Critical Race Counterstories: Testimonios and Pláticas With Latina Teachers in Rural Central California

By

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ABSTRACT

Critical Race Counterstories: Testimonios and Pláticas With Latina Teachers in Rural Central California

The California educational system is facing a major problem of diversity and representation in the teacher workforce. Latina/o children make up more than half of the population of students in California's public school system, yet their teachers do not mirror this population (CDE, 2022). According to the California Department of Education, (CDE, n.d.), this teacher-student demographic mismatch is especially pronounced in rural Central California, specifically Merced County. When discussing the diversification of the teacher workforce, the literature and research has often focused on the disparities, barriers, or lack of opportunities faced by Latinas/os and other people of color (Carver-Thomas, 2017). While this is important to understand, it is also important to understand what went right for Latinas/os as they entered the workforce as credentialed teachers. To know what went right, a different kind of story, one of success despite so many barriers or limitations, must be told. This type of story is the counter to the norm, or a counterstory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

Using Latina/o critical race theory (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as frameworks for these counterstories, this case study examined the journey of six women who were raised, educated, and now live and teach in Merced County. The participants provided their individual oral testimonio and engaged in a plática where they focused on what they perceived as barriers to their journey to the classroom, what they felt was enriching to their educational experience, and what they felt local education agencies and institutes of higher education should

know to support and retain other Latina teachers. These data should inform both K-12 institutions and institutions of higher education, improving the educational outcomes for all.

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To the participants who opened their lives, sharing so much time and their stories with me, thank you.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to all the Latina/o teachers, past, present, and future who have lived and served or will live and serve the children of the Central Valley, specifically in Merced County, my home. You show up every day and support the hopes and dreams of the children you teach, mirror the language they speak, honor the family they come from, provide a community of love and support for them, help guide them and their families, and advocate for them, elevating their voices to make a better world. Who you are and what you do matters. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

A significant problem that California schools are facing is one of diversity and representation in the teacher workforce. In the classic children's book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin & Carle, 1967) the author and illustrator refer to a teacher in the lines "Goldfish, goldfish, what do you see? I see a teacher looking at me. Teacher, teacher, what do you see? I see children looking at me." In the illustration, the teacher is a White woman with brown hair and blue glasses sitting in front of a group of children, many of whom are children of color. This simple, colorful illustration goes far to describe the stereotypic and historic ethnic makeup of the teaching profession in both the United States and especially in rural Central California, specifically Merced County.

According to the California Department of Education (CDE; n.d.), 23% of the student population in California is White, not Hispanic, while 63% of the teacher population is White. Of the non-White students, 54% are Latina/o while 20% of teachers in California are Latina/o. According to the CDE (2022), a diverse educator workforce helps society and all children and advances equity. When asked, "How does embracing diversity in the teacher workforce and among students support a positive school climate?" Warner (2019) responded,

> Regular exposure to and interactions with individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially during childhood, combat stereotypes, strengthen students' abilities to become comfortable with peers from different backgrounds, reduce unconscious implicit biases inside and outside the classroom, and lead to innovative and greater social cohesion.

She went on to say, "Students benefit from mirrors and windows: the mirror represents the story that reflects their own culture and helps them build their own identity, and the window offers them a view into someone else's experience." (Warner, 2019)

Statement of the Problem

All children benefit from "mirrors and windows" (Warner, 2019), but, according to the current statistics in California as a whole and specifically Merced County, many children simply do not have the opportunity. According to the US Census Bureau QuickFacts for Merced County (2022), the percentage of people who were reported to be White alone, not Hispanic or Latino was 24% and the percentage of people who were reported to be Hispanic or Latino was 63.2%. According to the website Education Data Partnership (n.d.), during the 2018–2019 school year, 2,812 teachers were working in rural Merced County. Of those teachers, 1,664 or 59% were White, not Hispanic, and 832 or 29% identified as Hispanic or Latina/o. These teacher demographics mirrored the rest of what is happening in California as a whole and painted a disturbing picture. Because of the lack of Latina/o teachers working in Merced County, the children in Merced County, like the children in the rest of California, have not received the benefits of a diverse set of teachers that provide "mirrors and windows" (Warner, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

Over the last several decades, the population of Latinas/os in California has increased substantially. According to the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute (n.d.), in 2019, Latinos were the largest racial and ethnic group in California and according to Flores (2011), Latinos are the fastest growing minority group entering the teaching profession. As the population of public-school students has become increasingly diverse, the population of public-school teachers has stayed majority White. According to the CDE (n.d.), only 20% of teachers are Latina/o, whereas 63% of teachers are White while Latina/o students make up 54% of the population in public schools and White students are 23% of the population. With so few Latina/o teachers in

California classrooms, more needs to be done so that the population of teachers and students mirror one another.

The focus of this qualitative case study, centered in rural Central California, was to identify not only the barriers and challenges faced by Latinas as they entered the teaching profession, but also the experiences these women found enriching. Each of the participants told their counterstory, detailing barriers and challenges they faced and how they overcame these obstacles to reach their goal of entering the teaching profession. Counterstorytelling, as defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) in their text *Critical Race Theory, An Introduction*, is "writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p. 171). In their own words, through their individual testimonio and in the group plática, I hoped to elevate the voices and stories of the participants to help educational leaders in K-12 and higher education settings support more Latinas/os as they pursued their education to enter the teaching profession.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this qualitative case study focused on Latina teachers who were from, lived in, and currently teach in rural Central California, specifically Merced County. The questions were designed to understand the challenges Latina teachers have faced, what they have had to overcome to complete their education and enter the teaching profession. The questions were as follows:

1. What do Latina teachers see as challenges or barriers to entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County, California?
2. What do Latinas identify as enriching to their experience entering the teaching profession?

3. What do Latina teachers perceive as possible strategies for districts, colleges, and universities to recruit and support other Latina teachers when entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?

Conclusion

In conclusion, California is facing a major problem of ethnic and racial diversity representation in its teacher workforce. Latina/o children make up a significant population of the students in California's public school system, yet Latina/o teachers do not. The teacher–student demographic mismatch is especially pronounced in rural central California, specifically Merced County. In this qualitative case study, the participants told their counterstory, a journey that was personal to them in the context of Merced County. The goal of telling their counterstory was to describe the barriers and challenges they faced, what they found enriching to their experience, and what they perceived as possible strategies for K-12 and higher education leaders to support and recruit more Latina teachers. A more diverse teacher workforce, especially one that mirrors the population in California, can do nothing but benefit the residents of Merced County and California as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

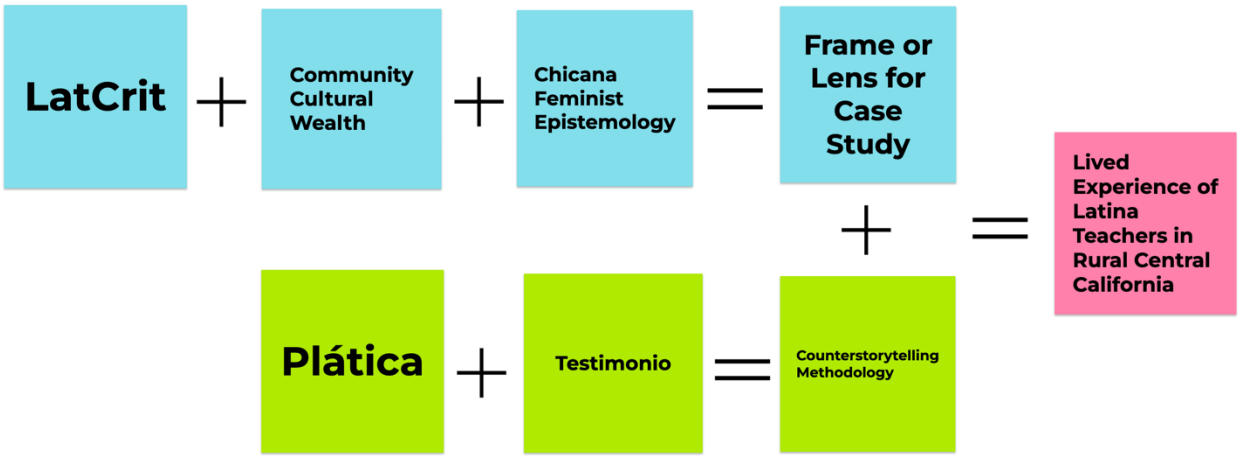
To understand the barriers and challenges Latina teachers have faced and what supports helped them overcome them while navigating the pathway to the teaching profession, I employed Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998). These theories, when brought together, framed, and structured the research to allow for the research questions to be addressed through a unique lens that centered and elevated the voices and experiences of Latina teachers who live and work in Central California, specifically Merced County. The LatCrit theoretical reasoning was used to explain the impact of race and systemic racism against Latina/o people that is present in the K–12 educational system (Kohli et al., 2017) and the impact of race and racism present in IHEs. In community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) provided a framework for understanding capital or wealth of knowledge that communities of color possess and have leveraged to support its members when perusing college, career, and beyond. These capital resources often are community and family based, not just financial, and are often undervalued or excluded from the ways of knowing and the traditional educational system. The Chicana feminist epistemology is a different way of knowing that, according to Calderón et al. (2012), upends dominant feminist methodologies and is aligned with the scholarship of Dr. Gloria Anzaldúa, (1999) focusing on her concepts of Nepantla, El Mundo Zurdo, and Coyolxauhqui.

Through the Chicana feminist epistemology and LatCrit, I utilized the methodology of counterstorytelling. The participants were able to detail their struggles and successes as they navigated both the K–12 and higher education settings to ultimately earn a teaching credential

and enter the teaching profession. Four of the participants were teaching at schools they themselves attended during their K–12 years. Two of the teachers were single subject teachers, one teaching middle school social science and the other teaching high school Spanish. The remaining four teachers taught at the elementary level, teaching self-contained, multiple subject classrooms ranging from second grade to sixth grade. One of the elementary school teachers taught second grade in a dual language academy and the others taught in a traditional setting.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



LatCrit

Critical race theory (CRT) has its foundations in the law and has since branched off into education. Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995) stated that race makes a significant difference in the life of an individual living in the United States. In education, CRT has allowed researchers to challenge the ways that race and racism have shaped the experiences and discourses children have experienced in the United States. According to Perez-Huber (2009), CRT allows the researcher to take the viewpoint of the lived experiences of people of color, especially through the existence and impacts of racism in America. LatCrit is a branch of CRT that, according to Solórzano and Yosso (2001), extends the CRT discussions and adds layers of racialized

subordination based on immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. According to Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), LatCrit also allows for the intersectionality of race, language, culture, immigration status, ethnicity, and class to come together so a researcher can evaluate the influences these experiences have had on the lives of Latinas/os. Through this lens, I examined the experiences of Latina teachers to better understand their experiences when they navigated educational spaces as both K–12 and higher education students, then into their careers as teachers in public schools in Merced County.

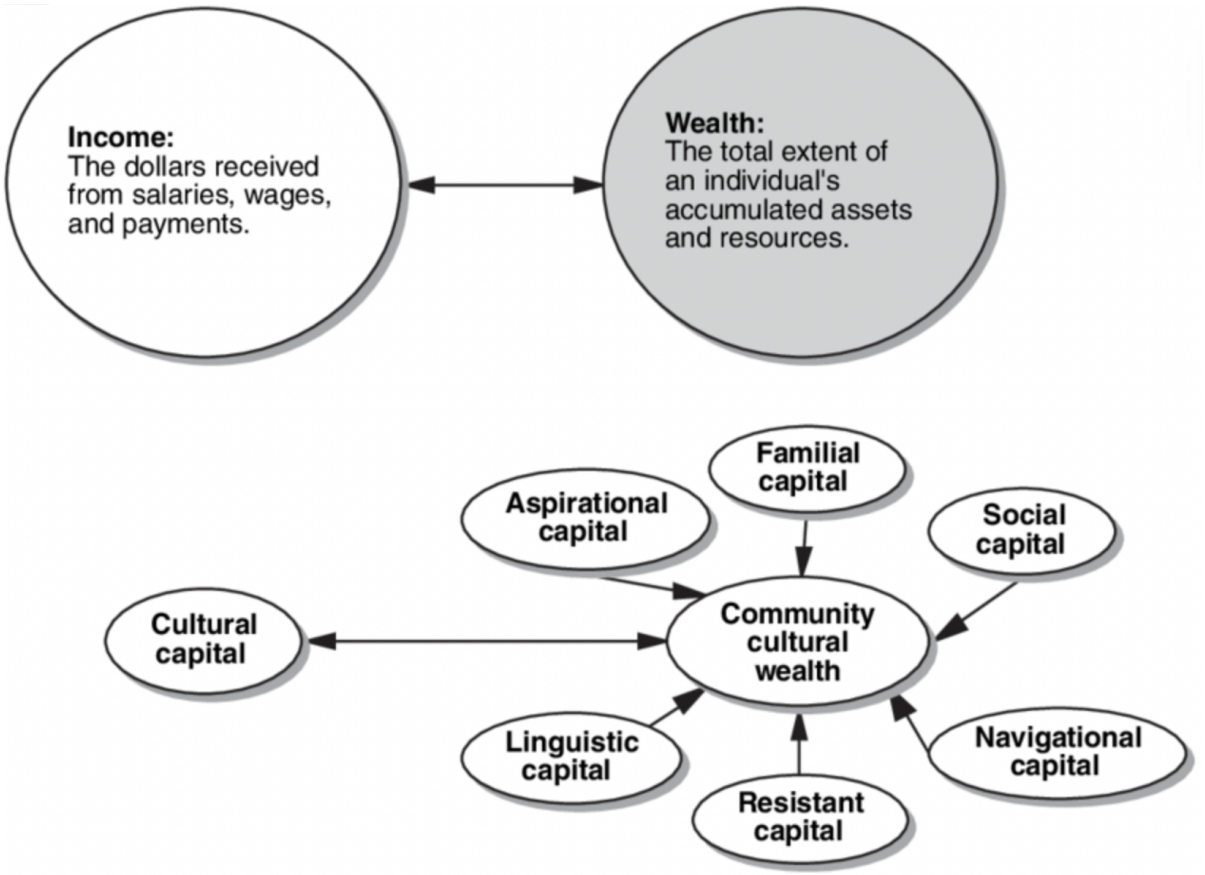
According to Martinez (2020), counterstories are personal stories that document persistence and success in the face of subordination and racism. According to Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002), a counterstory is a "counter-reality that is experienced by subordinate groups, as opposed to those experiences of those in power" (p. 194). Using LatCrit, and counterstorytelling, I conducted a case study that investigated the lived experiences of teachers who successfully navigated both the K–12 schools and IHEs to complete their education and work as credentialed teachers in Merced County.

Community Cultural Wealth

Dr. Tara J. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth decolonized the narrative about income, capital, and wealth. Yosso (2005) defined income as the dollars received from salaries, wages, and payments and wealth as the total extent of an individual's accumulated assets and resources. Capital is part of the wealth, but capital is not always cash or assets, as it is commonly known from an economic perspective. Yosso (2005) divided community cultural wealth into six different types of capital: aspirational, linguistic, social, familial, navigational, and resistant capital. Figure 2 describes income, wealth, and the connection between community cultural wealth and cultural capital.

Figure 2

A Model of Community Cultural Wealth



Note. Adapted from Oliver and Shapiro (1995).

According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital was the ability for people to continue to have hopes and dreams for the future, even when facing real or perceived barriers. Linguistic capital was defined as the intellectual and social skills attained through communication in more than one language. Social capital referred to networks within a person's community that can provide resources and support. Familial capital referred to the cultural knowledge developed through family, including immediate, extended, or chosen family members. Navigational capital referred to an individual's skills and ability to maneuver through and function in a variety of social institutions that included educational spaces. The final form of capital that Yosso referred

to was resistant capital. This form of capital included the knowledge and skills developed through challenging inequity. The individuals who participated in this case study all discussed the various capitals and how they were enriching to their experiences. Hopes and dreams, family and community support, guidance from members of their community or from K-12 or higher education professionals, the ability to speak more than one language, and the ability to persist when faced with real or perceived barriers all impact individuals and communities of color as they move through systems in the United States that were not designed to support them.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

According to Garcia (1989), the Chicana feminist movement came out of the 1970s and 1980s Chicano movement. The Chicano movement focused on social justice, equality, and political and economic self-determination, as well as educational reforms that would improve the outcomes for Chicana/o/x people living in the United States. According to Garcia (1989), Chicanas and other women of color faced specific barriers to their success, including traditional gender roles in the family, poverty, low high school completion rates, issues around healthcare, bilingual education, immigration practices, prison reform, welfare, and the political fallout from the U. S. policies in Central and South America. Delgado Bernal (1998) described a Chicana feminist epistemology as being grounded in the lived experiences of Chicanas. She went on to state that Chicana feminist epistemologies involve Chicana research participants in examining how their lives are being interpreted, documented, and reported on, while acknowledging that many Chicanas lead lives with significantly different opportunities than men or White women.

Fierros & Delgado Bernal (2016) described the Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology or viewpoint in educational research as more than just a theoretical lens, but a space for researchers to become familiar with the corresponding literature and methods and to analyze data. Dr. Gloria

Anzaldúa was foundational to conceptualizing a Chicana feminist epistemology. Anzaldúa (1999) stated that "if we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories." (p. xxvi). In utilizing a Chicana feminist epistemology as a framework, I was able to elevate the voices of the participants and decolonize the research methodology through the use of individual testimonios and one group plática. Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) defined the decolonization of research as centering the concerns and worldviews of individuals who are not "Western and respectfully knowing and understanding theory and research from a previously 'Other(ed)' perspective" (p. 1). Thambinathan and Kinsella argued that there is no standard model or practice for decolonizing research methodologies, but they believed it vital for the qualitative researcher to embrace other(ed) ways of knowing. They stated that this involves "unlearning and re-imagining how we construct, produce, and value knowledge" (p. 4) and that it is necessary to decolonize research to elevate the voices of those who have been overlooked or misrepresented. According to Battiste (2000), "decolonizing research means centering the community's voices and epistemological perspectives throughout the research process." (p. 5)

According to Pérez Huber (2009), a "Testimonio is a research methodology that has been described as a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future." People from minoritized backgrounds who have been historically excluded from the mainstream narrative possess a different type of wealth and funds of knowledge that should not be overlooked. Through witnessing the testimonios of Latina teachers who live and work in Central California, I was able to ascertain a better understanding of how race, class, gender, and injustice have been both barriers and entryways for these

teachers. I was also able to hear how these teachers have healed, have been empowered, and have advocated for other teachers who have had similar experiences. These teachers all grew up in the Central Valley and chose to live and work in the Central Valley. They all had their own reasons for choosing to live and work where they did, and they shared different viewpoints about what drew them back to this area and what they believed districts should do to encourage and retain more teachers of color to work in the Central Valley.

Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) shifted pláticas from what they had previously been, an entryway or small talk before an interview, to a more valid data collection system. According to Flores and Morales (2021), when researchers use pláticas instead of traditional interviews, they decolonize the Eurocentric methods of research that claim objectivity, even though it is impossible to be completely objective. Pláticas as a methodology center dialogue with the researcher asking questions and engaging with the participants through conversation. Flores and Morales described pláticas as a valid data collection approach that allowed participants and researchers to be considered collaborative partners in creating knowledge. Next, pláticas include the lived experiences of both participants and researchers as part of a two-directional research process, allowing them to be open and allow for vulnerability. Pláticas also allowed for a space for healing from past trauma.

Conclusion

LatCrit, community cultural wealth, and a Chicana feminist epistemology framed the research and centered the voices of the case study participants. Through these lenses, I used both individual testimonios and a group plática to discuss the lived experiences of Latinas who attended at least 10 years of their K–12 education in Merced County schools, became teachers, and came back to teach in rural Central California, specifically Merced County. In the telling of

their counterstory, these participants described how they succeeded within a system that continues to fail so many Latina/o children. Because these teachers have been successful, their testimonios will be an important part of the conversation around the diversification of the teacher workforce. When the people who work in and lead the K–12 educational system along with those who work in and lead institutions of higher education (IHEs) better understand the journey of Latinas as they work to become teachers, their funds of knowledge, the communities they come from, and how to meet them where they are, these educational institutions can support these women and improve outcomes for Latinas entering the teaching profession.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review for this study includes an examination of the legal and historical issues or barriers Latinas/os have faced living and working in Central California and the implications of Latina/o success for California as a whole. The review of the literature then discusses the implications of a diverse teacher workforce and the college or university opportunities for Latinas/os who are living in Central California. Next, this literature review details the requirements for earning a teaching credential, which leads to the challenges both universities and districts face in recruiting, hiring, and retaining Latina/o teachers as well as other teachers of color. This literature review concludes with opportunities California has to grow a stable workforce of teachers of color.

Legal and Historical Issues or Barriers for Latina/os in Central California

It is impossible to speak of the experiences of Latinas/os in Central California without first discussing the history of discrimination and exploitation of both U.S.- and foreign-born Latinos. Latinos have been living in California for many years, but for the purposes of this review of the literature, I will start with the annexation of California after the Mexican American War. According to Gilmore (1963), the Mexican–American War (1846–1848) resulted in the United States gaining more than 500,000 square miles of Mexican territory, extending westward from the Rio Grande to the Pacific Ocean. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States expanded significantly, adding what are now known as the states of New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Texas, and Colorado. California was admitted to the Union on September 9, 1850, as the 31st state in the United States.

In the California State Parks document *Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement*, (2015) the authors describe the history of Latinos in California and their settlement before 1900, Mexican immigration in the 20th century, the Mexican Repatriation, the Great Depression, World War II and the Bracero Program, Central American immigration, and South American immigration as well as changes to immigration policy. The California State Parks department described how the earliest Mexicans were drawn to California by the prospect of gold during the Gold Rush of 1848–1855 and by the year 1900, at least 8,000 Mexicans had settled in California. Many of these immigrants worked on the railroads or in agriculture, mining, or construction.

In 1910, the Mexican Revolution began. President Diaz was overthrown, and a decade of political upheaval and violence followed. The quality of life in Mexico was deeply impacted, which caused many Mexicans to seek refuge in the United States. At this time in history, people moved freely between Mexico and the United States until the Immigration Act of 1917 was put in place, restricting immigration by "imposing an eight-dollar head tax, a literacy test, and a physical exam on all who wished to enter the U.S. from a foreign county" (California State Parks, 2015, p. 5). By 1920, Mexican laborers formed the San Joaquin Valley's largest single ethnic group, but with the stock market crash of 1929 and the economic turmoil that followed during the Great Depression, the U.S. government began passing laws to discourage employers from hiring Mexican workers, both immigrants or U.S. citizens. According to the California State Parks, most of the repatriated people were U.S. citizens whose civil rights were violated. "Estimates of the numbers of affected Mexican Americans in California vary widely from approximately 100,000 to as many as 400,000, the number cited by the California Apology Act

for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program" (p. 8). An estimated 2,000,000 people were deported nationwide, and 1,200,000 of those deported were U.S.-born citizens.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, the pendulum swung the other way, and instead of a policy of decreasing the need for the work of Latinos, more labor was needed. In 1942, the U.S. and Mexican governments formed a guest worker program called the Emergency Farm Labor Agreement, commonly known as the Bracero Program. This program lasted 22 years and had a major impact on the U.S. economy.

> The Bracero Program also had the unanticipated effect of increasing both sanctioned and unsanctioned emigration from Mexico. Despite the poor conditions and difficult tasks assigned to guest workers, wages were still seven to ten times higher in the U.S. and many Mexicans remained in the country illegally after their contracts expired." (California State Parks, 2015, p. 9)

The Latino population in the United States began to diversify after 1970. In the late 1970s and 1980s, many Central American immigrants came to the United States as political refugees rather than for economic reasons. Civil wars and revolutions caused many people to flee their home countries, and many came to California.

According to California School News Report (2022), when California was established as a state, the founders set aside land to fund education. In 1867, schools became free for all children. In 1921, the State Department of Education was established, and this gave local school boards the ability to set their own budgets and collect taxes. During the Great Depression, school systems received massive cuts in funding, and by 1944, many schools were not being funded equally because of their funding formulas. In addition to school funding not being standardized, districts also had the authority to segregate students by race. The 1947 case *Mendez v. Westminster* ended this practice in California and set the precedent that would later be used in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to end segregation established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which stated that separate facilities, if equal, do not violate the Constitution.

After *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947), one of the most significant court cases that impacted the educational experience of Latinas/os in California was *Serrano v. Priest* (1971). In *Serrano v. Priest* (1971), parents argued that California's system of school funding was inequitable because students from poor communities were not receiving the same resources as those from more affluent communities. Because Latinas/os and other people of color tended to live in less affluent neighborhoods, the schools they attended had fewer resources. Another more recent case that has had a major impact on Latinas/os living in California was, according to the CDE (2021), *Williams v. California* (2004), a case brought before the San Francisco County Superior court that stated that districts were failing to provide students with qualified teachers, adequate instructional materials, or suitable facilities.

All these court cases were fought by families who wanted the best for their children and, by extension, the future of California. More recently, Latina/o children faced more discriminatory practices with the passage of Proposition 227 (1998), which was mitigated by the passage of Proposition 58 (2017). According to Hopkinson (2017), Proposition 58 implemented the California Multilingual Education Act of 2016, which allowed public schools more local control over bilingual education and how students will acquire English as a second language. Proposition 58 repealed Proposition 227, which required all English learners to be taught in English-only immersion classrooms. This shift allowed for schools to design programs to meet the needs of both students who are native speakers of English and want to learn another language and those who are English learners.

Implications of Latina/o Success

Because Latinas/os make up such a large part of the population in the state and in Merced County, it is more imperative than ever that they, as a group, succeed. According to Yosso

(2006), educational outcomes for Latinas/os are not good. Figure 3 detailed their educational outcomes.

Figure 3

The Chicana/o Educational Pipeline

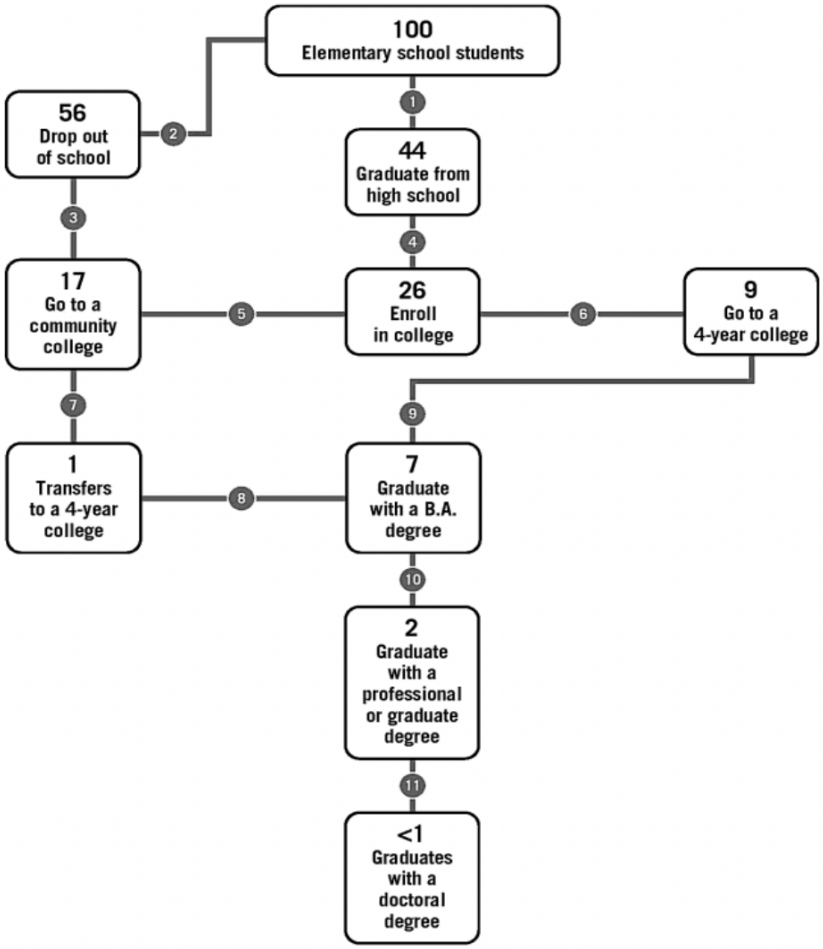


Figure 1.1. The Chicana/o Educational Pipeline[7]

Note. The figure illustrates low academic outcomes at each point along the educational pipeline in 2000. From: Yosso and Solórzano (2006).

In the chart shown in Figure 3, Yosso described the educational outcomes typical to Chicana/o children attending schools in California and the Southwest. These numbers are startling and reflect an educational outcome for Latina/os that must be addressed for the benefit

of all children. According to the Cook, Jackson & Johnson, (2019), out of all the racial or ethnic groups that live in California, Latinas/os have the lowest rate of completing bachelor's degrees in 4 or 6 years. They authors go on to say that the lower graduation rates are due to several academic and economic factors such as limited course availability and the high placement of Latinas/os in developmental or remedial courses. Many Latina/o students must also work at least part-time to cover expenses because they receive insufficient financial aid, so in turn they must reduce the course loads the carry, making it difficult to graduate on time. There is also a significant inequality of elementary and secondary school conditions, including a lack of access to quality facilities, qualified teachers, and support staff. Latina/o students often have less access to college preparatory classes or enrichment curricula. Instead, there is an overreliance on standardized tests that are biased in favor of White students and dismissive of Latina/o cultural strengths contributing to these dismal statistics.

When Latinas/os show up in school, they do not appear from a vacuum. According to the Emerging Leaders Internship of Portland, Oregon (n.d.), Latinas/os and other people of color have a lived experience that is important to understand and recognize. In their leaflet *Cultural Wealth and Your Career Narrative*, they state that everyone brings their full and authentic self—their talents, strengths, and experiences—to college, career, and beyond. Latinas/os must understand how to leverage all their assets to navigate the educational systems in California. People of color and Latinas/os have different forms of knowledge, and this is different from the knowledge of those in mainstream American culture. The different forms of capital that Yosso (2005) defines are key for people of color to complete their K–12 education and navigate their higher education journey to become credentialed teachers so they can be employed as educators in California.

According to the *Time* magazine article "The Complicated History Behind California's Vote on Bilingual Education" (Rothman, 2016), in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt created a commission on naturalization, which issued a report that recommended English language ability as a prerequisite for becoming a citizen because "if he does not know our language, he does, in effect, remain a foreigner" (p. 1). The article goes on to outline the push for English instruction through the 1950s into the 1960s, when in 1968, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act, designed to help children who spoke a language other than English to continue their studies in their home language while they continued to work toward English proficiency. There was funding for schools that planned to develop these programs. In 1974, the Supreme Court heard *Lau v. Nichols*, which found that it was discriminatory of the San Francisco school system to fail to properly educate students who spoke Chinese (Rothman). In 1986, English was made the official language of California.

According to Gándara (2017), the underperformance of Latina/o students has often been attributed to language barriers. This idea has driven political reform to change how students were taught to acquire English. Businessman Ron Unz led the English-only movement that began in California in 1998. The English-only movement made claims that if students received English-only instruction, they would be proficient in English within a school year and be equal to their non-Spanish-speaking classmates. These claims were proven false, as this goal was unrealistic. The misguided idea that language was an impediment to learning ignored the powerful role of poverty in the lives of Latino students.

Gándara (2017) goes on to discuss that nationwide, in 2017, nearly two-thirds of Latina/o children lived in or near poverty and less than 20% of low-income Latinos lived in homes where anyone has completed postsecondary education. These two items alone often result in children

living in poorer areas with few opportunities and resources. They attend underperforming schools and do not encounter peers who are knowledgeable about opportunities outside their home community or plan to pursue postsecondary education. The parents in these communities may not have the time or knowledge to evaluate the quality of their children's education, or they may not feel empowered to request that schools offer more opportunities. Many parents also grew up in these communities and may find themselves trapped, dealing with their own trauma from their educational experiences, and see few prospects. If these issues are not addressed, Latina/o students will continue in a vicious cycle that does not improve outcomes for a significant population in California and Merced County.

The Impact of a Diverse Teacher Workforce

According to Bristol et al. (2022), there is substantial evidence that supports retaining a diverse teacher workforce:

- Latinx students are more likely to say they expect to graduate from college when taught by a Latinx teacher, as compared to being taught by a teacher of a different ethno-racial identity.
- Being taught by at least one Black teacher reduced the probability of Black male elementary students dropping out in later years by 39% and increased Black students' intentions to pursue a baccalaureate degree by 29%.
- In multiple studies, Black students assigned to a Black teacher scored consistently higher in reading and math than their peers in other classrooms.
- Asian American and Latinx students were less likely to receive an out of school suspension in years that they had a teacher of the same ethno-racial identity.
- Black students taught by only Black teachers were less likely to receive exclusionary discipline than if they encountered only non-Black teachers.
- Students of color experienced less unexcused absences, likelihoods of chronic absenteeism, and suspensions when taught by teachers of color.
- All students, regardless of race, have reported feeling both academically challenged and cared for by their teachers of color. (p. 4)

According to the CDE (n.d.), the diversity of California's current teacher population does not reflect its current student population. Schaeffer (2021) explains that both elementary and secondary public-school teachers in the United States are not as racially or ethnically diverse as a

group as the students they teach. The number of Black, Hispanic, and Asian American teachers has increased in recent decades, but this increase has not kept pace with the significant growth in the racial and ethnic diversity of their students. According to the Partnership for the Future of Learning (2022), all students have the right to a quality education that prepares them for college, career, and beyond.

In the Learning Policy Institute Report *Diversifying the Teaching Profession—How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color*, Carver-Thomas (2018) reviewed the racial and ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce today. In the executive summary, Carver-Thomas outlines the benefits for all students when they have a teacher of color. First, teachers of color often teach in low-income communities of color where staffing can be challenging. Next, there is research to support that when students have teachers of color their academic performance is positively impacted (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Children of color reported that they experience social–emotional and nonacademic benefits when they have teachers of color. The children reported feeling cared for and that they are challenged academically. Finally, many teachers of color experience feelings of isolation, frustration, and exhaustion when there is little to no diversity among the teaching staff. Increasing diversity may help these teachers feel happier in their jobs and help with the high rate of teacher turnover.

Knowing that a diverse set of teachers is beneficial for all children, Shafer (2018) asked, "What can institutions do to increase the number of teachers of color?" She used focus groups to interview Black and Latina/o teachers to get their perceptions on the benefit of teachers of color and what districts do to support them. Shafer stated that one of the most powerful supports a school can give a student of color is to provide a teacher of color. She found that the teachers believed their race, ethnicity, and cultural background influenced their work in a positive way

that was beneficial for students and the larger school community. The teachers of color also believed that those same attributes often impeded their professional growth and created extra personal stress and barriers for them to overcome. Latina/o teachers stated that they wanted to value Latina/o culture but were often criticized by their colleagues for deviating from the curriculum, and Spanish-speaking teachers felt that their workload was increased because they had to serve as translators. Black and Latina/o teachers said they felt they had to prove their worth as educators and overall felt overlooked, undervalued, and that they had to prove their qualifications to parents (Shafer, 2018).

In order to diversity the field, Carver-Thomas (2017) discussed the barriers to recruiting and retaining teachers of color and promising practices that can support teachers of color. The barriers Carver-Thomas outlines are obstacles to completing college like financial burdens or lack of adequate preparation in high school, insufficient teacher preparation, exams teachers need to complete, and challenging teaching conditions faced when they entered the classroom. To address this, Carver-Thomas (2017) suggested that funding high-retention pathways into teaching, including teacher residencies and grow your own programs in addition to ongoing mentoring and support for candidates of color is important. Creating proactive hiring practices and improving conditions for teachers through improved school leadership is also key.

Colleges and Universities Serving Future Teachers in Merced County

Merced County has two colleges: Merced College, a community college, and the University of California (UC) Merced campus. Other universities have extension sites that are housed in the county of Merced, but for the purpose of this review of the literature, the only colleges or universities discussed will be the ones founded with home bases in Merced County. Merced College was established in 1962 as a community college, where students can earn

certificates, an associate of arts or sciences, A.A. or A.S. degree in addition to transfer credit to a 4-year college or university (Merced College, n.d.). As for UC Merced in 1988, The UC Board of Regents began plans to establish a new UC campus in the San Joaquin Valley (UC Merced, n.d.a). In 1995, Merced was chosen as the site (UC Merced, n.d.a). In 2003, faculty and staff started setting up research laboratories, and the first graduate-level courses were made available in 2004, with freshmen entering campus in 2005 (UC Merced, n.d.a). According to the Undergraduate Admission page on the UC Merced website, UC Merced, Merced Union High School District, and Dinuba Unified School district have recently joined together to create the Merced Automatic Admission Program or MAAP, a guaranteed admission pathway for qualified graduates of these high school districts. Additional Central Valley school districts including Chowchilla Union, Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified, Le Grand Union, Modesto City Schools, Los Banos Unified and Tranquility High School in Golden Plains Unified School District will also be joining MAPP in 2024.

Teacher candidates at both Merced College and UC Merced can be awarded financial aid and grants for both Free Application for Federal Student Aid- and California Dream Act Application-eligible students who qualify. According to the UC Merced Extension website, students in the credential program are eligible for Cal Grant, the TEACH Grant, and the Golden State Teach Grant, in addition to federal student loans. According to the website, at Merced College, students are eligible for both federal and state grants including Cals Grant B and C, the Student Success Completion Grant 24+ Units, the Student Success Completion Grant 30+ Units, the Chafee Grant for Foster Youth, and the California College Promise Grant, as well as student employment, tuition waivers, scholarships, and student loans.

According to the 2016–2017 Merced College catalog (Merced College, 2016), Merced College offers a Liberal Studies A.A. with a focus on elementary teacher education in their English, Basic Skills, and Child Development department. The courses detailed in the required core courses are required for transfer. LBST-10: Introduction to Education I and LBST-20: Introduction to Education II are seminars that introduce teacher candidates to the foundations of education, and both require 45 hours of tutoring in children in local schools. As of November 2022, UC Merced does not have a school or department of education, but there is an undergraduate minor in the School of Natural Sciences that is designed to prepare UC Merced students for admission into a teacher preparation program (School of Natural Sciences, n.d.). In addition to this undergraduate minor, there is a teacher preparation program for general education teaching credentials including multiple subject candidates and single subject English, social science, science, and math housed in University Extension. These credential programs offer both a traditional pathway into teaching and an intern pathway. Candidates can enter this program directly from UC Merced or from another 4-year institution. The teacher preparation program offered by UC Merced Extension is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the CTC.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC)

According to the CTC website, the mission of the CTC is "to ensure integrity, relevance, and high quality in the preparation, certification, and discipline of the educators who serve all of California's diverse students" (CTC, 2022). Its vision is that "all of California's students, preschool through grade 12, are inspired and prepared to achieve their highest potential by well prepared and exceptionally qualified educators" (CTC, 2022). The CTC is the governing body

that issues credentials, permits, and certificates to those who work in education, and they set program standards for all institutions and is governed by the state legislature.

The CTC lists several categories of credentials that are currently in use: elementary, secondary, education specialist, specialist, services, career technical education, adult education, and early childhood education. For the purposes of this literature review and summary, I will focus on elementary and secondary credentials. Candidates who want to teach at an elementary level seek a multiple subject credential. This authorizes the holder to teach in self-contained classes from grades TK to 12. A secondary credential is for candidates who plan to teach in departmentalized settings in middle and high schools. Many of the requirements are similar, but there are subtle differences detailed in the documents or leaflet provided by the CTC for guidance.

According to the document "Multiple Subject Teaching Credential" CL-561C (CTC, 2018)," a candidate who seeks to become an elementary teacher can complete their preparation at an accredited institution as an intern or as a traditional student teacher. All candidates seeking a credential must hold a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, satisfy the basic skill requirement, satisfy the subject matter competence requirement, pass the RICA, complete a course in the provisions and principles of the U.S. Constitution, and complete a CTC-approved preparation program inclusive of a teacher performance examination to obtain a formal recommendation for the credential. Public or private colleges or universities can offer a traditional or intern program, districts can provide intern programs, or candidates can complete their service with the Peace Corps to earn a credential.

According to the CTC website, *Single Subject Teaching Credential Requirements for Teachers Prepared in California (CL-560C)*, a candidate who seeks to become a secondary

teacher can complete their preparation at an accredited institution as an intern or as a traditional student teacher. Like the multiple subject candidates, all single subject credential seekers must hold a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, satisfy the basic skill requirement, satisfy the subject matter competence requirement, complete a course in the provisions and principles of the U.S. Constitution, and complete a CTC-approved preparation program inclusive of a teacher performance examination to obtain a formal recommendation for the credential. Single subject candidates do not have to demonstrate competency via the RICA. Public or private colleges or universities can offer a traditional or intern program and districts can provide intern programs as well (CTC, 2022).

All credential programs are accredited by the CTC. To be accredited, programs must go through the process of submitting Preconditions, adhering to the Common Standards, meeting Educator Preparation Program Standards, ensuring that candidates demonstrate competence of the California Teaching Performance Expectations, and programs must introduce candidates to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession that they will need to meet in the second phase of credentialing. (CalTPA n.d.)

The Challenge of Recruiting Latina/o Teachers and Other Teachers of Color

Over the last several decades, the population of Latinas/os in California has increased substantially. According to the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute (n.d.), in 2019, Latinos were the largest racial and ethnic group in California. Currently, Latinos are the fastest growing minority group entering the teaching profession (Flores, 2011). According to the CDE's website, *Diversifying the Teacher Workforce*, currently 20% of the teachers in California are Latina/o and 63% are White. The largest percentage of students are Latina/o, making up 54% of the population, whereas 23% are White. As the population of public-school students has become

increasingly diverse and as the population of public-school teachers have stayed majority White, considerable attention has been placed on recruiting more people of color into the teaching profession. Yet substantial barriers remain.

According to Irizarry (2011), Latina/o students who are born and raised in the United States are underrepresented in IHEs due to the failures of the K–12 educational pipeline. Irizarry stated that by the year 2050, these Latina/o students will make up close to half the school-age population in the United States. Historically, people of color were often unable to gain access to a higher education or faced hostile environments in schools that are predominantly White institutions. This necessitated the creation of historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, and Tribal colleges to create opportunities for people of color to attend college. After the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, more people of color gained access to IHEs, but continue to be underrepresented. With the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, colleges and universities were able to create race-conscious admission policies. But with *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California* (1978), the court ruled that racial quotas were unconstitutional for public colleges or universities, significantly limiting access for Latinas/os and other students of color.

Irizarry (2011) detailed other barriers to accessing higher education for Latinas/os and people of color, including standardized testing, such as college entrance exams like the ACT and the SAT. According to Robinson (2022), the UC system is to become a test-blind school for all applicants including out-of-state and international applicants. These assessments will also not be required or considered when applying for a Chancellor's or a Regents Scholarship. Originally, the UC had planned to introduce a UC-specific standardized test for its applicants, but at the November 2021 Board of Regents meeting, the regents decided that all UCs would remain test

blind, and there are no current plans for the UC to develop its own college entrance examination. In March of 2022, the California State University (CSU) system announced it would also permanently switch to a test-free admission system with the incoming class of 2025.

In the *Campaign for College Opportunity Report* from November 2021, Reddy & Siqueiros report that more Latina/o Californians are graduating from high school, enrolling in college, and succeeding. They state that 87% of Latina/o 19-year-olds have a high school diploma or equivalent compared to 73% 10 years earlier (p. 7). Forty-four percent of Latina/o high school graduates in the 2019–2020 academic year were prepared and eligible for university admission. A total of 1.39 million students enrolled in college in California and 43% of California undergraduate students are Latina/o. At the community college level, the number of Latina/o students taking and passing college-level math in their first semester was 33%, up from 8%, and the percentage of Latina/o students taking and passing transfer-level English in their first semester went from 20% to 56%. For the first time in history, the CSU entering class of 2019–2020 reflected the diversity of the population of California's graduating high school class, and admission data for the UC for fall 2021 showed an 8% increase in Latina/o admission from fall 2020. More than half of Latinas/os enrolling at the UC were graduating on time, 53% of Latino freshmen graduated in 4 years, and 51% of Latino transfer students graduated in 2 years. Nearly two thirds of Latinas were graduating from UC on time and 63% of Latina transfer students graduated in 2 years.

On the other hand, Reddy & Siqueiros (2021) of the *Campaign for College Opportunity Report* from November 2021 stated that more than half of California's Latina/o high school graduates were not eligible for admission to a 4-year university because they did not have access, support, or the ability to complete the A–G requirements for admission to the UC or CSU.

Seventy-eight percent of Latina/o students enrolled in a community college, but after 6 years, fewer than 32% had transferred to a 4-year institution. At the CSU, fewer than one in five Latino freshmen graduate in 4 years and only 29% of Latinas graduate in 4 years. Fifty-three percent of Latina/o freshmen who enroll at the UC will finish in 4 years. and 51% of Latina/o transfer students graduate in 4 years. Twenty-five percent of students attending the UC are Latina/o and are significantly underrepresented compared to the diversity of California.

Aside from completing a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, there are several financial demands of pre-service teachers that can impact the recruitment of Latinas. Four years of full-time study in California can be very expensive for the average family or individual. According to UC Merced (2019), residents who were undergraduates who first enrolled in fall 2022 living on campus could expect to pay $39,452 each year for fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, personal expenses, and health insurance. These fees are not all payable directly to the university and are used to create a financial aid package for students. Many students receive a significant amount of financial aid to meet these expenses, but credential programs are traditionally completed as a postbaccalaureate program, meaning 1–2 additional years of full-time study before entering the classroom and earning a living wage. At UC Merced, the Teacher Preparation Program is estimated to cost $24,606 to complete (UC Merced, n.d.b). This is inclusive of fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, personal expenses, and health insurance. This does not include the fees for the required assessments, clearances, and filing for a credential.

On the UC Merced (n.d.b) Teacher Preparation Program page detailing tuition and financial aid, the costs of obtaining a teaching credential are outlined. Each institution offering a credential program sets its own fees, but the fees for assessments and credentials are set by the

CTC. At UC Merced, before a candidate is admitted to a credential program, they must demonstrate mastery of basic skills via coursework or the California Basic Education Skills Test, or CBEST. If they choose the CBEST, the assessment fee is $102. A candidate must also demonstrate subject matter competence via an associated major, for example liberal studies for multiple subject candidates or chemistry for a single subject chemistry teacher candidate, on the California Subject Examinations for Teachers or CSET examination. CSET exams range from $97 to $99 each, and candidates often have to take two to four assessments per credential. In addition to these assessments, a candidate must have a tuberculosis clearance and a certificate of clearance from the CTC. To get a tuberculosis clearance may require a doctor visit and associated fees. To get a certificate of clearance, a candidate must pay to have fingerprints taken and pay an additional $50 to the CTC. The Live Scan fingerprint clearance can range from $50 to $100.

In addition to these preprogram costs, there are program costs like application fees, tuition, textbooks and materials, transportation, and parking, as well as assessments. Tuition is set by individual institutions, but at UC Merced, candidates pay $450 per academic unit. In addition to coursework, a multiple subject candidate needs to complete the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment or RICA as well as two cycles of a Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA). The RICA has three subtests, and each is $57. At UC Merced, all candidates complete the California Teaching Performance Assessment (CalTPA), and the fees for each assessment are $150. Once a candidate has completed all the requirements to earn a teaching credential, they must be recommended by a credential analyst and pay the associated $102 fee. At that time, a candidate has earned a preliminary teaching credential and can now seek employment as a

teacher of record in a California school. This is a significant financial investment on the part of the teacher candidate.

Hiring and Retaining Latina/o Teachers and Other Teachers of Color

According to Carver-Thomas (2017), to increase the number of teachers of color in the workforce there must be intentional preparation and hiring. Districts must provide teachers of color with ongoing support to overcome the barriers to recruitment and retention. Once a teacher of color is prepared, Carver-Thomas outlines several recruitment and retention strategies, including the timing of hiring, the information provided to teachers during the hiring process, and information about credentialing and pensions. When reviewing the timing of hiring, Carver-Thomas stated that nearly 40% of Black and Latina/o teachers were hired before August. These teachers of color were interested in securing teaching positions before they graduated/completed their preparation program to ensure they had a paying job as soon as possible. Schools that were successful in hiring more teachers of color also included their current teachers of color in the hiring process in important ways, like including them on hiring committees. Carver-Thomas went on to describe how comprehensive induction support during the first years of teaching and improved conditions through effective school leadership from administrators and academic leaders play a key role in the retention of teachers of color. Mentoring and support, both during a candidate's preparation and during their first years in the classroom, can help candidates complete a preparation program and enter the field of teaching with the support and tools they need for success. District-wide commitments to culturally responsive pedagogies and cultural competency support both teachers and students of color in an inclusive classroom. Effective preparation for school leaders will make schools a positive working environment, helping to retain teachers of color and limiting turnover.

According to Achinstein et al. (2010), teachers of color experience a higher turnover rate than their White peers. Because teachers of color are underrepresented in the teaching profession, their leaving the profession widens an already large ethnic and cultural gap between teachers and students. This turnover threatens the capacity nationwide to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce and could contribute to the negative educational outcomes for children of color. The authors went on to provide reasons they believed teachers of color were leaving the profession because, overall, the teacher workforce is facing a major issue when it comes to retention. Teacher salaries, school resources including instructional materials and school facilities, the support teachers need from professional development and mentorship, and support from administrators are all important factors when teachers are deciding whether to remain in the field of education. Another reason is that many teachers of color work at more difficult-to-staff schools with higher proportions of students who are ethnically or racially from nondominant communities and who are also from low-income, high-poverty backgrounds. These schools tend to be under resourced without strong parental and familial support. These conditions can be changed through purposeful and meaningful investments, thus allowing for more teachers, especially those of color, to remain in their classrooms.

Opportunities to Grow a Stable Workforce of Teachers of Color

Bristol et al. (2022) discussed two important steps that have been taken by the CDE. First, to address the racial mismatch between students and teachers, Assemblymember Mike Gipson and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond cosponsored Assembly Bill 520 or AB 520. The goal of this legislation was to provide additional resources to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color. AB 520 established the California Diversifying Teacher Grant Program, awarding one-time competitive grants totaling $15 million to school districts,

county offices of education, and/or charter schools to develop and implement or expand research-based programs to advance local efforts of recruiting and retaining more male teachers and teachers of color. The next step Bristol et al. outlined as an effort to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color was to establish the CDE Educator Diversity Advisory Group. This group, composed of teachers, professors, researchers, administrators, and legislators, made five primary recommendations to increase teacher diversity efforts. These recommendations were:

1. Create communities of practice for county offices of education and for local school districts to build their capacity to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color.
2. Maintain sustainable funding, measure outcomes for teacher diversity, and identify focal support factors at the state, county, and district levels.
3. Provide guidance and accountability for LEAs so grant funds support the development of foundational equity-based processes/practices.
4. Promote deeper partnerships and collaboration among LEAs, IHEs, and community-based organizations to build institutional pathways for candidates of color.
5. Develop a public awareness campaign that highlights how Proposition 209 constrains educator diversity efforts and continue to cosponsor educator diversity legislation.

Although the work has begun and the changes to policy and practices promise more diversification of the teacher workforce, there is still so much to do to ensure children get the best education that will lead them to success in college, career, and beyond (Bristol et al., 2022, pp. 1–2).

Conclusion

In summary, the literature sets a stage to understand the history of Latinas/os and the journey through the educational system in California that, for many Latinas/os, has become a

barrier to success in college, career, and beyond. My participants have become teachers, a counterstory, succeeding within a system that has failed so many before. Because these teachers have been successful, I am interested in what these Latinas did, what they continue to do, and what they believe are important factors in recruiting and retaining more Latina/o teachers in Merced County, Central California, and in California as a whole. Their testimonios will be an important part of the conversation around diversifying the teacher workforce. The experiences of these participants will also help teacher preparation programs, the CTC, and districts develop practices to recruit, support, and retain more teachers of color. Using LatCrit, community cultural wealth, and a Chicana feminist epistemology as frameworks for these counterstories, I will be looking for instances of different forms of racism and microaggressions these Latinas have had to endure, barriers and helping hands the participants have encountered in both K–12 settings and IHEs as both students and teachers, and what wealth or capital that these participants have used to be successful and meet their goal of becoming a credentialed classroom teacher in the Merced County. In using Chicana feminism as a framework, I am able to use testimonios and pláticas to decolonize the research methodology and recognize the lived experiences of my participants. This will allow me to transform how I conduct what would be a formal research process to something more culturally relevant for the participants.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

Research Design

For this study, I employed a qualitative case study methodology, as the goal was to understand the lived experiences of Latinas who live and work in rural central California, specifically Merced County, when entering the teaching profession. Rashid et al. (2019) described a qualitative case study as a methodology that allows researchers to deeply investigate phenomena in a specific context. Like Rashid et al., Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a case study as an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37). Merriam and Tisdell wrote, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 15). The focus for this study was a lived experience—understanding the journey from student to teacher for Latinas from Central California. Merriam and Tisdell guided my perspective regarding the qualitative research characteristics in their statement: "The focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive" (p. 15).

Research Setting

The research I conducted was very specific to one bounded system, Merced County, located in California's rural Central Valley. Merced County, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), in 2022 was a rural county, with a population of 290,014 as of July 1, 2022. In the same U.S. Census Bureau report from 2022, 62.5% of the people who resided in Merced County identified as Hispanic or Latino, 4.1% identified as Black or African American, 7.9% identified as Asian, 0.4% identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 3.4% identified as two or more races, and 24.8% identified as White. During the years 2017 to 2021, the percentage of

Merced County residents aged 25 or older who had graduated from high school or higher was 70.4%. Of that same group, 14.1% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. During that same period, 26% of the residents of Merced County were foreign born and 52.9% of households spoke a language other than English at home. The median household income for Merced County residents was $58,861, with a per capita income rate of $24,521; 21.9% of Merced County residents lived in poverty.

According to the Employment Development Department (EDD, 2022) website, Merced County is a highly agrarian place "bordered by Santa Clara County the northwest, Stanislaus County to the north, Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties to the east, Madera and Fresno Counties to the south, and San Benito County to the west" in the heart of Central California. The EDD website further described the labor market of Merced County, stating that "more than half the county's land is made up of an agriculturally rich alluvial plain produced by the Chowchilla, San Joaquin, and Merced Rivers." According to the website, "Agriculture is one of the county's main sources of revenue" and Merced is the "fifth-leading agricultural county in California." Milk and related products from Merced's commercial dairies generate the greatest amount of revenue for farmers. Other crops and animals grown on commercial farms in large quantities include poultry, beef, almonds, and tomatoes.

According to Norton et al. (2011) in the UC Cooperative Extension publication *Merced County Agriculture*, Merced County's largest industry was agriculture with a "raw product value of almost 3 billion dollars." (p. 1) The authors stated that given that agriculture was Merced County's largest industry, agriculture was also Merced County's largest employer, employing nearly one fifth of the population. The Center for Farmworker Families (2014) stated that California produced over 350 different agricultural products, including "1/3 of the nation's

vegetables, 2/3 of the nation's fruits and nuts and 90% of the strawberries grown in the U.S." and that approximately 500,000 to 800,000 farmworkers lived and worked in Central California, many of these workers were Latina/o. According to the California Department of Public Health (2021), 16.2% of children in California lived in poverty in 2021. This is slightly lower than the 17% of children who lived in poverty in 2021 nationwide, but in Merced County in 2021, 27.1% of children lived in poverty, and of those children 30.6% were classified as Hispanic or Latina/o.

Participants

For this case study, I utilized purposeful sampling by recruiting six K–12 teachers who met the required parameters for the study. They were all Latina (identified as female of Latin American origins), attended at least 10 years of their K–12 education in Merced County, held a current, valid teaching credential, and currently live and teach in a Merced County school district. Each of the participants was able to provide detailed information about the phenomena being evaluated in the case study. The six participants who were interviewed (Table 1) participated in an individual oral testimonio and one group plática where they were asked questions about their life, their journey, and ultimately their successes when entering the teaching profession. Four of the participants taught in the district they attended while they were in K–12 schools. After attending all K–12 school years in Merced County, the participants completed at least a bachelor's degree and a teaching credential and had chosen to return to teach in a K–12 setting in the Central Valley. Because Merced County's only IHEs are Merced Community College, established in 1962, and UC Merced, established in 2005, many students have not had the opportunity to stay close to home and earn a college degree. Due to the lack of colleges and universities, students must often leave Merced County to earn an undergraduate or graduate degree.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Grade Levels Taught	Years Teaching	What They Taught
Maria	6–8	10+	Social Science
Sofia	9–12	10+	Spanish
Camila	K–2	10+	Elementary
Daniela	4–6	1–3	Elementary
Isabella	K–2	1–3	Dual language Elementary
Elena	K–2	1–3	Elementary

Data Collection

To collect data, I met with each participant via Zoom both individually for one hour and as a group for two hours. For both the plática and the testimonio, I provided the questions we would discuss in advance. For the individual testimonio, I asked the participants to bring 1-3 items or pictures that represented their journey from student to teacher. All individual testimonios and the group plática occurred outside of school hours, outside of a school setting. In the group plática, the participants answered the questions in turn and were able to respond to one another. All questions were framed by LatCrit, community cultural wealth, and a Chicana feminist epistemology.

Both audio and video were recorded via Zoom, and I took notes, paying special attention to the different reactions of the participants, especially nonverbal cues displayed. In both the testimonio and the group plática, I kept a careful record (audit trail) of the dates, setting, and length of the interviews. The audio–video recording created by Zoom was stored as an mp4 on a password-protected computer. The recordings were sent to a transcription service and the

transcripts were stored on the same password-protected computer along with any memos and field notes. All data were collected in the latter part of February through late March of 2023. Many of the participants were personally impacted by the January 2023 flooding that devastated much of Merced County, so scheduling a group plática when all participants were able to attend was a challenge.

Data Analysis

The data set I analyzed was composed of individual testimonios and one group plática with all six participants. In both the plática and the testimonio, the participants discussed their journey from student to teacher. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), "the preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection." (p. 197). To analyze the data in this way, I scheduled all the individual testimonios with at least 5 days in between meetings so the recordings could be transcribed, and I sent the transcription to the participants for a member check. Four of the six participants left their statements in the testimonio and plática as they were, but two changed their statements, one adding details and the other removing details. I then inputted the individual transcript into Atlas.ti and did AI coding. With that first step, I looked for categories and coded. I then wrote a memo for each testimonio detailing my findings and ideas. As I added data and did more coding using Atlas.ti, I created more codes and categories based on similarities or "trees" as Merriam & Tisdell (2016) calls data sets. I continued with this process as I added each individual testimonio and combined all the data once I completed the plática.

After I had all the data, I reviewed my field notes, memos, and transcripts from each testimonio and the plática and then created some tentative categories that aligned with community cultural wealth. I sat down with all the data and sorted it by research question. I color

coded each research question: Question 1, barriers, blue; Question 2, enriching to their experience, pink; and Question 3, recommendations going forward, orange. I printed out the data by research question and found themes within the themes, placing experiences with other like experiences on large pieces of paper where I could review the data visually. The five themes that came through the data that aligned with the theoretical framework of community cultural wealth were navigational capital, resistant capital/persistence, familial/social capital, linguistic capital, and aspirational capital . The process included a clear audit trail that included a calendar that organized the dates of interviews, transcriptions, and coding, as well as a central location for memos.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

For any study to be trustworthy, there was both rigor and transparency, as well as "conducting the investigation in an ethical manner" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). To ensure this, I maintained a clear audit trail while collecting and analyzing the data. According to Merriam and Tisdell, "an audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (p. 252).

Positionality

I have several identities, but at the center of it, professionally, I am a teacher. Personally, I am a Latina of Puerto Rican and Mexican descent, an oldest daughter, a sister, a Titi, a wife, and a mother of two young dear, sweet boys. I have held a variety of roles in K–12 and college settings, including special education teacher, middle school English teacher, librarian, literacy coach, second-grade elementary school teacher, associate director for teacher preparation, and County Office of Education administrator, but at the heart of it I was always a teacher, and I

never shifted my focus away from service to children. I grew up in Merced County and attended various elementary schools in the city of Merced and in Winton, Rivera Middle School, Merced High School, Merced College, and CSU Stanislaus. CSU Stanislaus is in Turlock, a town about 20 minutes north of Merced along Highway 99. Because of my socioeconomic status and familial experiences, I had not done much traveling outside of my home community. I have never worked outside my home community. Because of this, I have been very sheltered and have lived in a community where I, a Latina, was part of the majority–minority. It was not until I stepped outside of K–12 schools into higher education as the associate director for teacher preparation with UC Merced Extension that I truly experienced a culture shock. The UC brings many people from all walks of life together in its mission to teach, to conduct research, and to provide public service, and many of those people do not look like me and are not from my home community.

When I started the CANDEL (Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership) program in 2020, I was in my first year as the associate director for teacher preparation with UC Merced Extension. In July 2022, I left UC Merced Extension in a full-time capacity and am now serving as a coordinator for intern teacher programs with the Merced County Office of Education. In this role I coordinate both multiple and education specialist intern credential programs and we are working to also prepare intern candidates who want to earn the PK-3 ECE Specialist credential. I currently serve as an instructor with UC Merced Extension, but my primary role is now at an LEA. This position has provided me with a unique opportunity to collaborate with the university to bring more programs to Merced, like a teacher residency focusing on early education. Before coming to UC Merced Extension, I worked in the small, rural Planada Elementary School District from 2007 to 2019. Planada Elementary School District

serves grades TK–8, and the kids went to high school in either Le Grand, another small town, or the slightly larger town of Merced in Merced County. Planada was largely populated by migrant farm workers and their children. Before teaching in Planada, I taught children with severe to profound disabilities for the Merced County Office of Education from 2003 to 2007. When working for the Merced County Office of Education, I was assigned to school sites in Planada, Le Grand, and Merced.

Prior to enrolling in the CANDEL program, I subscribed to the deficit thinking of so many in education who believe that children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds need to be fixed and assimilated to belong or be successful in society, not that there are inequities in the system that is failing to serve all children. Everyone has a different journey to make, and mine was filled with both barriers and privilege. Because I now understand this, I know I can listen to Latina teachers tell me their stories and I know that we will have some experiences in common while others will be very different. Merced County and the Central Valley are as diverse as the people who call them home, and I am proud to be a Central Valley native and resident and feel it is only right that I work to serve the children and families of Merced County.

Limitations

One of the major limitations to this study was the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Due to the circumstances of COVID-19, all interviews were conducted via Zoom rather than in person. Executive orders put in place by Governor Newsom in AB 130 at the height of the pandemic outlined in PSA 22-05 changed how candidates completed their credentials and who and where candidates were supported through their assessments. What happened in the classroom and in credential programs was extraordinary because of the restrictions put in place

to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The RICA was difficult to complete due to the closure of nonessential business, so candidates were able to file for their preliminary teaching credential without this assessment; but the assessment must be completed by the time a candidate files for their clear credential. The TPA was also deferred and needed to be completed by the time a candidate filed for their preliminary credential. The RICA and TPA requirements were then transferred to the induction phase of credentialing and left many candidates without adequate support in the classroom during their first years as a teacher or with support to complete these assessments. In response to this concern, on July 10, 2023, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 114. This budget trailer bill exempted certain candidates impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic from having to complete the TPA. The candidates who are eligible must have completed a CTC-approved teacher induction program on or before June 30, 2025, and/or demonstrated 2 years of service with satisfactory teacher evaluations by June 30, 2025.

The data of this study came from Latina teachers who are from the Central Valley and have returned to the Central Valley to teach. All the participants will be considered successes in navigating the academic pipeline that many Latinos have not been able to traverse. These teachers represent counterstories, so they are not the norm. Much can be learned from those who have stopped out in higher education or who have left the profession, but they are not included in this study. The data will also be limited due to the voluntary nature of the study and participants being drawn from my K–12 networks. Therefore, selection bias may represent a potential study limitation. Also, the use of nonrandom sampling and the sample size may not permit causal inference and may not be representative of Latinas who live and teach in the Central Valley. However, the data should provide insight into the experiences of teachers as they navigated the pipeline and drew from their various forms of capital and community cultural wealth.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to focus on the journey of Latinas as they worked their way from student to teacher. All the participants were from, lived in, and worked as teachers in rural Central California, specifically Merced County. I evaluated the individual testimonios and the group plática to answer the following research questions:

1. What do Latina teachers see as challenges or barriers to entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County, California?
2. What do Latinas identify as enriching to their experience entering the teaching profession?
3. What do Latina teachers perceive as possible strategies for districts, colleges, and universities to recruit and support other Latina teachers when entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?

Using Yosso's community cultural wealth capitals—aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant—as areas of wealth that communities of color hold, I evaluated and coded the data from the testimonios and the group plática, but I found that they often intersected with one another. For example, navigational capital, which is the knowledge that is required to maneuver through institutions like a college or university, may be connected to a family member or a person in the community. This depended on if the student entering college asked for assistance from a teacher from fifth grade whom they have kept in contact with or a family member who has already graduated from college. In the above example, navigational capital and familial capital/social capital intersected. The participants had a lot to share about their experiences in entering the profession, barriers and tragedy they had to overcome, their success stories, and their wisdom they had for institutional leaders in both TK-12 and higher

education settings on how they felt to best support other Latinas as they entered the teaching profession.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Aspirational capital: The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005). Each of the women who participated in the study had dreams and plans for their life, both professionally and personally. With determination, they all accomplished their professional goal of becoming a classroom teacher. Some of them had role models while others did not. Had the participants not had a vision for themselves and others who supported that vision they had for themselves; they may not have reached their goals of becoming a credentialed teacher.

   I think it's important to move people beyond just dreaming into doing. They have to be able to see that you are just like them, and you made it.

   —Sonia Sotomayor, BrainyQuote (n.d.)

2. Linguistic capital: The intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and or style (Yosso, 2005). All the participants were bilingual, and they all had both positive and negative experiences with the Spanish language. Overall, each participant was happy to be bilingual and they used their knowledge of the language to help their students, family, and community. They also saw their language skills as a way to be a role model, showing other Latina/o students that knowledge of the Spanish language was a gift. Language had a major impact on the ability of these Latinas when working to become a classroom teacher. The language they had themselves and the linguistic abilities of their families both hindered and helped these women when entering the classroom.

Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures.

—Cesar E. Chavez, BrainyQuote (n.d.)

3. Familial/social capital: The cultural knowledge nurtured among family members, community, history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). In the context of this study, family and community melted together given the close-knit nature of the community. Strangers became friends, who then became mentors for some of the participants. Familial connections and social connections were the foundation that the participants built their lives upon, but family was also a place of tension for some of the participants. The candidates all leveraged the power of their family and community. Some of those families and communities did not have much to spare, but they gave what they could with open hands and open hearts. Without family and friends to support them, the participants may not have had the same outcomes when working toward being a classroom teacher.

   Of all the rocks upon which we build our lives, we are reminded today that family is the most important.

   —Barack Obama, Father's Day Remarks (2008)

4. Navigational capital: The skills required to maneuver through social institutions are often not created for communities of color (Yosso, 2005). Moving through K–12 institutions are typically scribed. Students are assigned a grade by their age and progress through each year. A variety of opportunities were available to the participants that helped guide them into teaching. Some of the participants had strong guidance and support going through K–12 institutions or IHEs while others did not. They all used many forms of capital to navigate the IHE space through their undergraduate and credential programs, and the intersection of these different types of knowledges were pivotal in them

becoming teachers. The ability of the participants to navigate systems was greatly impacted by their access to strong mentors, advisors, and familial support in K–12 systems, at the college or university level, and in credentialing programs.

> If you can't fly—then run. If you can't run—then walk. If you can't walk—then crawl. But whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.
>
> —Martin Luther King, Jr., *From Keep Moving from This Mountain* (1960)

5. Resistant capital: The knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). Each one of the women who participated in this study faced real and perceived barriers and challenges that ranged from personal to professional. All the participants told counterstories, so they were all credentialed teachers living and working in Merced County who overcame these barriers and challenges. The ability of the participants to resist and persist came from the strength they found within themselves and support they had from others that told them they could do it. They all persisted by knowing who they were, where they came from, and where they were going. They worked hard through K–12, college, and credential programs, making sacrifices, not making excuses, and being responsible to themselves, their family, and their community.

> Fight for the things that you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.
>
> —Ruth Bader Ginsburg, from her Remarks at Radcliffe Institute, (2015)

Themes Emerging in the Data

Theme 1: Aspirational Capital

*A **Vision for Myself***

> I think since I can remember, I've always said I wanted to be a teacher, always, since I was a little girl. I actually pictured myself being an elementary teacher during that time when I was younger. I decided to teach high school when I was in university. So basically, my main focus was just school, school, school, school. (Sofia)

> I have an image in first grade where the project was to draw what you want to do when you grow up. And I already had a picture of myself being a teacher…I always told myself I either wanted to be a pediatrician, a teacher, or own a daycare because I don't know what it is, but all the children just come to me, even in church, which is crazy. (Elena)

> I've always had a clear vision of what I want. Ever since I was little, I knew what I wanted my future to look like. I have always driven myself, motivated myself, so there wasn't anybody really to say, "Oh, you need to do this," or, "You should do this, or go through this way." It was always in me, and I knew what I wanted to do. (Camila)

Each of the three participants above knew they wanted to be a teacher and had a clear vision for what they wanted to do professionally well before they entered higher education. They saw teaching and working with children as where their professional lives would take them, and because of that, they went to college with the goal of teaching in mind.

> I felt like after college I just really had no idea what I wanted to do career wise. (Daniela)

Daniela did not know what she wanted to do or what she was interested in until later in her career. When students struggle with what they are interested in a career, they often miss requirements, retake classes, or have to take additional classes they would not have had to take if they would have had a clear vision for what they wanted to do.

> "Am I even capable of being the teacher in the classroom?" So, it was confusing taking that step and deciding, finalizing, no, I'm going to be a teacher. (Isabella)

> They were amazed that somebody like me wanted to go to college, that it was already in me that I'm going to college…Well, at that time I didn't see it. I didn't know what they were talking about, I'm just a student, I'm going to go to college. Thinking back on that memory that I have, I think the fact that I was somebody who was below the poverty line, a female from a single-parent home and probably minority. Probably that's what they meant, and that's actually a good question…I think people that knew me back when I was in high school knew I was the first generation to go to college. (Maria)

According to Clance & Imes (1978) "imposter phenomenon" is a term used to describe the internal experience of intellectual "phoniness" that often happens in high-achieving women. Both women quoted above questioned their ability to become successful teachers either before

becoming a teacher or when looking back. But, because this is a counterstory, each of them did become teachers and, through their perseverance and aspirations, achieved their goals.

A Vision for My Future

In education, there are a lot of different avenues one could go down, like being a teacher, a site-based administrator, a counselor, a librarian, or a different level of service as a county office of education administrator. Outside of K–12 institutions, educators can serve at the statewide level by working for the CDE, or even at private companies that do educational research. Educators also work preparing future teachers and doing educational research to support the classroom. The women expressed their feelings about their aspirations and what they saw for themselves clearly, but they all left the possibilities open-ended, as they had hopes and dreams for their future.

> I do see myself being an educator until I retire. That is something that I really do enjoy, elementary. As I'm only on my second year, so I know that there is so much more to continue growing in every aspect, every academic workshop. So, I do see myself just continue attending more professional developments and growing as a teacher, as an educator, and being the best that I can be for all my future students. (Daniela)

> I did go through the administrative credential program, so I do have my administrative credential. When I went through it, I got it just in case I wanted to go in that area. I wasn't 100% sure 5 years ago I was going to go into admin work. But the opportunity came up, a couple of coworkers also wanted to go through the program, so it was a great incentive, motivating factor. The fact that I had two coworkers that were going to go with me through the whole program, so I did it. Now I'm at a point where I don't know yet right now today, today if you ask me in what direction I'm going to go. I know there will come a point where I have to decide if I'm just going to stay in education as a teacher or if I'm going to want to try and seek new adventures in the administrative field. If I want to just completely try something new and go to a different district, do I even want to teach at the college level? But if you ask me right now today, I don't know. But I do like the idea that there's a lot of options and possibilities for me in the future. (Maria)

The Influence of Teachers

The women who participated in this study spoke about the opportunities and mentorship they received from their teachers and school programs. They felt valued and seen by teachers,

were mentored by teachers, and were provided with opportunities to explore teaching before committing to the profession in college.

> I think the most positive role models I had in my life were teachers. Going to school I saw my teachers; I think it happened probably in middle school when I realized it. My teacher seemed to be the kind of people that I think I realized I aspired to be. Yes, the way they treated people, I had very nice middle school teachers. But also, their personal life, I looked at their personal life compared to my life, and I thought, wow they must live great lives. They were homeowners, they had nice cars, and by nice I just mean a regular new car. They went on vacations. I mean, now, as an adult I know they were living a good middle-class life but to me, I was not in that category. It was a goal to strive for. I was like, that's kind of life I want for myself. (Maria)

> Definitely in high school I was very blessed to ... There's like ROP [Regional Occupational Program], YOP [Youth Opportunity Program] those types of career opportunity programs. I know there was one class called Career Planning that was mandatory. Everyone had to take it, I think junior year. And so there I had a teacher, his name was Mr. Govea, and he was just awesome. He was a great teacher, and he had a huge impact in my life. Throughout my high school, on my school day, I got to walk to the elementary, which was down the street, and I would help a second-grade classroom for an hour. So that helped me build connections with teachers at Le Grand Elementary, which was awesome. It also gave me college credit, so I did my first LIBS 1000 class through that high school class. He helped me create my binder and I had to go through an interview at Merced College and everything, and I did it all because of him. I already knew I wanted to be a teacher, so I got ahead in college credit, and he really helped me get that binder going. (Elena)

> A lot of my teachers did the whole reading buddies, so I got the chance to, when I was in third grade, go down to kindergarten and then have that where you have, "There's your kinder buddy," and then you would get the book and read to them, or they would choose the book and you would read. And I always liked that. I enjoyed those Fridays to when we got to go to those little classrooms, and I was a reading buddy. That was the first point of, "Oh, maybe I like this, or maybe this is something that I could get into." (Camila)

On the other hand, teachers can also discourage students and potential future teachers with their negative talk and attitudes. One of the participants spoke about how a mentor teacher she observed tried to discourage her from entering the profession. These negative teachers can do much damage, but when someone has strong aspirations and the perseverance to endure, they can move forward with their dreams and plans.

> When you speak to teachers, a lot of teachers, they discourage you from joining teaching. One time I remember I was observing in a classroom and a teacher told me, "Why are

> you here?" I'm like, "Because I'm observing it for this teacher or whatever." And they're like, "You chose the wrong thing. You shouldn't have done that. You're in the wrong space." (Elena)

> Well, I know I hear stories, like when teachers say, "Well, is there somebody in your life that pushed you into teaching? Was there a special teacher that you looked up to?" And for me, there really wasn't anybody. Well, there wasn't anybody that looked like me, like that…I was like, let me look back and see in elementary school, middle school, high school, was there anybody that looked like me, that spoke Spanish? And I don't think that really was anybody. (Camila)

The Influence of My Social Circles and My Community

For the women who participated in the study, their communities were both their schools and places where they lived. All the participants grew up, lived in, and worked in their home community. A big part of why they wanted to be teachers was to serve their home community and give back to help strengthen their community. They all had aspirations of being mentors and lifting up their community, as detailed here:

> In the beginning, entering the credential program, and kind of deciding like, hey, maybe I want to go into teaching, I feel like it was a very big step for me, because I remember a couple of years before Mr. Gonzalez asking me like, "Hey, when are you going to go get your credential?" And me responding like, "Oh no, I don't want to be a teacher." I was like, "I want to be a counselor" …at the end, I feel everything was really worth it, and I would do it again because I got the job that I wanted. I am in my own community, and so I feel good now. It was all worth it. (Isabella)

> Being hired in the same district that I went to school in; I was very happy. I felt like I had accomplished what I set out to do. I became a teacher and not only that, in an area that pushes me to be a good teacher. Because I'm directly working with my community, not just... Actually, literally family members, I'm teaching family members. So that is a great achievement for me that I get to work with my community and I'm very happy that new programs have started at the district that I'm in that didn't exist before and I'm part of those programs and I get to think back on my experiences. Like you mentioned before, reflecting back on my own experiences and know that we have created this culture. That I'm part of a culture at my district that promotes the higher education and children and have created a culture I think as such there. Let me go ahead and say that I'm not the only Planada, I want to say born and raised. 'Because we say that if we're in Planada, we know there's no hospital in Planada but pretty much born and raised. I would say today, maybe there's... Oh man, I want to say 60% to 70% of the employees at the middle school I work at that are from Planada. So, the fact that you have these people that purposely came back to teach in their own community, I'm happy to be part of that group. (Maria)

> I feel like to me, it was the greatest achievement was when I got hired at Planada Elementary, so that was my elementary school that where I went. The classroom ... I originally, in my interview, the positions that were open was third grade and fifth grade. I originally wanted to be a third-grade teacher because I knew the third-grade group and I worked with them really well, so that's where I wanted to be. But they placed me in fifth grade, and it ended up working out because I ended up being in my fifth-grade classroom when I was a fifth grader. Isn't that crazy? And I didn't realize it until the first week. I was like, "Wait, this is where I was a fifth-grade student." So, for me, that was the biggest accomplishment, to go from a fifth-grade student to being a fifth-grade teacher in that same exact space with the teacher who had probably the biggest influence in my life was Mrs. Acosta. So, it was just mind-blowing to think, "Wow, I think I'm right where I'm supposed to be." (Elena)

All three of the above participants were from, lived in, and worked in Planada, California. Planada is a small rural town in Merced County with a large population of students from Latino backgrounds. Having several Latina/o teachers, administrators, and staff members allowed the students in the Planada Elementary School District to see themselves in their teachers and have mentors that will help the children to aspire to their dreams.

Theme 2: Linguistic Capital

Love of Spanish

All the participants in this study were bilingual; one participant taught in a dual language academy, and another was a single subject Spanish teacher at the high school level while the others taught in more traditional settings, primarily in English. All the participants reported using Spanish to communicate with their family and the families of the students they served in addition to the community, and they all expressed their thankfulness for having both languages. In addition, each participant expressed their love for the language and the cultural connections they felt to the language. The two who taught in Spanish for a significant portion of the day expressed enjoyment of teaching in Spanish and felt it was part of their duty to share the knowledge of Spanish with future generations. Spanish was a major part of the identity of the participants, and they were proud of their Spanish skills.

The participant who taught in the dual language program expressed her love for the language and said this was the reason she went into teaching. She enjoyed helping the kids learn Spanish and was happy to see the students' progress in both languages.

> I remember when, after that first year of being in the program as a DL [dual language] aide, I fell in love with the program. I fell in love with helping kids learn a language, or kind of reinforcing a language they first spoke, and making sure they don't lose it…So with the program, it was like, it's a great program, and I really enjoyed helping kids learn, and seeing the light bulb of those connections they were making between their two languages. And so, it made me want to stay in the classroom. (Isabella)

Another participant spoke about her commitment to learning Spanish correctly and who spoke Spanish in her home but could not read and write in Spanish. She had aspirations and determination to learn the language, so she taught herself Spanish by listening to music in Spanish, something she had open access to, and would spend time dissecting the music until she had it correct. She would also use support and guidance from her family to ensure that her translations were correct.

> But for the most part, it was Spanish music all the way. So, when I was in middle school, that's when I started, maybe even younger, I don't remember. But I loved listening to music, and I wanted to sing with the song. So, I had my tape recorder with my cassette, and I would record the song, or if I had bought the cassette, I would be playing it, rewind, play, rewind, play, rewind, play, rewind, play, rewind, just to make sure I would get every word out and then just start singing it. Then what I would do, I would show it to my parents, or I would show it to an uncle or an aunt just to see if I had written it correctly and then go from there. So, I self-taught myself how to read and write Spanish. (Sofia)

This dedication at such a young age shows her love of the language and the patience and dedication she had to learn the language. This love of the language carried forward in her choice of subject matter area to teach.

Spanish and the Community

> I think the Latino community, I think a lot of times many families are Spanish speaking only, so that builds a barrier and a lot of times that builds a barrier and students growing up in a household like that, they're not exposed to that and therefore they're already so many steps behind everybody else. (Daniela)

One of the participants saw the Spanish language as a barrier for families to fully participate in the community. Because so many institutions are English only and the literature, they put out is in English, those who do not speak or understand English are at a disadvantage.

When asked what their greatest academic achievement was, Isabella said "When I was not an English learner anymore." For her, when she was no longer classified as an English learner but redesignated fluent English proficient, she had entered the realm of no longer being looked down upon for her linguistic status. She then went on to describe how a focus on English only and her parents' commitment to her learning English caused her to lose her ability to speak Spanish and communicate with her family. She felt that she was losing a major part of her identity and had to work to get it back. Sofia shared her experiences of being treated as less than because of her linguistic abilities. Having a teacher who was unkind and unsupportive so early in her educational career could have derailed her. The trauma of having an adult you are supposed to be safe with treat you so unkindly could have made her dislike school or herself, but this was not her story. When she again faced discrimination due to her language abilities in high school, she was a stronger advocate for herself and had a teacher as an ally. She knew she needed to complete the general education English course to be college ready and pushed for her place.

Gloria Anzaldúa, a feminist and a Chicana cultural theorist who famously wrote *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999), struggled with finding a balance between her two worlds because she was part of both but not fully accepted by either. Anzaldúa described how the "coming together of two self-consistent by habitually incomparable frames of reference cause un choque, a cultural collision" (p. 85). She had many identities that were of equal importance but warred with each other, and because of these struggles, a shock or cultural collision happened. The participant Isabella, a self-described Mexican American, saw

bilingualism as part of her dual identity, but did not feel that there was a balance between or opportunities for students to use both English and Spanish in the classroom.

> Being Mexican American, I come with two languages, and we are able to balance between both worlds greatly if given the proper opportunities meaning neither are oppressed inside our classrooms. We are now taught to find our students' strengths, and our background knowledge in our first language is deep. Use it. Help us use it. I would say it is beneficial for people to continue keeping in mind the communities where the people that are trying to be credentialed for them are coming from. I mean, where they're going to most likely teach as well. Just to say, "Hey, you're within this community. These are the demographics and how to help those kids." Me, it's like the idea is to help the kids, not make it worse for them. Especially how a lot of us go into these classrooms and our teachers don't look like us. They don't talk like us. (Isabella)

In this quote, Isabella described the use of background knowledge and the importance of knowing the people who live in a community. She advocated for herself, being a bilingual Latina teacher, but also advocated for her students to see teachers who are Latina/o and bilingual who teach and value both languages.

Home and Spanish

One participant described how this prioritization of English and using English in so many different parts of her life was at the cost of her ability to speak Spanish.

> At home it was always that same idea, you have to be in a fully immersed English class so that you don't speak with an accent, so that you're able to read right, and continue on your education. And seeing that, it was like, no, I feel like I would've benefited more from Spanish, because I feel like throughout my schooling, I kind of lost a lot of my own culture. I remember there was a point where it was very difficult for me to communicate with my parents, because I lost so much Spanish. (Isabella)

To this participant, her language was central to her identity that was shaped largely from the lens at the intersection of culture and self. The loss of the ability to speak Spanish did not only mean a language to her, but it also meant her connection with her family, her connections with her community, and the connection she had with all the parts of herself.

Teachers and Spanish

Unfortunately, several of the participants had a very negative experience with their knowledge of Spanish and the classroom while enrolled in K–12 public schools in Merced County. It is often easier to remember the bad vs. the good, but one participant very clearly remembered both bad and good experiences. Sofia described her earliest experiences as an English language learner in Merced County schools:

> My first-grade teacher, I remember her, her name is Mrs. Elliot. She pretty much was a mean teacher. That was my first encounter with racism. She did not allow me to speak Spanish at school. Even though she was a Latina herself, she would not allow me to speak Spanish, and Spanish was my first language…There was no English in my surroundings at home. So, she would not allow me to go to the bathroom. She would put me on timeout by the wall because I needed to go to the bathroom or because I was speaking Spanish during school time when I shouldn't be. (Sofia)

> Second and third were my angels, teachers, Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Carmen, completely the opposite of Mrs. Elliot. Mrs. Graham spoke Spanish as well. Mrs. Carmen did not. She understood it. She tried to communicate as much as she could, but it wasn't her first language. (Sofia)

While it was hard to hear and hard to speak these truths about her educational history, it was also good to hear that not all the early educators who taught her caused harm. Unfortunately, she continued to battle that harm throughout her educational journey. Because of her status as an English language learner, she was placed in sheltered English classes where they were not working on standards but focusing on acquiring English. She felt that these placements were based on nothing other than her status as an English language learner and who she physically presented as. When she was moved to a general education space, she was successful and went on to be a college graduate, earn a teaching credential in Spanish and a master's degree in school counseling, and has served as a Spanish teacher for more than 20 years in the same district where she attended high school.

> Because my first language wasn't English, they wanted to track me. My parents felt that that was not the right place where I needed to be. I needed to belong in a regular English

> class because my grades spoke highly about it, but they were not looking at my grades. They were just looking at who I was and my name, and the fact that my first language was Spanish. But thanks to Mr. Graham, I was able to go into English, a regular English class, and I passed with flying colors. It's just like those were the people, and that's the reason that I want to help the Hispanic population because it's the 21st century, and still today, the same stories are being repeated. Nothing has changed. In regard to their last names or because your first language at home wasn't English, they automatically tracked you and they put you in lower classes. So, it's little things like that that it's just like, it upsets me because it seems like some people haven't learned. They're still in the same place. (Sofia)

Sofia went on to say that she still sees what happened to her happening today with ELD classes and how students who are primarily Spanish speaking or who are English learners are placed in their courses according to the master schedule. In this quote, she is advocated for students. She said that educational leaders need to give students the opportunity to do well. Placing students in classes that are not meeting the criterion for attending a 4-year college while in high school is setting them up for failure. She advocates for students who are like her and wants to avoid the future she might have had if someone had not stepped up and advocated for her.

Another participant described the importance of seeing someone who spoke Spanish and looked like her as a role model. Camila knew she wanted to be a teacher from a very young age, but unfortunately did not see many teachers who were Latina/o or bilingual. She pointed out that it takes a district commitment to ensure that students have a diverse group of teachers with a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. She unfortunately has experienced both life-giving and supportive environments as a teacher in a community that values diversity and employing teachers and staff that look like and speak like the children they serve and other spaces where the district does not value diversity and pushes people out through their oppressive policies.

> I would've liked when I was little to have seen, like I said, somebody like me that spoke Spanish and was like, "Oh, hey, they look like me. And maybe I can do that too," like that. But I know a lot of the districts, it depends on how they hire and things like that. In my experience that I had; I think the only reason why they hired me was just because I

> was Mexican. That was the only reason. And then after that, they were like, "Oh, we don't really like you," and then try to make it impossible for you work there so then you would want to quit, and then they would bring in whoever they wanted. But just maybe open it up for a lot of the Latinos to, "Hey, this could be your profession." Instead of seeing a lot of the images of teachers and then mostly are White ladies, but having more of us, somebody that looks like me, like that, for them to see. In Planada, a lot of the kids see that most of us are Hispanic. But just other programs and stuff, to be like, "Oh yeah, there are people that look like you and that can...There are teachers, and that could be you too if you want to." (Camila)

Theme 3: Familial/Social Capital

Family Is a Blessing

For all the participants, family was a supportive group of people. They all had active relationships with their family members, and, as in many relationships, there were negatives and positives. For the most part, family was an integral part of the success of the participants as well as major motivation behind the participants, driving them forward. The participants wanted to be independent, and the families of the participants wanted them to be successful and happy in a career that would support them and the families they built moving forward in life. Daniela spoke about her family fondly, saying that she was fortunate to have the family she has and how they helped her find her way into teaching, a career she is passionate about and sees herself doing until she retires.

> I'm very grateful and blessed to have the family I have. They are a great support system who pushed me to find my pathway. (Daniela)

Below, Camila described how her parents supported her journey to becoming a teacher and the importance of their expressions of pride in her.

> My parents were a big part of my journey. They're the ones that motivated me to be the best that I could be, because you always want to make your parents proud. You always want them to say, "Oh yeah, I did well with bringing up my daughter. And look where she went. And she doesn't need any help or anything like that." I pick my parents' picture just because they're always my motivation, and they still are. Even though they're no longer here, but anything I ever think of, any goals that I have, I always like, "Oh, wouldn't that make my parents proud?" (Camila)

Having a loving, supportive, and helpful family made a significant difference because they were able to provide a stable place for the students to call home. Camila, as quoted above, still felt that she had that home, even when her parents were no longer living. She knew they were proud of her and was proud of herself with how her parents raised her. In her choices and when setting her goals, she still visualized her parents and thought about what would have made them proud of her.

The Impact of Las Madres

Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States of America is credited with the following quote: "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." He, like several of the participants in this study, credited his mother as a positive, self-sacrificing, all-in-for-their-success supporter. Daniela described how her mother and other family members were able to be role models for her when entering the teaching profession. She credited her mother along with other members of her family with paving the way for her to reach her goals, even if she was not sure with her particular path.

> My mom actually works in the education field as well. So, we've been around lots of educators. I also have family members who have been vice principals and principals and educators as well for many years. So, I have been around it. It's just, I think at the time after college I just was unsure of what route to take even though I was semi surrounded by it. (Daniela)

Without the unwavering support and aspirations of their mothers, the candidates quoted below would not have been able to complete their education and become a college graduate and a credentialed teacher. Pursuing an education and a career is a shift in the traditional roles of women in the Latino culture, but these mothers wanted a life for their daughters that included independence and security.

> I had my mother's support. The fact that that wasn't even an issue in my house, that yes, I came from a single parent home, only female in the home…The cultural limitations sometimes, right? The fact that I'm a female firstborn, it would require for me to move

> away to college when we talk about some of the cultural limitations. The fact that I had her support, and it wasn't even she was pushing me, yes, you're going to... She supported me 100%. I think the fact that I had that helped me. So, if I didn't have that I think that would have been where I could have easily derailed in my goal. But because I had her support, which was my number one, I believed the person I needed on my side, and I had it. I think that's why I was able to do it, I was able to become a college graduate. (Maria)

> My mom would always tell me, I don't want you to be dependent on a man. You need to be independent. You need an education. I don't want you to be like me. So that stuck with me. That stuck with me. In regard to that, it's like, "No, no, no, I got to do this on my own. I got to do this on my own." (Sofia)

Ensuring that their daughters had an education and a career that would include steady hours, health insurance, and retirement benefits was important to the mothers of the participants. Each of the participants knew they wanted to go into education and work with children, and their mothers were there to support them and wanted more for them then they had. For Sofia, knowing her mother's goals for her helped her to set goals for herself, and she was motivated to persevere through her education to reach her goal as a credentialed teacher.

In the novel *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom, one of the characters described sacrifice in the following quote: "Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else" (p. 94). This sums up the next quote from Elena.

> I know my first year of college, my mom walked to work. She worked at Planada Elementary, and she walked to work every single day, even in the pouring rain so that I could borrow her car to go to college…So she's a part of my journey, the sacrifice that she made for me was huge. (Elena)

Her mother prioritized her education so much so that she gave what she could to support her daughter as she pursued her education.

> I recently had this conversation with my mom. I told her, "I'm always going to disappoint you, because I'm going to do what's right for me. I'm just going with what feels right and if it doesn't feel right, then I'm going to stop." And it's no longer kind of allowing that dictation, like I said, growing up Mexican American, it's what mom and dad say because of "el qué dirán" (what will people say?), even if you're 30 years old. And to me it's like, "No, it's my way." (Isabella)

Finding the strength to be true to yourself and live life the way you want can be liberating, but in a traditional Latino family, it can also be a challenge. Isabella unapologetically threw off the expectations of others in the pursuit of her own truth and goals and aspirations she had for herself.

The Impact of Other Family Members

Each of the participants was asked in their individual testimonio to bring three images or items that represented their journey through their K–12 and higher educational experience into teaching. The following quotes from testimonios are all about the images the participants chose to share.

> It wasn't until my brother became a teacher a few years before me and it wasn't until he gave me the push of "Hey, you should start subbing." And after he did give me that push and I was like, I should just check it out and see how that goes. And the moment that I started subbing, I was like, "This is it." That's when my eyes really open to, I mean, I absolutely love kids and I have a passion for more elementary students. So that was really when everything kind of sparked for me. (Daniela)

For Daniela, getting a push from a younger brother helped her on her way. When she started substitute teaching, she found her love for education, teaching, and working with children.

The next quotes are all from Elena. She was fortunate enough to have had many mentors and supportive people in her immediate and extended family who helped her along the way during her time as a K–12 student, while completing her bachelor's degree, and while completing the requirements of her teaching credential. One of those family members was her aunt, who is also a teacher living and working in Merced County.

> Yeah, that is my aunt and that is a picture of her and myself outside of GW School Supply, which is a teacher supply store. And this picture is so meaningful for me because it represents my journey because my aunt has been a teacher for 25-plus years, and she's my role model and she's my biggest influence as to why I chose to become a teacher. Every single summer since I could remember, she takes me with her to her classroom and I help ... Well, at the end of the year, I helped her tear down her classroom because they

> used to have to take things off of the walls over the summer so they could be cleaned. You couldn't leave any bulletin boards or anything on the walls, so I would be the one to help her take everything down. And then come July, we would go to the store. I would be so excited to help her pick out her decor for the new year and then put it all back up for her. So, this picture is so significant because it was my first year of teaching. I got to actually go to GW School Supply with her, and we both got to pick items for our own classrooms, which was like ... We cried. It was just so awesome. (Elena)

This story brought everything full circle for Elena. Her aspirations to be a teacher, the hard work and dedication it took from her, and the sacrifice that her family made to support her through the work were evident here.

Elena overall credited a lot of her success to her family and their prioritization of her education and how they were role models in the work that they did. She was fortunate enough to have an aunt who was a teacher and took her to work with her so she could see a classroom, but she also had parents who sacrificed a lot of their time and energy, and perhaps did not get to live the life they may have wanted, because they were focused on giving her the best life that they could. She knew that her parents and extended family members chose to help her by giving her their time and money, even when they did not have to, and she was grateful, making sure to thank them when she had the opportunity.

> The reason why I chose to include this part of my journey is because my grandfather, he's the one who opened up so many opportunities for me throughout my youth. So, my grandfather, he's the one who instilled up the work ethic into me. He gave me the work ethic that I feel like I needed from a young age. Not only with this picture, but he also has a ranch. So, in high school, he opened up lots of opportunities for me, to pay for my prom for example. He would tell me, "Hey, you have this coming up, right? You have prom. All right. Well, I have a lot of weeds over here that you could pull. Come over this weekend, get here early in the morning, and help me out. And then we'll get some stuff paid for you." He did a lot for me. (Elena)

> My father, being an immigrant from Mexico, sacrificed his family, not having his family around for holidays and any important events, just not having him around his family who lived in Mexico, he made the ultimate sacrifice for me. So, in this photo, his two sisters from Mexico came to my graduation and I got to give a speech, which was awesome. Everyone who participated in the commencement got to give a 30-second speech, so I got to thank them, thank him, and then I put the sash over his neck because my accomplishments are his accomplishments. So yeah, it was great. (Elena)

Mentors Along the Way

The following participants found mentors when entering and in their early days of teaching. These mentors were Latinas as well and did what they could to support new teachers. Having these women available to help made a significant difference in how both Isabella and Sofia taught and how they felt about education as a whole. Isabella is a new teacher and the teacher who supported her as a student teacher was still working with her through induction. Because she had such a strong mentor that was supportive, she was able to get the help she needed as a first- and second- year teacher.

> I feel like I was blessed, that I received more help, than people stopping. I feel the more help, it was teachers within the district who became my mentors, who I still have as mentors. Me being able to feel comfortable enough to go to them and say, "Hey, I'm having this issue. Can you help me?" or "What would you do here in this situation," for everything. Even once in the program, I still have the same mentor that I started off with in the program and it's been kind of going through. And so, it's been a huge help to build that relationship. (Isabella)

For Sofia, having a coworker who became a very close friend made a significant difference in her early experiences while working as a classroom teacher. This experience helped to sustain her as she persisted in teaching for more than 20 years. She spoke from a place of both great joy and profound sadness when she talked about her friend and mentor who had passed away.

> I ended up having a master teacher who was my coworker, my colleague, and her name was Dolores Espinoza. She took me under her wing. She made me who I am today. We were partners in crime. I kid you not. She taught me so much…So she taught me a lot, and because of her is what I am today. I miss her dearly. She passed away a couple of years ago, but she was feisty. Oh, my gosh. She was feisty. She would do things that I would be like, "Dolores, I couldn't do that." She's like, "Come on, just let it go." ...We were 10 years apart, but we got really, really close together. I would go over to her house, and I would do things with her family. We went to Texas one time, and then we went to Spain as well. So, we did a lot of traveling together. So, we became more than just coworkers, we became really good friends. So, I just try to hold her memory up high still. But it's hard now because a lot of people don't know her anymore. (Sofia)

The importance of mentors and people who love what they do, and love children cannot be understated. Teaching is very relationship based, and according to Lopez and Zalaquett (2006), Latinas/os benefited from having strong mentors that included family members, teachers, and counselors.

Being a Mentor to Others—Coming Full Circle

Fortunately, Maria had a fun learning environment where she was able to enjoy the space.

> I really enjoyed the environment. I honestly liked being in the classroom, my teachers provided a safe, fun learning environment that I enjoyed. I liked learning, and I really liked that space, that area, that environment like I said that they created. I look forward to going to school and I always tell the kids, even now I love education, I love learning, I love this environment. (Maria)

Because of her love for learning, she too became a classroom teacher and has striven to create that space for other students in her community. She purposefully found a teaching position in her home community with the desire of being an active part of that community because she wanted to have a positive impact on the students who sat in the seat, she was in just a few years before.

> So, then the opportunity opened up at the middle school that I used to go to where actually the teachers that taught me were retiring…So I applied because purposely …it wasn't like a coincidence or let me just see what happens. No, I purposely wanted to apply at the district I went to. I wanted to work in an area where I felt that my work would have an impact, and I wanted to work in an area where I felt like my job meant something to them and to me. But to me too, because the people I was going to teach I knew them, or I knew their parents. I know the community members, it was personal for me, right? These are the people that are from my community. So, it was going to mean something to me going back to the district that I went to. (Maria)

Maria was deeply enmeshed in the community and took her role as a role model seriously. She knew the people she was serving and felt an obligation to them, ensuring that the knowledge she had would be passed on to the next generation. She knew the value of showing success by being the teacher who looks like the students, talks like the students, and is deeply connected to the community.

Theme 4: Navigational Capital

> Teaching and the whole education thing, it's a journey. And it's not a straight road; there's curves, there's bumps, there's roadblocks, there's all things that you have to go through. But as long as you don't give up and then you find your path, then you're good to go. (Camila)

The pathway through school and life is a challenge for many students, but Latina/o students often encounter obstacles that are unique due to language, culture, and socioeconomic status. Because of this, the elements of community cultural wealth needed to intersect in many places to ensure the participants were successful in their pursuit of their educational goals. The participants in this study discussed their pathway into the teaching profession, what went right for them, and what could have derailed or what could have been a barrier to them as they navigated K–12 institutions, colleges or universities, and credentialing programs.

K–12 Advising

The importance of strong mentorship and early experience was apparent for Elena as quoted below. She was fortunate enough to attend a school with a robust career and technical education (CTE) program. In that space, she described assignments where the students were able to write long- and short-term goals, plan for their future career, and spend time in that career space. She already had aspirations of being a teacher and had familial support, but this academic support through her school site continued to help guide her toward education as a career.

> I would say the ROP program in high school, which had to do with the whole career planning. Being that that was mandatory, I don't think I would've taken it had I not known ... Had it not been mandatory. We created long-term, short-term goals, planned our career, so ROP for sure was my biggest influence, as well as teachers that I had around me and my family, which was my aunt, and then my neighbor's aunt, who I was actually pretty close to. (Elena)

Elena and Maria had different experiences in school, but that most likely had to do with the times that these women attended K–12 institutions. Maria started teaching in 2003 and Elena started teaching in 2021. According to the CDE (2022), the 2005 CTE standards were revised

and a CTE model curriculum was developed and adopted from 2011 to 2013. With a greater focus on college and career readiness, Elena benefited from this mentorship. Unfortunately, Maria did not have any such program to support her, but she now as a teacher has the opportunity to support other students in her home community.

> There were no special programs that I can think about at the high school I went to. I know that today where I work it's the same district, by the way it's the same district that I went to school in that I came back and taught in. I believe the programs we have now did not exist when I was there. There was no let's promote college life and 21st-century skills type of programs that I was aware of, maybe that's saying something that I was aware of. (Maria)

Maria had a strong vision for her life and had mentors along the way, but without structured courses and support with setting goals and spending time with children as a high school student, her outcomes could have been different.

Higher Education Advising

Some of the participants had strong mentorship while others had weak mentorship in their bachelor's degree program as well as in their credentialing programs. Elena described having faculty advisors that helped the pre-service teacher candidates schedule their courses to ensure they would graduate on time. She was confident in the advising process and had consistent faculty advising because she planned for courses in a required class during class time. Providing time and having a personal relationship with that faculty advisor made it easier for her to ask questions and ensure that she had the most up-to-date information.

> As well as advisors, reaching out to advisors for help. Scheduling the liberal studies program was really awesome in the fact that in your libs class, you do all of the scheduling and planning there with your professor. Instead of having to really schedule with an advisor separately, they tell you exactly where you need to go next and things like that. (Elena)

Also, it was important for Elena to have faculty advising take place during class time as she was worked and commuted to campus on a daily basis. If she had had to seek advising

outside of class time, she might not have received the support she needed to complete her program.

Sofia had both good and bad experiences in her preparation. She was happy with her supervisor, but she completed her preparation as an intern teacher. She received strong support from her clinical practice supervisor when she was in her traditional preparation but did not receive such strong support when she transitioned to her onsite internship.

> I'm very blessed with the supervisor that we had for the credential program, because he was very nice. He showed us. "This is what's going on and I'm not making it up. I'm not rose coloring it for you. I'm not making it easy for you," but he was fair. Let's just put it that way. He was fair. We were a class of, I want to say 25. I don't remember, but we were a good group. We were very united, so we would always try to help each other. (Sofia)

> In the first semester of my credential, I didn't get a lot of experience. I got a lot of observations. That's all I got. But I never once, the teachers did not tell me, "Okay, get in the front and see what you have," or, "Let me help you. I have this, do you want to present it? I'll show you how I present it, and then you make it your own in the next class." That never happened to me. So, I was just teaching the way that I was taught when I was a student at the high school. Like I said, the first couple of years were really hard. (Sofia)

As a shy person, Maria struggled to navigate Fresno State University. Because she had no connections and no one to lead the way, the bravery and determination she displayed in her preparation for teaching showed her strength of character, grit, and focus to meet her goals.

> I was so shy. All right, giving yourself those little pep talks to yourself. Tomorrow you're going to go to this office, you're going to go ask. If they say no, that's okay. Talking to yourself, you're going to have to get over this. (Maria)

Many college professionals see several students a day. It is important and worth noting that for Maria, faculty and staff could have done a lot to support her, but they could also do much harm if they did not serve he and other students like her in a life-giving manner. Having advisors and connections within an institution as large as Fresno State University was important for Maria, given the differences between Fresno and Maria's home community of Planada. Fresno is

one of the largest cities in California, and even though it is less than an hour's drive from Planada in the Central Valley, the difference between the two places is significant.

> I didn't know anybody. Did not know anybody in the educational field, I felt I was completely on my own. I graduated high school, I went to Fresno State, lived there for 5 years. I did know some people from my hometown of Planada, but I was the only one I believed that went into the educational field. So, I felt I was alone navigating that area on my own. Literally, everybody from my professors to the people in the educational department office, everybody was new to me. I didn't know anybody. I did my student teaching; I didn't know anybody. I did my student teaching in Fresno; I had never been on a school campus in Fresno. Everything was new. Everybody, every interview I went to didn't know anybody. Had no connections, on my own. (Maria)

It is easy to get lost in large institutions, but again, Maria's grit, determination, perseverance, and aspirations came together to help her navigate the system to earn a credential and teach in her home community.

Using My Aspirations to Support My Pathway to Teaching

For Sofia, she always saw herself going to college and viewed it as a natural progression after high school. She had a strong vision for herself that defied any preconceived notion of what Latinas/os did after high school.

> I can honestly tell you that if someone would ask me why I went to college, my answer would be because it was the next thing after high school. For me, it was just the next thing that I needed to do. It wasn't an option of, "Well, let me think about it. Maybe I'll take a year off." No, it just came naturally. Just like if it was from sixth grade to seventh grade, from eighth grade to ninth grade, it was the next step that I needed to take. (Sofia)

> When I was in middle school, I wanted to be a teacher. I knew right away by eighth grade, freshman year, I was going to go into education because I wanted to be a teacher. That's what I wanted. So, when I got to high school, I'm like I know I'm going to be a teacher, just tell me what I have to do. It's always been my mentality. What do I have to do to do this? (Maria)

Like Sofia, Maria did not question whether or not she would attend college because she had a clear vision for herself and for what she wanted to do in her career. She knew that she would need guidance and support from school professionals when she completed high school

and had to figure out how she would get that support. She was able to receive that support and has now become a teacher in her home community.

> I know that students, I mean other individuals who are exposed, they already have their direct path already paved after college or during college, make sure you're doing this, so they're always one step ahead. I feel like for me, my pathway has always been very long and challenging and it all happens for a reason. And then that's where I am today. But I do feel like my pathway has been a lot more challenging in comparison to others. (Daniela)

Daniela felt like others had an easier pathway into the teaching profession because others had more specific aspirations than she had. Having a clear vision for the future and knowing what career path you want when entering college helps to save both time and money.

> Things happen for the right reason when they happen. And for me it happened a little bit later. Once I did start subbing, I absolutely loved it and I stayed subbing for about two to two and a half years. And during that time, I decided to go through and start my teaching credential and go through that route. And ever since then, I'm loving it. (Daniela)

Once Daniela started substitute teaching, she found her direction and started working to earn her credential program. Daniela believed that things happen for the "right reason when they happen." She believed that she had to go through college with different goals and then needed her family to support her to come to a profession that she would grow to love.

The Community That Supported Me Along the Way

Isabella experienced indirect support from others in her community. Those who had completed their education and had entered the teaching profession opened the metaphorical door into the profession for her. It was not peer pressure, but more the result of seeing someone else do something and seeing it as a possibility for yourself that gave her a needed push.

> It was other people from my community that had graduated a couple of years before me as teachers now. So, I feel like that kind of allowed me to enter and gave me that... it just opened the doors for me to get into an educational setting. (Isabella)

Camila, on the other hand, wanted to go into teaching because she knew what an impact she could have on her community. She wanted to be a mentor for others who were Latina/o and

Spanish speakers. She did not have anyone in her circle who could help her navigate her way into teaching, and she wanted to be that person for someone else.

> That was another factor that pushed me into, hey, you could be a teacher and you can relate to the community and the students because they look like you and you talk Spanish. And like I said, no one in my family was a teacher, so there wasn't anyone that could relate to my experience or that I can ask, "Hey, how did you do this?" Or "I have this going on." They would just listen to what I had to say, and they really couldn't help. (Camila)

How My Family Helped Me Navigate Through K–12 and Higher Education

Many people look to their family for support, guidance, and help. The women who participated in the study who were first-generation college students did not have anyone in their family to help them navigate IHEs.

> I think in the beginning, it's hard because I didn't have anybody that I can ask because, like I said, I didn't have no one in my family that was a teacher, or I didn't have anybody else close that was in the teaching profession. There wasn't any way that I can say, "Hey, I'm going through this. What do you think?" Like that. I had to find out on my own how to do things. And sometimes I failed at stuff, but then you just get right back up. And then it's like, "Am I really supposed to do this? Or did I do that?" (Camila)

> The first let's say person in my family, but I just want to say maybe just not having anyone to help me, guide me and having to figure it out on my own. That was challenging. Like I said literally figuring out everything, how to fill out an application. I can't remember if they helped me in high school. Okay, I can't remember so I'm not going to say anything about that. But being in college the fact that I had no one to let's say help me with any documents that needed to be filled out, just navigating college campus and being first generation. So, the idea of even moving away from home and navigating alone in a city that was new to me, and because I was first generation not knowing how to navigate even college life. (Maria)

Both Camila and Maria have been teaching for more than 15 years and successfully navigated college and credential programs. They both believed that had they had others close to them that knew how to navigate they system, it would have saved them both a lot of struggles.

Daniela and Sofia both had people in their immediate and extended family who were in education. Because of this, they had the advantage of having someone to ask questions to as they

navigated school. They also had the advantage of a role model, seeing someone who came from similar circumstances who were able to complete their education and become teachers.

> So, I was in regard to just family members, hearing different ideas, different stories are what led me a little bit closer (to teaching). Once I decided that that's the field that I wanted to take, then I was able to network a lot more with past family members, past family friend teachers that we knew. And it became a lot easier in the sense of making connections with other teachers and finding out, "Hey, did you take this? Did you take this?" And they were able to open my eyes and help me figure out what else I needed or other things that I would be able to try to continue earning or getting. (Daniela)

> I have an uncle, and he's my mom's younger brother. My mom has nine brothers and sisters, and the baby, he was the only one who got an education here, a university education, and he became a teacher. We're just, I want to say my uncle and myself were about maybe just 10 years apart, more or less. We're not that far apart from age…He went to Stan State, he went to Sacramento to become a teacher. So that's when I became more aware of it. So, I remember when I was younger, I would say that I would consider my uncle like my older brother following his footsteps. (Sofia)

Credential Programs and the Impact of COVID-19

Both Elena and Isabella completed their programs in a traditional manner, but Elena was able to complete her 600 hours of clinical practice through a long-term substitute teaching position, whereas Isabella completed her clinical practice as a student teacher. Sofia started her program as a traditional student, but transitioned to being an intern teacher when she was hired to teach in her former high school district.

All the requirements of earning a teaching credential are set by state law, and when COVID-19 hit in March of 2020, there were added complications to completing an already challenging program. Candidates had to shift, in many places overnight, to online learning both at K-12 sites and in IHEs. There was no plan, no preparation, no rollout. It was an emergency situation that several candidates found themselves in, yet they were still able to earn a teaching credential in spite of the challenges.

> And then COVID. I feel like the biggest influence was COVID. It made it really difficult and stressful, because it's not only trying to learn online, but I also mean, I would go to work and see the kids and I was like, I felt like them. It's like I couldn't focus, it was just

> a bad predicament to be in, and it's just due date after due date, in every aspect of my life. So, it made it really hard during the program itself. (Isabella)

Executive Order N-66-20 gave program sponsors the authority to issue preliminary credentials to candidates who had not met all the requirements that were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. When schools were shut down and testing centers were closed as nonessential businesses, credential candidates could not complete assessments. So Executive Order N-66-20 allowed for candidates to earn preliminary credentials without the full 600 hours of clinical practice, if the program felt they had had enough time in the classroom and the TPA and RICA (if required) could be completed in the second phase of credentialing, induction.

> Honestly, there was a point in the program where I was like, I just wanted to give up. It was just too much, and COVID, it just made everything worse. But...there was another one. I mean, even now it's the tests. I still have CalTPA2 left to take, and it's like there was a few where I had to take multiple times, the RICA, even the CalTPA1, I had to do it twice. I was like, it was either my wording, or... it was hard, and it was just me constantly having to go back to make sure everything made sense, because in my mind it's like, I'm reading and writing in English, but it also makes perfect sense in Spanish, just that making sure everything was good. (Isabella)

Isabella was one of the candidates who was able to move forward without having completed her required assessments and is struggling to pass them outside her program. Induction programs had not had the responsibility of supporting candidates through preliminary preparation including TPAs or RICA in the past and are still struggling to support candidates.

Sofia did not believe that the way candidates were assessed was an effective measure of how they would perform as a teacher. She believed that there are other and better ways to measure teacher performance and believed that credentialing programs should be tasked with using different measures to certify teacher candidates.

> They need to experience that, not with video and filming themselves and then, "What would you do different?" No, there's other things. There are other ways where the credentials should be changing in requirements and even testing. Even the testing in itself, is just my personal opinion, do not portray exactly what's going on in the classroom. (Sofia)

Elena was frustrated with how her institution handled the navigation of the teacher performance assessment. She did not pass one TPA the first time through and had to go through the remediation process outlined by her university. She was also frustrated by the fees associated with the process.

> I could definitely say like CTC, there's a lot of ways that the fees, the ridiculous fees. Just be prepared for that. TPAs. When you don't pass a TPA, the whole issue of how they almost remediate you like they have you meet with a counselor to fix your issues, and then you have to basically pay for everything all over again. The fees are ridiculous. I personally, I failed at one TPA, I think it was Cycle 1, and it was probably a one-sentence error. I repeated a sentence in two segments. They were like it's too repetitive because that sentence should only be in the lesson plan and not in the lesson rationale. And I'm like, "Really?" So, then they had me pay $200 to meet with an advisor or something from the liberal studies department and then where he told me, "Hey, you know what? Let's not even meet. Literally you just have to delete the sentence, pay the fees again, and then you'll be good." So just definitely be prepared for the fees. I think that definitely could be a setback for people. (Elena)

Theme 5: Resistant Capital

Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). Each of the women who participated in the study faced real and perceived barriers when entering the teaching profession. Without their aspirations, their ability to navigate spaces not designed to support them, their linguistic gifts, and their family and community, many of them would not have achieved their educational goals. They faced some very real barriers and challenges and overcame them with strength, perseverance, and grace.

Who I Am

Camila described how she knew what she wanted for herself and for her future. She knew that in order to achieve and become a teacher, she would have to work hard, do well in school, and go to college. She knew that her achievements would be hers, and her education would always be an asset that would not be looked down upon or taken away.

> I knew, well, if I want this for my future, then I have to go, and you have to do this, you have to do this, and you got to make sure you do it good in school, go to college. That

> was always my mindset. Nobody could ever say... or take that away from me. And then that helped me through the whole teaching because everything changes. There's growth and this and that and like that. (Camila)

She also stated that being a teacher and persevering through school and her preparation made her a better teacher because teaching children requires adaptability, flexibility, and a growth mindset.

Elena had to endure overt racial discrimination and stereotyping. Instead of becoming angry, she "chose to prove them wrong" with her actions. She was so disappointed to encounter these attitudes because she understood that these questions would most likely not have come up had she been White, been of a different socioeconomic status, or lived in a different part of the state or country. She chose not to let this negative interaction derail her or discourage her from being who she truly was, a positive, hardworking, focused, calm, kind, family-oriented young woman who wanted to teach children in her home community.

> I chose to just prove them wrong through actions, through interactions, the way that I spoke to them, through the way that I came off, my behaviors and things like that. I could remember clearly, I had one friend from high school that I met, and she was Caucasian. And just to hang out, we became best friends and we wanted to hang out outside of school, and her mom chose to interview me before we started to hang out. So, she asked me a couple of questions. She's like, "So can you tell me, are you a gangster or affiliated in any gang? Are you a part of any gang?" And I was like, "No." I was so offended. I cried. And then so I just chose I'm not going to let this bring me down, I'm just going to prove that I'm not like that. They'll learn. And now that mom is my second mom. So just proving people wrong through actions, through positive interactions. (Elena)

Isabella believed that she could separate her personal beliefs from her role as an educator while helping students acquire a second language.

> My personal likes do not define me as being a bad educator or even influence. What I have does not decrease what I do in the classroom with students and our focus. It's like I'm not there to impose any of my beliefs. I am there to help them learn, to help them be able and communicate their feelings effectively in my case in two languages Spanish and English. I do not show my tattoo or piercing often on school site out of respect for others' beliefs, but it does not mean that I won't be seen outside of school campus because I am from the community, I teach in. So, it's different. (Isabella)

Camila also had to endure some aggression and prejudice when teaching, but knowing herself, what she can do, and knowing that even if others engage students with different strategies, it does not make her any less effective, has been key for sustaining her in the classroom.

> And then I also put that I've taken it into account my whole teaching experience, the good and the bad. And that's shaped me to the person that I am now. I don't let it define me. Those bad experiences that I had at that other school; I don't let that affect me because I know what I'm capable of. I know that, hey, I'm not the same as the other teacher next door to me. I may be different, I have a different teaching style, but that doesn't mean I'm not good enough. And the only person that I'm responsible for is me. I have my own dreams, my goals, and I know what I want. (Camila)

Working My Way Through It

All of the women in this study were hardworking, driven individuals who did not have the privilege of attending school on a full-time basis without having to also work a significant number of hours to pay tuition and living expenses. Elena was a hardworking individual who worked her way through high school, college, and her credential program.

> So, I was in high school during this time, and I would take care of my niece all the time. So, after high school, my mom would rush me over there (grandfather's business) and I would work about 3 to 4 hours every single day. But on top of it, I would be babysitting my niece. So right there in his office, I would have to be changing diapers and taking care of her. (Elena)

She, like many others, did what she could to support her family and, in the process, learned the value of her labor.

Elena reflected on her time in college where she worked full time, went to school full time, and commuted on a dangerous road while living at home to save money. She did this for her entire undergraduate degree. The hard work, perseverance, and dedication here shows her dedication to becoming a teacher.

> I made a Facebook post that I posted in 2017. I said, "Just started and I don't know if I can do five days a week of commuting, then heading straight to work. I feel like I live in my car now." And at this time, I was going to school from 8:00 in the morning to about

> 2:30 in the afternoon, rushing to work at Le Grand Pizza Factory, changing in the bathroom of the Pizza Factory, and I worked until midnight, and did it all over again the next day. (Elena)

> I could definitely say getting through college (was the hardest thing) because I worked full time and still having to drive to Stanislaus to finish school and things like that. I think balancing school and work. My crazy schedule was definitely one thing. The long hours, late nights, that was the biggest struggle. I remember one time I actually fell asleep in the Starbucks drive thru at 6 in the morning. I was like, "Oh, I need coffee." I was in a long line, 6 in the morning, and I dozed off and I could hear people honking at me. I was like, "Wait, what?" I dozed off in the Starbucks drive. I'm like, "Yep." I remember those times. Some real struggles. Trying to stay awake on the freeway. (Elena)

Isabella discussed her work as a farm laborer, some of the most challenging work a person could do. While in her credential program, she was working many jobs both in the school community and in the private sector.

> For myself, even throughout the (credential) program, I was working still as a farm laborer. I was still working as an aide during the school year. I've worked in restaurants; I've worked in different little settings. So, it's always staying busy, even during the time off when there was no school as an aide, it was going to the fields. (Isabella)

She said that to "staying busy" she would work as a farm laborer in the agricultural fields during her breaks from working as a paraprofessional in a dual-immersion classroom. She was able to work multiple jobs, go to school, and complete her preparation to become a teacher through COVID-19 and the challenges that come with full-time coursework, assessments, and clinical practice.

Perseverance in the Face of Tragedy

Unfortunately, the lessons we get in life are not all from positive experiences. Sometimes life is not fair, and people suffer greatly. Elena described her relationship with her brother in the following quote that showed what she endured on her journey to becoming a credentialed teacher in her home community.

> Throughout my entire life since I was a little girl that I could remember, I had a brother who was involved in gangs and things like that. So, my family went through a lot like him going to jail, violence in our home, being kicked out of our home by violence and

> things like that. We've been through so much, so that could have definitely derailed me. My brothers are the ones who got it more, but he created such a bad reputation for our family in the school system. He got expelled from Le Grand High School, expelled from Granada, that they almost expected that we would be just like him because he was the oldest brother. So, when we went into school, some of them would be like, "Oh, you're his sister or you're his brother." And so, they would expect that from us, but we were not like that. So, then they would change their opinion about us once they got to meet us. But in 2020, let's see, I was already substituting, I was substituting, graduated college. He actually, he was still doing the same thing, and he actually was shot in the head. Yeah, he got shot in the head, and it was awful. And people passed away from the incident, and he actually survived the incident. He was on life support and things like that, so that situation could have definitely brought me down 100%, but I still continued. I was still substituting and working. I was long-term substituting for a kindergarten class, and that teacher was going through something. She was losing her brother to cancer, so I was substituting for her, and I didn't want to fail her. It was in the middle of COVID, distance learning, so you need the positive energy for little kindergarteners, but I'm like, "My brother's on life support." and we were really going through it. It was just insane. But I just used it to keep me busy, keep me motivated, and keep the bills paid. Yeah, and so he's still doing good. He actually lives with us right now. He survived. He's blind and he's paralyzed in half of his body, but we make the best of everything, so I can't complain. (Elena)

The time Elena described here was terrible for her and her family. Elena was part of a close-knit, collectivist family. For her, when one member struggled, all the members struggled. Through sheer determination, she persevered and earned her teaching credential. Even through her own personal struggles, she thought of and prioritized the students she served and the teacher she was substituting for in a situation that would have made many other credential candidates drop out of their program. She used the work, held on to her aspirations, and used her love and loyalty to family and community to continue the work. At the end of the quote, she talks about her brother's current condition, saying that the family makes the best of the situation, so she "can't complain." The perseverance in the face of adversity was commendable.

My Community

When discussing the challenges that people from Latina/o backgrounds face when pursuing a profession in education, Daniela noted that when people do not know what to do, they have to work harder than others who understand the pathway. She came up against some issues

in her education; having to repeat courses or other requirements prolonged the process and could derail people who are not willing to persevere.

> I believe that it would be nice to, I think that a lot of people that come from a Latino community are not necessarily exposed to as many backgrounds. They do not necessarily know the pathways that you need to go into. And that makes it challenging…you may have to work twice as hard, take classes that you've already taken or now have to take double because you should have taken that before. And those were things that I experienced throughout my career. If I would've known, I wouldn't have had to take all of these classes now and so on and so forth. (Daniela)

The winter of 2023 was a devastating year for the town of Planada, California. Garrison (2023), in the *Los Angeles Times*, details the events of January 9, 2023. Miles Creek overflowed its banks and the levees that were designed to contain the creek failed. The entire community of 4,000 residents was evacuated and about half the homes and the local elementary school was destroyed. Many of the residents were farmworkers and were not legal residents, making them ineligible for federal disaster funds. Planada, a community that has been plagued by violence, poverty, lack of housing, insufficient storm drains, lack of streetlights, few sidewalks and sewage problems, had flooded before, in 2017. At that time the elementary school's library and fifth-grade classrooms were destroyed. Elena, a teacher and resident of Planada, suffered personally and professionally because of the flood.

> In my teaching career, however, my biggest struggle has been losing my classroom to the flood that happened here in Planada. Now we are team teaching in tighter spaces at a different school. The only items that belong to me are the items in my rolling cart. It really puts into perspective how lucky I was to have my own classroom space. This definitely has been my biggest struggle, but I know that things will get better. (Elena)

Despite everything that had happened, Elena still had hope and perseverance. She had hope for her community and she knew that "things will get better." Losing everything, homes, classrooms, and watching children suffer weighed heavily on everyone, but her ability to be grateful and appreciative of what she had and will have again shows her ability to resist and persist.

In-Program Teacher Preparation/Assessments

Candidates who were in preparation programs during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, like Daniela, had to overcome many obstacles when completing their program. Credential programs include coursework, clinical practice or student teaching, and assessments including the TPAs and RICA for multiple subject and education specialist candidates. The TPAs were designed to be natural harvests of materials that teachers are doing every day, but they are also formal assessments that require a lot of time and effort to complete.

> The biggest struggle, number 1 by far is TPA 1 and TPA 2. Those are the biggest struggle I think, I know that there is lack of teachers for many reasons. And I think that it's just an obstacle to become a teacher sometimes. (Daniela)

Overall, Daniela outlined the struggles she had with earning a credential and how the COVID-19 pandemic situation impacted her. When schools closed and businesses closed, candidates were not able to complete their required preparation, so the governor made an executive order that allowed teacher candidates to defer their assessment requirements to the second phase of preparation, induction.

> So, just all of the prerequirements for getting into a teaching credential program. So, all of the CSETs that we needed to take just to be able to get in. After that, taking TPA 1, TPA 2, it was a struggle. As a first-year teacher, so much on your plate already from parents to admin to every student to every single department and TPA 1, having to write up a report, having to record when you're still trying to figure out what you're doing as a new-year teacher. But on the video, you need to portray yourself a certain way when that's not the reality of every teacher…So, I was actually fortunate because it happened, I was in the teaching credential during COVID, so I filed for the credential under the executive order. And I was very lucky enough because if it wasn't for the executive order, number 1, back to, it circles again, it would've been my number one struggle. And I don't know if I would be exactly where I'm at right now. Due to the executive order, it did allow me that full year, and I'm currently still working on my RICA. I did pass subtest 1, I passed subtest 3, and I'm still working on subtest 2. So, here we are now 2 years later and I'm still working on something. So, it just, it's very challenging knowing that you do have to originally pass TPA 1, TPA 2, and RICA within your credential. And the only reason that I had that extension was because of the executive order due to COVID. If it wasn't for that, I don't think I would currently be on my second year of teaching. So that was very challenging. (Daniela)

Daniela did not feel that the TPA was an accurate measure of her ability in the classroom given the nature of the video and what is required of the assessment cycle.

Conclusion

Each one of the women who participated in this study faced many barriers and challenges that ranged from personal to professional when they worked to become credentialed teachers living and working in Merced County. Through their individual testimonios and a group plática, each one of the participants shared their unique journey to the classroom that included moments of great joy, profound sadness, love in the form of sacrifice, and the solemn pride felt by these women as they recounted their journey from student to teacher. Given the demographics of Merced County and the academic outcomes for so many Latinas in the United States, the fact that each of these women achieved their goal of becoming a classroom teacher was commendable. They had the drive and audacity to dream of a different life. They used all the linguistic resources they had, bringing their full and complete self to school as both a student and as a teacher. They leveraged the power of a supportive family and community. They had mothers who wanted a life of independence for their daughters and were willing to sacrifice to make it happen. These women navigated systems that were not designed to facilitate their success and showed their determination through their resistant behaviors, not giving up when they faced challenges.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 6 is organized into five parts: summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations, and a conclusion. In the summary I reviewed the purpose of the study and the research questions, detailing how I conducted the study and how I arrived at my findings. In the implications and recommendations sections, I discussed policy and practice considerations that both LEAs and IHEs can utilize when undergoing efforts to diversify the teacher pipeline. I concluded with reflections of how this study impacted my work as a researcher, scholar, and practitioner in the field of teacher preparation and teacher education.

Summary of the Study

In this qualitative case study, I interviewed six Latina teachers who were from, grew up in, and now teach in rural Central California, specifically Merced County, to learn about their experiences as they pursued their education for a career as a classroom teacher. Using LatCrit, a Chicana feminist epistemology, and community cultural wealth as frameworks, I met with each of the participants individually and heard their testimonio. After all testimonios were complete, I met with the whole group for a plática to more fully understand the journey of these women and to bring them together in community with one another. To evaluate the data, I used Atlas.ti and sorted the data by themes according to the elements of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory and by research question. The themes that came through had to do with aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial/social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

The first theme that came through the data had to do with hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the participants. Had the participants not had a clear vision for themselves and others who

supported that vision they had for themselves; they might not have reached their goals. The next theme that came through had to do with language and the major impact the Spanish language had on these Latinas when working to become classroom teachers. The language they themselves had and the linguistic abilities of their families both hindered and helped these women when entering the classroom. Community and family also came through as a major theme. The candidates all leveraged the power of their family and community. Some of those families and communities did not have much to spare, but they gave what they could with open hands and open hearts. Without family and friends to support them, the participants may not have had the same outcomes when working toward being a classroom teacher. The next theme had to do with navigating educational systems. The ability of the participants to navigate these systems was greatly impacted by their access to strong mentors, advisors, and familial support in K–12 systems, at the college or university level, and in credentialing programs. The fifth and final theme had to do with the resistant behaviors the participants exhibited when challenging real and perceived inequities. The ability of the participants to resist and persist came from the strength they found within themselves and support they had from others that told them they could do it or to defy others who said they could not do it.

Research Questions

The research questions in this qualitative case study focused on Latina teachers who were from, lived in, and currently worked in rural Central California, specifically Merced County. The questions were designed to understand the challenges Latina teachers have faced, what they have had to overcome, and how they completed their education to enter the teaching profession. The questions were as follows:

1. What do Latina teachers see as challenges or barriers to entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County, California?
2. What do Latinas identify as enriching to their experience entering the teaching profession?
3. What do Latina teachers perceive as possible strategies for districts, colleges, and universities to recruit and support other Latina teachers when entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What do Latina teachers see as challenges or barriers to entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County, California?

There were many challenges and barriers experienced by the women who participated in this study. Given the legal, historic, and social issues faced by Latinas/os living and working in the Central Valley, the participants faced a unique set of circumstances that both helped and hindered them as they perused their education and aspiration of becoming a credentialed teacher in Merced County, California.

Some of the participants struggled with seeing themselves as teachers because they had not had a teacher who looked like them or spoke Spanish. According to Bristol et al. (2022) there is substantial evidence that supports the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce on all students. Having a clear vision of what you want to do for a career helps a person focus on what they need to complete to get where they plan to go. When someone is unsure of what they want to do or does not believe themselves capable of the work, that barrier can go further than any real barriers put in place by others. Many of the participants had a strong vision for their future, but other adults like teachers and community members doubted their ability to complete their education

and become teachers. Having little professional support for their dreams and aspirations could have derailed the participants, but because they had a vision for themselves, they persevered. Many of the women received support from their friends and family that helped the participants cast the doubters aside, allowing them to move forward, knowing they were capable and needed in the teaching profession.

Linguistic ability was a major barrier for several of the participants. Many of the Latinas who participated in this study came from homes where Spanish was the primary language spoken and they learned English at school. With the implementation of Proposition 58 in 1998 and the subsequent repeal of that proposition with the California Multilingual Education Act 2016 (Hopkins, 2016), the landscape around bilingual education and the services multilingual students received looked very different. The parents of the participants, because of the push to be fluent in English, reinforced English proficiency at home and prioritized the English language over Spanish. The abilities to speak, read, and write in English are important in academic achievement in the United States, and several of the participants struggled to navigate that space and retain their ability to communicate effectively in Spanish.

The legal and historical discrimination faced by Latinas/os and speakers of languages other than English is well documented in the literature. For much of California's history, bilingual education has been part of a greater conversation about immigration policies, and while English is not the official language of the United States, naturalized citizens must be proficient in English. Schools are taught in English, and when a parent enrolls a child in school, they must answer a question describing the home language of the student. If parents answer anything other than English, a student must be assessed using the ELPAC, English Language Proficiency Assessment for California. If the student is found to be fluent English proficient, then no other

requirements must be met, and the student is placed in the general education classroom with no other required linguistic support. If the child is found to need supplemental instruction to acquire English, then they are categorized as an English language learner and the district is required to provide both designated and integrated English language development services (ELD). Being placed in ELD classes can limit a person's ability to complete the A-G requirements to attend a 4-year college after high school, thus limiting their opportunity to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree or beyond.

The familial and social relationships the candidates had did a lot to support and sustain the participants through their journey to become a credentialed teacher. Many of the participants came from homes where there were not enough financial resources to allow them to go to school full-time without the need for additional employment. The mothers of the participants told them that they needed to go to college and get a career because they did not want her to have to be dependent anyone. This sentiment was echoed by the other participants, and the desire for independence and a better life than their family and community had was clear. Elena described how her mother walked to work every day so that she could have access to the car and go to school. Walking to work and walking home adds a lot of time to the day and does not allow someone to be as mobile as they can be with access to a vehicle when they need to get somewhere quickly. Often people will leave work to pick up lunch or stop by the grocery store on the way home. Doctor appointments and other medical appointments are often scheduled in short periods of time before and after work, but without access to a vehicle, her mother would not be able to go. In the heat, in the rain, in the cold, this mother walked to work, was on her feet all day at work, and walked home after a full day of work with young children.

Another situation showed through as one that could have derailed one of the participants and no one would have blamed her. While in preparation for teaching, the participant's brother was shot and nearly died, but instead of allowing this major life event to stop her, she used teaching through the pandemic to help her manage her grief. To complete her clinical practice requirement, she was serving as a long-term substitute teacher. For many teacher candidates, this is ideal as they can be paid a substitute wage. The participant had a strong desire to support her family in spirit and financially, so she did not miss a single day. This support for her family echoed the support she was given and showed how true love sacrifices for one another.

Children spend a lot of time in schools, and teachers can be mentors and have a major impact on children during that time. They can create either a space that is safe and joyful where students can learn together, or a place that causes trauma and pain. For some young people, it does not take much for them to dislike school. One ineffective teacher, a student who is a bully and is not managed by the school staff, or a person who learns in a different way or has talents not recognized by the system can all be reasons a student is turned off. The participants also found support on-site through district employed supervisors and other district staff. Given the teacher shortage and all the negative information around teaching, it is important for teachers and pre-service teachers to find others who will be positive. In the article "Find Your Marigold: The One Essential Rule for Teachers," Gonzalez (2013) likened teachers to marigolds and walnut trees. She described companion planting—placing vegetables and plants near each other to improve growth for one or both plants. The "marigold effect," like companion planting, can exist in schools. Some teachers encourage, support, and nurture other teachers. Walnut trees are poisonous. Gonzalez encouraged teachers to avoid the "walnut tree" teachers, of whom she provided the following examples: "Kid-Hatin' Kate" does not see the positives in children.

“Retirement Dan” is counting down the days until he is “outta here.” “Twenty-Page Tina” sets impossibly high standards for students and brags when children fail. “Badass Bobby” is the teacher who claims that kids “wouldn’t try” anything in his class. Then there is “Hattie-Who-Hates-the-Principal,” self-explanatory, or “Lawsuit Steve” who is always reminding you to “be careful.” “My Time Margaret” works only contracted minutes and keeps track of everyone’s duty days, and “Good-Old-Days Judy” does not like anything new and reiterates how good things used to be. The people who teachers surround themselves with, be they family or other staff, made a major impact on the participants.

Navigating LEAs and IHEs can be challenging for any student. The importance of role models cannot be overstated when it comes to seeing the potential for yourself and opportunities that can come your way. Camila was strong and persevered through a lot of issues to be a teacher and to stay a teacher, but she now understands that that may not be the norm for others. In her current district, she sees it as a gift to the students that they are able to see her as their teacher, someone who looks and talks like the students she serves.

Those who do not have anyone in their family or in their community to help them navigate LEAs or IHEs are often at a disadvantage. Parents are often the greatest advocates for their children and help their children to navigate institutions. If the parents are unable to navigate systems, their children will often need additional support from outside of the family to support them. For example, if a student is a child of immigrant parents who do not know how to communicate in English, that student may be more dependent upon their teachers to help them navigate educational institutions. Without familial or social support, students would need to turn to guidance counselors and advisors to support them, and those systems of support are different at different institutions. The participants who had been teaching for 10 or more years had fewer

opportunities in their K-12 education to investigate teaching as a possible career than those who had recently come into teaching within the last 3 years (the 2020–2023 academic school years). Maria talked about how she did not have an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program or any CTE opportunities in high school. She had made up her mind that she was going to be a teacher and had to figure out how she was going to get there. She also mentioned that she was incredibly shy and going to offices and asking questions when she was in college was a challenge that she had to overcome. Sometimes the bureaucracy we do not see can stop someone from completing college.

Aside from navigating K-12 and IHE institutions, navigating credential programs is a true struggle. There is a lot of misinformation from both other teachers and programs that is not correct. Credential candidates often struggle with this and end up having to take additional assessments that they could have met the equivalency for by taking coursework. Because credential programs are governed by the state of California, when legislation is passed, program sponsors have to align with the regulations. The requirements for a credential earned in 2003 are very different from the requirements to earn a credential in 2023, so having the correct information is imperative. To enter a teaching credential program in California, a candidate must hold a bachelor's degree, meet the Basic Skills Requirement, meet the Subject Matter Requirement, have fingerprint clearance and meet the US Constitution requirement. Once they are admitted to an accredited program, they must complete coursework to prepare teachers, typically 35–45 units, and clinical practice that requires 600 hours of in the classroom time over the course of a program, inclusive of 4 weeks of solo teaching, and they must pass a series of TPAs. Candidates must also pass RICA if they plan to teach special education or multiple subject areas. In traditional programs, this work can be completed in 1 year with full-time study; in an

intern program, candidates typically complete this work on a part-time basis in the evening while working full-time during the day. Many full-time students who are fortunate enough to have financial support from other sources like family can focus on their studies, engage in social activities, travel, and enjoy their time in college. Others must work, even in high school, to be able to support themselves and their families. Carver-Thomas (2017) discussed these barriers for teachers of color when entering the profession. The costs associated with earning a teaching credential, the quality of the preparation, and the assessments teachers must complete pre-service are challenging and are a barrier to entering the classroom.

The final theme that emerged from the data was the ability to resist and persevere. The participants described tragedy, both personal and professional that impacted their journey to the classroom and the importance of role models cannot be overstated when it comes to seeing the potential for yourself and opportunities that can come your way. Camila was strong and persevered through a lot of issues to be a teacher and to stay a teacher, but she now understands that that may not be the norm for others. In her current district, she sees it as a gift to the students that they can see her as their teacher, someone who looks and talks like the students she serves. Aside from mentorship, a major issue was the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented pandemic situation changed how people functioned at school, in society, and within their community. Institutions had to leveraging technology to do their work in a different way. While this worked in many spaces, those who did not have the resources suffered the most. People who had jobs that could not be done in a remote setting, children and families who depended on school systems for meals, and people who did not have the academic resources or support for their children suffered greatly. The privilege to stay home and have no great loss of income or opportunity is not one that everyone had.

Another major disaster faced by the participants was the flooding that occurred in the winter of 2023, was a devastating year for the town of Planada, California. Isabella, Elena, Maria, and Camila all taught in the Planada Elementary School District, and they were all personally and professionally impacted by a major flood. All 4,000 residents were evacuated and nearly half the homes and the local elementary school was destroyed by flood waters. Because many of the residents were low-income renters or not legal residents, they were ineligible for federal disaster funds. Planada, a community that struggles with violence, people living in poverty, lack of adequate or affordable housing, insufficient storm drains, lack of streetlights, few sidewalks and many sewage problems, had flooded before, in 2017. At that time the elementary school's library and fifth-grade wing housing 4 classrooms were destroyed along with several homes in the area. The participants who lived and worked in Planada had major disruptions to their classrooms and personal lives, living in a community where flood waters destroyed everything they owned. If they were not personally impacted, they had immediate and extended family and friends who were impacted. On a personal note, I was a teacher in the Planada Elementary School District for 12 years and I have deep family roots in Planada as well, so it was with tears in my eyes and a heavy heart that I saw the suffering in a place that provided me with many of the opportunities that allowed me to pursue my dreams of adult education and teacher preparation. Teaching in Planada made me the teacher leader and advocate for teachers I am today and without that experience, I would not have gone to UC Merced as the Associate Director for Teacher Preparation and into the CANDEL program at UC Davis. The winter of 2023-2024 is predicted to be as bad or worse, so the Central Valley and Merced County will be bracing for more rain and flooding.

Research Question 2: What do Latinas identify as enriching to their experience entering the teaching profession?

Along with challenges and barriers, there were many gifts that the participants identified as enriching to their journey to the classroom. It is important to understand what went right for Latinas who entered the workforce as credentialed teachers so these conditions can be replicated as much as possible by LEA and IHE teacher preparation programs. This will go far to diversify the teacher workforce. The first theme that came through the data had to do with the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the participants and of their families, social circles, and community. Each of the women who participated in the study had a distinct vision for herself and for her future. For the most part, many of them saw themselves as lifelong educators, but in what capacity, they did not know. There are many quotes, poems, anecdotes, and stories about how teachers impact students and the future. For young children, teachers are often the most influential adults outside of their family given how much time they spend in school. Children often start school in kindergarten at age 5 and continue through Grade 12, age 18, so the adults who staff schools are bound to have a profound impact on the lives of children. These impacts can be life altering in both positive and negative ways.

All the participants identified their personal and familial aspirations for becoming a teacher. The participants wanted something of their own, an education and a career. One participant said that her education could never be taken away, and their families wanted security for their daughters. Having a solid education was fought for in cases like *Mendez v. Westminster (1947), Serrano v. Priest (1971)* and *Williams v. California (2004)*. Several of the participants described their mothers as being a major positive influence who wanted a life of independence for their daughters and were willing to sacrifice to make it happen. In The Barbie Movie, Ruth

shared this sentiment in the quote, “We mothers stand still so our daughters can look back to see how far they have come.” (Gerwig, 2023) Each of the mothers sacrificed and gave everything they could so their daughters could go beyond where they were. These mothers and families wanted a life of independence for their daughters, instilling in them a work ethic and drive to work for what they wanted in life. One participant said that she wanted her parents to always be proud of her, and even though they had passed, when making decisions, she still thought of them and asked herself what they would have wanted for her. Other family members and community members played a major role in the journeys of the participants to the classroom. Elena described her grandfather, her aunt, and her former teachers as all being people who had helped her get where she was going. Her grandfather taught her how to work hard and put in the time to earn what she wanted. Her aunt was a teacher as well and she was able to see her work with students, help her to set up her classroom, and celebrate with her when she was hired for her first teaching position in her home community. These participants were intrinsically motivated to complete their education because of their vision for their future. Having this knowledge and a vision for their life made it easier for these participants to reach their ultimate goals and this also would have helped instructional leaders when guiding students through both K–12 and college or university.

Each participant also described aspiring to the teaching profession because they wanted to help the students who came along behind them. Community was very important in the lives of people of color. Cesar Chavez (1984) was quoted as saying, “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.” He understood that communities are made stronger when people come together and support each

other. Elena described teachers in her home community who cheered her on and helped her in every way they could as she worked to achieve her goals. Isabella described a positive pressure to become a teacher put on her by her district superintendent and other friends who had attended school with her and were already working as teachers in her home community. They all encouraged her to go into education as a teacher, but when she was hired to be a paraprofessional in the dual language academy in her home community, her love of the language, her love of her community, and her desire to serve that community came together.

There is great importance in having a mentor, having positive role models, and having people who look like you and speak like you to help you feel included and comfortable in a setting. The participants all wanted to be a role model for the students and give the students something to aspire to. This strong vision harkens back to their vision and determination to get into the teaching profession and shows that once someone gets somewhere, they continue to have dreams and visions for themselves. Their aspirations changed once they reached one goal, but they continued to aspire to something beyond what they perhaps at one time thought possible.

The second theme that shined through the data was the love of the Spanish language that the participants shared. Each of the participants was bilingual and found having the ability to speak another language was a gift to them. When Spanish is a major part of a community, it is important to have teachers that value the knowledge of the language. It is also important to have teachers and school leaders who look and talk like the students in the classroom. It is very clear that this participant believed in the necessity of diversification of classroom teachers. Sofia described how she worked hard to be bilingual and listened to music in Spanish and leveraged the knowledge of her family to ensure that she had an adequate understanding of the vocabulary. Camila talked about how being a teacher and speaking Spanish was not something she saw as a

child but was proud to be a teacher of students who, like her, were English language learners. Providing Latina/o children with a role model and showing them that a person who looks like them, knows language like them, and is from where they are from can be successful is an ultimate counterstory.

There were many barriers for the participants as they navigated both K-12 institutions and colleges and universities, but the participants identified mentors and advisors within those institutions as people they credited with getting them through their education. Former teachers and administrators and university administrators and faculty all helped the participants as they navigated through their bachelor's degree and the requirements set forth by the CTC. Elena credited the advising system at her university with helping her navigate through the system. She had a class where the focus was on navigating the requirements to become a teacher. The faculty advisor did all the advising during class time, eliminating the need for her to seek out this advice on her own. She said it was helpful to know the person who was working with her, and she trusted their advice. Earning a credential under typical circumstances can be a challenge but working through a credential program during the COVID-19 pandemic added a layer of complexity. The three participants who earned their credential during this time also credited their success to mentors and advisors.

The final theme that emerged from the data was the incredible perseverance and dedication each of the participants had when completing their education. Each one of the participants had to overcome obstacles and see themselves as more than what others saw. Teachers are often held to a higher standard than are other professionals because they work with children. Other professionals like bankers or lawyers do not endure the same level of scrutiny that teachers must. What a person is, what they look like, or their personal choices do not make

them a more effective or less effective educator. In addition to the normal scrutiny that teachers must endure, the participants had to overcome people and institutions that did not believe they belonged as students or as teachers. They had to persist in the face of adversity around their linguistic abilities and the harsh treatment they received while learning English. Through hard work and persistence, they all eventually flourished in English and were able to complete college and credentials, with several of them going on to earn graduate degrees. The participants got where they are today through hard work, and by not allowing anyone to make them feel as though they were not worthy because they all knew they belonged in the classroom as teachers. Not all young people can persist in the face of so many barriers, so to have this kind of strength of spirit at such a young age is a gift.

Research Question 3: What do Latina teachers perceive as possible strategies for districts, colleges, and universities to recruit and support other Latina teachers when entering the teaching profession in rural Merced County?

When asked, "What do you think K-12 and IHEs/credential programs should know about how to recruit and support other Latina teacher candidates?" each of the participants had some advice to give. Several of the participants said that K-12 institutions needed to do more to reach out and support Latina/o students to enter the teaching profession. Programs like AVID, where students learn about going to college after high school and focus on study skills to get them there, as well as CTE classes, where students receive hands-on, real-life experience in a particular field while still a K-12 student, were helpful. Having strong mentorship available to parents and families was also important. One of the participants mentioned that Latino families are often at a disadvantage because they do not speak English. She felt that if there was a more

concerted effort to get information to these families in their home language, then outcomes for students would be different.

The rest of the information the participants provided had to do with navigating the requirements set forth by the CTC and the fees and tuition that they had to pay for professional preparation. Credentialing programs are accountable to the CTC for their accreditation, and IHEs are also accountable to WASC to accredit their programs. To be accredited by CTC, program sponsors must offer coursework that meets the standards identified by the Teacher Performance Expectations, supervise candidates as they complete at least 600 hours of clinical practice through student teaching, internship, or residency, and work with candidates as they complete their program assessments, including the TPA and the RICA. Each program is responsible for showing the CTC how they adhere to the program standards through a 7-year accreditation cycle.

The participants identified the CalTPA as a major barrier to completing their preparation. Completing a TPA in a typical time is challenging, but the added complications of the COVID-19 pandemic made it nearly impossible for the participants to move forward. Living with the fear and uncertainty of that time due to the little information known about the virus, the shift from in-person learning to online-learning in the K-12 space and in the higher education space, and the personal losses that everyone was experiencing made it a dark time in history. The candidates were able to file for their preliminary credential without having completed all the requirements, but two continued to struggle with them beyond when they had in-program support. The participants also identified the fees associated with both cycles of the TPA, $150 per cycle, and the way that they were scored as major barriers. One candidate had to pay an additional $200 remediation fee after she did not pass a cycle on the first attempt. She had a small part to fix, then, after fixing the section, resubmitted at the cost of an additional $150, then passed.

Financing their higher education was a challenge for several of the participants. They all had to work while attending school in their bachelor's degree and throughout their credential program. One participant described working until midnight every day and having to leave home to commute to school at 6 AM daily. One of the participants transitioned from a traditional preparation program to internship, and another participant described working as an agricultural laborer during the summer to earn money to pay her tuition. Another worked as a substitute teacher while completing her preparation. Thomas-Carver (2017) described financial burdens and a "key contributor to reduced college completion among students." (pg. 10). To become a teacher in California, a person needs a bachelor's degree and a teaching credential.

Overall, the candidates felt that there were a lot of requirements to become a teacher and they all struggled to complete them. They felt that there needed to be more mentorship and guidance, more outreach to families and the community, and more support and financial aid to cover fees and costs associated with becoming a teacher.

Carver-Thomas (2018) made several recommendations for policy and practice of how to recruit and retain more teachers of color. She argued that teacher recruitment and retention begin with high quality teacher preparation, but many teachers of color are not adequately prepared for teaching as they complete internship programs, needing to work their way through preparation. To support teachers of color, Carver-Thomas (2018) suggested service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs along with teacher residency programs to provide financial assistance during preparation. Getting teachers of color to the classroom is important but combining "high-quality clinically rich preparation with financial support" (p. 1) will keep teachers in the classroom. Carver-Thomas went on to list three important benefits for students, especially students of color, that happen when they have teachers of color. First, having teachers of color

boosts the academic performance of students of color. Next, students of color experience social–emotional and nonacademic benefits when they have teachers of color. These include fewer unexcused absences, lower chances of chronic absenteeism, and fewer suspensions. White students have also expressed that when they have a teacher of color, they feel cared for and academically challenged. Finally, teachers of color are a resource for students in hard-to-staff schools because many teachers of color often are called to teach in low-income communities of color.

Carver-Thomas (2017) also suggested the use of Grow Your Own programs support bringing in teachers who reflect the local population and are more likely to continue to teach in an area with shortages. High school students, paraprofessionals, after-school program staff, and other community members are all potential teachers who need support, guidance, and mentorship to enter the teaching profession. She also suggests that school sites could improve teacher working conditions by improving school leadership. Colleges and universities could also do a better job by creating stronger articulation agreements and provide more ongoing mentoring and support that allow for teacher candidates to move through and between institutions in a timely manner. According to Carver-Thomas (2018), "High-retention pathways and financial support can build a pool of diverse teacher candidates who are well-prepared for long-term success in the classroom" (p. 6).

Implications for Policy and Practices

In the executive summary of *How to Increase the Diversity of California's Educator Workforce*, Bristol et al. (2022) described measures the California state legislature has taken to diversify the workforce. In 2020, Mike Gipson and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond cosponsored Assembly Bill (AB) 520. This bill provided "additional state

resources aimed at recruiting, supporting, and retaining teachers of color" (Bristol et al., 2022). The author went on to describe the California Diversifying Teacher Grant Program, which includes one-time competitive grants totaling $15 million to school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools to develop or implement new research-based programs that address "local efforts to advance the teacher workforce while emphasizing the retention of male teachers of color." The next step taken by the CDE and State Superintendent Tony Thurmond was to establish the CDE Educator Diversity Advisory Group. The purpose of this group is to advise State Superintendent Tony Thurmond on how the "CDE can recruit, support, and retain teachers of color across California" (Bristol et al., 2022).

With these efforts to invest in research-based teacher preparation programs focused on preparing a more diverse group of teachers to teach the majority–minority children in California, it is important to hear from those who are in the field now. In Merced County, more than half the students in the classroom are students of color, and increasing their academic achievement would raise the academic achievement of the valley as a whole. Understanding the barriers Latina/o children face in K-12 institutions and in IHEs, but knowing not what went wrong, but what went right, is key. What knowledge helped them persist? What support helped them attain their goals? What can K-12 districts and IHEs, including credentialing programs, do to overcome these issues? How these conditions can be replicated will be an important first step toward recruiting, supporting, and sustaining Latina teachers and other teachers of color in California's classrooms.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

More must be done to support Latinas and other people of color as they enter the teaching profession. The barriers that some teacher candidates face are often insurmountable and keep the profession closed off. According to Carver-Thomas (2017), insufficient teacher preparation,

financial limitations, teacher exams, lack of role models and support from mentors and leaders, and lack of access create a system that promotes only those who persevere in spite of many difficulties while locking out others who do not have the capacity to persevere through the barriers. The system of credentialing today, as stated above in the review of the literature, best supports those who have the resources to be able to complete full-time study and student teaching during 1 to 2 years for preparation. Those who complete this form of preparation are often being supported by outside resources or family and those participants are often not people of color. More needs to be done to fund candidates as they complete their preparation through grants, student loan forgiveness, or residency models where candidates are provided a stipend to complete their preparation program.

To support students as they become teachers as well as teachers in the field, colleges, and universities, along with TK-12 institutions, could create affinity support groups or safe spaces for people from diverse backgrounds. This ongoing mentoring and support for people of color can improve the likelihood that people of color will complete their preparation. (Carver-Thomas, 2017) This would allow for the load of supporting students and teachers from diverse backgrounds to be shared by many helping hands, not just one diversity appointee. Leveraging the knowledge and skills of other individuals not in the leadership team could be a gift to teacher candidates and teachers in the field. Along with safe spaces and support groups, TK-12 institutions along with colleges and universities should develop mentoring programs and leadership opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds. This will allow programs and TK-12 institutions to "Grow Their Own" teachers and bring in people who would be excellent teachers.

TK-12 LEA leaders need to make diversity an important factor when hiring staff and recruiting a leadership team from there. Diversity should include race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality. In TK-12 spaces, teachers need to have some autonomy in their instructional setting, and they should feel supported when they honor culture in the curriculum and in the classroom. Teachers should do what they can to offer a culturally responsive education to students and validate the experiences of their students. LEA and IHE administrators need to understand candidates and teachers of color. They need to respect these individuals and genuinely listen to them, especially when they discuss workload, burnout, the curricular programs they are using in the classroom, and what supports they need to be more successful. Also, TK-12 leaders and college or university administrators need to be prepared for courageous conversations on race, racism, the cultural differences between staff and students, and the discomfort that comes with having these types of conversations.

Conclusion

According to the Merced County website describing county demographics, Merced County is home to an ethnically diverse population with a large population of Latinos. Merced is in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, the world's most productive agricultural area, and agriculture-related industries are a major source of employment, along with food processing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), 63.2% of the people living in Merced County are from a Hispanic or Latino ethnic background; 70.4% of the population over the age of 25 has a high school diploma and only 14.1% of the population over the age of 25 has a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is $58,861, and 21.9% of the population lives in poverty. Merced County is a rural place that is economically depressed and does not have

historically high educational attainment. Given that more than half of the population in Merced County is Latina/o, Latina/o success is important to the future of Merced County.

The participants in this study were all Latinas who were from and now teach in Merced County. I, like the participants, am a Latina who is from and attended preschool through 12th grade in Merced County. I attended various elementary schools in the city of Merced and the town of Winton. I graduated from Merced High School in 1999 and from Merced Community College, earning an associate in arts: liberal studies degree, in 2001. I earned a bachelor's degree in liberal studies with a concentration in exceptional children and youth in 2003 and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in multilingual education in 2014. I earned credentials as an intern, working while completing my preparation to be an education specialist, then a general education teacher. I have worked in education as a teacher and administrator for the past 20 years (2003–2023) in Merced County. I started as an education specialist for Merced County Office of Education Special Education, then worked as an English/language arts teacher at the middle school level, then as a district librarian, and finally as a second-grade teacher in the Planada Elementary School District. I also served as the Associate Director for Teacher Preparation with UC Merced Extension, and I currently serve as a Coordinator for Intern Programs with Merced County Office of Education preparing Education Specialists and Multiple Subject intern candidates. The journey has been one filled with challenges, but one that I thought was very personal to just me.

After conducting this study, I saw that I had much more in common with the participants than differences. I now have a better understanding of what I can do and what the institutions I serve can do to better recruit and retain more Latina/o teachers. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (n.d.) said, "I think it's important to move people beyond just dreaming into doing.

They have to be able to see that you are just like them, and you made it." I myself am a counterstory and can hold my own journey up for others to follow. I am privileged and positioned in a space where I can do a lot to support aspiring teachers as they enter the teaching profession. I have had the pleasure of serving future teachers in the credentialing space since January of 2019, and I hope to continue to support candidates as they earn their credentials and become teachers in the classrooms of Merced County and beyond. The programs I have worked with have had a high concentration of Latina/o candidates, who in turn serve a high number of Latina/o children in both special and general education settings. The teachers who shared the details of their life and journey with me in this study had to overcome much to enter the teaching profession. Listening to them and the other candidates I have worked with has done much to increase my empathy and make me a better teacher and servant leader.

Moving forward with this work, the words of Cesar Chavez (1984) continue to ring true. "We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community…Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own." There is still a lot of work to be done to diversify the teaching profession in California and in California's Central Valley, especially in rural Merced County. The K-12 educational outcomes, college and university outcomes, and the requirements to earn a teaching credential continue to impede many Latinas/os and other people of color from entering the teaching profession. According to the Public Policy Institute of California in the report *California's Population* (Johnson et al., 2023), "No race or ethnic group constitutes a majority of California's population: 39% of Californians are Latino, 35% are White, 15% are Asian American or Pacific Islander, 5% are Black, 4% are multiracial, and fewer than 1% are Native American or Alaska Natives, according to the 2020 Census." But given that so large population

in California is Latina/o, the future of the state's success will be dependent on all students and especially students of color seeing teachers who look like the children in the classroom, hearing a language that sounds like the language they know, and knowing that leadership and a profession is not only for them, but critical for their future and the future of California and the United States as a whole.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Individual Testimonio

1. Can you please describe the three images you brought here today that represent your journey?
2. What happened for you that made you want to go into teaching?
3. What professional connections did you make before entering the teaching profession? What professional connections do you have now?
4. What systems, communities, or mentors helped you navigate your educational experiences? Were there any systems, communities, or individuals who had the potential to derail your educational experience?
5. When you envision your professional and personal life, what does it look like?
6. What has been your greatest achievement when entering the teaching profession?
7. What has been the biggest struggle you have had when entering the teaching profession?
8. What are some of the ways that you have decided to define yourself or your future differently than what others may have expected of you?
9. What do you think K–12 and institutes of higher education/credential programs should know about how to recruit and support other Latina teacher candidates?

Appendix B: Plática Group Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your K–12 experiences here in the Central Valley.
    a. What schools did you attend?
    b. Can you describe a positive or negative experience you had that led you into teaching?
2. Tell me about your college experience.
    a. What schools did you attend for your undergraduate degree? Your credential?
    b. Can you describe a positive or negative experience that led you to teaching?
3. How has language helped or hindered your ability to communicate during your own educational journey?
4. How did you know how to get through college? Your credential programs?
5. How did you know how to finance your education?