and your research design.

This description should be short and written for a lay reader, not for someone in your field. Also, your response should be understandable without the reader having to refer to another study document. Do not cut and paste your thesis/dissertation research abstract.

Latinos make up a majority of Oklahoma City Public Schools, but make up a very small percentage of the teaching population. The desire of this research is to learn about "push and pull" factors that aided in the Latino educators to choose teaching as a career.

Participants will be asked to answer a set of questions, included as an attachment, in person or via video conference.

7.2 Add a row for each task participants may complete.

Which participants will complete this task?	What is the task?	How long will the task take to complete?	Where/How will the task be completed?	Will this task be recorded?	Will medical clearance or screening be required for participants to complete this task?
☑ All Participants ☐ Some Participants If only some of the participants will complete the task, note which groups of participants will complete the task below. Refer to Section 100 for your noted participant groups.	○ Survey Instrument ○ Focus Group Discussion ● Individual Interview ○ Observation ○ Personal Records /Data Review or Analysis ○ Intervention /Physical Task ○ Other If OTHER, please describe:	1 hour	☑ In-Person ☐ Online ☐ Email ☐ Telephone ☑ Zoom /Skype or similar platform	● Yes ○ No If YES, note how the data will be recorded: ☑ Audio-Recording ☑ Video-Recording ☐ Photographs	○ Yes ● No If YES, explain how medical clearance will be obtained. If a screening instrument will be used, you will need to upload it in the upload section after the application.

7.3 Does your research design include any of the following elements?

☑ Research for a thesis/dissertation
☐ International research
☐ Deception/Concealment
☐ Research involving the military

8.0   160 - Student Research

8.1 **Note: Students who are serving as Principal Investigator on the study must submit a signed Student as Principal Investigator form. Please go to the IRB website (irb.ou.edu) and click on Application Forms under "Resources" to access this form. You will be asked to upload it at the end of the application.**

Provide the name of the student who is writing the thesis/dissertation:

Ronald L. Grant Jr.

8.2 **Provide five (5) references from the literature to support your hypothesis:**

B Bayer, P., McMillan, R., & Rueben, K. S. (2004). What drives racial segregation? New Evidence Using Census Microdata. Journal of Urban Economics. 56: 514-535

Belak (2001). Race and the achievement gap. Rethinking Schools Online, 15, 1-6, retrieved from **www.blackwellsynergy.com/pdf/samplesp733841.pdf**

Borman, G. D., & Rachuba, L. T. (2001). Academic Success Among Poor and Minority Students: An Analysis of Competing Models of School Effects. Report number 52. Johns Hopkins University.

Burrus, J., Elliott, D., Brenneman, M., Markle, R., Carney, L., Moore, G.,... & Roberts, R. D. (2013). Putting and keeping students on track: Toward a comprehensive model of college persistence and goal attainment. ETS Research Report Series, 2013(1).

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. The American Journal of Sociology. 94:S95-s120.

These articles help show that minorities, like Latinos, usually go to lower performing schools thus making it harder to go to college. This is examined to see why those who are able to go to college, choose to teach rather than any other major.

8.3 **What is the proposed end date for this research project?**

04/28/2023

9.0   200 - Study Sites

9.1 **Describe your study site(s):**

I am looking to begin with 10 Latino teachers from the Oklahoma City Metro area. They may be teachers in elementary, middle or high schools.

9.2 **Are there multiple data collection sites, with different investigators conducting research at those sites?**

◯ Yes ◉ No

If YES, enter the names of each site and the lead investigator at each site, and respond to the questions below.

Describe the management plan for monitoring the conduct of research activities at each site.

Although I may draw participants from multiple sites, interviews will take place in person at a single site, an office, or via a video conference.

I will conduct all the interviews with the same questions, and environment.

Describe how research data will be transferred to the Principal Investigator's site.

In person interviews will be recorded by me, the Principal Investigator, and I will physically handle all equipment myself. Recordings will be uploaded to password protected cloud storage, and I will not keep physical copies.

This process will be followed with recorded video conference files too. After the video conference, I will upload the recording to password protected cloud storage and will delete the physical recording from my computer as soon as I verify that it is safely in storage.

Describe how the Principal Investigator will be notified of the need for modifications, and of any unanticipated problems and/or protocol deviations.

Since I am the PI I will know immediately of any problems and deviations from establish protocols.

Describe how the Principal Investigator will confirm information for Continuing Reviews and notify all study sites of study closure.

Given the structure of this research plan, I feel this is not applicable. I will notify all participants via personal communication once the study is concluded.

10.0   250 - Key Study Personnel Roles

10.1   Click the "Add a row" button to add a row, then select a member of your KSP and list the research responsibilities and availability. Click t button again to add another row until you have a row for each KSP. **This table must reflect each person listed in Section 3.0, including your faculty sponsor (if applicable).**

Name and Information	What will this person do?				
Grant, Ronald Larry Position at institution: ☐ Faculty ☐ Adjunct Faculty ☑ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student ☐ Staff ☐ Research Center Employee	Will this person directly interact with participants? ◉ Yes ○ No This person is adequately trained and has sufficient time for these activities. ◉ Yes ○ No	Human Subjects' Research (HSR) Activities ☑ Recruit ☑ Consent ☑ Collect Data ☑ Manage /Monitor Identifiable Data ☑ Analyze Identifiable Data	Not-HSR Activities ☐ Analyze De-Identified Data ☐ Advise /Consult ☑ Manuscript Preparation ☐ Other If "Other", please describe: _____	This researcher will be involved in the following activities (check all that apply): ☑ Conducting study activities at OU, RSU, or Cameron University ☐ Conducting study activities at another institution ☑ Conducting study activities in the field	Is this person associated with another institution? ○ Yes ◉ No If YES, please provide the name of the institution and contact information for the HRPP/IRB office at that institution. _____
					Is this person

Dr Velazquez, Mirelsie Position at institution: ☑ Faculty ☐ Adjunct Faculty ☐ Graduate Student 　Undergraduate Student 　Staff 　Research Center Employee	Will this person directly interact with participants? ○ Yes ● No This person is adequately trained and has sufficient time for these activities. 　Yes　　No	Human Subjects' Research (HSR) Activities ☐ Recruit ☐ Consent ☐ Collect Data 　Manage /Monitor Identifiable Data 　Analyze Identifiable Data	Not-HSR Activities ☐ Analyze De-Identified Data ☑ Advise /Consult ☑ Manuscript Preparation 　Other If "Other", please describe:	This researcher will be involved in the following activities (check all that apply): ☑ Conducting study activities at OU, RSU, or Cameron University 　Conducting study activities at another institution 　Conducting study activities in the field	associated with another institution? ○ Yes ● No If YES, please provide the name of the institution and contact information for the HRPP/IRB office at that institution.

10.2 **Describe the key study personnel management process and continuing interaction between the Principal Investigator and research team/fac sponsor to assure that the protocol is being carried out as approved by the IRB. For example: How often will you meet with your research team? Who is responsible for notifying the IRB of any deviations or unanticipated problems?**

I will conduct the research myself, and will coordinate with my chair when I code and theme the qualitative data. My chair and I will meet at least once every two weeks. I will be responsible for notifying the IRB of any deviations or unanticipated problems.

10.3 **Are there any non-OU collaborating researchers involved with this study?**

○ Yes ● No

11.0　300 - Risks and Benefits

11.1 **Investigator's Risk / Benefit Assessment**

Select the appropriate option for your study:

● Research not involving greater than minimal risk.
○ Research involving greater than minimal risk, but presents the prospect of direct benefit to individual participants.
○ Research involving greater than minimal risk and there is no prospect of direct benefit for the individual participant; however, it is likely to yield generalizable knowledge about the participants' disorders or conditions.

11.2 **If the research exposes participants to risks that are greater than those they would experience in their daily lives, check all of the boxes for risks that apply:**

☐ Economic/Financial Risks
☐ Employment/Occupational/Professional Risks
☐ Legal Risks
☐ Physical Risks
☐ Psychological Risks
☐ Social Risks
☑ Other

If OTHER, please describe:

COVID-19 exposure
breach of confidentiality
accidental data release
deductive re-identification

11.3 If you selected risks above, what is the possibility that these risks will occur and what is the likely severity if they do?

There will be an extremely low possibility that these risks will occur.

The severity of any of these risks will be minimal, given the steps taken to minimize them.

As vaccinations and our knowledge of COVID-19 has increased greatly, a positive contact could still result in health consequences.

The severity of the other three risks are minimal, even if they are breached because the participants are only sharing their experiences and answering general questions.

11.4 Explain what steps will be taken to minimize risks and to protect participant welfare.

All participants will be given aliases to protect their real identity. Furthermore, their school sites will be given different names to further ensure no one can figure out who they are.

Social distancing and masking will help mitigate COVID-19 exposure, as will video conferencing.

Confidentiality will be kept by only speaking of the interviews with my chair and by only using aliases for participants.

Recordings will be immediately transcribed and then deleted once written to prevent accidental data release.

Expanding the participant group to the OKC metro will allow me to minimize deductive re-identification, because it increases the number of schools the teachers can come from.

11.5 Describe the anticipated benefits research participants will experience directly. Do not include compensation here. If none, state "None."

None.

12.0   350 - Recruitment

12.1 Describe your proposed recruitment procedures:

For example, consider the following questions:
- Who will approach potential participants?
- What information are potential participants given about the study?
- What safeguards are in place to minimize coercion?
- If the researcher(s) is also the participants' supervisor/instructor, how will you assure that the identities of the research participants remain unknown to the researchers until after (1) the data have been gathered and de-identified or (2) the class grades have been assigned?

Guidance
- If the participants are under the direct supervision of the researcher(s) [such as employees or students of the researcher(s)], someone other than the researcher must conduct all recruitment and identifiable data collection activities.

I will approach potential participants in person or via a phone call, and tell them that they have been pre-selected to participate in this research study because they have identified as Latino/Hispanic and they are current teachers in OKCPS. They will be told that this research aims to gain insight into why Latinos/Hispanics choose to pursue careers as teachers.

Safeguards to minimize coercion will include the ability to opt out of the process at any time, without the need for a reason to be given. They may opt out by sending an email, which minimizes the need to talk to me.

I, the researcher, am not also the participants' supervisor/instructor.

12.2   Indicate how potential participants will be approached:

☑ Direct Contact / Verbal Script
☑ Telephone Script
☐ Email
☐ Recruitment Flyer
☐ Web Posting
☐ Other

If OTHER, please describe:

13.0   400 - Compensation to Participants

13.1   Select the form of compensation:

☐ None, No Compensation
☐ Cash
☑ Gift/Gas Card
☐ Food
☐ Class Credit Hours
☐ Extra Credit
☐ Other

If OTHER, please describe:

13.2   Provide the total amount of compensation a participant is eligible to receive for the research:

$25

13.3   When and how often will the participant receive compensation?

The participant will receive compensation once, at the end of the study.

14.0   450 - Informed Consent

14.1   Check each method that applies:

☐ Signed consent
☐ Online consent via the internet or email
☑ Verbal consent
☐ Unsigned consent document handed out with data collection instruments
☐ Deception consent with debriefing document
☐ Authorized concealment where participants are warned about possible deception
☐ Informed consent will not be obtained because this research studies pre-existing data

14.2   Who will be consenting to participate in the research? (Check all that apply)

- ☑ Participant
- ☐ Child
- ☐ Parent of Child
- ☐ Guardian
- ☐ Legally Authorized Representative
- ☐ Child, Parent, Guardian, or Legally Authorized Representative outside of the state of Oklahoma

15.0   475 - Waiver of Signed Consent

15.1   You have indicated that your study may qualify for a waiver of signed consent. Please note the most applicable justification for this waiver from the options below.

- ○ Category 1 - The only record linking the participant and the research is the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each participant will be asked whether they want documentation linking them with the research and their wishes will govern. The research is not subject to FDA regulations.
- ⦿ Category 2 - The research present no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.
- ○ Category 3 - The participant is a member of a distinct cultural group or community in which signing forms is not the norm, the research presents no more than minimal risk, and there is an appropriate, alternative mechanism for documenting that informed consent was obtained.

16.0   550 - Funding

16.1   Check all of the appropriate boxes for funding / support sources for this research. Include pending funding source(s).

- ☑ Not externally funded
- ☐ External funding [Industry, Government (Non-Federal), Non-Profit]
- ☐ Funding from one of these federal agencies: Departments of Defense, Energy, Justice, Education, or Environmental Protection Agency
- ☐ Funding from any other federal program not listed above

If you are receiving funding from a federal program not listed below, please describe here:

16.2   Has this research proposal been routed through the Office of Research Services (ORS)?

- ○ Yes / In progress
- ⦿ No

If "Yes / In progress", enter the ORS proposal/award number:

17.0   600 - Privacy and Confidentiality

17.1   What identifying (or potentially identifying) information will you collect from research participants?

Please note: If you will obtain identifying information from participants, be sure to note in your consent form that the data is being kept "confidential" rather than "anonymous."

- ☑ Name
- ☑ Contact Information
- ☑ Employer and Job Title
- ☑ Demographic Information
- ☐ Health Status Identifiers
- ☑ Direct Quotations

- ☐ IP Addresses
- ☑ Other Identifiable Information
- ☐ No Identifying Information

If you selected "Other Identifiable Information" above, please describe:

Audio/video files

17.2 Will you provide a copy of the research data to anyone outside of the research team?

○ Yes   ◉ No

17.3 How will you transfer the data to other investigators, outside entities, or devices?

- ☐ Data transfer via a secured network connection
- ☐ Data transfer via encrypted files or devices
- ☐ Data transfer via secure cloud network hosted by OU
- ☑ Data transfer via secure cloud network not hosted by OU
- ☐ Other

If OTHER, please describe:

17.4 How will you protect the identity of your participants?

- ☑ Interactions are held in a private area.
- ☑ Only designated personnel are present during discussions.
- ☑ Research records are reviewed in a private area.
- ☑ Data are coded; data key is destroyed at end of study.
- ☐ Data are coded; data key is kept separately and securely.
- ☐ Other

If OTHER, describe:

Describe other persons who are not participants who will be present for the research, and note what they will be doing during the research activities.

None

17.5 How will participants be recorded?

- ☑ Audio-Recording
- ☑ Video-Recording
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Electronic Monitoring
- ☐ Other
- ☐ No Recordings

If OTHER, please describe:

Participants identities will be protected during the transcript by use of aliases. I will not transcribe their name on the transcription doc. I will only use their alias.

Who will transcribe those files and how will participants' identities be protected in the transcripts and in transferring the data to the transcriptionist?

I will.

17.6 How will you store data during the research project?

Please see the OU-IT Data Storage Matrix for more information about approved data storage options: **https://www.ou.edu/ouit/research/research_storage**

☐ Data are kept in a locked filing cabinet.
☐ Data are kept in a locked office or suite.
☑ Electronic data are protected with a password.
☑ Data are stored on a secure network.
☐ Other

If OTHER, please describe:

17.7 How long will you retain data and how will you dispose of it? Provide justification if you plan to retain data indefinitely.

NOTE: If you have multiple data sources, please describe when and how you will dispose of each data source. You should also describe what variables will be removed from the data, especially if you are collecting IP addresses from a small number of participants.

Audio/video files will be immediately deleted upon transcription.

De-identified transcripts will be kept in a secure place until my dissertation is finished. Afterwards, I will shred the de-identified transcripts.

17.8 Will you obtain a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality for this research?

○ Yes ◉ No

If YES, please see the **IRB website** for more information about Certificates of Confidentiality and additional consent requirements.

17.9 Does your research involve any of the following activities with participants or collaborating researchers in countries associated with the European Economic Area (EEA)? If so, check all that apply.

(Countries included in the EEA: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.)

☐ Recruiting and collecting data specifically from EEA participants
☐ Analyzing data specifically from EEA participants
☐ Sharing identifiable data with EEA collaborators
☐ Sharing de-identified data with EEA collaborators when a key exists

If so, please contact the IRB/HRPP office (405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu) for language that must be included in your consent form template.

18.0   650 - Application Type

18.1 What level of review is appropriate for your research?

○ Full Board/Committee
○ Expedited
◉ Exempt

19.0   700 - Conflict of Interest

19.1 **Do you or any key study personnel, including non-OU collaborators, have a Conflict of Interest (as defined in the OU COI Policy – see help bubble) that could possibly affect or be perceived to affect the results of the research, educational, or service activities proposed?**

○ Yes   ⦿ No

If you answered 'Yes' to the COI question, click the bar to complete the COI Disclosure Form. If your campus's Office of Research has provided you with a COI management plan, upload it along with your other study documents -OR- upload documentation from that office that a management plan is not required.

20.0   750 - HIPAA

20.1 **Does your research involve the collection, use, or sharing of Protected Health Information from medical diagnoses or medical records?**

○ Yes   ⦿ No

If Yes, you are required to store PHI on a secure data server or on an encrypted device, and to transmit the PHI using only secure transmissions (e.g., University approved portal, encrypted email, secure file transfer). Please contact IT for assistance.

Please note: Storing Protected Health Information (PHI) in the cloud (Office 365, Qualtrics, Surveymonkey, etc.,) is not permitted.

HIPAA templates are located on the OU IRB website (irb.ou.edu), under Resources - Application Forms. You will have the opportunity to upload HIPAA documents at the end of the application.

21.0   800 - Final Assurances

21.1 **Use the text box below to add any other information you would like to include in this application.**

I believe this to be a pretty straightforward request to be able to conduct interviews with adult Latino/Hispanic teachers in OKCPS to help gain insight on what drew them to pursue a career in education.

21.2 **Principal Investigator Certifications**

☑ I certify that all information provided in this submission, including support materials, is complete and accurate.

☑ I certify that all investigators have completed the education requirements of the Norman Campus IRB ("NC IRB") as applicable and required for conducting human subjects research.

☑ I assure that I have obtained all necessary approvals from external entities, as applicable and required for conducting human subjects research.

☑ I assure compliance of all investigators to this submission as approved; relevant OU IRB policies and procedures; applicable federal, state and local laws; and, ethical conduct of the research and protection of the rights and welfare of human participants, as applicable and required for conducting human subjects research.

☑ I agree that all participants entered onto the master list of participants for the study must sign a consent document prior to undergoing any study related interactions or interventions, unless the IRB has granted a waiver of informed consent or a waiver of signed consent.

☑ I agree to promptly report protocol deviations and/or unanticipated problems as defined by OU IRB policy to the OU IRB, as applicable.

☑ I assure that I have documentation of encryption for all electronic devices used in conducting human subjects research.

☑ I assure that I have the resources necessary to provide 1) adequate time to conduct and complete the research; 2) adequate number of qualified staff; 3) adequate facilities; 4) access to a population that will allow recruitment of the necessary number of participants; and 5) availability of medical or psychosocial resources that participants may require (if applicable).