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In the Principal's Office: Testimonios of Chicanas and Latinas Leading Urban High Schools

Nova Star Meza
Loyola Marymount University

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by

Nova Star Meza

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all of the women in my professional world who have become my coconspirators and lifelines, many of whom I met as a wide-eyed new teacher with no training and no experience. Cynthia, Diane, Lorig, Michelle, and Patty—we became fast friends because the job overwhelmed us and we needed to support one another. We graded papers at coffee shops, we helped each other stay one day ahead of our lessons, and we made sure to unwind with cocktails at Friday happy hours. Whatever we did, wherever we were, we laughed and shared stories and solidified our friendships for a lifetime. Even though our daily and weekly get-togethers consist more of text messages than grading sessions now, both our shared experiences and unique paths, past and present, hold us together. In the many years since my teaching days, I have added more women to my circle of friends—administrators and educators like Sarah and Susan, the brave members of my Forum group, and the wonderful women in this study—who inspire me, lift me up through conflicts and bad days (or years!), and give me the strength to continue this important work.

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Returning to graduate school after a nearly 15-year schooling gap was one of the most difficult decisions of my life and I feel so fortunate to have landed at the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice at LMU. My professors, my cohortmates, and all of the support staff at LMU were simply amazing; the encouragement and guidance put me at ease, gave me direction, and expanded my thinking about education, equity, and leadership. I leave feeling better equipped to continue working in service and love for students and community of Los Angeles. I am also so incredibly thankful to have gone through this process with my friend and colleague Dr. Christian Quintero, who was a year ahead of me in the program. I cannot express my appreciation for everything you have helped me with—letting me know what to expect from professors, loaning me your books, reading drafts of my chapters, and most importantly, meeting me on Saturdays so we did not have to write in isolation.

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ABSTRACT

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The number of Chicanx and Latinx students in U.S. public school settings increased significantly at the close of the last century and continues to increase well into the 21st century. The numbers of Chicanx and Latinx, and more specifically Chicana and Latina, high school principals, however, have remained disproportionately low. Studies that focus on leadership identities of Chicana/Latina school leaders are few. *Testimonios* in this study shine a light on voices of six Chicana/Latina high school principals; these leaders described their background and schooling, their career journeys, and their leadership paths. This study is informed by two theoretical frameworks: Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and applied critical leadership (Cordova, 2018), which insist Chicana/Latina voices are centered and valued. In-depth, semistructured interviews encouraging reflection became the basis for six *testimonios* that focused on telling participants' leadership story as authentically as possible using long, unedited quotes to preserve their unique voices. Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Consciousness Framework provided structure to analyze and uncover themes of duality participants experienced: family as strength/challenge, leading as an insider/outsider, and trauma/resilience. Applied critical leadership principles were used to uncover common transformational leadership traits: leading with a social justice lens, high levels of reflection and self-awareness, and a focus on team-oriented servant leadership.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The number of women leaders in K–12 educational settings has increased significantly in last 30 years. According to a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) brief, the percentage of female principals more than doubled from to 1987–1988 (25%) to 2011–2012 (52%) and the percentage of experienced female principals (those with 10 or more years of principal experience) increased nearly four-fold, from 12% in 1987–1988 to 47% in 2011–2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Racial and ethnic makeup of principals, however, has not changed significantly. The same study reported although the number of White principals decreased from 87% in 1987–1988 to 80% in 2011–2012, the number of Latinx principals increased by only 4%, or from 3% to 7%, and the percentage of experienced Latinx principals increased only 3%, from 2% to 5% during the same time period.

Although the gender divide has diminished overall in public school leadership, secondary school demographics paint a different picture, at least on the national level. The number of female leaders in 2017–2018 comprised 54.6% of all public school principals, but in secondary schools, they were a mere 32.6% (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Although the NCES survey results did not disaggregate secondary principal data by race or ethnicity, if the overall percentage of Latinx principals in 2018 was only 7%, it would be safe to assume the number of Latina principals in secondary settings is remarkably low. In contrast to the national principal demographics, the Los Angeles Metro area showed a different story altogether. The largest school district in California and the second largest school district in the nation, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], 2020),

reported nearly 46% of principals were Latinx, 20% higher than the number of White principals. This statistic was in alignment with the overall population of the area. According to the Pew Research Center (2016), the percentage of Latinxs in the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim Metro area was 45.1%, a far higher number when compared to the national level of 17.3%. Although unable to find concrete statistics on the number of Latina high school principals in LAUSD, through a rough, unscientific hand count from the LAUSD online "School Directory" (n.d.) at the time of the study, I estimated there were about 88 high school principals; approximately 45 were women, and of that half, about 40% were Latina, or 20% of the total number of high school principals.

In her study on educational leadership for social justice, Santamaría (2014) posited leaders from historically marginalized groups have a unique and powerful lens that "might result in these leaders' increased multicultural understandings, alternative perceptions, and practices of applied leadership" (p. 349). She further indicated these leaders are uniquely positioned to promote leadership that is multicultural, socially just, and equitable. Santamaría and Jean-Marie (2014) argued for increased attention on these groups because "there is added value in the stories and narrative accounts educational leaders of color, women in particular, share about the ways in which they lead which are qualitatively different from historically mainstream leadership practices" (p. 334).

Problem

There is a dearth of information on underrepresented women leaders in secondary school settings and need for further study in this area (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). The mere fact it is difficult to find data that disaggregate using both gender and ethnicity, pointed to a neglect in

this area. Méndez-Morse et al. (2015) found studies of women administrators rarely included women of color voices and, when they were, "this inclusion frequently essentializes women of color educational leaders, as there is limited discussion concerning the impact of race/ethnicity for minority populations, both female and male" (pp. 172–173). In their study, Hernandez and Murakami (2016b) considered intersectionality of race and gender and suggested further research in this area. Latinas, they found, often felt added stresses of both gender and race/ethnicity. For example, one such struggle was "pressure to be a role model for members in the community and additional challenges with balancing work and life" (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016b, p. 4). Unique voices of Latina school leaders have been historically excluded and need to be heard.

Significance

Increasing numbers of Latinas in principal ranks could be of significant benefit to all schools who serve Latinx students. Hernandez and Murakami (2016b) posited Latinx leaders may be best situated to support Latinx students because they often lack role models. Hernandez and Murakami (2016b) also asserted:

> There is still much to be learned about Latina/o leaders' growth in the K–12 administrative ranks, including their histories, contributions, and experiences with issues related to racial identity, racism, sexism, and other historically marginalizing emblems of identity, often undocumented and invisible in the school leadership research. (p. 16)

Because Latinas in leadership positions can positively impact a school's culture and climate, school district officials will benefit from findings of this study. By increasing understanding of unique obstacles faced by Latina leaders, insights from this study may encourage district leaders to seek out ways to mitigate or eliminate those obstacles.

As Latinas begin to break through barriers of a once male-dominated position—the high school principal—there is an even greater need to hear voices of Latinas in these roles to illuminate how they have negotiated their race/ethnicity and gender as they have sought to become effective leaders. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) believed ethnicity/race and gender are both significant to understanding who they are; they do not just represent one identity or another, to themselves or to others. They found when Latinas encounter barriers at work or are unjustly targeted, "it is often difficult or impossible for them to identify which part of their identity is being targeted or the extent to which their individual performance or personality is responsible for the situation" (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 36). Through deep reflection and inquiry, this study revealed ways practicing Latina high school principals handle and maneuver around these barriers. Findings from this study may also benefit instructors and leaders of administrator preparation programs. Narratives of a handful of Latina principals, their stories and reflections upon their experiences, can serve as inspiration to emerging Latina school leaders among the teacher ranks.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to explore in depth how Latina high school principals serving in urban high schools perceive how their race/ethnicity and gender have informed and influenced their leadership development, identity, perspectives, and actions. This study sought to add to a growing body of literature focusing on lived experiences of Latinas as educational leaders; with a focus on high school principals, usually a male-dominated demographic, this study explored an especially understudied area. The following research question guided the study:

How do Chicana/Latina high school principals understand and express the ways race/ethnicity and gender influence their leadership identities and practices?

Positionality

I have hovered above two cultural worlds. After moving away from the predominantly Mexican American Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyle Heights when I was 7 years old, I lived most of my young life in a suburban, mostly White neighborhood—a place my working-class parents sought out because, in their words, they did not want to raise their daughters in the *barrio* where they had grown up. When I moved back to the city in my last two years of college, I felt an immediate connection to it, as if my return was a homecoming; I felt a comfort I had not experienced since I was a small child. Living only 30 miles east may not seem far geographically, but it was worlds away politically and culturally.

I have lived in various neighborhoods in northeast Los Angeles for almost 25 years and I have taught and led in the same downtown neighborhood my entire career. I have often felt an almost familial bond with the largely Latinx community, but I have not generally felt like an insider. My ability to speak Spanish is limited, and I believe many formative years spent estranged from my extended family and in a suburban, largely non-Latinx, White neighborhood has had an enduring effect on my consciousness; feelings of estrangement often endure. This insider/outsider dynamic and my gender have most certainly given me a unique perspective and positionality. In many ways, this study was a study of myself, albeit a somewhat "hidden" self. Whereas I once believed these attributes were deficits, they have perhaps primed me to be a more cognizant researcher, astute to complexities of notions of identity and the importance of one's own personal journey, one's perceptions of self, and one's actions.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was informed by two theoretical frameworks: Chicana feminist theory and epistemology and applied critical leadership.

Chicana Feminist Theory

Chicana feminist theory is the overarching theoretical framework that informed this study. The term Chicana, often used to identify women born in the United States from Mexican descent, is also a political identifier, one Delgado Bernal (1998) described as an "identity of resistance that we consciously adopt later in life" (p. 556). In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, as social and cultural movements were reaching a pinnacle in the United States, Chicanas began a movement in *El Movimiento*, the Chicanx social and political movement which criticized dominant structures in pursuit of social justice (García, 1997). Chicanas, standing side-by-side in the struggle with men, became disillusioned and embittered over continued sexism—*machismo*—and patriarchal models and "forged a feminist consciousness" (García, 1997, p. 1). This movement continued to gain traction years later by Chicana feminists like Anzaldúa (1987), whose book *Borderlands: La Frontera*, gave rise to the concept of "border consciousness," or living life on the border between two worlds, "a contradictory place where hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of the landscape" (Preface, para. 2).

Delgado Bernal (1998) outlined a framework for using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research and asserted liberal educational scholarship failed to focus specifically on experiences of female students, and traditional feminist approaches failed to focus on unique experiences of Latinas and others who are not White. Méndez-Morse (2003) added to Delgado Bernal's (1998) argument for inclusion of a Chicana feminist approach to research in education

and suggested research extend to educational leaders. Her article made a case for uncovering how interwoven issues of patriarchy, skin color, class, language, religion, and sexual orientation have played a part in leadership stories of Latina educators.

As a condition of the study, participants identified as Latina or Chicana. For those who did not identify as Chicana because they are not Mexican American, Chicana feminist theory, with its focus on borderland experiences, could still be applied. This may seem controversial to some; the term Chicana/o is rooted in Mexico–United States borderland world. The term, however, can be broadened to encompass a larger borderland theme. Elenes (2001) described her experience in consciously adopting Chicana as a personal identifier:

> I am *Mexicana*/Chicana. I was born and raised in Mexico in a bilingual/bicultural home. My father is Mexican and my mother Anglo-German. I have always traveled and transversed borders. After a short time in the U.S., and as I became involved with the Chicana/o community, I soon understood the struggle of people of Latin American descent and embraced the Chicana/o movement for liberation. I have, thus, identified myself as a *Chicana* as a result of my politics, not from the experience of growing up Mexican American in the U.S. Like many other Chicanas, I bring this cultural and political perspective into my teaching. (p. 692)

In the same vein, Gonzalez (2001) has used the term Chicana as "a political ethnic term referring to Mexican American, Central American and South American women residing in the United States who share indigenous ancestry, memory, culture, and conscious of patriarchy, colonization, and racialized-political structural realities" (p. 654). As a self-identified Chicana, I have brought this consciousness to my role as researcher. My participants, Chicana/Latina

principals in a large urban district in Southern California, certainly have lived these realities or have undoubtedly become cognizant of them through their studies and in their work in urban schools. Using a Chicana feminist lens, this study contributes to the body of work that engages Chicanas/Latinas to speak about their unique experiences.

Applied Critical Leadership

An applied critical leadership (ACL) framework guided the study's focus on educational leadership. ACL is an emergent theoretical framework that uses principles of transformational and transformative leadership, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory (CRT) "to support transformation of the roles of school leaders of color play" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 2). Santamaría and Santamaría (2012) proposed this theoretical framework is *"a strengths-based model of leadership practice where educational leaders consider the social context of the educational communities . . . based on the educational leaders' identities (i.e., subjectivity, biases, assumptions, race, class, gender, and traditions) as perceived through a CRT lens"* (p. 5). ACL encourages identification of a leader's strengths and what she brings to the table in her leadership practice. Leaders who identify with mainstream culture can choose to practice through a CRT lens by asking, "In what ways does my identity . . . *interrupt* my ability to see other perspectives and therefore provide effective leadership?" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 6). However, a person of color or a member of a marginalized group who leads with a CRT lens may ask, "In what ways does my identity . . . *enhance* my ability to see other perspectives and therefore provide effective leadership?" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 7). This distinction, the authors asserted, reveals members of marginalized groups possess positive attributes and deserve exploration and study.

Summary: The Frameworks Working Together

For this study, Chicana feminist theory and epistemology guided the overarching insistence Chicana/Latina voices be at the center of the work and provide counternarratives to traditional educational leadership stories, which are often devoid of Chicana/Latina voices. ACL guided the study's focus on participants' identities as educational leaders and helped to uncover transformative practices of Latina principals.

Methodology

This study used the narrative approach of *Testimonio*, a qualitative methodology, to deeply examine professional and personal experiences of six Latina urban high school principals. Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) asserted "the *testimonio* has the unique characteristic of being a political and *conscienticized* reflection that is often spoken" (p. 525). This oral story, they continued, must be written and shared for it is a political act: "The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525). Through in-depth analysis of participants' experiences as stories told by them, I sought to more fully understand how participants' race/ethnicity and gender shape who they are as educational leaders and how those parts of their identity have informed their leadership practices.

Because of my own positionality as a Chicana, high school principal, and colleague to my participants, I believed *testimonio* would work well for this study for it allowed for and even encouraged relationships in the research process. Additionally, one *testimonio* in this study was my own. Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) wrote "*Testimonio* is both a product and a process" (p. 365) and "Most of the methodological and epistemological discussions regarding *testimonios*

focus on an approach in which an interlocutor, who is an outside activist and/or ally, records, transcribes, edits, and prepares a manuscript for publication" (p. 365). The researchers also asserted there is a different approach where "the *testimonialista* is both researcher and participant where, for example, a formally educated Chicana/Latina documents her own collective story in or out of academia" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 366). This approach, they said, challenges "dominant notions of who can construct knowledge" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 366). Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2011) contended some scholars viewed the notion of a scholar–participant problematic because she is no longer in a subaltern position. They found "[a] group identity and group marginalization continues to exist in academia even when we have attained a relatively privileged status" (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011, p. 111). Although my participants, including myself, are educated and possess a master's degree at the minimum, our *testimonios*, collectively and individually, have lived—and to varying extents continue to live—in the margins as Chicana and Latina high school principals.

I knew all participants as colleagues in the same large urban district. I knew most of them well professionally, for we often found ourselves in the same professional organizations and groups; some I knew more than just professionally, for we had formed friendships after finding ourselves in those same groups over the years. By using semistructured interviews, I was prepared with guiding questions, but I was also "open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions" (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). Through the use of skillful interviewing techniques, I attempted to uncover how participants perceived race/ethnicity and gender have informed and shaped their leadership practices.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

This study was limited to a small sample of Latina principals in one district in California; therefore, findings may not be generalizable to either the larger district or to educational leaders in the state. Principals were selected early in the process and although there is a high turnover in the principal position, they were available throughout the duration of the study. One participant had recently self-demoted and left their position to become an out-of-classroom teacher and one participant disclosed she would be leaving the principal position at the end of the school year, just a few months after I interviewed her. Interview questions drew from the principals' lives, both personally and professionally, to elicit reflection and help participant and researcher make connections between the two aspects of their lives. This type of questioning, which can be deeply personal, works best if participants are comfortable sharing their stories, although this was beyond the researcher's control. I knew most participants to varying degrees; some I worked closely with in various organizations and settings. These relationships, although a potential strength of the study that may have assisted in assuring great openness and honesty, may have also hindered that openness and honesty, as some might have hesitated to divulge various feelings and incidents that could be perceived as unprofessional or wrong. Indeed, during one interview, the participant hesitated to finish describing an incident for fear specific details would identify her. As the researcher, I took measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity when reconstructing *testimonios*.

Delimitations

This study sought to give voice, through *testimonios*, to six Chicana/Latina high school principals; all of whom I knew and were easily accessible to me because I had relationships with them through various professional and academic networks. Participants were current or former high school principals serving students in Grades 9 through 12. The small size of the study was a key factor in this qualitative study. In narrative research, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) asserted researcher and practitioner must develop a relationship in which both feel cared for and both voices are heard. Fewer participants ensured in-depth storytelling.

Definitions

- ***Applied Critical Leadership (ACL):*** According to Santamaría and Santamaría (2012), ACL is a: strengths-based model of leadership practice where educational leaders consider the social context of their educational communities and empower individual members of these communities based on the educational leaders' identities (i.e., subjectivity, biases, assumptions, race, class, gender, and traditions) as perceived through a CRT lens. (p. 5)
- ***Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE)***: Delgado Bernal (1998) described scholarship of CFE seeks to shift "the analysis onto Chicanas and their race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality" (p. 559).
- ***Chicana/o/x*****:** Generally regarded as a person who was born in the United States of Mexican descent, Villenas et al. (2006) wrote, "Chicana is often used to refer to U.S.-born women of Mexican or Latin American descent who identify with a collective history of oppression and pride connected to a political consciousness with its origins

in *El Movimiento* or the Mexican American civil rights movement" (p. 7). Delgado Bernal (1998) described the term as a political and cultural "identity of resistance that we consciously adopt later in life" (p. 556). For this dissertation, I used Chicana or Chicanas when specifically referring to a woman or group of women and I used Chicano or Chicanos when specifically referring to a man or group of men. I used the inclusive Chicanx or Chicanxs when referring to a group that may consist of women, men, and/or people who identify as nonbinary.

- ***Educational Leader*:** For the purposes of this dissertation, Santamaría and Santamaría's (2012) definition works well. In the United States, the authors contended, educational leadership is hierarchical; when problems arise in education, plans emerge from the highest level, the federal government, then state level, then to local agencies. Superintendents and chancellors of local agencies then disseminate information to school-level leadership: the school principal. The authors posited, "Educational leaders are currently responsible for influencing the feelings thoughts, and behaviors of their constituencies while addressing the most complex issues facing education of all time" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. xii). For consistency and clarity, this dissertation used the term educational leader to refer to anyone at the principal level or higher, although certainly there are educational leaders throughout a school and community.
- ***Hispanic*:** Merriam-Webster (n.d.-a) defined Hispanic as "of or relating to the people, speech, or culture of Spain or of Spain and Portugal." This somewhat antiquated term,

often used to referred to anyone in the United States who spoke Spanish, is now often replaced with Latina/o/x.

- ***Latina/o*:** In their book, *Brown Eyed Leaders of the Sun: A Portrait of Latina/o Educational Leaders,* Hernandez and Murakami (2016a) "use the term *Latina/o* as referring to all Hispanics, with an emphasis on the presence of Central and South Americans, U.S. territories like Puerto Rico, and the border country of Mexico" (p. xvii). For this dissertation, I used Latina or Latinas when specifically referring to a woman or group of women and I used Latino or Latinos when specifically referring to a man or group of men.
- ***Latinx:*** Merriam-Webster (n.d.-b) defined Latinx as "of relating to, or marked by Latin American heritage—used as a gender neutral alternative to Latino."

Note on Terminology

For this dissertation, I preferred using Chicanx and Latinx over the generic, male-centered Chicano and Latino, or the gender binary, Chicana/o and Latina/o, as more inclusive terms when referring collectively to women, men, or those who identify as nonbinary. I did not, however, alter direct quotes from literature or participants in this study.

Organization of Study

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 presented the background to the study, the problem being addressed, the study's significance to the field of educational leadership, and the purpose of the study. I also introduced the research question, my positionality as researcher, theoretical frameworks that informed the study, the research method used, and limitations, delimitations, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 is a review of pertinent literature

on the history of leaders in education, women in educational leadership, Latinxs in educational leadership, and more specifically, Latinas in educational leadership. I also expand on theoretical frameworks as they relate to educational leadership. Chapter 3 describes research methodologies used for this qualitative study. Chapter 4 includes *testimonios* from Chicana/Latina principals. Chapter 5 presents findings and analysis of data. Finally, Chapter 6 offers a discussion and recommendations for the field of educational leadership.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In high schools, the principal position overwhelmingly has been occupied by White men. The U.S. Department of Education's (2016) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported from 1987–1988 to 2011–2012, the number of female public school principals at all levels had doubled from 25% to 52%. At the secondary level, however, the number of women in the principalship was significantly lower than the overall percentage of female principals; they comprised only 32% in 2011–2012. More recently, NCES published results from the 2017–2018 National Teacher and Principal survey and reported 33% of high school principals were women; only a 1% increase from 2011–2012 results (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). From 1987–1988 to 2011–2012, opportunities for leaders of color had not increased as dramatically as they had for women. The NCES brief stated the overall number of White principals at all levels decreased only 7%, from 87% in 1987–1988 to 80% in 2011–2012; results from the 2017–2018 survey suggested this number had remained stagnant, as only 6.6% of principals at levels reported being Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

In Southern California, however, demographics were very different. In the largest urban school district in the region, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD, 2020) reported Latinx principals outnumbered their White colleagues by 18% (44% and 26%, respectively) and female principals comprised 62% of all principals. Yet, Latina high school principals, even in LAUSD, remained an underrepresented group. This study sought to give voice to Latina high school principals, to investigate their perceptions of how intersectionality of race/ethnicity and

gender influenced their schooling and career trajectories, explore how they defined themselves as leaders, and examine how they created and recreated their leadership identities.

In this chapter, I examine existing literature in five sections. First, I look historically at school leaders' gender, race/ethnicity, and educational leadership development. Second, I discuss the characteristics and unique challenges of women in educational leadership roles. Third, I discuss Latinx leaders in education. Fourth, I explore literature on Latina leaders to expose their voices and reveal how they develop a leadership identity. Finally, I examine literature on the theoretical frameworks that informed and focused this study.

A Look Back: History of Educational Leadership in the United States

The following section explores the history of educational leadership in the United States, looking specifically at the history of gender roles, race and ethnicity, and the development of educational leaders.

History of Gender Roles in Education Leadership

Since the inception of the position, men have dominated the principal role in the United States. Blount (1998) described her book detailing the history of women superintendents in the United States, as "an historical account of how teaching became women's work and school administration men's" (p. 2). By the middle of the 19th century, Blount found as women sought teaching jobs and began to dominate the profession, men became increasingly troubled by the association of teaching as a woman's profession and newly perceived feminization of the role and began to leave the teaching profession for employment that gave them—or they perceived to give them—more social capital and power. The author argued efforts began to create male-only professional organizations, such as the National Educational Association, as a way to garner a

perception of status and clout for men who remained in the profession and to discuss ways to ensure their viability in the realm of education. Men in these organizations made efforts to identify the need for males in education to ensure safety, discipline, and other perceived masculine strengths. Very soon they began to create a male-only niche: school administration. To describe this new employment opportunity for men, Blount (1998) wrote:

> Just as communities eventually had welcomed women into schoolhouses to perform duties derived from the notion of republican motherhood, so too did school districts hire men to assume new authority positions configured suspiciously like institutionalized, idealized versions of the family man, husband, and father. (p. 26)

Although districts did not immediately find the need to hire school administrators, the role soon found its footing and it quickly became commonplace. Blount contended creating the administrator role was a way to ensure men would most definitely be in a position to manage, control, and monitor legions of women who might have entered the teaching profession seeking autonomy and independence from men.

In the early 1900s, a movement began among women educators to shift male dominance in school leadership. Ella Flagg Young, the first female superintendent of Chicago schools, stated:

> Women are destined to rule the schools of every city. I look for a large majority of the big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership. As the first woman to be placed in control of

> the schools of a big city, it will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been made and to show cities and friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man. (Young, 1909, as cited in Blount, 1998, p. 1)

Tyack and Hansot (1982) contended at the time of Young's ascendancy to the superintendency, women educators began to assert their power in demanding more leadership roles and commensurate pay. The authors pointed to an increase in women in leadership roles in the early 20th century, such as women serving as state superintendents in nine states, a three-fold increase in women in county superintendent positions, and an overall increase in women in leadership positions throughout individual school systems. They concluded, however, whatever gains women leaders made began to reverse. The authors resolved women "filled the posts that men did not want, and when their jobs became attractive to men, they were displaced" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 190).

Written nearly 100 years ago, Leonard Koos' (1924) book on the role of high school principals in the United States presented information that attested to the low numbers of women in the position. Koos, who surveyed 421 high school principals across the United States, found fewer than 10% were women and in the largest schools, most of whom served in smaller communities. In the largest community, all 66 principals were men. The median salary for women, he found, was 40% of the median salary for male principals; the highest annual salary for man was $6,000; whereas, the highest salary for a woman was $2,520. Koos (1924) wrote even though women dominated teaching staff at high schools, "the present situation affords little or nothing of encouragement for ambitious members of the sex to rise to the positions of larger responsibility in this field" (p. 9).

By the 1970s, women in educational leadership positions not only remained low, but were in decline. Silver (1976) found at each stage of a woman's career in education, there were factors that contributed to the decline. Prior to teaching, women pursuing undergraduate education majors were not adequately prepared to understand the educational system as a whole and were encouraged to see teaching as an end goal, not a steppingstone in their careers. While teaching, women had few models of other women leaders; men who were in power were often biased toward grooming other men for leadership positions. Women were often bound to societal pressures such as taking leaves to have children or putting her husband's career before her own. If a woman was among the minority to desire a position in educational leadership, she would have to attend graduate school, which, Silver argued, perpetuated a decrease in the ranks of women leaders. In graduate programs, bias against women and lack of support during and after programs by university professors who were overwhelmingly male and conservative, were often reasons, the authors cited, for this decrease. For those few women who were able to gain positions in entry-level leadership, many were often relegated to that position. Women leaders at school sites, Silver argued, were more likely to experience isolation, not only by subordinates, but by other leaders who were more likely to be male. The author also asserted women were more likely than their male counterparts to view the principalship as an end, not a step to something higher. Silver speculated women valued their work at schools with children and preferred to remain at that level; whereas, men valued roles that were more prestigious, required more decision making, and offered more money. Finally, at the fifth and highest career level, such as the superintendency, a woman, even if she were to have been eligible, would ultimately

almost always be voted down by school boards, which often consisted of "the most traditional segment of the district's population, the 'pillars of the community'" (Silver, 1976, p. 18).

A decade later, in the 1980s, gains for women in leadership positions were nominal. According to a report on women in educational leadership, from the 1970s to the 1980s, the number of female high school principals increased from 3% to 6.1%, those in the superintendent position increased from 0.6% to 6.7%, junior high principals from 3.5% to 10.2%, and elementary school principals from 20% to 26.5% (Weller, 1988). Bell and Chase (1994) analyzed historical data on school leadership in the United States from 1899 through the early 1990s and found although women comprised 70% of the K–12 teacher workforce and were just as likely to be enrolled in educational leadership programs, men continued to dominate administrator ranks. They also echoed Silver's (1976) concern nearly two decades earlier that faculty of educational administration programs in universities consisted primarily of men; the percentage of women faculty in educational leadership programs was less than half of the percentage of women in all faculty positions at the university level.

History of Race and Ethnicity in Educational Leadership

Men historically have been overrepresented in the field of educational leadership, and those men who did run schools and districts have been predominately White. An unpublished report by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.), as cited in Haven et al. (1980), found in 1974, 1976, and 1978, women of color comprised, respectively, 2.8%, 3.3%, and 3.4% of public school administrative positions. Men of color fared only slightly better at 7.6%, 8.2%, and 8.1%. Haven et al. also found, in a 1979 research study of secondary principals in 1977 by

Pharis and Zakariya (1979, as cited in Haven et al., 1980), 96% were White, 3% were Black, and less than 1% were Native American, Hispanic, or Asian.

The history of schooling in the United States is also a history of segregation. Haven et al.'s (1980) literature review cited a number of instances in the 19th and 20th centuries where people of color were running schools. These schools mainly served students of color who were often not allowed in traditional, segregated public schools. Schools for Black children, often funded by community or by private endowments, were led by both Black men and women both prior to and after the Civil War; some existed until the 1960s. Segregation in California and New Mexico before and after World War II motivated Mexican Americans to create and lead schools for their children (Carter, 1970). Mexican American administrators, Carter (1970) wrote, were rare except in predominately Mexican American schools and districts. He illustrated in one such district the principals and assistant principals, not to mention office staff, board members, and counselors, were all Mexican American. In districts with diverse ethnic makeups, Carter (1970) found districts "are eager to procure as large a Mexican American staff as possible"; however, "While Mexican American teachers are hired and placed, few are promoted to the administrative ranks" (p. 80). Nearly a decade later, Carter and Segura (1979) continued to find there were few Mexican Americans in positions of educational leadership and those who were often worked in schools that predominantly served Chicano communities or worked as district-level administrators over programs such as bilingual education or Title I. The authors found Chicano leaders at all levels in predominately Mexican American districts, but they were relegated to low-level positions in predominantly Anglo districts.

The end of segregated schools in the 1960s led to a sharp decline in school leaders of color. As schools integrated, they were consolidated; leaders of color were often the ones demoted or displaced in the process (Abney, 1974). Coursen (1975) reported from 1964 to 1970, the number of Black principals in Texas decreased by 600; in Alabama, the number of underrepresented principals decreased by 120, to just 14; and in Kentucky, the number of Black principals had decreased by 90%, from 350 to 36. Moving forward to the end of the 20th century, numbers of minority leaders remained bleak. Bell and Chase (1994) found teachers and leaders in K–12 education did not mirror the racial and ethnic identity of the student body. They wrote, "The nearly 10 percent of learners who are Hispanic study in a system where less than 3 percent of teachers are Hispanic" (Bell & Chase, 1994, p. 144). Latinx leaders, they found, comprised only 2.1% of leadership in middle schools and 1.5% of leadership in both secondary and elementary schools; in secondary schools, nearly 95% of school leaders were White.

Development of Educational Leaders: Historical Perspective

Tyack and Hansot (1982), in their book on the history of public school leadership in United States from 1820–1920, found prior to the mid-19th century, schooling in the United States was highly diverse and included private schools, publicly funded schools, and charity schools. By the mid-19th century, a movement toward a standardized vision of education, a "common school," gained momentum. The vision of leaders such as Horace Mann, included free, quality education funded by the government and ensured all students, regardless of social status, be schooled. Leaders of the movement, often not educators themselves, were men, although women played a large role in the common school movement, albeit behind the scenes. Tyack and Hansot (1982) wrote, "Even the most ambitious and effective female leaders often

needed men to front for the activities and to persuade males to grant the resources of money and power they required to pursue their work" (p. 63). Although schoolmasters and principal teachers were often employed in larger urban districts in the early part of the 19th century, school leadership and administrative positions did not become commonplace in the United States until the mid-1800s in both rural and urban schools (Blount, 1998). In urban schools, these early school supervisors, Blount (1998) asserted, determined when students could promote to the next grade level, evaluated teachers' instruction, and disciplined students. Blount found rural supervisors were often charged with overseeing teacher certification and would travel to one-room school houses to ensure quality of instruction, although many men did not have instructional experience. Neither rural nor urban supervisors in the 19th century were certified or trained to lead schools or districts; universities did not offer specialized training in school administration until the late 1800s.

In 1905, Teachers College, Columbia was the first university to offer a full program in school administration and it did not become a common practice for states to require licensure or specialized training until the 1930s (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Koos (1924), in his study of over 400 high school principals, found almost one third of respondents had taken three or fewer courses in education; of the six courses 50% or more principals had taken, only one was specifically geared toward administration and not teacher education. An influential leader of his time, Dr. Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, was "one of a small band of leaders who professionalized school administration" (Koos, 1924, p. 121). Cubberley, who was originally a physicist and university professor, became superintendent of schools in San Diego, California in 1896. Two years later, Tyack and Hansot (1982) wrote, he went to Stanford University to teach

in and reinvigorate the crumbling education department. The authors found although this was not viewed as problematic during his career and lifetime, Cubberley was a nativist who believed White men were superior, a segregationist who thought Black children were inherently inferior in intellect to White children, and an undemocratic school leader who relied on top-down leadership methods that excluded teacher input. Tyack and Hansot contrasted Cubberley's top-down leadership style with Dr. Ella Flagg Young's. Chicago's first female superintendent, Young espoused John Dewey's theories of schools as democratic institutions and believed school leaders should practice democratic and participatory leadership. Because of the sheer size of her organization and complex layers of administration, however, even Young, the authors argued, eventually created a hierarchical, bureaucratic organization. Beck and Murphy (1992) reviewed literature on principal leadership from 1920–1990 looking for metaphorical language and symbols and found the 1920s principal was largely defined as a scientific manager, but included spiritual and religious metaphors and images. A decade later, the authors asserted, religious and spiritual metaphors and images were replaced with language and imagery from corporate and factory worlds and the principal role became synonymous with business manager.

By the 1950s, school and district administrators were more trained than ever before, credited in part, Tyack and Hansot (1982) claimed, to states' requiring administrators to obtain more rigorous certification. This certification, as Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) asserted, was likely focused on "general management principles, school laws, administrative requirements, and procedures, with little emphasis on student learning, effective teaching, professional development, curriculum, and organizational change" (p. 5). As they entered the second half of the 20th century, the authors asserted, those school and district leaders who had enjoyed some

level of consistency in values and goals in preceding decades, were merging into a new era—one of desegregation, Cold War fears of intellectual inferiority in light of Russian gains in science, economic changes, and shifts in educational needs. Beck and Murphy (1992) found during this era of great change and challenge to the status quo, associated metaphors "painted a picture of administrators concerned with overseeing minute, even trivial, details of institutional operation" (p. 393). The researchers, who found similar examples throughout history of a tendency to focus on simplistic operational tasks during challenging times, pondered if educational scholars and leaders stressed "the principal's role in facing solvable problems—even if these relate to trivial issues—and that they have often ignored the reality that principals must deal with troublesome situations not amenable to quick solutions" (Beck & Murphy, 1992, p. 393).

The 1960s and 1970s ushered in movements for civil rights, women's rights, and anti-Vietnam War protests which sparked change and conflict, not only in the country as a whole, but in schools as well. Goodwin et al. (2005) asserted those movements, along with a proliferation of powerful teachers' unions, and federal actions, considerably changed the role of school leaders. The authors characterized these decades as tumultuous and asserted added responsibilities required by the federal actions further encouraged a focus on management and compliance. They posited the 1980s brought forth three waves of reform movements beginning with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which called for more accountability and greater student achievement. The second wave called for teacher empowerment and a restructuring of school governance; the third wave added parents, students, and community involvement. The authors, considering the changing role of principal over 200 years and added responsibilities and expectations over time, discussed increasing complexity and

demands on leaders' time and concluded there were negative consequences such as lower morale in the profession.

Developing Educational Leaders: Moving From the Past to Present

By the end of the 20th century and into the next, demands from the federal government only amplified with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), which increased accountabilities for school leaders and threatened harsh consequences if goals were not met and served to decline further the morale and status of the profession (Goodwin et al., 2005). Principals of the future, the Goodwin et al. (2005) concluded, would have to be instructional leaders and pedagogical experts, skilled human resource experts who employ collaborative methods and ensure shared governance, and skilled communicators and negotiators who work hand in hand with the larger community and business world. Educational leadership programs, unfortunately, have not yet caught up with this ideal. Kempner's (1989) research, which included surveys of 144 Oregon administrators on their work and training they received for their positions, found educational administration had a culture of professionalism that often drove and defined training in administrative programs. Kempner (1989) wrote, "The webs of significance that compose this culture are predominantly male oriented, based upon conceptions of control and authority drawn from metaphors of business, the military, and athletics" (p. 119). Kempner's findings echoed Blount's (1998) research of early 20th century male administrators, which asserted principals emulated militaristic or industrial leadership styles valuing hierarchical leadership roles that equated position with power. Women and people of color, Kempner (1989) argued, did not find easy access to leadership roles because they do not share "the physical, social, and cultural attributes of the those who currently predominate in educational

administration" (p. 120). The author questioned administrator training programs' ability to develop democratic, moral leaders and implored program leaders to seek out underrepresented candidates and ensure certification goes beyond typical leadership skill building and incorporate philosophy and ethics of administration.

Research on educational leadership in the 21st century has suggested much work is still needed to prepare aspiring administrators to work in diverse school settings. In her study of race and gender in leadership preparation programs, Rusch (2004) suggested students and faculty encountered what she called fault lines that occur as they "attempt to navigate across and within differences [and] power and privilege related to gender, race, and status become mitigating factors" (p. 18). Although Rusch believed these fault lines can be sources of strength, she conceded they often caused further division and alienation. Rusch and Horsford (2008) posited although many educational leadership programs infuse social justice concepts in the content of their courses, theories, often filtered through professors' and students' experiences and values, rarely lead to socially just practices of new school leaders. When they examined the intended, implemented, and assessed social justice curriculum, Woods and Hauser (2013) found instructors' intentions were high, but implementation and assessment of the curriculum were low. Of 71 California university instructors of educational administration they surveyed, they found 68 (97.1%) believed issues of social justice should be integrated into their courses, but only 29.8% reported their programs had a structured, formal approach to ensure integration.

Women in Educational Leadership

Characteristics of Women in Leadership Roles

Women lead differently than men. Fauth's (1984) synthesis of research conducted with women principals from 1956 to 1979 found they were just as capable in their roles as leaders as their male counterparts, although their leadership styles differed. She suggested women were more concerned about student achievement, knew more about curriculum, valued teachers more, were more concerned about individual students' needs, and led more democratically than male principals. Gupton and Slick (1996) asserted women's style of leadership is more transformational, or collaborative and distributive, in contrast to men's transactional, or authoritarian and traditional, ways of leading.

Women in educational leadership have often found the need to negotiate the role they were expected to exhibit as a leader, finding they had to incorporate behaviors of stereotypical male and female gender roles. One of Silver's (1976) five recommendations for women leaders encouraged them to dress in a style that concealed physical characteristics to avoid being seen as a "sex object" (p. 33). In the 1980s, Fauth (1984) spoke of women caught in a double bind where they must exhibit, simultaneously, toughness and tenderness. In a study conducted in the early 21st century, where four female researchers and educational leaders audio-recorded two 120-minute dialogue sessions on their leadership experiences and then analyzed and reflected on those sessions, one researcher, Susan Hannah, stated, "Our sexual roles follow us into any job, everywhere. I think gender does intrude. It's a power, though. We can use it" (Murphey et al., 2005, p. 280). As more women have entered leadership positions, one researcher, Kathleen Murphey, posited that there seemed to be a broader range of styles available to them than to men.

Sanchez and Thornton's (2010) literature review on gender issues for leaders in K–12 settings found stereotypes of traditional gender roles historically have hurt prospects of women in leadership roles. Men were most often found to be perceived as authorities and disciplinarians, traits historically viewed as favorable for school leaders. Women, on the other hand, were often perceived as emotional and collaborative, traits not historically considered favorable; however, the authors found "more recently, collaborative approaches have been judged more desirable within educational leadership" (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 4). With a move toward shared leadership practices and collaborative methods such as professional learning communities, stereotypical female traits including caring, collaboration, and inclusiveness have become more desirable in the field of educational leadership.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) wrote of five most common approaches that have characterized women in educational leadership gathered from a synthesis of literature on women in educational leadership: (a) leadership for learning, (b) leadership for social justice, (c) relational leadership, (d) spiritual leadership, and (d) balanced leadership. They found women leaders believed in horizontal, not hierarchical, leadership that emphasized shared power and relationship building. Women of color and White women, they found, were committed to social justice and had a "strong desire to transform the learning conditions and opportunities for those who have been least well served by current educational policies and practices" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 11). Women, particularly women of color, found a deep connection to spirituality and leadership to which they were inextricably bound; their spirituality gave them purpose, a model, and inspiration for their leadership. Women in leadership prioritized instruction and student learning. Women leaders, the authors found, also strived to create a

balance between work and home and "seem to be able to lead well when their responsibilities at home and in the office are in some kind of balance" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 24).

Challenges of Women Leaders

Women as Mothers and Wives

One challenge facing women in leadership roles stems from deeply ingrained notions of women seen as mothers and wives first. Blount (1998) found single women of the 1800s were given a great deal of freedom to become educated and employed in contrast to their European counterparts, but that freedom was revoked when they married. Marriage in the early half of the 20th century, Tyack and Hansot (1982) asserted, supported a man's leadership growth, but did the opposite for women. Women, they wrote, were often pressured to leave the teaching profession upon marriage; some districts even barred married women from employment altogether, a practice that grew during the Depression. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) suggested, "Like men, women experience the day-to-day activities of leading as all-consuming, but unlike many men, many women leaders go home to another 'day's work' taking care of family and home" (p. 21). Gupton (2009), whose article reflected on participants' advice given to aspiring women leaders in a 1990s study she conducted with Gloria Slick on women in educational leadership, argued even 15 years later, the advice was relevant. Much of the advice, such as "be prepared," "work hard," and "practice good people skills" (Gupton, 2009, p. 5), was meant to be applicable to all leaders, both men and women, but specific advice was provided for women. Her first section of advice was to be prepared and secure proper credentials, obtain the right schooling, and develop an astute political awareness of the leadership role; Gupton said women have progressed quite a bit in this area. The author noted women need to be prepared for the

consequences of leadership, however, and asserted, "A woman—more so than most men—must not only be qualified with credentials, but must also be tough-minded and persistent, and aware and prepared for the stiff demands of the job and the toll it can take on a family" (Gupton, 2009, p. 7).

Finding a balance between work and family obligations has been difficult for women aspiring to lead. Despite an assertion from a 1977 dissertation by Baughman (as cited in Fauth, 1984), whose study found for women teachers who were interested in pursuing a leadership role, family aspirations did not minimize career aspirations and "saw only a minimal likelihood of career interruptions for marriage and child rearing" (p. 69), literature has suggested the opposite. Gupton (2009) believed family responsibilities were the "most lingering and significant issue" (p. 16). She suggested women in the 21st century still must choose between career advancement and motherhood. For women who want both, they often put career on the back burner while they rear their children. When they are ready to focus on their careers, it is often impossible to catch up with their male contemporaries who, without obstacles, were able to move their careers forward and obtain the highest levels of leadership roles. McGee (2010) surveyed 90 Florida school administrators and found the number one career obstacle was participants' own anxieties about balancing career and family; the majority of her respondents reported starting their administrative careers later in life, after rearing children. In reviewing literature about women in educational leadership, Sanchez and Thornton (2010) concurred family obligations have remained as a roadblock for many women entering the field of educational leadership. They wrote, "In many families, women are expected to maintain traditional family roles independent of existing or new job responsibilities" (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 6). Grogan and

Shakeshaft (2010) found women leaders preferred to strike a balance between work and home, instead of simply concentrating on work as a man might be accustomed to doing.

Weller (1988) suggested men and women may simply have different definitions of success. Men, she said, defined their success in terms of work, but women defined success as a balance between relationships and work; women, often equate success with balance in their lives. To achieve this balance, Sanchez and Thornton (2010), suggested women "carefully consider" and plan marriage, pregnancy, and other events "to facilitate an appropriate balance between work forces and family obligations" (p. 9).

Held to a Higher Standard

Women in leadership positions have long felt they are held to a higher standard than their male counterparts. For women who did aspire to leadership roles despite expectations of society and family, Estler (1975) found women faced a multitude of barriers, including higher expectations. She asserted college admissions required women to have a higher ability than men. Once in leadership roles, Estler continued, women were not only often paid less, but were required to be more qualified than their male counterparts. In her report, more than 10 years after Estler's article was published, Weller (1988) advised women to "be above reproach" (p. 7) and act more professionally and appear more competent than their male counterparts. She added women pioneers in the field of educational leadership often "functioned in a goldfish bowl, where their every decision was scrutinized" (Weller, 1988, p. 8). She argued continued adherence to these higher standards would "continue to erode gender barriers" (Weller, 1988, p. 8). Gupton (2009) believed, even 10 years ago, there were greater expectations for women than there were of men and advised women to expect great scrutiny and judgement. She wrote, "Even

into the 21st century, this advice [to work hard] remains relevant and probably will be for many years to come" (Gupton, 2009, p. 8).

Gender Discrimination

Research has demonstrated that many women believe their gender has contributed to a lack of opportunities for growth in the workplace. Estler (1975) wrote, "A deeply instilled pattern of societal discrimination that affects the aspirations of women, these subtle processes often appear to be a stronger force than overt barriers in women's failure to reach leadership positions" (p. 366). As Estler described, women have had less access to financial resources, college counselors and faculty have discouraged their professional goals, and women have had to contend with greater lifestyle demands than men in the same positions. Estler found literature on women in leadership positions pointed to two processes that diverted women from leadership roles. The first process was how women responded to society's definition of women. Women, she argued, were caught in double bind and often responded to societal pressures by not pursuing leadership roles. The second process revolved around a prejudiced selection process whereby they were required to have more experience than men and were more often denied experiences that would lead to higher levels of administration, such as the superintendency.

Bell and Chase (1994) found 20 years after Estler's (1975) article, little had changed in explanations of why women were still underrepresented in leadership roles. Furthermore, women, they asserted, did not lack aspirations for leadership, but faced limited opportunities to join leadership ranks because of structural and cultural barriers such as access to opportunities, a preponderance of men in gatekeeper positions, persistence of subtle and blatant sex and racial discrimination, and public policies that diverted focus away from equity in education to a focus

on excellence. In a research study surveying 151 women executives in education, Gupton and Slick (1996) found 92% of respondents "either strongly agreed or agreed that the 'good old boy' system is alive and well in educational administration" (p. xxvii). A decade later, Noel-Batiste (2009) used the same survey and 80% of her respondents answered strongly agreed or agreed to the same question. In a qualitative study on eight administrators, seven of them women, in a district in the southern United States, Marshall (1994) asserted all women studied identified "their gender affected their ability to fit comfortably" (p. 171). They had to compensate for their gender and learn how to lead without being too aggressive; they felt lonely and excluded from male administrators; and, finally, they suffered through it all in silence and downplayed both sexist stereotyping and forced and/or perceived isolation (Marshall, 1994).

Latinxs in Educational Leadership

Characteristics of Latinxs in Educational Leadership

Latinx leaders can positively impact lives of students, especially Latinx and other students of color (Hernandez et al., 2014; Murakami et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2008). Murakami and Hernandez (2013) asserted, "We perceive Latina/o school leaders as strong candidates to transform schools based on the own racial identity development and their experiences of social injustices" (p. 65). In their study on Latinx principals, Murakami et al. (2016) surveyed 213 school leaders across the nation and looked specifically at identity, leadership, and advocacy of students. These three areas identified by researchers provide a useful paradigm for examining literature on Latinx educational leaders.

Identity

Defining Latinx identity is complex. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) asserted Latinxs are comprised of various subgroups most often identified by their nation of origin and vary in socioeconomic status, use of language, politics, and culture. The authors also stressed Latinxs are quite varied in terms of racial identification; some identify as White and some view Latinx as its own racial category. Murakami et al. (2016) found principals' own "experiences as students shaped the way they constructed their identities as principals" (p. 289). Over 75% of their participants reported their own schooling experiences were very positive (43.2%) or mostly positive (32.4%). When asked "to what extent their racial background created barriers or problem," 45.1% responded "to some extent," 52.1% responded "not at all" and 2.8% responded "to a large extent" (Murakami et al., 2016, p. 290). The researchers noted male and female participants' responses were significantly different in this area; 51.9% of male principals responded their backgrounds created barriers to some extent whereas only 40.9% of female participants responded as such. As nearly half of surveyed principals identified their racial background was a barrier or problem, the researchers found principals' race and ethnic identities were important to principals' practices. In contrast, Niño et al. (2017) conducted a study on 216 Latinx administrators in Texas and asked principals if their ethnicity was a barrier to their work, to which an overwhelming number—76%—responded rarely or never. Additionally, 61% of those administrators responded their racial and ethnic background impacted their work positively.

Leadership

Leadership styles of Latinx leaders, although certainly varied, have tended toward a more democratic, socially justice leadership model (Bordas, 2015; Murakami et al., 2016; Niño et al., 2017). Bordas (2015) posited Latinx leaders are primed to answer the call of a current workforce need for leaders to shift away from hierarchical structures to create more inclusive, collaborative environments because "Latinos come from a *We* or people-centered culture" (p. 56). Murakami et al. (2016) asked Latinx principals to describe their leadership in one of three ways: democratic, delegative, or autocratic; the participants responded 57.5%, 24.5, and 9.4%, respectively. Murakami et al. (2016) asserted, "Given that leadership requires high involvement into human agency, we considered that their democratic style related to contemporary demands for distributed styles of leadership" (p. 292). Niño et al. (2017) stressed the importance of the principal's role as instructional leader and "need to be well versed with cultural relevant pedagogy to fully immerse the aspect of claiming leadership and ensure learning opportunities for all" (p. 15). The authors' research on how Latinx principals spend their time indicated a need to develop instructional, culturally responsive, and transformative leaders who work to improve classroom practice.

Advocacy for Students

Murakami et al. (2016) found Latinx principals shared a vision for advocating on behalf of all students. Many principals in their study not only believed they needed to ensure academic success, but also strived to support other needs, some as basic as food and shelter. The researchers found principals were highly supportive of English learners (ELs), sought out teachers who were positive and would best serve their students, and openly advocated for their

most needy students. Rodríguez et al. (2016) proposed a concept of Latino educational leadership to prepare Latinx leaders throughout the educational pipeline to navigate a system often mired in deficit thinking and racism, to ultimately serve diverse student populations, specifically Latinx students. Martinez et al. (2016) found Latinx leaders were poised to answer calls of Latinx parents for school leaders to better understand their needs and support their communities and students. Martinez et al. (2016) stated many Latinx leaders know and understand "that *familia* often comes first for Latinxs, that relationships are built on *confianze* and *respeto*, and that the *sacrificios* that Latinx parents make are necessary to ensure a better life for their families" (p. 12).

Challenges for Latinxs in Leadership Roles

Latinxs have been underrepresented in higher education and the field of educational leadership and becoming an educational leader, more specifically a principal, is not easy. On a macro level, the picture is grim. In 2013, the percentage of Latinxs who had earned master's degrees was considerably lower than non-Latinxs, only 3% in comparison to Asians (15%), Whites (8%), and African Americans (6%; Santiago et al., 2015). In 2011–2012, only 7% of all principals in the United States were Latinx (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Education leadership and administrator training programs may not provide adequate training for prospective Latinx leaders. Rodríguez et al. (2016) asserted, "University led principal programs historically provided an incomplete preparation model that did not include or identify the full scope of competencies and skills needed to lead current and future diverse K–12 schools" (p. 141). Critical scholars, the researchers contended, have continued to press for inclusion of Latino voices and experiences in administrative programs.

Latina Leadership in Education

Experiences of Latina School Leaders

The search for literature on Latina school leaders was a challenging task. Niño et al. (2017) and Hernandez and Murakami (2016a, 2016b) noted although research on career paths and barriers of Latina school leaders began to see momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, it has slowed considerably since then. Studies on the impact of ethnic identity on Latina leaders' management style were conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s, but literature remained sparse (Niño et al., 2017). Many studies cited by Hernandez and Murakami (2016a) were doctoral dissertations from the 1990s. Martinez et al. (2016) also found "most of what is known about Latina leaders comes from dissertation studies; revealing barriers that Latinas face in obtaining and sustaining leadership positions in schools" (p. 4). In a more recently published article by Martinez et al. (2020), the authors cited nine dissertations written about Latina educational leaders in the last decade between 2009–2016.

Ortiz's (1982) study on career paths of Mexican American women in education in the Los Angeles area during the late 1970s pointed to multiple barriers Latinas faced in school and district assignments. The researcher found discriminatory practices often relegated aspiring leaders to positions in schools with high percentages of Latino students, schools which were in disrepair or had students with academic or behavioral challenges, or to positions in special projects at the district level where students of color "are primarily targets" (Ortiz, 1982, p. 186). Of the 55 administrators surveyed for her study, Ortiz found more than half—30—were either special projects coordinators or specialists. The status of those coordinators and specialists in the organization was often precarious. Neither teachers nor administrators, they were not well

integrated into the school culture and were not held in particularly high esteem in the larger district. Latina leaders who were assigned principal positions were given assignments in the most difficult schools. If they did well, they were often rewarded by being reassigned to a similar school; they were rarely promoted and when they were, Ortiz described them as being possessive of their jobs and felt a need to be fiercely loyal to the organization. One principal who had achieved the position of assistant superintendent of personnel invoked images of war as she stated her need to continually fight for her job:

> Well, I have obtained this post. It has required time and energy. Now I must prepare for the next battle, and the next. You see, now I must keep their post for a reasonable time. I don't doubt a war will result. If I expect to advance, I must continue in this way, there's no alternative. (Ortiz, 1982, p. 195)

In the 21st century, common themes around how Latinas lead have emerged. Niño et al. (2017) reiterated a recurrent theme for all women in leadership positions and asserted, "Common barriers for Latinas include negotiating a balance in family, religion, community, and careers" (p. 10). Hernandez and Murakami (2016a) found similar challenges reflected in the literature and added challenges of "career mobility, lack of role models, lack of mentors, and work-life balance" (p. 71). Although the authors found Latinas had been more visible in the educational leadership landscape, the prevalence of literature suggesting it is still a male-dominated arena led them to assert, "If Latinas want to establish themselves as school administrators, they may still have to conform to historically prescribed male-dominated norms" (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016a, p. 71). Latinas, like other women of color, have often struggled in the workplace because of their gender and ethnic or racial identities. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) wrote:

> When Latinas have negative experiences or encounter systemic barriers, it is often difficult or impossible for them to identify which part of their identity is being targeted or the extent to which their individual performance or personality is responsible for the situation. (p. 36)

In their review of literature, Avalos and Salgado (2016) found, "Among the barriers which have been cited are a lack of role models and mentors, lack knowledge in regard to networking, as well as the presence of structural barrier including school organization, school boards, and 'good old boy' networks" (p. 24). Echoing those barriers, Martinez et al. (2020) found four themes emerged from *testimonios* of four Latina school leaders in Texas: gender roles and expectations of motherhood, criticality of mentorship, confronting and addressing racism and sexism, and harnessing bilingualism to empower self and others.

Latina Leadership Identity

Despite many barriers they face, Latina leaders have been committed to social justice and democratic leadership (Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami & Hernandez, 2013; Niño et al., 2017). In their study involving two Latina principals in high-need primary schools, Medina et al. (2014) asked participants to reflect on how their leadership influenced their specific school sites. Both participants saw their roles as critical and influential; they believed leaders of high-need schools must serve parents and community and they believed they must cultivate excellence in staff and provide a positive, collaborative environment to ensure that excellence. Principals, the researchers found, led with a moral imperative and infused a moral character in their daily work. In her research on six Mexican American principals in Texas, Carr (1995) stated, "All six stressed collaboration, team work, group decision making,

service, respect for others, and tolerance for diversity" (p. 13). Carr asserted these qualities valued by these principals were not those typically valued in the educational administration field at large. In their study on four Latina school leaders, Martinez et al. (2016) also found all three school-level administrators focused on assets of their students and community and "nurture[d] a spirit for social justice" (p. 23). An ethic of care and focus on relationships are common themes for Latina leaders. When principals in her study were asked about their perspectives of power, Carr (1995) found their words were ones "of connectedness and caring rather than domination and coercion" (p. 18). Principals had little concern for rules or traditions, but instead focused their energies on valuing and caring for people around them.

Research has also shown that Latina educational leaders have a unique set of interpersonal and communication skills. In their findings from the National Latino Leadership Project study, Hernandez and Murakami (2016a) reported 132 Latina educational leaders respondents valued family and community. Leaders pushed for parental involvement and were sensitive to needs of the community in which they worked and believed it was their duty to respond to those needs by providing professional development for their teachers and ensure adequate support staff is available. Martinez et al. (2016) found administrators in their study sought a collective approach to leadership that "leveled the power dynamics of traditional school leadership" (p. 23). Although voices of Latina school leaders in studies by Avalos and Salgado (2016) and Martinez et al. (2020) revealed the strain bilingualism had on lives of Latina leaders, especially in schooling, bilingualism was also a great asset that helped them to communicate with the students and parents in ways that greatly benefited their school communities and made them better leaders.

Latina Voices Matter

> *Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out, then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking in the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.*—Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 80

Anzaldúa's (2012) words were a poignant insight on silence endured by Chicanas; it is not only imposed by dominant culture, but in their own. Chicanas, she said, had internalized the dominant culture's notion their Spanish is subpar; they use "their language differences against each other" (p. 80). Anzaldúa called the shame and silencing of Chicanas and their Chicanx Spanish linguistic terrorism. Language is such a part of one's identity that to disavow and make it illegitimate is to disavow and make illegitimate the person who is speaking. There is a scarcity of information focusing specifically on Latinas as educational leaders and they deserve greater insight, study, and voice.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study sought greater understanding of ways gender and race/ethnicity have helped shape leadership identities and Latina principals working in urban high schools. Chicana feminist theory and epistemology and applied critical leadership (ACL) were the theoretical frameworks selected because they aligned well with the study's problem, purpose, and significance (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Chicana Feminist Theory

Chicana feminism rose out of the Chicano movement—*El Movimiento*—of the 1960s and 1970s. García (1997) wrote Chicanas "raised their voices in a collective feminist challenge to the sexism and domination that they were experiencing within the movimiento" (p. 3). Nieto Gomez

(1974/1997) found the split to be one in conflict, both in the larger Chicano movement and larger women's movement. Men in the Chicano Movement, fearing a division would weaken it, wanted the Chicana to "wait and fight her cause at a later time" and the women's movement, also seeking to avoid division, "recommended that she melt into the melting pot" (p. 87). In the early part of the movement, *feministas*, Nieto Gomez described, were rejected by the larger Chicano Movement, and came to be seen by "Loyalists" as anti-*El Movimiento.* Men and women loyalists believed the *feministas'* challenge of a woman's role in marriage and motherhood was unimportant to and even counter to the Chicano Movement, whose focus was on racism and economic oppression. Nieto Gomez posited the *feministas'* struggle against sexism differed from that of the Anglo woman's movement, for they not only had to contend with sexism in the workplace and in the healthcare system, but they also suffered from racism. She wrote, "Chicana feminism shares with all women the issues that affect them as women. . . . But it is in the context of the needs of the Chicano people who suffer from racism that sexual issues have a new dimension" (Nieto Gomez, 1974/1997, p. 91).

Castillo (2014) called the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, "The largest movement in the history of the United States to force the government to reckon with its native Latino population" (p. 26). In 2 decades, she proclaimed, the movement had fallen. The fate of the *feministas*, who fought sexism in the larger Chicano Movement and racism in the larger women's movement, was a similar one. *Xicanisma*, a word coined by Castillo in the 1980s to describe Chicana feminism, sought a reconsideration of what is perceived to be defined inherent characteristics of Chicanas, "such as patience, perseverance, industriousness, loyalty to one's clan, and commitment to our children" (Castillo, 2014, p. 37). Although Xicanisma has not

sought to reject these traits outright, it has encouraged Chicanas to redefine them and do so assertively and self-confidently. Because much of Chicana history has been annihilated, Castillo (2014) proclaimed "as Xicanistas we must simultaneously be archaeologists and visionaries of our culture" (p. 163). Despite grueling physical and emotional challenges of the past, *Xicanistas*, Castillo asserted, are survivors and envision a world free of sexual violence and exploitation, a peaceful and balanced society, and a world in which everyone experiences a better quality of life.

Anzaldúa's (1987) seminal work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, chronicled her existence as a *mestiza*, a woman "between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)" (preface, para. 2). The border between Texas and Mexico represented the physical border, but she described a nonphysical borderland that is psychological, sexual, and spiritual—"not particular to the Southwest" (Anzaldúa, 1987, preface, para. 1). Straddling physical and nonphysical borders, she proclaimed, was both negative and positive. Border life was rife with hatred and exploitation, but it was also exhilarating, knowing one was participating in an "evolution of humankind" (Anzaldúa, 1987, preface, para. 3). Living between two worlds, Anzaldúa, believed, could awaken consciousness. The new *mestiza* is tolerant of contradictions and ambiguity; she is pluralistic. Anzaldúa (2012) wrote:

> *En unas pocas centurias,* the future will belong to the *mestiza*. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness. (p. 102)

The *feminista* movement, Xicanisma, and Anzaldúa's concepts of the borderland informed Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE). CFE counters traditional research epistemologies which "reflect and reinforce the social history of the social history of the dominant race, which has negative results for people of color in general and students and scholars of color in particular" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 563).

CFE

In 1998, Delgado Bernal introduced CFE as a framework for educational research. CFE incorporates concepts of *mestiza* consciousness, borderlands, and Xicanisma, which are unique to the Chicana experience. Delgado Bernal (1998) wrote, "Adopting a Chicana Feminist Epistemology will expose human relationships and experiences that are probably not visible from a traditional patriarchal position or a liberal feminist standpoint" (p. 560). Although CFE, Delgado Bernal (1988) asserted, shares characteristics of other endarkened feminist epistemologies, which included "examinations of the influence of race, class, gender, and sexuality on opportunity structures," it differs in that it "validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism" (p. 561). CFE allows for Chicanxs in the field of educational research to work outside traditional paradigms that do not consider uniqueness of the Chicanx educational experience. CFE allows these researchers to "uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge . . . and place some trust in their own cultural intuition" (Delgado Bernal, 1988, p. 574).

Delgado Bernal (1998) conducted semistructured oral history interviews and focus groups as well as phone interviews with eight Chicana participants who had been student leaders

during the 1968 Blowouts in East Los Angeles. The researcher recounted, “My life experiences as a Chicana provided a source of cultural intuition that helped me both listen to and to hear the interviews” (Delgado Bernal, 1988, p. 569). Prior to the focus group, the researcher gave participants an opportunity to analyze data by providing each of them with the transcription from the oral history interviews to respond to, reflect upon, and interact with the data. Allowing participants to both produce, through speaking, and validate, by analyzing data and knowledge, are essential to CFE. By doing so, CFE “addresses the failure of traditional research paradigms that have distorted or omitted the history and knowledge of Chicanas” (Delgado Bernal, 1988, p. 574).

Applied Critical Leadership

Santamaría and Santamaría’s (2012) ACL framework intersects principles of transformational leadership, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory (CRT), to create a strength-based model, “wherein leaders identify and consider the positive attributes of their identities that contribute to their leadership practice” (p. 5). The authors defined the scope of ACL in this way:

> Applied Critical Leadership is the emancipatory practice of choosing to address educational issues and challenges using a critical race perspective to enact context-specific change in response to power, domination, access, and achievement imbalances, resulting in improved academic achievement for learners at every academic level of institutional schooling in the U.S. (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 7)

In a study of five women principals from underserved backgrounds, Santamaría and Jean-Marie (2014) found participants shared characteristics consistent with ACL, such as building trust with

the mainstream, engaging in critical conversations, leading by example, honoring constituents, and bringing people to consensus. The researchers posited, "The principals could not tease the essence of themselves and their experience with education out of the ways in which they led" (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014, p. 351). This study pointed to the importance of studying leaders who are not of the dominant culture. The researchers found evidence these leaders used their "underserved backgrounds to critically tap into intersecting aspects of their identities and experiences, using these attributes as resources that positively impact their leadership practice in multicultural, complex, and multidimensional educational contexts" (p. 355).

The Frameworks as Blueprints

Grant and Osanloo (2014) asserted a theoretical framework is the blueprint for a dissertation; it is "the guide on which to build and support your study and also provides the structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole" (p. 13). As a self-identified Chicana who selected Chicanas/Latinas as subjects of my study, I sought a deeper level of understanding the complexity their experiences. By using Delgado Bernal (1998) and Delgado Bernal et al.'s (2012) CFE, I centered leadership experiences and stories of Chicana/Latina educational leaders and entered the research with knowledge my own identity as a Chicana educational leader could potentially add an even deeper level of understanding.

ACL, the second theoretical framework that guided this study, focused participants' practice as leaders who, as women of color in urban high schools, were positioned to challenge traditional notions of educational leadership and lead using a social justice lens. Using ACL's strengths-based model helped uncover transformative practices of Chicana/Latina principals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Recruiting and hiring Latina high school principals should be a priority for school districts. The field of educational leadership, particularly the role of principal is evolving—moving from domination by male-centered authoritarian and disciplinarian leadership traits to increased recognition of collaborative and caring practices, traits more often associated with women. Collaboration and care have become even more desirable than authoritarianism in some cases (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). Latina educational leaders are uniquely positioned to answer this call for a shift in the collective educational leadership mindset. Latinas are committed to democratic, community-based, and caring leadership practices—characteristics that are beginning to redefine 21st-century perceptions of strong educational leadership (Carr, 1995; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016a; Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami & Hernandez, 2013; Niño et al., 2017).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine and uncover ways race/ethnicity and gender have influenced leadership identities of Latina principals. This examination sought to shed light on unique viewpoints and perspectives Latina high school principals bring to the world of educational leadership. Throughout the research process, I employed Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) and an applied critical leadership (ACL) framework to inform interview questions and data analysis (Calderón et al., 2012; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012).

Research Question

As a qualitative researcher, my research design was emergent, and although I began with one overarching question, I knew that this question, along with all phases of my research plan, might be altered or amended after I started research in the field (Creswell, 2009). I began my research seeking to answer one question:

> How do Chicana/Latina high school principals understand and express the ways race/ethnicity and gender influence their leadership identities and practices?

Rationale for Qualitative Approach

To adequately answer the research question, I selected a qualitative design for this study. In detailing characteristics of qualitative study, Hatch (2002) identified participant perspectives as one such characteristic and proclaimed, "Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it" (p. 7). By engaging a small number of Chicana/Latina high school principals in deep conversations about their unique experiences, I sought to explore details of their leadership identities from their own viewpoints. I anticipated these perspectives and viewpoints would sometimes converge, but I understood it was likely they would also diverge, perhaps even more so. I believed, as Gay et al. (2011) described the mindset of qualitative researchers, we do not live a stable world and all perspectives are contextual and valid. This study sought to uncover participants' insights, perspectives, and experiences and to hear their voices, which are too often excluded.

The research question invited an advocacy/participatory worldview which Creswell (2009) described as research that gives voice to disenfranchised groups and advocates for change in lives of participants, researcher, and in places where they work. As stated in the previous

chapter, as Latinas emerged as leaders of high schools, their leadership style was often more democratic and socially just (Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami & Hernandez, 2013; Niño et al., 2017). They also led more often with a relationship-focused ethic of care (Carr, 1995). These characteristics can have a profound effect on lives of children, families, and teachers in schools, especially schools in urban districts.

Method

I captured the *testimonios* of six Chicana/Latina high school principals in a large urban California school district. A nontraditional approach, Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998) stated, "narrative as research method provides us with glimpses of previously hidden reflection on school-life phenomena" (p. 8). *Testimonios* or narratives allowed me, as researcher, to coconstruct each participant's story of leadership. Clandinin (2016) asserted narrative inquiries are cocomposed by inquirers and participants and they are relational; inquirer and participant live "alongside" (p. 23) one another and becomes a part of each other's lives. Narrative inquirers, she proposed, are not objective and "do not stand metaphorically outside of the inquiry but are part of the phenomenon under study" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 24).

My research problem pointed to an exclusion of voices of Latina school leaders (Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2013). This study sought to help remedy that problem as contributes to a small yet growing body of literature highlighting and celebrating unique voices of Chicana/Latina school leaders. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of them, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). I sought to immerse myself in the leadership stories of my participants and walk alongside them,

listen to and observe their stories, and uncover how they experience school leadership as a Chicana/Latina.

Narrative research in education has been used to encourage and increase teacher reflection, to better understand what and how teachers think and make decisions, and to empower and give voice to teachers (Gay et al., 2011). Gay et al. (2011) added there are many complex issues in education, such as gaps in student achievement, poverty, and cultural differences, that are not easily solvable. They posited, "Narrative research provides educational researchers with an opportunity to validate the practitioner's voice in these important political and educational debates" (Gay et al., 2011, p. 401). A form of narrative writing, *testimonios* are the "construction of a discourse of solidarity" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 526). The authors concluded because the 1970s *testimonio* has been "sanctioned as a literary mode," they have "come to understand this form of writing as a part of the struggle of people of color for educational rights and for the recovery of our knowledge production" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 526). *Testimonio*, the authors insisted, "must include the intention of affirmation and empowerment" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527).

Testimonio "can be understood as a bridge that merges the brown bodies in our communities with academia as we employ *testimonio* methodology and pedagogy in educational practices" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364). The authors went on to assert *testimonio* is a process, product, pedagogy, or methodology, the text or audio produced, and a teaching and learning device. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) began their volume of collected *testimonios* by stating they all kept *papelitos guardados,* or protected documents—writings or thoughts that helped them process through difficult times in their lives. These *papelitos guardados* are often

kept secret and safe but await "the appropriate moment when we can return to them for review and analysis, or speak out and share them with others" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 1). Sharing, they asserted, can be empowering because "Creating spaces for Latina feminisms—*latinidades feministas*—means confronting established and contested terms, identities, frameworks, and coalitions that have emerged in particular historical contexts" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) posited "women of color theory recognizes the complex intersections of ethnicity, nationality, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and other markers of diverse identities and commitments" and, the authors further recognized, "Latina feminists propose that difference is not a mask that can be put on or taken; it forms the basis of who they are in the world, in their scholarship, and in their political practice" (pp. 3–4).

While conducting research, Huber (2009) and her participants reflected on the process of creating their *testimonios* and stated, "Based on our own theorizing, we arrived at the following understanding of *testimonio – 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*" (p. 644). In their study on how Chicana/Latina students respond to microaggressions, Huber and Cueva (2012) utilized *testimonio* as a powerful methodological approach that centered those who have been oppressed and revealed their resilience. They stated:

> Chicana/Latina feminists have built on Latin American social movements like Freire's (2001) process of *conscientização* (a critical consciousness, *conscientización)* where oppressed communities construct self-reflective movements to mobilize through critical pedagogies of empowerment and praxis. Through this process, the subaltern assumes

> agency by engaging a shared knowledge of oppression to resist and humanize our experiences. . . . Documenting *testimonios,* then, becomes part of this process—passing down knowledge from one generation of scholars to the next. (p. 393)

In the following sections, I provide details about participants, setting, data collection, and data analysis.

Protection of Human Subjects

An application was submitted and approved by the Loyola Marymount University Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection and welfare of participants of this study. Participants received an Experimental Subject Bill of Rights and signed an informed consent form. An online application was submitted to the committee for external research of the school district in which all participants are currently employed. Preliminary permission to conduct the study was granted by the school district (see Appendix B).

Participants' identities remained anonymous, and confidentiality was maintained at all times. All handwritten field notes were kept in my possession, in my home, and in a locked filing cabinet. All audio recordings were transcribed by the transcription service, Rev (https://www.rev.com), which maintains strict confidentiality agreements (see Appendix C), and were saved in my personal Google Drive account, which was password protected. Transcriptions were downloaded from my Rev.com account and saved to a folder on my personal laptop, which was password protected. I maintained all data under these conditions for duration of the study and will destroy data three years after conclusion of the study.

When recruiting participants, I heeded Hatch's (2002) advice and, in addition to providing each participant with a letter of informed consent, I created a "research bargain" that

specified “the roles and responsibilities of the researcher and each participant” (p. 46). Hatch described the research bargain as a document with elements common to an informed consent, but is less rigid and formal. Both informed consent and research bargain documents clearly outlined my research question, my intentions for conducting the study, and potential benefits and risks to participants. One main benefit to participants included opportunity and time to reflect on their careers and leadership identities. The life of a principal is fast paced, often scrutinized, and sometimes lonely. The ability to reflect and tell the story of one’s life has potential to be an empowering experience. I anticipated minimal risk for participants of the study, although some may have felt discomfort, embarrassment, or anger if, by recounting their stories, negative experiences of sexism, racism, or ethnocentrism were dredged up during interviews. To minimize these risks, I ensured confidentiality, gave each participant a copy of the interview protocol prior to our meetings to allow for identification of questions that may trigger negative feelings or memories, and conducted frequent check-ins and breaks during interviews.

Participants

Subjects were selected by purposive, “homogenous” sampling (Gay et al., 2011, p. 147). Seven Chicana/Latina principals were contacted via email explaining the purpose of the study and asking for their participation; five principals agreed to participate. As a high school principal during the time of this study, I also participated. The six high school principals identified as Chicana/Latina women and had worked for the same large urban school district in Southern California as a high school principal for at least one year. Participants were between the ages of 40 and 49. As a high school principal working in the same district at the time of the study, I recruited all participants from my professional networks.

Setting

Participants in this study were high school principals from a large, urban school district in Southern California. Ethnic origins of students served by the district were: 74% Latino, 9.8% White, 8.4% Black, 6% Asian, .04% Pacific Islander, and .02% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Ethnic breakdown for all principals, elementary and secondary, was: 40% Latino, 30% White, 21% Black, 7% Asian, and 2% American Indian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander.

Data Collection

I conducted individual, semistructured interviews with subjects; all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the transcription service, Rev. Data included audio recordings from interviews, my personal field notes from interviews, an optional questionnaire some participants chose to complete, and documents, such as email correspondence, that participants chose to share with me pertaining to the topic of this study, which provided greater context and insight of participants' unique leadership identity. Although I used an interview protocol, as a qualitative researcher, I understood I was the key instrument to collect data (Creswell, 2009). The following protocols and procedures were used to gather information on participants.

Semistructured Interviews

To gather information, I interviewed each participant using a semistructured interview protocol. Seidman (2013) asserted, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). I anticipated each participant would be interviewed at least two times, each interview taking approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. Due to participants' busy personal and

professional lives, four participants were interviewed twice and two were interviewed once. First interviews took 40 minutes to 1.5 hours; second interviews ranged from 30 to 40 minutes.

I used a "phenomenologically based interview" approach that "combines life-history interviewing . . . and focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology" (Seidman, 2013, p. 14). Seidman identified four phenomenological themes in his readings of various philosophers:

- Theme One: The temporal and transitory nature of human experience
- Theme Two: Whose understanding is it? Subjective understanding.
- Theme Three: Lived experience as the foundation of "phenomena."
- Theme Four: The emphasis on meaning and meaning in context. (pp. 16–18)

These phenomenological themes, the author asserted, "matter because understanding them and how they play out in the interview structure and techniques offers grounding and guidance for the interviewer" (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). I initially hoped to follow the author's "three-interview series" (p. 21) which includes: focused life history, details of experience, and reflection on meaning. The first interview focuses on participants' lives prior to becoming a principal, such as their family, school, and teaching experiences. The second interview gathers information about details of their current context as principal, avoiding opinion as the author suggested. The final interview engages participant in reflection of the "meaning of their experience" as they connect their past to the present (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Although Seidman recommended three separate, 90-minute interviews conducted three to seven days apart to allow some time for participant reflection and continuity, he did suggest alternatives researchers may explore if time and

circumstance require, such as combining interviews one and two or conducting all three in 1 day, which I proposed to participants who could not commit to multiple interviews.

To ensure my time with each participant was valuable, I followed Seidman's (2013) recommendations to ask primarily open-ended questions and to listen on three levels: listen to what is being said, listen for an unguarded inner voice, and listen for process. Interviews were recorded on my iPhone to allow me to better listen to and engage with participants. Recorded interviews were transcribed using the online transcription service Rev.com which guaranteed a 24-hour turnaround. I reviewed each interview transcript within a week of receiving it to check for errors or misinterpretations while my memory of the interview was still more or less intact.

Interview Protocol

The interview questions (see Appendix A) were semistructured and developed to elicit answers from participants that would connect to my research question and theoretical frameworks informing this study: CFE and ACL. I also used the "three-interview series" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) approach to develop questions that first help build an understanding of participants' life history, then to gather specific details about their experiences as an educational leader, and, finally, to help guide them to reflect on what their experiences mean to them. I consulted with three main sources when developing my interview questions. I used questions suggested by Seidman (2013) to facilitate the three-interview series approach. I adapted questions from the interview protocol created by Santamaría and Santamaría (2012) from their study on ACL in school leaders. I consulted the interview protocol from the study conducted by Moorosi et al. (2018) on leadership and intersectionality among Black school principals and adapted questions to capture insights from participants on how the intersection of race and

gender influence their leadership identities. Table 1 outlines connections between interview questions and theoretical frameworks; intentionally, many questions elicit answers that cross over into two or all three theoretical frameworks.

Table 1

Interview Protocol: Connection to Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical Framework	Interview questions
Chicana feminist theory and epistemology	1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15
Applied critical leadership	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

Field Notes

In addition to recording interviews, I took notes during and after each interview. When taking notes during the interview, I was mindful not to allow notetaking to become a distraction. Gay et al. (2011) recommended taking notes after the interview to avoid disrupting interview flow, although they did acknowledge remembering after the fact is difficult. My notes during an interview session were short and lacked details of participants' answers; they were primarily focused on recording participants' mannerisms, gestures, and other nonverbal cues to allow me to gain a bigger picture of the interview when I read transcripts after they were transcribed. My field notes also included my own postinterview questions, feelings, and reflections. I set aside time following interviews to take those notes to optimize accuracy of my memory.

Analysis Plan

Writing and Organizing the Testimonios

As a new researcher, I followed steps in Hatch's (2002) polyvocal analysis, for it provided a structure, one the author urged the researcher to interpret not as prescriptive, but as a starting point that assisted creation of *testimonios*. Polyvocal analysis consists of seven steps:

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole.
2. Identify all of the voices contributing to the data, including your own.
3. Read the data, marking places where particular voices are heard.
4. Study the data related to each voice, decide which voices will be included in your report, and write a narrative telling the story of each selected voice.
5. Read the entire data set, and search for data that refine or alter your stories.
6. Wherever possible, take the stories back to those who contributed to them so they can clarify, refine, or change their stories.
7. Write revised stories that represent each voice to be included. (Hatch, 2002, p. 202)

The first step of polyvocal analysis was to ensure all data were read in their entirety after data collection was complete to "get an overall feel for what's there" (Hatch, 2002, p. 203). Identifying voices, Step 2, and marking where voices are heard, Step 3, was straightforward as I collected individual, not group, voices. These steps required I also identify my own voice and "be reflexive about [my] own place in the telling of others' stories" (Hatch, 2002, p. 203). Writing biographical accounts, according to Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007), "demands that we locate the person in context and community, describe what she/he does and how she/he sees her/himself" (p. 466). This process, the authors asserted, enables researchers to see "how we have come to know the participants but also to review our own biases—to see how we have imposed value judgements [*sic*] upon participants" (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 466). I listened to and reread interview transcripts multiple times throughout analysis to better identify my own voice, interpretations, and perspective.

The fourth step, writing narratives for each voice, I thought would be a fairly straightforward step, but it was actually quite time consuming. After recordings were transcribed and initially checked for errors and misunderstandings, each participant's interview was thoroughly read and organized through a process of "restorying" (p. 72), or organized and rewritten in chronological order with a beginning, middle, and end (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) suggested the researcher analyze data by looking for epiphanies in participants' stories that can point to transformational moments in their lives, and I looked to uncover those in the *testimonios*. I also found their suggestion the researcher pay careful attention to figurative language, such as metaphor and metonymy, in stories to be helpful. The authors proposed "examining metonymy and metaphor can promote insight into researchers' and participants' tacit assumptions by exploring how such figurative terms are used" (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 465).

I followed the fifth step in Hatch's (2002) polyvocal analysis and returned to and reread the collected data, "searching the data for information that confirms, extends, or calls into question the findings expressed in your stories" (p. 205). It is not unlikely, Hatch asserted, stories may lack continuity; it is to be expected, explored, and included in the draft. This process was also time consuming. Once this step was complete, Step 6 called for narratives to be taken back to participants for clarification, refinement, or change. Hatch (2002) contended, "Inviting participants to read and comment on their own stories as presented by the researcher improves the balance of power in the construction and ownership of stories" (p. 206). This step ensured *testimonios* captured participants' voices and tone accurately. Four participants had minor suggestions to clarify a thought or correct a typo. The seventh and final step in polyvocal

analysis was to take comments and suggestions from participants and revise stories. Hatch (2002) argued the final product tells participants' stories and the researcher should resist making connections and observations of relationship between stories, although he suggested the researcher may want to keep a journal to document one's "story of stories" (p. 206). Throughout reconstruction of narratives, I avoided attempts to make connections between the six *testimonios*, although when some commonalities seemed obvious, I made mental notes of connections but did not document them.

Analyzing the Testimonios *Using Mestiza Methodology*

Polkinghorne (1988) wrote, "The theme or point of the story is not usually directly presented by the text, for it requires inference and interpretation on the researcher's part" (p. 169). After completing polyvocal analysis, I manually coded data by highlighting the *testimonios* and transcripts looking for, as Creswell (2009) suggested, the expected, the surprising, the unusual, and those that "address a larger theoretical perspective in the research" (p. 187).

The framework used to analyze the data was borrowed heavily from Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Methodology presented in her dissertation. In describing the basis of her methodology, Cordova (2018) asserted:

> First and foremost, Mestiza Methodology was constructed for this study from the assertion that research about Chicanas must be carefully crafted from relationships, designs, and methods that unearth subaltern knowledge derived from intersubjectivity (between conscious minds) as opposed to subject-object duality, where Chicana voice is often co-opted by unequal research relationships, as well as constrained by a sole analysis of the researcher. (p. 151).

Cordova's (2018) study was grounded in Delgado Bernal's (1998) CFE and Anzaldúa's (1987, 2012) *mestiza* consciousness. CFE "questions objectivity, a universal foundation of knowledge, and the Western dichotomies of mind versus body, subject versus object, objective truth versus subjective emotion, and male versus female" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 560). Delgado Bernal (1998) contended CFE embraces dualities and challenges dichotomies. Anzaldúa (2012) called this a *mestiza* consciousness; whereby, one can transcend these dualities. Anzaldúa wrote (2012):

> In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (pp. 101–102)

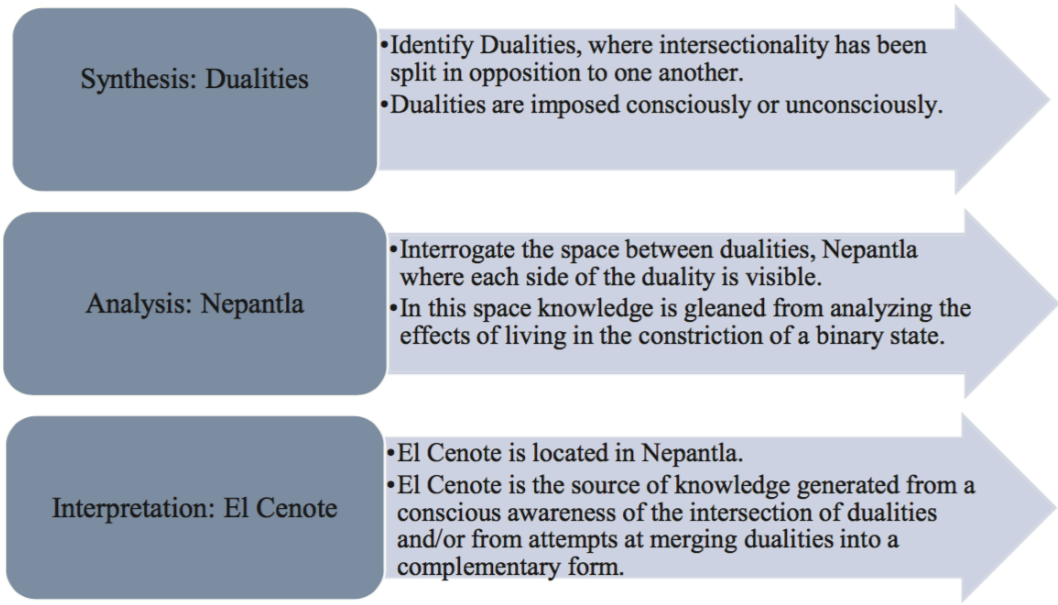
Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Methodology "affirms Chicana intersectionality, and the dualities within, mold her lived experiences differently than that of Chicanos, other males, and women that only she can fully examine, describe, and interpret" (p. 152).

Although this study was informed by Cordova's (2018) methodology, it did not replicate the approach. Cordova's study of four graduate students in educational leadership included a great deal of collaboration with her participants who not only wrote their own *testimonios*, but also participated in coconstructing a collective *testimonio* that synthesized, analyzed, and interpreted findings from individual *testimonios*. Using Anzaldúa's (1987, 2012) *mestiza* consciousness as a guide, Cordova (2018) and her participants used a three-step process: they identified dualities that emerged from *testimonios* and analyzed them "by locating Nepantla to understand the effects of each opposing duality identified, and interpreted *testimonios* by

integrating the knowledge excavated from the space between dualities where they intersect; El Cenote" (p. 298). See Figure 1 for Cordova's framework.

Figure 1

Mestiza Consciousness Framework



Note. This figure depicts the three phases of data analysis and differences in the origin of knowledge between *Nepantla* and *El Cenote*. Figure and description from *Chicana Feminism Informs Educational Trajectories and Leadership: Graduate Student* Testimonios *from Nepantla* (Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Texas at San Antonio) by A. J. Cordova, 2018, p. 298. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (UMI 10928787). Copyright 2018 by A. J. Cordova. Reprinted with permission.

This study adapted Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Methodology by using the Mestiza Consciousness Framework as a guide for data synthesis, analysis, and interpretation. Unable to collaborate with the study's participants, I conducted the three-step process by meticulously reading, identifying common themes of duality, and organizing data. I identified three areas of

duality: (a) family and culture as a strength/weakness, (b) insider/outsider duality, and (c) duality of trauma/resilience.

Analyzing the Testimonios *Using Applied Critical Leadership*

In addition to analyzing *testimonios* using Mestiza Methodology, I used ACL framework to analyze how principals' leadership identities enhanced their practices. Santamaría and Santamaría (2012) defined ACL as an intersection of principles of transformational leadership, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory. ACL's approach is strength based, not deficit based, where "leaders identify and consider the positive attributes of their identities that contribute to their leadership practice" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 5). Whereas, leaders from mainstream groups must recognize their identities may "interrupt [their] ability to see other perspectives," leaders of color can recognize their identities "enhance" that ability (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, pp. 6–7). Multiple readings of transcripts and interview notes revealed leadership practices that emerged from their identities as women and Chicana/Latina that allowed them a unique perspective of their students, their communities, and their faculties and staffs.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness in a qualitative study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) used four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I employed the "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) technique to help establish credibility. The authors posited prolonged engagement "is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortion either of the self or the respondents, and building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). As a current high school

principal who identifies as Chicana, I believed I was well "oriented to the situation" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302) of my participants. As an insider, I was not as susceptible to distortions than someone less familiar the participants' situation and had a somewhat built-in level of trust. In addition to prolonged engagement, I used member checking, Step 6 in polyvocal analysis. By bringing drafts of narratives back to participants and asking for input, I ensured my findings accurately described participants' experiences.

To establish transferability, I used two strategies: rich, thick description and purposive sampling (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When conveying my findings, I practiced rich, thick description to "transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). Vivid details and descriptions and inclusion of multiple perspectives provided a greater depth of participants' experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) encouraged purposive sampling to include a "wide range of information" (p. 316). Participants in this study were selected because they were Chicana and Latina high school principals, but they have had a wide range of lived experiences.

An audit trail was conducted to establish both dependability and confirmability. An inquiry audit was used to establish dependability in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested an audit be conducted much like a fiscal audit is conducted in the financial world. I relied on what Creswell (2009) called a peer debriefer throughout the research to audit data I collected and analyzed. A fellow doctoral student and study partner, the peer debriefer reviewed *testimonios* and analysis and provided clarifying and probing questions to ensure greater accuracy and dependability. To establish confirmability, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) fourth criterion for trustworthiness, the inquiry audit extended to what the authors called a

confirmability audit. For this final step, my dissertation committee chair "examine[d] the product—the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations—[to attest] that it is supported by data and is internally coherent so that the 'bottom line' may be accepted" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). Throughout data collection and analysis, I used journal writing for self-reflection as a means to clarify my own bias throughout the process of presenting research findings and analyzing those findings for meaning (Creswell, 2009).

CHAPTER 4

Testimonios of Chicanas/Latinas in the Principal's Office

This chapter presents *testimonios* of six self-described Chicana or Latina current or former principals; two of the six participants are no longer principals. Although *testimonios* are often written in the first person, these are presented in the third person, as interview transcripts did not often follow a linear path. These third-person *testimonios* attempt to tell a more linear, chronological story of each participant; but, to keep their voices at the center, large quotes were taken from interviews and used here. Large quotes ensure participants are telling their own stories in their own voices. Information about participants' ages and years as principals at the time of the interviews can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Information

Name	Identification	Years as Principal	Age
Paola	Chicana	7	40
Alma	Latina/Guatemalan	7	44
Bella	Chicana	8	49
Sonia	Chicana	5	41
Julia	Chicana	1	44
Stella	Chicana	7	44

The *Testimonios*

Paola

Background and Early Years

Paola was born in Orange County, California and raised by immigrant parents from Mexico. Her mom was a high school graduate and her father had a third-grade education. She described her mother's story as "bilingual, bicultural." Paola's mother immigrated to California

as an infant, but after her father abandoned the family, she returned with her mother and siblings to Mexico when she was nine years old and did not return to the United States until she was 14 years old. When she arrived in Mexico with poor Spanish-speaking skills, her mother decided to pull her out of school where nuns gave her trouble. When she returned to high school in the United States, she had forgotten most of her English and was enrolled as an English learner in her high school in Orange County. Because her mother spoke both English and Spanish, Paola described this bilingualism as an advantage over her peers who had immigrant parents who could only speak Spanish.

When Paola was seven years old, she and her family moved to a small community near Riverside, California. Although the community has seen many changes in the decade prior to this study to include newer housing developments, memories of her hometown are of a rural, "little place" that smelled of manure every morning. "It was disgusting," she said, "but it was home." She described the demographics as "50% Mexican, not even Latino, Mexican families, working class, mainly undocumented, and then 50% White. And the White families were also working-class families." She further described demographics of her community in connection to her schooling:

> So it was really interesting because as a kid, you don't really understand how demographics impact your schooling or anything like that. I just went to school with a bunch of Mexican and White kids. Consequently, the majority of my teachers in elementary, middle, and high school were White. I can name the few teachers that were Latinos, but most of my teachers were White. What I didn't know then that I know now, is that I got really lucky. Well, I think I got really lucky. Because the female teachers in

particular who I still keep in touch with now, there were very liberal White women. But back then I didn't even know the difference between liberal and conservative. I just knew that they cared about me, and they motivated and encouraged me always.

When asked if most of her teachers came from the same small town, she said, "They lived in Riverside, and more affluent communities. So they definitely weren't residents." Paola recalled one of these White teachers encouraging her to apply to the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project (CLYLP), a one-week summer institute in Sacramento, California.

Schooling Experiences

She applied and was accepted to the institute at the end of her sophomore year in high school and attended that summer. She described this as a pivotal moment in her life, saying:

> At the time that I attended the program—I think it had just turned 15 years old, I was pretty young. Anyway, it was your typical youth leadership thing, where they take you for a week in the summer and you're immersed in leadership development. But what made this one interesting is, it was all about Chicano and Latino youth. And I went as a rising junior, and it was the first time that I was exposed to just a bunch of other highly motivated young people like me that were brown. They also had a week-long—intense days—of workshops for us and they broke us up into these little, they called it *familias*, so you got really close to your peers, then they had a peer counselor, and a facilitator.

Paola described this time as transformational and shared how it "completely changed my life, having that experience. I came back calling myself a Chicana. I remember my parents were like, 'What the hell happened to her?'"

When she returned to school, she started a *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Axtlan* (MEChA) chapter, an organization for Chicanx students. She said, "I was like, *viva la raza*, Chicano power!" She further described this newfound activism and her supporters, her White, female teachers:

> It was a trip, because here I am, this young girl, I can just imagine, this little thing trying to revolutionize my peers and my school. So again, it's interesting because my liberal, White, female teachers were all about it. They were so excited for me, one of them sponsored my MEChA club. And what was interesting was that the Latino staff on campus, which weren't many, were really threatened by what I was doing. I think they thought it was too militant, or I think that they were comfortable with the status quo at the school. They were the ones that were more critical of what I was trying to do with my peers, which is such a trip.

Her involvement in the CLYLP was where she really started to see herself as a college student. Although she and her siblings were always encouraged by her parents to go to college, they "didn't have the resources or the know-how . . . they just knew that they wanted that for us." Although she credited both of her parents for instilling in her a love of and respect for education, she was able to meet people in CLYLP who would later become her formal mentors. She said:

> So when I went to CLYLP, I met all these older Chicanos and Latinos who were in college or had graduated from college and had professions. It was the first time I was surrounded by that many people who had actually "made it," if that's the term you want to use. So after that, I was like, ok, I know that I have these mentors now. And this was before the internet or social media. So I remember that I would write letter to these

> adults. We had phones, but they were house phones, so I tried to set up phone calls. A lot of them would take me to lunch, like, "Ok, let me help you with thinking about where you want to go." It was just crazy the way I learned to network at that conference. I took it seriously.

After high school, Paola attended the local University of California. Although she believed her grades could have taken her further, she said, "At the time, it's what made sense." Although it was close to home, she did insist on living on campus because she wanted to ensure she had the "full experience" and she also "just needed to get the hell out of my house. We had all kinds of issues."

While in college, Paola was able to study abroad in Spain and that experience led her to realize she did not want to live in the Riverside area forever. She said, "I realized that I was more of a city girl." After Spain, she secured an internship at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. She stated:

> Actually, it was the spring quarter of my senior year, which was interesting. While I was there, I was offered a summer gig. And I was like, hell yeah. Because I love D.C., it was so much fun. And I was just living my best life. This college student living on the east coast. It's funny, because I came home to graduate, flew home to graduate, and then I flew right back to start my little summer job. And my plan was, I actually got into Columbia, which was my dream school for graduate school. And I was ready to go, I had an apartment in New York already, which is impossible. I was ready, I had submitted all my paperwork. But then all this stuff happened in my life where I had to make a difficult choice to defer my entrance and come back home.

Once she returned home, she began a job at a nonprofit organization in Riverside. Although she quickly advanced in the organization, she found herself often isolated in an office, writing grants. Upon reflection, she realized the most fulfilling part of her job was the 1 hour a week she was able to spend with young people in the organization's youth program. She had spent some of her college years tutoring students at her former high school, later advancing to lead tutor, and recalled how often her former teachers, her mentors, commented she would be a really good teacher. At the time, she stated, she was "really resistant, for some reason, I was like, 'No, I don't want to be a teacher, I want to try other things.'" After working at the nonprofit and not feeling fulfilled, Paola began to realize she might make a good teacher and decided to apply to Columbia University, her dream school. She shared:

> And then my younger sister got pregnant with my nephew, and it was again one of those life decisions where I was like, well I can go off to the East Coast and start my life there, or I can stay here and go to school somewhere around here, because I really want to be part of this baby's life. My sister was young, she was like 21 when she got pregnant, and she needed help. So, the compromise. Because she was really upset, she wanted me to go to Columbia. So the compromise was, I'm going to grad school, but I'm gonna apply locally. So, anyway, I got into UCLA's Teacher Education Program—TEP. And then I started my master's and my teacher credential. I was in Riverside, so I moved to East LA. I still live in East LA. Once I moved to East LA, I was like, this is home. I've been really blessed to travel all over the world, but East LA has always felt like home. It still feels like home 16 years later. So I knew I wanted to work in schools in East LA, or at least that was my thought.

Teaching Experience

Paola conducted her student teaching in a high school located in East Los Angeles, where she had hoped to secure a teaching position. Unfortunately, they were not hiring in her subject area at the time. At a hiring fair she learned the Chicana principal of a well-known, beloved, historically Chicanx-centered high school in East Los Angeles, who was known, Paola said, to have a bad reputation as someone people feared, was present. Paola insisted on walking right up to her and said, "I'm not leaving here today until you offer me a position." Paola, laughing at the memory, said, "She looked at me, and I remember, she goes, 'Oh really? Well, we'll see about that.' And then she walked away and kept mingling." Paola recalled her persistence in pursuing this principal, who, by the end of the event, hired her.

Her first few years in the teaching profession, she, like most new teachers, was in a sort of survival mode and focused on her craft and her own classroom. After her 3rd year, her school was embracing the small learning community (SLC) model, and had begun to make small schools, or academies, in the larger school. She, along with a group of colleagues, started their own SLC. She recalled, "So we started our little SLC, and it's one of those things where someone said, 'Somebody needs to take the lead. Paola, you would be great.' And me naively being excited, was like, 'Ok, sure, I'll do this.'"

A few years later, the school district was opening a new site that would consist of multiple small high schools not far from her current site. They were accepting applications, and she and her colleagues decided to apply. These schools were a new model the district had modeled after Boston Pilot Schools. They were small, usually thematic or career-based, teacher driven, and had some autonomies around instruction, assessment, and leadership other district

schools did not have. She remembered, “Somebody informed us about it, and they were like, ‘You could have you own school.’ And we were like, what?” She described her time as lead teacher, saying:

> So there we go. We start this little design team. And we worked endless hours, not paid, to dream up a school based on the SLC that we already had. So again, long story short, we go through the whole process, and we end up getting our little school. So we open the school, and I definitely took leadership roles there, but clashed with my administrator. And after trying to work things out and trying to stay on board, I just couldn’t work there anymore.

While Paola was writing the SLC plan, she and her cowriters enrolled in a district-paid administrative program through one of the local California State University administrative credential programs. Although she was adamantly against becoming an administrator, five other colleagues at her site convinced her she had “nothing to lose” and maybe they could learn something they could use for their plan. She shared her thoughts on how she felt about becoming an administrator during that time, stating:

> People would ask me all the time and I’d be like, Hell no. And they’d be like, “Why? Why not? You’re already doing all these things.” I’m like, I love teaching. Back then I saw admin as being very top-down. That’s the reason we were trying to leave. I had a few good, ok, maybe two, administrators I respected and learned from. But the rest, I just couldn’t stand them, to be honest. I couldn’t stand them. So when people would say, “Do you want to?” I’d be like, “No I don’t want to be like that person. I don’t. I have no interest.”

After working as a coordinator and lead teacher in the school for 2 years, she realized she was not happy and needed to leave. She felt overworked and underpaid and shared her dissatisfaction with her administrator. She said, “In my head it was like, I’m basically doing your job, and you’re taking all the credit, and I’m not getting paid to do this.”

Becoming a Principal

After deciding to leave her current site in East Los Angeles, she began to look for teaching or coordinating positions when a colleague and friend of hers told her to apply for a principal position at one of the small high schools at a yet-to-be-opened site in South Los Angeles. At that time, Paola was not really interested in finding an administrative position, and certainly not as a principal. After the first round of interviews at the new school did not go well, however, her friend, again, encouraged her to apply. She recalled:

> So then my friend was like, “Paola, they haven’t found somebody. What do you have to lose, just go apply. Just go through the process, you never know.” So I think at that point I was also not really finding anything that suited me, so I was like, ok. They’re never going to hire me, why would they hire me, I’m not even an assistant principal. So my ignorant ass. . . . I’m like, ok. If I’m going to do this, then I really want to give it my all and just see what happens. So I end up meeting with [one of the lead teachers], it’s love at first sight. We hit if off immediately. She and [the other colead] were the ones that wrote the plan for this school what ended up being [the new school]. And she’s like, “Ok, I’m going to send you the PDF.”
>
> It was an 80-page proposal. And I start reading it and I was like, oh my God. I remember I cried reading that proposal because it was so well written. It was like a

> dissertation, legit. It was researched. And we had just written a proposal 2 years ago and our proposal does not even compare to this. This is amazing. So I joke with people, I drank the Kool-Aid at that moment. When I read that proposal, I was like, man, if these people put in this amount of work, I want to be there. It was so inspiring.

When she learned one of her friends from TEP had just been hired on as one of the principals of one of the other two schools on the new campus, she reached out to him. He told her, "I've been waiting for you to call me." When she asked why, he said, "Because you need to come be the principal over here. You know how to open a school. You opened a school." Paola shared she hesitated to apply because this school was not in her familiar East Los Angeles setting; it was in South Los Angeles. She shared, "Previous to my interview, I had never set foot into South Central Los Angeles. I had just heard about it. . . . I'm like, I don't know South Central. I don't know anybody there." Her TEP friend persisted and told her to give it 1 year.

The style of interview was different than any Paola had been to before; the team had interviewees do some group activities prior to a one-on-one meeting. She interviewed in a group with four other men; she was the only woman. She described the men as well dressed, all in suits, while she was "wearing [her] Target dress." She laughed at the memory, saying:

> I was so naïve, it's so hilarious. And I'm like, ok. . . . And during the group activities, I thought it was so funny because all of the men were trying to one-up each other. It's like your stereotypical male, ego-driven experience. And I'm the female there. And I was just like, these fools. I'm going to keep it real and speak from the heart. That's all I knew how to do. The whole time, that's what I kept thinking, because it was intimidating. But I'm

like, I'm not going to get hired anyways, so I'm just going to be myself, I'm going to keep it real. That's all I kept saying.

When she emerged for the interview, she felt confident. She was pleased with her performance. She was genuine and honest; when she did not know the answer to a question, she would own up to it. That afternoon the two lead teachers gave her a call. She said:

> And I get a call from [the lead teachers], same afternoon. So I'm like, oh, they're probably going to say, "Thank you, but no thank you." So I pick up the phone and they're like, "We're calling, we want to offer you a position." And I was like, whoa. So I just said, "Ok, can you give me 24 hours, I need to think about this." And they said, "Sure, no, we just want you to know. We really need you to think about it, because we should have had someone a month ago, but the clock is ticking." So [her partner] comes in the car, and at that point I'm crying because I think it all started to hit me. So he's like, "What's wrong?" So I'm telling him and he's like, "Babe, why are you even thinking about it? You know you want to do this, this is all you've been talking about for a month." I'm like, "But I don't know what the hell I'm getting into." He's like, "Just take a risk. What's the worst thing that could happen? I'm like, oh my God. So I call them the next day, and I'm like, "Alright, let's give this a shot."

Paola started on June 1, 2012; the brand-new school was set to open in just 2 months, that August. Thinking back, Paola said she felt she must have been just so naïve, so underprepared to go from a coordinator position to principal of a school in South Los Angeles. When she thinks back on her 6 years at the school, she described the experience in extremes, somewhat of a best-of-times, worst-of-times kind of experience. She said:

> They were the best years of my career, the best. I love teaching, I love what I'm doing now. But those experiences, they were the hardest years of my life. The most challenging, draining, difficult years of my life, but they were the best, which is so crazy. And it was so intense, and so unsustainable that I had to make the difficult decision of leaving, because if I keep going at this pace, I'm going to die. My health, every aspect of my health began to suffer. And I'm like, I'm still young enough where I can re-steer this ship.

Paola contemplated leaving the school after each year. The first year, she said, was so insane, she wanted to quit then. She vividly described how she had to force herself to continue after each year, "Every May, it seems like I would have an emotional breakdown, a nervous wreck, on the floor, sobbing, because something crazy happened at school." Each year she would tell her partner she could not do it anymore, but she kept returning—until the 2018–2019 school year. That year, she had made up her mind, would be the last. She recalled June 25, 2018 was the last day of her assignment, saying:

> I went on my phone and I put a countdown calendar on it, and Nova, that was the only thing that would keep me going some days. . . . I had the light at the end of the tunnel. And I know it's super dramatic, but I really feel like this. If I would've worked one minute past June 25, I think I would be in a mental institute or something. Because it was too much.

Defining Her Leadership Identity

Paola found a style that worked for her, but she was hesitant to call it successful. She recalled what a professor in her administrative credential program had told his students: spend

90% of your time supporting good teachers, do not worry about bad teachers. That advice became her philosophy and she "quickly identified who my team was going to be, and I worked side by side with them as much as possible." Like her other school, this school was one of the district's semi-autonomous schools. Paola felt her school thrived especially at distributive leadership autonomy. She worked so closely with her instructional leadership team (ILT), she almost always consulted them when she needed to make big decisions. She said:

> My ILT, I kept it small, because we only had 25 teachers. So it was about five teachers, and they were deliberately chosen because they were the hardest working teachers at my school. So we were just this little tight-knit team that would meet almost weekly, but at least every 2 weeks, and we did everything together. We did PD [professional development], we did WASC [Western Association of Schools and Colleges]. We did testing, everything. Everything you could possibly think of that needs to be done in a school, we did it collaboratively. And on top of that, they taught. And then on top of that, I dealt with all the other operational stuff. Because although we had APs [assistant principals], they were never part of that inner circle I had.

She described her work with the ILT as successful because it was collaborative, and she thrived on the collaboration. She did, however, see a possible gap in her success—instructional supervision. She stated:

> I think that I made excuses for, or maybe it was that I just didn't have the time, but it was not easy for me to get into classrooms as often as I would have liked. If there is something I could've changed, it's making sure I was in classrooms every day. And I set that goal every year for myself and every year it was a failure.

Paola described reading a book, which had been given to principals by district leadership and described a process to help school-based administrators get into classrooms more often, "I read that book, I made my little schedules, I would start off really good." But within a few weeks of every school year, every month, her work, she said, came to be more about just "putting out the fires."

Paola believed she was not always an effective instructional leader, something she described as essential for the principal position. She summarized her style of leadership, saying:

> I think I was more of a cheerleader for my good teachers. To this day I get daily texts from my teachers that I worked with. They valued our friendship. And then I have these [principal] friends who are like, "Oh my God, I would never be friends with my teachers, are you kidding?" Because that means if I have to evaluate them or I have to write them up, that's so weird. And there were, I'm not going to lie, there were a few times where those things would happen. And it did really mess with my psyche, when I had to be the principal, in terms of issuing discipline or whatever. That was really hard, and that definitely changed relationships.

By the end of her 6-year tenure, she made attempts to play it safe when cultivating friendships at work and this did not necessarily sit well with her. She said, "I think, just in general, I like to live my life with love at the center and that's how I tried to lead. I was not that fear-based principal."

I asked Paola if she ever had any models of the instructional leader she defined as successful—one who was in classrooms, supervising instruction. She had one district level instructional director who she imagined might be that kind of leader, for he described his experience as principal at a Los Angeles charter school in a way that made her believe he was in

classrooms daily, but that was never modeled for her; she never saw it in action. When she was a classroom teacher, administrators rarely observed her teach or gave her feedback; she shared "[as long as she] had shit up on the board and my standards [posted] and I made some reference to it during my lesson. . . . Ok, cool, you're the best teacher ever." She further reflected on her own style of leadership, one focused on relationship-building. She said:

> So when it came my turn to be an instructional leader and guide my teachers from novice to more advanced levels of instruction, I had never had that. And to this day, I don't even know if I was a good teacher. I don't know. I know I've always been about relationships, so I knew I had good relationships with everybody. Even the people who drove me crazy, whether it was students or teachers or parents, I still established positive relationships.

Paola spoke of her ability to foster positive relationships with great pride, it was a skill she had clearly honed because it was so important to her. It was difficult to get into classrooms and coach teachers and she wondered if that was why her school's data on standardized test scores were low. She shared:

> I guess the pressure I always felt is, maybe the false notion was, if you get into more classrooms and you really coach your teachers, your scores are going to be better, because our data sucked. If you look at the data in my school in the 6 years I led, oh my God, it's embarrassing. . . . It's funny now that I'm reflecting, maybe that's why I didn't get into classrooms, because I didn't know how the hell to do it. I don't know.

Although Paola wondered about her ability to coach teachers, observe teachers and provide feedback, and ultimately, raise test scores, she knew those things were not the primary concern for her and those who had designed the school. She shared:

> Let me say this first. It's not that I didn't have a vision. I had a very clear vision. But my vision was never about data. It wasn't about the test scores or the graduation rate, that piece. My vision was based around the vision of the teachers that wrote the plan of the school, and their vision was to bring healing to this community. Personalization. Restorative justice. The social-emotional support. That shit, we had down. Nobody can ever say we didn't know how to support our kids in that piece.

Even 6 years into the job, Paola never lost her focus on these aspects of her work. She never rushed to check her students' results on standardized test scores the very minute they were posted to the Department of Education website, like many principals did. She posited her social justice background would not let those things rise to a high level of importance for her. She shared a story to further illuminate her stance, saying:

> I knew at the end of the day, that's not what kids remember. I'm sure you can relate. Like the kid who at parent conference night, we were done, it was 7, and we were making the announcements. And this kid, I get called to some classroom, and this mother who immigrated from Jamaica was like, "Ms.," in her Jamaican accent. "I'm leaving my daughter with you, she's failing all her classes." She was walking down the stairwell, she was leaving. And I was like, "Ma'am, you can't." And this kid had just checked into our school, we didn't really know her or her daughter. I'm like, "You can't leave your daughter, I'm gonna have to call the police." She said, "Call the police, I don't care."
>
> We ended up having a [restorative] circle at, by this time it's 7:30, so now we're there until 8. They make up, we're like, "Whew, let's go home now." And we're walking, and I'm like, "Where did you park?" She said, "Oh, we walked here." It's 8 o'clock in

> South Central. I'm like, "You're not walking." So there I go, driving them to their house. And I'm like, to me that's where, again, it's the soul-sucking work that people will never, ever understand or know unless they're doing it. And that's, in my opinion, that's what that mom and that daughter are going to remember. Who knows what happened to that girl. I don't know. I'm sure I can find out. And I have so many stories like that. I guess that's what I was in it for.

Paola described dealing with many situations in South Los Angeles as "life or death." She recalled a few situations of success, of students leaving gangs, getting help with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and enrolling in college despite so many obstacles, and although she also reported so many were not successful, she felt the few who were successful "were enough that it kept us going."

The district, Paola felt, could have done a better job at providing support for her success. She had three different district-level directors in 6 years. She said:

> I think because I'm so relationship-based, for me my relationships with my directors mattered. And, as you know, our directors are a revolving door. Just when I felt like, okay, I finally think I figured out how I'm going to work with this director, and we would get in our groove, then it's like, nope. Just kidding. You have someone new. And that was so difficult, because it was like a whole new adjustment and a whole new set of expectations, and a whole new way of relating with somebody. So it's this weird game. And I hated that. I think I tried to take the best of every director I had. And I'm lucky, because I only had three in my 6 years. And I've heard some of my friends have had six in 6 years, there was one new one every year. So that, I think, hindered. I think if there

would've been a little more of a consistent relationship, because we look to our directors to give us direction and guidance and support.

And then it was always like, just not feeling fully comfortable. Like when I would be like, okay, I think I'm. . . . it was always like, "Wait, am I going to get in trouble for this? Are they going to be upset because of that?" It was this weird, always at the back of my mind, fear. And I hate that. I hate fear-based relationships. I've never been good at those, I run from those. But I couldn't run, because they're my bosses. So I just tried to make the best of it. And I did try to garner the best of what they could provide, because they're human too. So I tried to be empathetic and be understanding. But again, their job, or I guess what they understand their job to be, is to be all about data and numbers, so that's what our meetings would be about, and I would be mortified. What is my graduation rate?

Although she looked back on her relationships with her directors as never fully achieving a level of comfort, at least not the kind of comfort she had worked to build between her and her teachers, she did acknowledge the more time they spent with her at her school site, the fewer questions they would ask about her data, "because I think they would realize, just how much we were doing and how impossible it was for them to have those expectations."

She reflected because she had left the school she was only then becoming aware of just how intense of an environment her former school endured on a daily basis. During the 1st year, they opened with few out-of-classroom positions; she described it as "bare bones." Fights, she said, occurred daily; their suspension rate was "through the roof." Paola and her colleagues fought to bring in more counselors, psychiatric social workers, and security aides. During her 1st

year she quickly realized she was woefully underprepared for the operational aspects of her job, stating:

> Yeah. I always felt like, and I still feel this way, I think a big component that's missing from admin programs is, it's almost like you're running a business, because you're doing budgets too. You're doing everything. You're running a business. And I didn't have any of that background, I don't know if you did, but we're educators. And all of a sudden we're put in these really managerial positions. And it's like, there were so many things.

Paola felt fortunate she was on a shared campus that was able get support from her other principal colleagues. When they were able to secure more funding, either through the district or through grants, they would often share positions that could benefit the entire site.

Leadership Style

When asked to define her leadership style, Paola pointed to Angela Valenzuela's work on authentic caring. She said:

> As long as people know you're genuine, especially young people, and that your heart is in the work, and it's not just some façade, and we say this a lot, it's cliché. But you're not just there for a check. As long as it's coming from a genuine place of love and caring, then people will respond to that and will feel supported.

Paola knew she brought authentic caring to her classroom and that was how she led. She was not sure if it was successful for teachers. Some teachers, she said, "weren't about that." Paola said learning about restorative justice was transformational to her leadership practice. She stated:

> It was scary going to work every day. Even for me as the principal. So the only thing we knew how to do was suspend kids, and we had to get order. So our suspension rate was

> crazy. I look at it now and, oh my God, I'm surprised they didn't fire us that 1st year, just for that. So naturally, when we reflected, we were like, "We can't keep doing this." Because it went against everything we were about. Everything. So then we're like, in our plan, we say we're about restorative justice but we're not practicing it. We're not even trained in it. That's when we again, through our own resolve, no support from the district, we went out and we sought grant monies, and were able to partner with [a nonprofit] and hired [a restorative justice counselor], and the rest is history. I'm actually glad that we did it that way, even though it seemed unfair and it was difficult. Because then we got a different perspective on how to do it. And I feel like we have a really organic understanding of what it was and have built it to what it is now.

The restorative justice circles not only created safe spaces for Paola's students, but for her and her team as well. She said:

> I wouldn't be in there and be like, "This just happened," because half the time I couldn't share what was going on, because it was personnel matters or confidential matters. But just being in a space where I felt heard and listened to, was like I said, it was transformational. And I needed that, because otherwise I felt like if I keep all this in, again, I'm going to go crazy. And then I'd come home whenever I'd get home, which was usually past 6. And I didn't want to burden [her partner] with all that, and I didn't really want to talk about it at that point. I'm like, I'm home.

Challenges of Being a Chicana Leader

While in the day-to-day grind of being a high school principal, Paola said it was difficult to ascertain challenges of being a woman, of being Chicana. She recalled:

> Oh yeah. I think I've always been the person who, I don't realize what's happening until I take a step back from it. Even though people would say stuff, and maybe it's just because I didn't have it in my bandwidth to let my thoughts go anywhere, because then it was going to be another thing I had to deal with. But in retrospect, now that I've had a chance to be out and reflect, was it the first 3? No, the first 4 years, which was the majority of my time there, I had two male counterparts. And people would tell me all the time, "If it wasn't for you, the school would be falling apart. You're doing all the work, and these guys are just riding on your laurels."

For Paola, that feedback was difficult to hear in the moment, and she genuinely did not view it that way for the first few years. She said:

> I thought, no, these are my brothers. I see these guys more than I see my own freaking partner. And vice versa, they saw me more than they saw their wives. So we became this little unit. And it wasn't until time passed, especially I think when one decided he was leaving and then didn't have the freaking cojones to tell us. Then I was like, you know what? We have worked side by side. . . . Long enough to feel like we have this bond, we're connected at the hip. And when that happened, I was like, he doesn't care. For him it's just a job. And he couldn't even, whatever. And again, not have the guts to tell us. So anyway, that's when I started to realize, I have taken on a lot of the crap work here. So when it came down to having to get the work done, guess who ended up having to do it?

So it was all this shit work that nobody wants—to write people up, nobody wants to sit there and write conference memos and [work with] staff relations. Nobody wants to do any of that, but somebody has to do it, so it was that hard work. And I don't even know how to classify it.

When Paola reflected on any challenges she had experienced she felt were specifically related to being Chicana, she was not so sure. She stated:

Because that's one I haven't really thought about more in-depth. And I'm sure there were probably many times where that became a factor. But maybe it's because I'm so confident and clear in my identity, it's so much a part of me that I don't categorize it, it's just me. So if there were any sort of hurdles or even discriminatory practices upon me, I think that's going to take more time for me to think about, to be honest. The only thing I can think of, I don't know. I'll just say it. And then maybe you can help me process it. I definitely felt like I had to work harder to gain the trust of my African American families. But once I did, that relationship was, I would say, even stronger than some of the Latino families I worked with. Isn't that a trip? It's been very interesting. And in fact, the students that still want to maintain contact with me since I've left, most of them happen to be African American students.

Paola was not sure why that happened, "there could be a lot of reasons," she said. She continued:

At first, I was like, I don't know what the hell I'm doing. I just knew that I had to figure it out, because again, my core values. And again, it went back to just being myself, being authentic, showing them through my actions that I wasn't there to be racist or discriminatory or judgmental, they were my babies just like anybody else was. I don't

know. I just dove in. Yeah. And also knowing that they were the most severely under resourced. All of our kids, sorry to say this, but they're fucked in terms of all the statistics and all the research. All of them are. All of the kids at [the school], whether they were undocumented, newcomers, poor, trauma, violence, gangs, drugs, you name it. They had every single category you could check off.

Paola said she knew her Black students, especially boys, were perhaps the most fragile population she served, and she made sure she checked her own internal biases, "And not just myself, but my staff too. . . . they're well-meaning, educated, socially just people who still through their actions create these racist, discriminatory environments for our kids."

Paola wore her Chicana-ness with pride, saying:

So it's not anything I would hide. They knew, they knew who I was. Everybody knew who I was. And again, I think because it's just me, I wasn't embarrassed. I have the loud Latina laugh, the cackly, loud laugh. People would be like, "Oh, here comes Ms. __," because you could hear me down the hall cracking up. I never was like, "I'm the principal, I need to behave a certain way." No. And again, it comes from the authentic caring. I'm just me. And if people like that, great. If they don't, it's something we're going to have to work through. But I would play in my office, English music and Spanish music. When we would have dances, I'd be out there dancing with the kids, English and Spanish. It's just me. It's so much a part of me, I don't even categorize it.

Reflection on Leadership

A few weeks after her first interview, Paola was able to read through the transcript of the first conversation and reflect on it. Paola said her recent transition back to a nonadministrative

position has allowed her to do much more reflection on her leadership than she had been able to do while she was in the principal position; she felt she had "unique perspective." She shared:

> In terms of education, in terms of making an impact on students' lives, I've had both sides of the experience. And it's making me, currently, in my current position, as an out-of-classroom teacher, appreciate the flexibility that I now have. But also, I get to be more purposeful in my work and really choose when I want to lead and when I want to be led.

Paola was struck by how much people needed her and "had never been in a situation where everything depended on me, everything." Every day, she said, someone—parents, students, teachers, support staff—needed something from her and as she reflected back, she saw now how exhausting that was. Although she knew their priorities might not be hers, she believed in the power of relationships and always wanted to make sure she gave everyone as much attention as she could, which unfortunately, never seemed to be enough.

Paola felt she was never able to complete tasks; she never knew what the day would bring and send her in an entirely different direction. She reflected:

> I don't miss that at all. I don't miss that great sense of responsibility. Now I realize, even when I was asleep, I wasn't resting because I was having nightmares or dreams about work. When I had "time off," I wasn't resting because people were constantly emailing me or texting me or calling me. So even when I was on vacations or whatever, people still need you because you're the leader, you're the principal. And I guess you just kind of get used to that, but now that that isn't the case, I just realize how much pressure . . . it was just so much pressure that I was under.

Looking back, Paola thought this way of leading was not ideal for her. She was just "pulled in so many directions" she was unable to focus; everything felt like it was an emergency, she rarely had time to think through before acting.

Paola felt as if she "could take on anything" after the principalship; after 6 years in the job, she said, nothing will scare her in the future. What she realized now, however, was leading in that manner did not appeal to her. Paola said, "I'm the kind of person that likes to plan in advance, reflect." When she was a principal, she felt it was impossible to plan for everything that could happen in a given day and even more difficult to stop and reflect because reflecting on decisions she had to make, did not make, or did not want to make was often the worst part of her job. She shared:

> And that's why I think when, sometimes we would have our trainings for principals or whatever and we would be asked to reflect, and I was always an emotional wreck. I couldn't even put myself in that space because I would just start crying because I was so stressed out and so overwhelmed and so burnt out.

The job, Paola felt, was all about living in the moment, constantly "going, going, going, going, going" and after a while it was too much.

Reflecting on Gender and Leadership

After reading her first interview transcript, Paola thought about relationships she had with co-administrators on her site. When she first opened the school, the two other administrators were both men and although she liked them and worked well with them, she did recall not only having to do "crap work" they did not want to do, but she realized when one of them was replaced by a woman principal, dynamics changed for the better. Not only did she describe those

2 years as more fun and enjoyable, she felt she could be more herself with her female counterpart. To illustrate the tight bond Paola had with her, she shared an incident where she nearly broke down in front of her staff during a professional development. The meeting did not go as planned, and her teachers and staff were engaging in a community circle; when the talking piece arrived, she began to cry and could not stop. After rushing out of that space, she immediately called her counterpart who stopped what she was doing and came to her side straight away and talked her through it. She recalled:

> I mean she freaking stepped in to help me. So I don't think I could have done that with my male counterparts. There's no way, no way. Like they would have been able to do that for me or that I would have felt comfortable asking for that kind of support. And so I think as females, because it is. . . . And I'm not saying that the males don't get emotional or that they don't have moments like that. But I just think it looks different and maybe that's what they would do with their wives. I don't know. It was just crazy.

Although Paola often pondered leaving the position after emotionally charged and difficult times like that, those thoughts were often fleeting. She said:

> So, and I think that's also part of being like a female is like. . . . And not just a female, but a female that was raised by the hardest working female that I know. Under the worst of circumstances. That's what I saw growing up and that's what I did. And again, I don't regret it because it was the best part of my career, but I do realize, like the unhealthy patterns that I learned from my mom.

Paola was grateful her counterpart was in her life for her last 2 years as a principal, and she pondered if she would have been able to stay longer had she worked with her in her first 3 years.

Reflecting on Ethnicity and Leadership

Paola shared it "tripped her out" when, during the first interview, she found it difficult to answer the question, "how has being a Chicana has had an impact on her leadership?" Her school, she said, was a unique place; diversity, she said, "is so accepted and so valued and revered that I think people appreciated it more than felt threatened by it." The community as a whole valued student voice and saw them as individuals, not simply as groups to classify.

Although she felt being a Chicana did not impact her negatively, she said it did shape her as a person and definitely as a leader. She shared:

> I think I took it so serious and I still do. I guess I always have as an educator, but more as a principal. I wore my identity on myself as like my trophy or like my medal. You know what I mean? I wanted everyone to know that I came from immigrant parents, that I spoke English and Spanish. That I loved eating food and dancing and going to concerts and just like your stereotypical, you know what we think of, I guess Chicanos, also being very socially just and like, you know, always doing my best to stand up for underrepresented students or families. It was . . . I mean, it's just who I am. I felt that in that role as the leader of the school, I had such an opportunity to highlight it and to not be ashamed. And to just put it out there, so that the students that I served, most of them being Latinos themselves could be like, dang, I can connect with Ms. __ that way.

Paola proudly displayed her degrees in her office and when she spoke to students, often shared her own life story, which would resonate with students. She would tell them her working-class parents wanted her to have a better life and she was so lucky to be able to make a good salary by helping students, talking with them every day.

Paola believed her life experiences and her own identity as a Chicana allowed her to lead in the most socially just way possible. She shared:

> So I used all that. And then like I said, even for my African American students, it was always about trying to make them aware of the struggle that they historically have and just sometimes having to say some really painful things in terms of when we'd be in circle and two of my Black males got in a fight. And in circle I'd be like, you realize that at most other schools you would have been suspended. You might have gotten arrested, you might have gotten a ticket for this. And the minute that happened, you know, I was trying to explain the school to prison pipeline and you're so lucky to be at a school where we understand those things and we don't want to do that and so we want to work with you that you need to meet us halfway.

Identity, for Paola, was always "front and center" for her and she "unabashedly" talked about it and used it to relate to her students and everyone she worked with.

Next Steps

Paola shared she was simply overwhelmed with a going away party her former staff threw for her. She even protested at first they should not have one; everyone would be too busy ending the school year. She likened the celebration to a funeral; not only did staff from the entire complex attend, but her family and friends came as well. She recalled:

> It exceeded any expectation I had of what they were planning. But I also just felt like, you know what, it's so. . . . Again, as a, as a Chicana, it's so hard to take compliments sometimes, because we're not raised that way. But I was like, you know what, I'm going to take this as the biggest compliment of like, this is what I gave and this is how they're

> thanking me for it, you know? And it was just awesome. Like we. . . . Every detail that they put into it. . . . We ended with a circle, like a huge circle, like 50 people in the MPR [Multipurpose Room], you know what I mean? Like, it was just beautiful.

Paola was aware of the legacy she left as founding principal of her small school; she felt although it was a relatively short time, she was able to accomplish much to be proud of.

Paola left the principalship and transitioned to an out-of-classroom teaching position at a school where she was able to focus on something she has an incredible passion for—restorative justice. She had considered leaving the district because she often felt so frustrated by it, she decided against leaving because of her health and retirement benefits, although she did not rule out the possibility of ever leaving because she is "not the kind of person that's going to allow a retirement plan to get in the way of that."

Paola shared reading the transcript of our first meeting inspired her because she saw so much in her story that could help others. She shared:

> So I kind of got inspired like, you know, I need to start writing and start reading. And I need to get back in that kind of mind frame because I've been spending too much time watching *Jane the Virgin* or whatever. Doing just brainless work. Not even work just vegging. Vegging out, because I've been so tired the last 6 years.

She realized although there had been so many principals and educators who had come before her, many of them did not share her unique perspective and background. She said:

> I think the more we can share about our experiences, the more that other women might take the plunge and do it in a more sustainable way. That's like my hope, right? Like make it more sustainable somehow. I don't know how.

She shared although she never felt successful as a principal, especially if success is described as getting high test scores, she said she would love to be a coach or a support to other principals. The job, she said, is such a lonely one.

Alma

Background and Early Years

Alma was born in Guatemala and immigrated to the United Stated when she was 12 years old. She described her introduction to her first school, a middle school in the central Los Angeles area, as being a traumatic experience and remembered it was difficult to adjust. At that time, in the mid-1980s, the community, she said, was still largely Mexican and Mexican American and she was among the first wave of Central American immigrants to this part of Los Angeles. She shared:

> So now looking back I feel like I have the language to say, oh, but very purposely then I learned very quickly not to use certain words that are very colloquial to Central America and to Guatemala because people were just so cruel and just made fun of you so much and just bullied you incessantly. That you pick up on all the Mexican lingo. And I think it's why there are words that are very Guatemalan expressions that I haven't used in decades. And I think part of it is just the process of adaptation. You're like oh I say that and everyone makes fun of me. What I should say is this, right? And I read that, like how we're so observant. You're constantly watching how people are doing things so that you totally don't stand out all the time because that's just sometimes too painful. People remind you that you don't belong, that you're not from there. And so you kind of learn all these expressions and things.

Alma said she read somewhere writers from Central America who come to the United States described their American story as becoming "Mexican before you become Salvadorean, before you become Guatemalan again." She returned to work in the community where she lived as a child and she said:

> I love it and I always tell students, it's so great and now you get to be you, like nobody would ever make fun of you if you said, "I'm from Guatemala" or "I'm from the El Salvador," or "My mom's from Honduras" or even if you were born here. Whereas in those days it was just very different for us. Very different.

Alma's father was first to travel to the United States; the family followed 3 years later. The adjustment period was not easy. Her father worked 7 days a week and it was difficult to get reacquainted with him, but Alma said by the time she entered high school, her family life seemed back to normal.

Schooling Experiences

Alma attended a small all-girls Catholic high school in Guatemala and making the move to a large, multitracked school in the center of downtown, Los Angeles was definitely a challenge. Always a good student, Alma worked diligently to learn English. She said:

> I think once I found my space, once I found teachers who were so helpful, and counselors, I sort of found my space. And then once I started doing well in school again. By eighth grade I feel like, oh wow, okay I understand English now, I'm getting better, I'm advancing, they changed my math class, so I was in an algebra class. All of those things just made me feel better, like okay maybe I can do, it won't be this crazy thing all

> the time. And I think even the bullying and stuff, it did kind of change and subsided. I was in different classes, too, and it just felt better.

Alma tested into the gifted program and although she and her parents really did not know what that entailed, high school counselors who came to visit her middle school in the eighth grade used it as a marker to enroll her in honors classes for the upcoming school year. She said, "I didn't know what that was, but I was like, oh that sounds good."

Her high school, like many during the 80s and 90s in Los Angeles, was extremely large and they tracked their students. She said, "I happened to be in this track where you were very nurtured, the teachers were really great, you were treated with a lot of respect and dignity." At the end of her freshman year, one of the teachers created an international studies academy and she spoke of this program as a pivotal moment in her life. She said:

> Now I'm like, what a brilliant man. Since there's so many immigrants and international students, because that's how he saw us like in a way, like wow you're bringing all this amazing knowledge about other countries. Rather than, oh look at you, you don't know anything 'cause you're coming from out of the country. So he creates this like International Studies Academy. And it's like the beginning of this small learning community. He handpicked the teachers who were going teach us. And he makes a brochure that has all the countries we represent, the description of it. I wish I had the material, but I remember as a student feeling really honored and privileged like, oh my God, we're part of the International Studies Academy because we represent other countries and other experiences.

As soon as she joined the program, she and her classmates were encouraged to go to college. She shared:

> I think I just followed them. I just went like, okay, yeah, college. Not so much because I didn't know or like my family didn't know that. Because looking now, my family in Guatemala, like all my nephews and nieces they all go to college. Everyone's a professional and again that's part of the family. But when you go to another country you don't know whether you will have that opportunity or how that would even work for you.

Alma described her high school experience as fun; she participated in the speech and debate team and was in a supportive and caring environment. Her college counselor encouraged her to apply to various schools, including a prestigious school. She remembered, "I didn't even know where that was on the map in California. But he was telling me I should apply so I was like, okay, I'll apply. Using a typewriter." She was accepted and traveled by plane, alone, to the university that fall.

Alma majored in psychology, but in her junior year took the first step toward moving into the field of education. She stated:

> One of my friends was doing a coterm getting a masters her senior year. She was a year ahead of me and she told me about it. She's like, hey do you know if you have enough units or credits have you considered doing a master's in education? We had taken some education classes together and so I looked into it and I went to this advisor and he's like, oh yeah, you totally can do the masters. So I applied to the coterm program, I got in. So I ended up doing this masters essentially my senior year and writing a thesis. And the reason I'm saying that is because it's how it all, those things connect.

Alma described her professors in this program as amazing; their work around language acquisition, bilingualism, and biculturalism was eye opening and affirming for her. She thought, "People study this?" It is what she eventually wrote her master's thesis on. She stated:

> I tell [my advisor] I'm interested in studying Central American students in the U.S. but in education. So I started doing a lit review and I tell him, a lot of it is just around the civil war and I'm not interested in that. What I'm interested in is how are we doing in school. So he's like okay, well let's have that be your thesis, a literature review. Just keep researching and whatever you find you're going put it all together and explain what the patterns are what you see and what might be needed. He said, and that'll be your thesis. That's good for a masters. So I find this little book, like it had just come out, called *Central American Students in U.S. Schools* by Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Carola Suarez-Orozco.

She would later work with one of the authors of this book as a principal. Alma described this and other moments in her life, like taking a chance and moving away from home to an unfamiliar place all on her own, as opportunities she was glad she "jumped" at. In this book, Alma said, she found herself. She learned she wanted to help others.

Teaching Experiences

Throughout college and then after graduation, Alma worked for a nonprofit that found service-oriented jobs for students and recent graduates. When she was 22 or 23 years old, she worked in local schools through the nonprofit; her work with those teachers was when she learned first how to create instruction, how to work with families, how to facilitate meetings, and how to collaborate with others. She shared:

> But I think all of those pieces informed in how why I ended up becoming a teacher, the type of teacher, and then eventually as a leader, as a formal leader, why those values were the same really that in '96 I was learning and getting trained on and the skills that then you end up using throughout your career. So after the nonprofit I realized that the most important and influential piece in the school was the teacher and the classroom. So I think, I need to go back to school and become a teacher. And another corp member was my teammate, we both start going to San Francisco State for a teaching credential. And that was the emergency credential era, so we both did emergency credentials, we get hired at the school where we worked, because that was like a low-income school.

Although the majority of the district was affluent, Alma worked at the only school, at that time, designated low income. All of the educators, she described, were blonde; she laughed and said, "Whenever we would go to professional development, my friend who was a redhead and then it would be me with the black hair. No one else had black hair in the entire district." The school had difficulty staffing teachers, but Alma and her friend found it to be a place that suited them well. She said:

> And we started working as teachers. And again that school, because of all the reform efforts and the collaboratives that they were a part of, all teachers were in teams, we had multigrade classrooms, this was elementary, a bilingual program. Which in the end, all those things informed how I was shaped as a teacher. I had great mentors, veteran teachers who were just amazing at teaching reading, who were bilingual, and also community organizers.

During her early years as a teacher, Proposition 227, written to end bilingual education, found its way on the ballot and Alma and her community rallied against it. She recalled:

> We had fought when I was in college against Prop[isition] 187, lost that, although when it got up in the courts it was overturned. But then [Proposition] 227 comes and then we're working against it. And even after all this work—we would hold press conferences, then you start meeting all these other community activists and kind of have a group of people who do that and that informs too how I am as a teacher. But also it's very defeating, like you don't have a lot of money and you're just going person to person and trying to do all these things and then you lose, people pass the proposition and then I think after [Proposition] 227 I just felt really defeated like, oh God, I'm never going be community organizing ever, that's like the worst thing ever and it's disappointing and how do you fight with this huge amount of money and campaigns.

For Alma, that moment seemed to solidify her desire to finish her credential and immerse herself in teaching. She shared, "But then I think teaching then became, okay that's my vehicle that's how I can really make a difference and it was beautiful."

She decided shortly thereafter to return home to Los Angeles and apply to become an elementary school teacher. Her first interview did not go well. She recalled it in detail, saying:

> I did not like the principal at all, he's very rude, I thought, and condescending. And I was just, just as a woman too. I come in, I'm wearing a suit, I have my resume, I have this thing and he tells me, he's like, "Well why do you want to do this because you know, you guys, you come here with your little tank tops." He says this! And I'm like . . . what tank

top? “You come from these big schools, you think you know everything, you think you’re going to.” You know like, and he just goes on.

I was so angry I almost wanted to cry. Like cry but out of anger because I wanted to punch him. And I was like oh I am so clearly not meant to work under you or for you. Because I had come from very strong female principal. Very strong female team of teachers who were my mentors and I had one male mentor teacher but the other ones were all female. Really amazing. So all the models I had were these amazing, collaborative, supportive female leaders and teachers and community organizers and even the men who were community organizers were very different. And all of a sudden this man is telling me this and I’m like, tank tops? Like I am showing you what I’m doing. I have my portfolio, I have my student award, like I don’t think this is a joke of a job.

She was eventually interviewed for a teaching job where the interview seemed more like a conversation; they were interested in her teaching philosophy and her work as a community organization. “It was a match,” she declared. The school was led by a male principal, but she was surrounded by female teachers who collaborated with her and supported her. Although she enjoyed her time there, she left the school after a year; she decided she wanted to finish her credential and instead of working in elementary schools, she wanted to work in middle school.

After a year of substitute teaching, she returned to teaching in another school district about 20 miles east of Los Angeles. She described her 1st year there as a difficult transition, saying:

I just wasn’t prepared emotionally to deal with all of their trauma and things. And one of my students attempted against her life after that 1st year I had her. And that was really

traumatizing for me. Like I just, I felt like such a failure. Like how did I not know that you were in such pain? Because I would see her every day, she would come to my classroom every morning. She'd get there really early so she would be there. And if I was 10 minutes after 7:00 she'd be like, why are you late? And I'd be like, late, there's nobody here. School doesn't start for another hour and a half. So it was really traumatic for me. And I had a couple of other students who had really complex, difficult lives. And sitting through like SSPT [Student Support and Progress Team] kind of things, parents crying and the students crying. I just couldn't take it anymore. I was just like, maybe I'm not made for this. Maybe I just don't have the skills.

So at the end of that school year, I resigned. I told my principal, I said I just can't do this. I don't think I was made for this, maybe this isn't it. And I resigned and he's all like, "What?" But he takes the resignation and then I go and then that whole summer I was like, what am I going do? What do I want to do and exploring and thinking and my brother at the time was doing financial advising and some other stuff. He like introduced me to some people, so I was like, first of all I don't like any of those people. What do I enjoy and what do I like and then had this sort of moment of like, well I guess what I've always loved is to teach. And I'm like what am I doing, like I have to learn how to deal with that. How to deal with the trauma and the students and so I called the principal and I'm like, okay I don't want quit. I don't want resign after all.

Luckily for Alma, the Board of Education allowed her to rescind her resignation and as luck would have it, the school had an opening for eighth-grade English as a second language (ESL) and ESL history. The principal told her all other positions were filled, this position was the only

one no one wanted. Alma recalled, “And I’m like, that sounds perfect, I’ll take the newcomers. That’s perfect!” She continued:

> And of course I loved it and then I realized, oh this is like my calling, to work with immigrant studies. And then the other two classes were more like, sort of like LTEL [long term English Learner] kind of studies, I loved them. So of course I loved it, and I think I was better prepared. I didn’t have my former student but she became my mentee because she was now in eighth grade. And she kind of told me about everything and her hospitalization and what she was doing now. And we became really close. She was actually one of my junior bridesmaids at my wedding. And then I realized the importance of mentoring, like my whole perspective and how I approach the teaching and the trauma and the dealing with all of that changed.

Alma made it a point to really get to know her students and their families, and, as she put, she “really hit a stride” that year. The next school year they hired a new teacher who taught seventh grade newcomers. Alma described her work with this teacher as another pivotal moment in her career, saying:

> And she was in a different hallway than me, we were in the bungalows, of course, like the newcomer kids. That’s how I see it now. I’m like, no wonder we were out there. We were not worthy of the main buildings of the school. All of their classes, actually were in the bungalows. But this amazing teacher. . . . We just started talking and I’m like, oh my God. She had the seventh grade newcomers. And so we start talking about like what we see like in terms of the program and orientation we don’t agree with and how we want to change things. And then the room next to me, the teacher was going to move and it had a

> connecting door so she tells me, she said how about we both, like I move to that room. So she's giving up this prime classroom in one of the main buildings to come next to me. And she said that way we could collaborate because you have the newcomers that are eighth grade and I have the ones that are seventh grade, but you know how they're not all on the same level so we started having all these ideas about, "Oh, levelize it. Like, you teach this stuff, I teach the other one, like we'll collaborate, we'll do these things together."

When they explained their idea to the principal, he was, she described, "laissez-faire" but supportive. She and her partner teacher were able to completely create a whole new program for English Learners at her school. Alma said she was so thankful to be able to collaborate with such an "amazing teacher" and shared, "I always feel like I just have been so lucky to end up with people who are really smart and very thoughtful and I just learn from them."

Beginnings of a Leader

Not long after becoming an ESL teacher and working with her colleague to revamp the program for English learners (ELs), Alma became an instructional coach. She said:

> So I don't know whether that, because see it's just interesting, it's all these things that in hindsight you can see all these little threads and how they inform who you are going to be become because then I became a coach, like a halftime coach for the school. And that was my first time out of the classroom and I really had to think about it. Whether or not I wanted to do that because I really loved the teaching and the students and it meant that I was going have to give up two of my periods or one. But in the end I thought, okay well

> maybe then I can work with other teachers and then strengthen our department. So I started doing some of that work which was really exciting.

As circumstances would have it, after becoming a part-time coach, the EL coordinator was leaving her position and nominated Alma for it. At first she hesitated, she recalled:

> But I was like, oh well I feel so honored and then I was like let me think about. Let me talk to my family, whatever. So I do and I go talk to my husband, my parents and they're like that sounds great, it's an opportunity, you know.

She took the position. She said, "I was also really excited about revamping the EL program and how we served students. Because I just felt like. . . . I kept seeing these things that were not right."

This position allowed her take a broader view of systems in place at her site and elsewhere. She described some of this work, saying:

> And then I start getting to know the people at the high school because then what we noticed was that our ELs were always just automatically put back in the lowest tracks to repeat whatever stupid class ELD [English Language Development] thing even when they were higher. So I start articulating with the counselors. And that was one of my first kind of like. . . . And then they start talking about, because they have AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] and then I'm like, well maybe we should have AVID. And so that becomes really exciting and then I think, well I should learn more about how to be like a formal leader and that's when I go to [get a credential in administration]. This was in like '06, like early in '07.
>
> Alma described her decision to apply to an administrative program that year as "totally

random." After a few brief Internet searches of local programs, she landed on one with a focus on social justice and she knew it was the perfect fit. She laughed as she described herself calling the number listed online; it was late on a Sunday evening in January or February and she had intended to leave a message. She knew deadlines had passed to apply for that year's cohort, which would start in the summer. She thought she would just do some research on how to ready herself for submitting a great application for the next cohort. To her surprise, the program's director answered. Laughing as she recalled the conversation, she said:

> So then he's like, oh hi. I'm like, oh. I told him I wasn't expecting anybody to answer. He's like, "Tell me, what do you want? What are you looking for?" And I tell him, "I'm interested in applying." [He says], "Well you should just apply." I'm like, "I know, I know, I've missed the deadline." He's like, "No. I'm telling you to apply right now." I thought he meant like you should apply next year. And I'm like, "You mean like this year? Like apply like right now?" He's like, "Yeah, just get to work on the application, I'm writing your name down." And I'm like, "Well I'll have to take the GRE" and he's like, "Yeah, so take it." And I'm like, "ok." It's like so random. But you think, well, if I hadn't called, if I hadn't.

She was accepted to the program and Alma began that summer. She described the 1-year program as exciting and, just as she was finishing, found her principal, a well-liked man who had been at the school for 11 years, had been moved to another school and was replaced by a woman. She remembered the moment, saying:

> So that was the first, or at least in the LA area, my first female principal. And she seems really great. I'm really excited, we get a new coordinator too, another woman come in

from another school. And it seems like a really great team. And she's super excited. And then one of our APs who was really unhappy that the other principal had left and so the new principal is like, "Well don't you have your admin credential?" I'm like, "Yes!" Like yesterday, like I just finished my program, you know what I mean. And she's like, well then you should be the AP. We'll see what we can do. So it was all really superfast like that and I was like, really, oh my god.

Although just fresh out of an administrative program, Alma was excited and felt encouraged and even empowered by her principal. In fact, the principal told her, "You know the school, you've been here, people know you, people trust you. I think it should be you." Alma described the beginning of her first administrative job as an assistant principal as a positive one. She reflected on all they accomplished, saying:

> We become a really good team. I told her about AVID. I'm like, "You know there's some things we can do, we can really strengthen and work on it with the high school." And she's just like, "Go for it. Go for it. You do it. Make it happen." Totally like, just go, do it. And then I'm like, oh my god. So of course I go and do it. But again, you find these people, we had a couple of new teachers who were just really amazing and energetic and they're super young so they're like yeah, I had that in high school, but they're still so young they just went through a program. And then we launch like another program. I start looking into special ed. I think always with the lens of like, who's being left out at school? And because I think that was a much more traditional school, like the band kids were like, woo hoo, hooray for the band kids . . . you know, but then the EL's nobody

cared about, the special ed that were like pulled out even for RSP with their own bad teachers, most of them were not really good.

Then we start doing research around inclusion and I start working with one of . . . Because I had worked with one of the special ed teachers who would always send students to me. She was always like, would you take my student, I'm like yeah, why wouldn't I take them? Then I start working with her and we get excited about an inclusion model. Which is what we started here at [her current site]. So I think, see that's why I did that because eventually I would come to another school where we would relaunch and launch an inclusion program.

Soon after reflecting on the excitement of her new role and trust and willingness of her principal to allow her to bring new programs and ideas to the school, she shared the relationship between the two began to deteriorate, especially in the 3rd year of working together. She shared:

It's really great for a few years but then . . . the way I see it now, although now I feel bad too because I probably gave that principal a hard time. Now that I'm a principal I'm like, oh, I wasn't so nice as her AP sometimes. But I felt like we outgrew each other and I outgrew her. That's how I say it. And I began to disagree with some of the decisions she was making that were kind of unilateral and didn't really include everyone. And the things she was having me do sometimes with teachers I just disagreed. Because I felt like it was personal to her. Like, you want to write up that teacher because he's not doing what I tell him to do rather than there's real evidence that that person is like hurting students or whatever. So that I didn't really like and I started really kind of resenting her. And we started to kind of come apart a little bit and then the team started to break down a

little bit. And I just felt like I needed to stand my ground and I'm like, I know I'm your underling, I know you're my boss, but I will not do that. And you can't make me and you can't make me think like you do and you can't make me do what you're telling me to do. So I'm not going do it.

So we started having some real differences and sometimes exchanging words. I mean not in a bad way but more like, "Well you said this, well you. . . . " Because I'm like, "When you're going raise your voice at me then I'm going do the same." And it just was clear that we were done with each other. Maybe it was the 3rd year where things started deteriorating. And I think that was, it started because she brought in somebody that she knew from her other school and then that person all of a sudden had all the power and could do whatever and we were like, wait, we haven't all decided. We don't even tell the teachers or whatever. But it was just really tense. I also had my first child around then so I was gone and then came back. But then I was like, this isn't going work anymore.

Fortunately for Alma, the principal was moved to another location and she was relieved; she knew she was not going to be able to work there with her much longer. The principal's replacement was a man, whom Alma described as "very open, very political in that district, very open about how the game worked." She told him, after he asked her, she was interested in becoming a principal and he said he would help her. She did not find his advice initially helpful. She recalled him saying:

"Here's how it works. Like these are the people you have to know, like, for me, I'm coming from blah, blah, blah school, I have to take this school, I don't want to. I don't want to be here, but I'm only taking this because the promise is if I take this school, then

> they're going give me this other school and that's what I really want. And sometimes you have to do that," he'd tell me. "You just have to do whatever they tell you so that you get to where you want to be."

Alma was turned off by his approach to administration, his advice on how to have political savviness to land a job as a principal seemed to be the antithesis of how she envisioned school leadership. She recalled:

> I don't want do that. Like if that's what it takes to be a formal leader in a school. And he was like, but let's do this. So whatever, right, he's my new principal so we start working and it's good. But then some principalships opened up. And I said, well maybe it's time and I talked to him and I said, you know I'm thinking about applying, he's like you should apply and then see what happens, maybe you will maybe you won't. And [the district's] like notorious for like certain people will always get the position and others won't and I thought, well I have no connection to the district, I didn't go to schools in [the city], I don't know anybody, I don't know the board members, I'm not friends with them, I don't go play basketball or golf with them. Those sort of things you have to do. I don't go to their parties, I don't know anybody, so maybe this is a really long shot.

Alma applied for and was selected to be a principal at an elementary school.

A New Principal

Alma's first principalship was in the same district as her former school, but it was located in an adjacent city. She was surprised at how different it was from her other experiences in the district; she said it was like "stepping into the Twilight Zone." Nearly all teachers and staff were veteran teachers with many years at the site. Alma, then in her mid-30s was surprised to see

everyone was at least 20 years older than she was. Teaching strategies, the classroom vibe, all seemed to be of a time long passed. They seemed to think she was too young and made it known to her. She described her experience as a first-time principal, saying:

> That was a hard community. It was just hard. I was kind of like a hit with the parents at the beginning. Not always, but at the beginning. With the students, obviously I love students and teachers could tell like, wow, you really care about students. Which I thought was funny, I'm like, don't you all, like don't we all? Isn't that why we're here? But that would always impress them. Like wow, you really care about them. Like you actually want to spend time with them. Because we were doing all these different programs, elementary is where you don't have a lot of people, you have like a coordinator and that's it. But I got lucky, I had somebody really good in the office who did attendance so we started these programs for incentives. My school psychologist was great. I'm actually still in touch with her. And I told her I see a lot of issues around behavior and just how students interact. Like let's start doing some groups there were all these friends with like girls' groups, like girls against girls. So we start doing these girl groups, just she and I. We're like, I don't know anything but we can talk to kids and see what's going on here. She's like, oh yeah, let's find some curriculum.
>
> So we were running this like social skills groups, which I loved and I don't get to do that now. But I was used to doing that because in elementary you have to do everything because you don't have a lot of personnel. So just you and you hope an office person's really good too who can help you. And then the district hired these data people who were classified but they're supposed to run all your data, your common assessments,

> your whatever. And she was incredible. And I was just like, God you're so bright, why don't you have a better job, she's got credentials. Like you're really good at this. But she was excellent with all the database systems and so we started systematizing, I started releasing teachers to collaborate, because I was used to doing that in my other that's how we did. And the teachers were like, nobody's ever asked us if we want to collaborate or we need time to plan. And some really took to that and it was really exciting. So I think the 1st year was really exciting.

In the midst of all of this exciting change and a new beginning, she did run into some complications, most notably with some of her out-of-classroom staff. Her coordinator was ineffective, often falling asleep during meetings. Her secretary was also problematic and ineffectual. She later learned, however, the two were very connected in the district. She talked about her secretary's behavior, saying:

> Later I find out these things, so again that's not my forte, these political games that people play, I'm better now. I'm so much better now. I'm good now, almost. But then I was naïve and thought, aren't we all here for the kids? She was very political, very powerful, very well connected, and very incompetent. So I was just like, well you can't write or read or understand things. So why would I ask you to do anything for me? But then she started getting kind of mad about that. Like, "Well I'm the main secretary, and you should come to me for everything." But I was like, but you don't know how to do that. Like if I ask you give me such and such report, you don't know how to work that data.

When she spoke to the superintendent about her issues with the two, he initially appeared ready to help her and told her to "get rid of" the coordinator. He said, "he is keeping you down and we need you to do something with that school, that school's been underperforming for decades." He also encouraged her to remove the secretary as well. Alma, unfortunately, learned later he was all talk.

Alma, new and admittedly naïve, left the meeting with the superintendent empowered to confront and transfer the two staff members. She reflected on what happened next as a complete failure to understand district politics and the strength of deep-seated community ties. She said:

> So I talk to the coordinator and then the HR person says, "Well we got to do it today because the board meetings tomorrow." And I'm like really, it's all happening superfast. So I do and I tell him, oh you know what, they're going to move you. And he's like, "What? Oh, this isn't over." He totally—he was like this sleepy guy was always falling asleep—his face, everything changed. Like oh no, you're not doing this. And I'm like, what did I just do? So he goes, tells this other clerk who is also very well connected like a [union] worker, the board member because she's invested in the city and again, it's a small community, everybody knows everybody. She's like, "You're going do what to so and so? I don't think so." And then all the sudden everybody turns against me. Like from the next day I come in and everybody's like, we're not even going to talk to you anymore.

Alma reached out to the superintendent again to confirm she was following his direction, but he reneged, and she felt as if she was left out on her own. Although she described this time in her career as "awful," she also said "it was such a good learning experience in a way."

The teacher union representative, shortly after the fallout, called her to classroom to have, what Alma described as a "secret meeting." The teacher told her how well-liked she was, how much better students were performing, especially in the bilingual education department who had felt so neglected for years, and how morale had increased. Alma said she also confided in her, "no one's going help you now pretty much," and broke it down for Alma: "These are like untouchable people and you decided to go for the untouchables." Alma recalled saying, "How would I have known?" The teacher responded to her, "But the superintendent chose not to tell you." Alma, reflecting on the conversation, said:

> It was a man, he was a man. A man. A man who's like 1,000 years old. He was and he still is. I was like, oh my God, once that teacher kind of broke down some things and I talked to other people and they started telling. . . . Including the former principal, the female principal, I called her because in the end we kind of made up, and I was very grateful for everything I had learned from her. And she was like oh, here's what happened. She's like breaking it down for me, all these political connections. Oh that person is related to this board member, and that board member is duh, duh, duh, duh. And I was like, oh, how come nobody tells. . . . And I think part of it is, I used to work in the Northern part of the district. This [city], this other part. Nobody tells you. How would you know? And again, I was very naïve. I just thought, oh come on, the world just wants to get better and I'm here to make it better too. And that's why they put me here.

Alma was pregnant at the time and went on maternity leave near the end of that school year. A few weeks later, she received a letter from human resources telling her she was reassigned. She was disappointed because she felt as if she had only started and had "so much to

finish at that school." She called the human resources office and, after speaking to various people, finally found one who would talk. Alma remembered her saying, "I want to tell you something probably nobody's going tell you which is, one, nobody's going give you a good answer, you just have to accept these things, you just have to go with them, you do what they tell you, you can't just." Alma described feeling "disturbed" by the realization she would be moved because she tried to improve her school. She spent that summer feeling angry.

Despite the setback and bad feelings, Alma returned from maternity leave to start at another school. She recalled:

> I show up at my other new elementary school and, of course it's like a small town so everybody knows and they're all looking at me like, so people will come up to me and be like, I'm so sorry about what happened to you, they shouldn't have done that. But they have these faces where I'm like. . . . I don't even know, I don't even know why do you know anything happened to me. But I'm like, huh, that's so interesting. And I'm just having a really hard time because, again, we go to meetings and then they've assigned a person to cover when I was on leave, she then became the principal, also very well connected. But she feels really bad for me. She's like, "I'm so sorry, I was not trying to take over your school, that's not why I came."

Alma had mentored the new principal, but held no ill will toward her. Despite still being upset with the superintendent who initially made her feel he would support her, she eventually grew to like to her new school, especially students and families, and "the buzz around" her among employees died down.

A New Beginning

As Alma attempted to reconcile her negative feelings over what had transpired and give her new school her everything, she found it more difficult than she thought it would be. When she saw an opening for a K–12 span school in a large, urban district, she immediately knew she had to apply. She recalled her state of mind, saying:

> I'm still really angry and I still feel really like, you guys are such. . . . Just so many other things that happened in the district that I just felt like, this is so wrong. The level of corruption and nepotism and why people deciding on somethings versus others. Just all based on like, well that's my friend, of course he has to get that contract or of course . . . It's so bad. It was so disappointing. I just was like, it was awful. But you know, I start. And then, lo and behold, I see this email from [my former university] looking for a principal for the community school. And I read it and I'm like, is there a place like this on Earth? Because it sounds so amazing to me.

Although the school year had already begun and she had already made changes her staff and faculty were excited about, she was even more excited about the opportunity to work at a school where the mission was closely aligned to her own. After she spoke to her husband, whom she described as her "conscience," she decided to take a chance. She recalled:

> So then, that is again one of those, like it's midnight and I should start working on my application now. So we did. So I start working on the application that same night. My husband's like, he's always like super helpful and supportive. He's like, I'll look for your transcripts, they need all these things. He's like, "where are your documents?" I'm like, in the files, transcripts you know. So he's like scanning things and. . . . Anyway, we put

together the whole thing, we submit it in like 1 or 2 days. And then I'm just waiting. And then I get an interview and I come here [to her current site]. And I'm like, oh my god.

At her interview she toured the school and started to recognize where she was. It was the site of an old building she would pass in the mornings on the way to middle school; she was in the neighborhood where she grew up. She described her feelings of the realization, saying:

> I'm like, it hits me, I'm like, oh my god. Because it feels like this whole circle. Like I lived here, this is where I grew up, I go out, I go to this other district. . . and now I'm back. It just kind of hit me, like oh my god. Because, in many ways I had always wanted to come back to this area to work. But once I left for [the former district], it just felt really removed and different and I felt like, oh I wonder if I'll ever get a chance to work near the community where I grew up. And so like all these things come back to me, like oh my god. Now I'm here. After all that I've been through I get to come back. And I got the position.

A Difficult Transition

She described the resignation letter to her former superintendent as one of the most pleasurable experiences she has ever had. She acknowledged, "it's probably very petty and bad," but walking into his office and handing him the letter left her not only with a sense of relief, but a sense of empowerment. Although excited and reinvigorated about starting at a new school, it was not without challenges. The school had only been open for a few years and only had one previous principal. It was created by a group of social justice-minded educators and had an incredibly strong partnership with a large university. She recalled her 1st year as a real push and pull from her teachers and staff, saying:

> So you think about all the little pieces that inform who you are and how you get to where you are and then I think, now I get to be here. The 1st year was really, I tell people yeah, I still have scars that are very visible from that 1st year, you guys really, a lot of you were not super nice to me. But I do, now I see how people were pushing back on me and how much of it stretched me and helped me grow as a leader. To fully embrace a much more kind of socially just perspective. And I always tell teachers now you know, it's thanks to you and how you see things that I become braver as a formal leader and I push back too. And thanks to the way things have been set up here from the beginning as an infrastructure that I then get to be more and do more.

Alma also described other difficulties of being at this new school. No longer in a suburban area, she was now working in a large, urban district, a city she knew well as a middle and high school student, the city she lived in after immigrating from Guatemala, but one she was no longer familiar with. With most of her teaching career spent in suburbs, albeit not entirely affluent or well-to-do suburbs, they were certainly not like the urban space where she had landed. She described the transition:

> But it's been so hard. I think there's been a couple of times when I really have wanted to just walk out of it. Like it's just too much. And I think it's always the student piece and the trauma and that emotional thing that I, that it has taken me this long, because now I'm at a better place, at a healthier place. Then now I can say now I know how to deal with it. But initially, at first it was just hard getting used to, I think especially the teachers. The parents, the students, that's always, to me been like a strength, it's easier for me to connect there than the teachers per se. Because sometimes I don't agree with, I have a

really high standard about what students should be learning and doing. And it's very hard for me to hear, well it's just so hard.

Alma connected with families and students and saw herself and her family in them. She had a difficult time reconciling some of things teachers would say or do. Although they considered themselves socially just and progressive, Alma did not always see examples demonstrating those qualities. She shared:

> Anytime I hear it go back to the student, like they're not doing something, they're not something, especially here because I feel like, actually I'm one of your students, I'm pretty sure we can do it. Like if I did it, I'm pretty sure they can do, because they're just like me and their family. . . . Like when they talk about their home situations, their home lives, how they live in small, tiny spaces. Yeah, that's how I grew up. So you can't tell me that it's impossible. That it's not that the parents don't care, whatever. And now I know, there's other things and I know I also come from a very stable family, two parent household, you know, very different. But I also know the potential is there. So there was some friction around those things.

Although her recollection of this friction between her and her staff was one of the reasons she deemed the school to be one of the hardest jobs she has had, there were bigger, and certainly more complex issues that made her transition to this school so challenging. Alma did eventually earn the respect of her faculty and staff, but managing the work in a community where challenges seemed wide-ranging and multifaceted, started taking a toll early and was not as easily resolved. She confided:

And then the student piece. I think that's been hard, like I said. I think eventually, and really even going to therapy—this is TMI—but eventually I just had to go see someone about what I was experiencing and feeling about my job. And about the role we play in people's lives and students. Because you see so much trauma and so many awful things. I think for me the most traumatic was we had a student who is now in prison for murder. And when the police came with his picture as a suspect I just remember feeling so destroyed, like imploding. And I tell people I almost never knew what would be worse. To think that your student was the one who was murdered or that he was the murderer. And he just, because we had had other things with students happen that same semester, by the time this happened I was just like, I can't do this. I can't do it anymore. And I just felt that, even some of my habits just weren't as healthy. Even drinking. And I tell people, it's not so much the amount, it's the frequency.

And then you think, okay, I'm doing this every day now. Because I need to relax and I need to. . . . And then you start thinking this is not healthy. And then again, I feel, for me, I always need to figure out things. So I started calling it PTSD. I was like, it's like PTSD. Because I was listening to all these podcasts about. . . . I know, I don't know why. . . . About veterans and what they felt and sort of the space they were living in but also almost the rush of the combat. And then coming back because on weekends sometimes I really miss the school. I just wanted the level of excitement and craziness and you just want to stay in that space. And I'm like, that's not okay. That's not good.

After speaking with her school's psychiatric social worker, who confirmed there was such a thing as compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, she was relieved what she was feeling had a name and she could research it.

This feeling of unraveling, as Alma called it, began to happen after 2–3 years at the school. At that particular time, she said, there were "some really awful things" that happened to some students. She described an incident where she had to recommend expulsion for a student who was victimizing a younger student:

> Oh my god, I just left that meeting and I was just crying. Like, oh my god what did we do? And then you think about all of them, right. The older student, what he's been through that would create that condition and the little one and what he had to deal with. And the parent. And then the grandma was there because the mom had just come out of jail—I said these crazy stories, right—she's just come out of jail, she makes an illegal U-turn. The cop stops her and I guess she had an outstanding something else, so he takes her back. So she never makes it to the hearing to see her son, who's the victim. And he's all sad because he thought mom was coming. And I am just like. . . . This is an awful world. It's so unfair. Then you see like, poverty, incarceration. Like all these things just compound to make some children's lives impossible. And so the fact that they're here, that they're alive is like we should all just be clapping every day. Yay, you're here, you're alive.

Alma said these series of incidents just wore on her more and more and she decided to make a commitment to stop drinking, to make herself and her health a higher priority. She started to read

more about vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue as way to understand why she and other educators often fall victim to these.

Challenges With District Leaders

Alma's challenges not only came from within the school, with teachers and students, but also from district. In the 7 years she had worked in the district, she had seven different directors. Some relationships have been "cordial," as she described, and some had been extremely strained, even adversarial; none have really worked well for her. She said:

> I know some people had loved their directors and they've been great. But for me that has never been the case. And I think, I do, because I can get feisty too. I'm like, you know if you don't treat me then I'm just going give it right back. Like I'm not going to just be like, oh I don't want to lose my job I'll just be nice and quiet even though you're kind of insulting me. I'm not going do that. So then my, like my third director told me, he's like you know, you're really should start thinking about how you interact with us. Because you are building a reputation for being difficult. Which of course didn't sit well with me at all, right. Because then it's like a student, I swear I'm still like a teenager in that respect.

Just a few years ago, one of directors and district leaders attempted to have her demoted, but the school community and faculty from a partner university fought hard to ensure that did not happen. Although she did not get into specifics, the experience, although it wore on her a great deal, gave her new insight and perspective. While going through the ordeal, she confided in two more veteran, female principals from an outside-of-district organization she belonged to and,

despite knowing them for some time, was shocked to learn both had been through similar experiences. She described the encounter:

> And I was like, why didn't you tell me that? Why doesn't anybody tell you these things will happen for these reasons. . . or politically you need to be strategic about . . . I feel like there's this whole hidden agenda, like the hidden curriculum, that nobody tells you about as a formal leader. Like somebody should tell you, hey be mindful of these things, be strategic, be more thoughtful, mind these things.

She described how she had asked these women leaders, who had many more years of experience than she does, how they can do this "insane job" and they would tell her, "Well you just finished another year, right? You just finished another year." Alma said they started to share more stories with her and opened up about their experiences and learnings. She recalled:

> And they were like, "But you do learn how to be much more strategic and political. You do learn how to navigate the game better to always make sure your school's going to be okay and that you're going to be okay. That's an important learning." They're like, "So appreciate that. You now have this and yeah, it was really hard when it was happening and it might have been a different outcome, you still would've learned that there are things that you always, in any system, have to think about. But there are ways to do that and it's why you should get to know board members and should get to know the community and do these other things. Because then you sort of create like a buffer almost around you and your school."

Navigating the Politics

Alma did learn a great deal from that experience 2 years ago and took the principals' stories to heart. In the 2 years since her near demotion, she has seen incredible growth, not only in her school community, but in own savviness when it comes to district politics. She described a recent visit with members of the staff of one of the school board members and other district personnel. After the meeting, she described a discussion with a district person that was uplifting, saying:

> She was like, "You were so good. I saw you how you were talking to all those people" and, you know, I didn't know some of them, that was like the first thing and I thought oh, whatever. She's like, "You were so good. Your conversation and then you like move from one person to the other person" and she's like, "I really admire that; how have you learned how to do that?" And then it totally hit me, I was like, you thought I was good, because you're you, you're just doing it. But I was like, oh my god, I have clearly gotten better at this.
>
> She's like, "Yeah, that's so great. How have you learned that, how do you know what to say or what to do. You were so consistent." I was like, you're right. Like it was almost like, I was! Oh my god, I have learned a few things about how to navigate that world. And you sort of listen to them and pay attention to them and you're like, oh, that's how I'm supposed to do it. Instead of naively thinking, oh I'll just do, you know. So I think that's a lot better and it doesn't bring me as much stress as it used to. And I'm okay with that. Like I'm fine.

Alma described she learned being more politically savvy could be of great benefit to her as well. If someone from the Board of Education or the district needed her with little notice, she would say yes because she knew she could later leverage those relationships to help her school with resources. The way she saw it, building relationships could be mutually beneficial.

Leading as a Latina

When I asked Alma about her think about her experiences as a Latina leader, she stated it was important to her to look at her leadership through the lens as a woman of color. In her previous district, Latinxs were definitely the majority and although there are many Latino leaders in her current district, it was certainly more diverse. As a former elementary school principal and current K–12 span school principal, she noticed some striking gender differences; in elementary school, women principals are much more the norm, but that is not the case in secondary circles, where men tend to dominate. Alma described some gender differences she saw:

> And then I see female leaders versus male leaders and I do think we are seen differently. And I do think men do get away with a lot of things that a woman would never get away with. Even the way we dress, even the. . . . I'm just like a woman could never just do that. And you know it and you know sometimes I question things because people think, because that's happened here in this district too, I feel people have said, actually one of my directors told me, she's like, "You know, you need to stop talking about race, because you're Latina and you're going to make other people feel bad and you just sound angry." I was like, White people feel bad? I was like, my God, that is exactly. . . . And she went on and on and I was like, "Actually, you just defined privilege, which is why I bring up these things."

Although perturbed by the conversation with her director, Alma also later thought to herself, “Be the angry brown girl . . . the only person who could speak about that is the brown girl, because she’s the only one who’s actually living it and sensing it.” Alma described an incident when she, the director, and other principals were on a hiring committee together, saying:

> I brought up the issue of representation, because we had different candidates and some of the candidates were White, some of the candidates were Latino who had grown up around here. So I said, “I think it’s important for us to think about who represents the complex in both race, ethnicity, and the experience of having grown up around here. I think that makes a difference and I think it makes a difference for our students. And representation is really important.” I said, “when you’re a minority, when you see the first whatever, you’re like oh my god, really, I could do that too.” There’s something really meaningful about representation. It wasn’t even like I went off on like White people are the oppressors or something.

Although Alma felt she was very clear in her intentions to bring light to representation, one of her colleagues, a White man, she said, became upset.

After Alma voiced her opinion, the director effectively shut down the conversation by stating the hiring committee could not use representation as a factor in their decision making because it was not in the original criteria they were using. Later, after the interviews, the director called Alma to say she “was making people feel uncomfortable.” This surprised Alma because she never mentioned the words Latino or Latina or even White privilege; again, as she said, she was simply trying to argue for representation. Alma was not sure if the director would have said

anything if the gentlemen had not brought up his own discomfort. She was also surprised no one on the hiring committee agreed with her point of view; they just stayed quiet. She recalled:

> Everybody just quiets down. And I think it's in part because it is uncomfortable. And that's why people don't talk about it. And when it's about us. And I think yeah, I think that was really hard and I think it's still sort of an issue and sometimes I see that though as a person of color. If you're the one bringing up something, then all of a sudden people are uncomfortable. But I don't see the same level of discomfort if a White person says, well if we look at accents or privilege then everybody nods. And everybody's like applauding this White person for bringing it up. Like we should all be so happy, right. But if we bring it up, it has this level of discomfort to people, even people of color themselves are like, oh I don't want to talk about that. Don't bring it up. Or don't put me with you. And I think I find that just really interesting because I feel I see that and I think that that's really interesting.

I asked Alma if she felt any improvement in how colleagues or coworkers perceived issues of race/ethnicity or gender identity over her career. She stated:

> In my experience it hasn't gotten a lot better, at least not from the bigger district. Like I think in our school we were more open to talk about those things. And again, I think it's how people, the level of discomfort, how they feel obviously has to do with where they are in their own issues and identity and what they think. Not so much to do with what you might say or imply by what you're saying. Even the questions you ask, which is really interesting. But people will make of it whatever they . . . I just think that that privilege is still very . . . because right after that the same director said, "I think one of the problems

with our students is that they don't have enough White people in their lives." That was right after that other thing about me not saying anything. And I was like, did you just say that, because, boy there was such a deficit because I did not have enough White people around me growing up. Like you just said that? Out loud? I was just like, oh my god. So see how then, right, that burden of proof, the burden of whatever, is always put on the person of color. Because there's something wrong with you and if you only had all these White people to learn from you'd be so much better. You'd have an easier time. As opposed to, well no, this system of oppression was created to make sure somebody was left out. That's why it was created. It's a construct. There is nothing better, inherently, about being White or this. That was a construct. Just like class, just like all these things. They're constructs to benefit a particular group of people. I was like, oh my god is this the most. . . . But what's interesting is, I thought, oh my god that's the most assimilationist thing I've heard in a long time. Really, in this community you think what they need is to be around more White people? So yay for all the gentrification because now they'll be better, finally.

Reflection

A few weeks after her initial interview, Alma had the opportunity to reflect when we met for a second time. As she looked back on her life and leadership trajectory, she was very aware of the many complexities of her life that informed who she had become. Growing up in a developing country emerging from civil wars and subsequent power struggles with oppressive dictators, watching her family members protesting politics, and coming to the United States in

middle school and learning to navigate her way schooling and a new life, were all major influencers in who she would become. She shared:

> I think at first it's just kind of happening to you, but I think later in your life you do decide what things you're keeping, what things you're adopting, which things you just reject that are never going to be part of you. And you also accept, I think, who you become through that process of immigration and adaptation. And I think all of that leads me to know now, and really embrace this idea of a leadership that is very open, that is inclusive, that is very much in dialogue with the community all the time. Sometimes I don't always agree with what people may bring forward, even parents or their philosophies or how they might see things, but I do value that space to just listen and engage.

After 7 years at her current site, Alma shared she loved her job, in large part because she had been able to build capacity in her staff to the point where much of the work she used to do, she no longer had to; she had empowered her them to take on leadership roles. She enjoyed when people on her staff take an idea and "added their own imagination" to it, made it richer and more complex.

Alma did not have the need to control everything around her. Although she described many of her staff members as alphas, but she was not; she said she was humble and did not need much attention or recognition. She did, however, express her frustration it was hard for those in positions above her to see this way of working could actually work better. She shared:

> I think what's been hard is sort of showing the systems where I've worked that that's the way to go. I feel like nobody believes me, at least in the bigger system. But I see people

> just hold on to this construct and these hierarchies. I think that really always just gets me going and makes me very angry. And then I think that's where we've gone all wrong. And I think that that's why the system in the end keeps producing the same things, because there's just these little pockets where you really have shared leadership, real ownership in the community, and then the rest is just one monster after another.

Alma wished the system encouraged leaders to work with their faculties and staff to collaborate in creation of a true shared vision and mission, instead of reinforcing a top-down model.

Reflection on Leadership as a Latina

Alma said what made women better leaders than men was their ability to multitask "because that's what they do in everyday life all the time." Women principals she knew, she said, were "Just so much more open, I think, and genuine . . . when I hear them talk about their schools, the projects, the initiatives." She felt instead of focusing on themselves, they talked about people with whom they worked. In contrast, she felt male principals she knew talked used "I" statements much more often than "we" statements and did not readily acknowledge their colleagues' contributions.

Alma acknowledged, as a Latina, she has always been encouraged to see the "collective way of looking at things" and felt family was important in making decisions, but because her family in the United States is relatively small, it was less of an issue for her. She shared:

> So, I feel a little different in that sense. And I do appreciate, in some ways, the . . . I think the more American. . . . Although, maybe it's more just White American, . . . Kind of like, "Oh, you're on your own" thing. Like this is some individual freedom. Not individualistic. Like, it's just about me. But rather the freedom that you get. So, sort of

> reinvent yourself. Sometimes without your family, in some ways. Like, it's just you. And I appreciate that, I think.

Alma said she has been drawn to social justice movements since college and felt she has become even more pulled into that work. She was currently in a doctoral program and excited the program's focus was on social justice leadership. She reflected on her studies on social justice, saying:

> Like, I'm studying it, thinking, "Oh, yeah. That is what it is, and that is why I do things differently." I'm definitely trying to reimagine a new space for public education for leadership for schools, and I'm actually in a position where I can do it.

Alma felt her unique background (e.g., gender, ethnicity, schooling) allowed her to occupy a place privilege; she believed her background offered her leverage in a work toward positive change in the system.

Reflecting on Spirituality and Leadership

Alma identified herself as a practicing Catholic who has always loved to "study different philosophies." She felt Eastern philosophies were especially fascinating to her and allowed her to understand no one person is any more important than another and it was important to keep a sense of detachment toward ideas. She described her belief in a "liberatory Catholicism." She shared:

> I feel like that love, and the love of God, and Jesus, and those teachings really have to do with loving yourself, loving others, accepting and embracing everything, which is why I don't even believe in constructs like sin. Like a novel, that was made up. That's just a way to control.

She felt lucky to have found progressive ministries and churches who have given her a place to worship in love. Prayer, she said, was energizing for her and her religion, whom she shares with her children, has become a legacy for her family; a place of comfort she hoped will stay with them.

Her Mother's Enduring Influence

Alma's mother had passed away recently, and it was clear she was an incredibly strong force in life and her leadership identity. She recalled:

> I think my mom was such a giving person and had a really strong sense of justice for everything. She questioned things a lot. I think that's one of the things she taught us to do, including formal religion. She was very Catholic, but also was very explicit about, "Well, this is what men created." Literally, men. So, that's not the love of Jesus Christ, or the teachings, or God. Right? That has nothing to do with it. And then, "These are articles of faith and that's what they are." So, she was good about that, I think. And she was always very just about what was the right thing to do, regardless of who the person was or what they represented.

Her mother, Alma shared, believed justice could be fought for and obtained without having to dehumanize others in the process. She believed in peaceful, nonviolent protests and punishment should never take away one's humanity.

Alma had recently thought about her mother when her teachers went on strike and were not being kind to other staff who were crossing picket lines. She said:

> Regardless of what the fight was and who you thought was on your side or wasn't, being disrespectful, and hurting people, and scaring them, or standing by that . . . I'm having a

> hard time embracing and saying that was right because I feel like my mom would be like, "No. You don't do that."

She said at times like those she often channeled her mother and questioned herself when she does not call out wrongs in the moment. She also did it when she considered whether to move students who were academically or behaviorally challenged. She said she would "think a lot about their humanity and how they belong" to the community as much as anyone else. She had a difficult time pushing students out when she thought of her mother's teachings. She shared:

> They don't disappear. They might not be in front of us, but that doesn't mean that as a society, as a community, we really supported them, so that in the future, they're much better off than where they are now. You know? They're just being an inconvenience, almost, to us because they have difficulties. Like, whatever. You know? Behavior, or academic, or . . . I just worry about that, I think, sometimes. Even for a social justice school, that people are like, "Well, what are we going to do with so-and-so? Isn't there another place for them to go?" I'm like, "What other place?" You know?

Alma felt her teachers and staff were often short-sighted about moving a child with problems out; she said, "They'll come back to us because we're all in the world."

Next Steps

Alma was amazed she has been a principal at her site for 7 years and knew she wanted to be there for at least another 2, especially because she was in the doctoral program. She also loved she had family, nieces and nephews, and children of her friends who attended her school and were proud of it. She did, however, think her tenure would probably end in the next few years. Change, she said, was not a bad thing. She did worry, to some extent, about her successor. She

worked with an assistant principal who was a founding member of the school and Alma believed she was the obvious choice, but worried about the district's control over the hiring of a new principal. She said, "They think that just throwing things out, blowing it up all the time for no reason . . . is the way to go." Alma said it worried her, but she was also comforted in knowing her school community is not only resilient, they are empowered and will speak up if they are ultimately not happy with whomever is selected.

Being back in school had given Alma a chance to really explore other options for her future. She shared:

> And so, now I'm really like, "Oh, my God. Maybe I should explore life in academia and really start planning for that, whether it happens or not, but start setting myself up for that." I'm going to submit a proposal for a paper. I think I'm just going to do that. Like everything, I'm going to look for opportunities and ways to start getting my name out there, wherever that leads me. I think I would love to become a dean of students somewhere, and help. . . . Because now there's first gen centers. There's all these programs coming up and developing in different university systems and the community college, and I would love to do that.

Having worked with elementary through high school students who are immigrants or whose families are immigrants, made her wonder how she could help serve those students at the next level, as they navigate complexities of higher education. She was excited about the prospect of this future work.

Closing Thoughts

When asked if she had any final comments about her role as a Latina leader, she shared she was glad there were so many more of use than there had been in the past. She also wondered:

> I wish there was a better way to unify our voices to really critique the system a little bit more since there's so many of us. Otherwise. . . . Yeah. I think that there's a power in numbers, and I wish many of us were a little bit more critical rather than. . . . Including myself. Like, how am I standing up or how am I questioning things? Am I asking questions around race, and class, and immigration status, and all of these things to keep pushing back on the system. I think that that would be really good.

She recalled many, if not most, of her former coworkers in the suburban district were Latinos, as were students and families. She said, however, many educators were many generations removed and do not lead with a progressive, social justice mindset. Alma ended by sharing she felt what was needed was to "push back and have a more radical arm of Latino educators really pushing back and sort of deconstructing things for people all the time."

Bella

Background and Early Years

Bella is the youngest of 10 children. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico before she was born, in the late 1950s, early1960s. Her father brought with him only a second-grade education; her mother completed the eighth grade. Education, Bella said, was extremely important to her parents; consequently, all 10 of their children graduated from college. She spoke proudly of her siblings, the majority of whom are also in the field of education, some of the others in the medical field and sciences.

Bella grew up in a household that taught her to be proud about her Mexican heritage. She shared:

> We spoke Spanish at home and I danced Folklorico since I was 4 years old. We didn't really celebrate Cinco de Mayo, we celebrated Independence Day. We would go to the city hall and Mexican celebrities would lead the celebrations in city hall and we would attend those. We would attend any places that would celebrate Folklorico dancing or Mariachi. I grew up with that. I just thought that's how everybody . . . that everybody had two cultures. You had where your lived and where your parents came from, right?

Bella grew up, and still lives in, a northeast neighborhood of Los Angeles, a neighborhood once considered working class and largely Latino, but has recently experienced gentrification. Bella was the product of both public and Catholic schools. She went to the local public elementary school, but "got into trouble" at the local middle, so her parents enrolled her in a parochial school. When it came time to transition to high school, she tried the local large, comprehensive high school, but did not like it and returned to a parochial program. Bella did quite well in school and was accepted one of the prestigious University of California colleges in her senior year of high school.

As the youngest child, Bella felt she did not have much of a voice at home; she was often told she was "too little" to participate in conversations at the dinner table. She described how this somewhat frustrating scenario actually served her well outside of her home and especially in school, saying:

> Even when the table started getting smaller because everybody started going off to college, I still didn't have a voice, but I was a great listener and when I would go to

school and I would have these conversations with my teachers, they're like, "What are you talking about? Why are you having these adult issues? Why are you talking about these adult issues? That's interesting."

I would talk about who Martin Luther King was and how profoundly he had an impact on Latinos or on my family or how The Beatles were such a great influence in youth culture. This was, as a 5 year old, a 6 year old, a 7 year old. They were very intrigued by that. What they would do is they would have me lead discussions. I would be the leader in the pod.

Bella credited school for helping her discover her leadership potential early on, recalling:

I was always the youngest. The teachers really helped me develop my leadership skills and I took that home so when I didn't have a voice within my family, I would get all the neighborhood kids and we'd play school for instance. I was a teacher and my dad would set up a tent in the backyard and that was our little school house or when my sisters wanted to play with me, they would let me lead the whatever we were playing. I would put these plays together. They weren't mine. . . . I would get *Gone with the Wind*, I would get all our Folklorico dresses and make us wear them so we could have these big old dresses. Anyway, then they would encourage me to run for student leadership and I was like, "Oh, oh."

Then my other siblings ran for student leadership. I already knew what I needed to do based on what I saw. I just mimicked them, "Oh, that's what I have to do." I only mimicked what my older siblings did. Then that's what I did in elementary school, that's what I did in junior high school, that's what I did in high school.

Growing up the youngest of child in large family, Bella was confident in herself and her abilities; she was liked by teachers and adults, she was active in her community and she sought out leadership opportunities.

Bella's family was active in political marches and actions, especially those who protested plights of Central Americans. She said:

> In the 80s, Central America was going through civil unrest and these two Catholic priests that really pushed for the idea of social justice and impoverished nations and they were one of other two fathers that were leading the cause here in LA and my family was very much involved because we also. . . . We got this from my grandfather on my mother's side.

Bella was proud of her Chicana/Latina heritage, but did not necessarily see that as the only defining piece of who she was. Bella shared, "It wasn't until I was in college where, I didn't have an existential crisis, but I was questioning why we had to segregate ourselves by calling us Chicanos or Mexican."

College Experience

Bella was not surprised to get accepted to large, prestigious university right after high school, in fact she had expected she would go there her whole life. She had spent much of her childhood at the university; three of her siblings were alumni. Although she applied to other schools, Bella said she "knew she was going there" because, she shared, "We studied there, I spent weekends there; I knew the campus, it was familiar to me. That's how it was my whole life." She expected much from the university—a top-notch education, a love of learning, and

life-long connection, but what she did not expect was how much she would have to confront the issue of her identity, her ethnicity. Bella said:

> I grew up in the era of multicultural movement right out of the 60s, after the. . . . Right when desegregation was unfolding in the nation. I grew up watching Big Blue Marble, we're one human race. I grew up with the philosophy of we're one human race and I've always. I never, ever doubted that. . . . I never questioned my identity. It was really odd when I would get asked, "What are you." I'm like, "I'm a human being." That's how I would respond. Not to say that my family did not celebrate our Mexican heritage because we did.

Once at college, she felt an immediate need to attach herself to groups and organizations as way to make friends, get involved, and find assistance. The first organization she gravitated toward was the "affirmative action program," which helped students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students not only navigate the university system, but also lent assistance to those who may need to shore up any academic deficiencies that they may have had. Bella first sought them out for tutoring help with math and writing but learned "they also offered culture shock workshops and acculturation workshops because fraternities and sororities at the time dominated the campus." Bella recalled:

> For me, that was foreign. It was foreign for me to be treated as a second-class citizen. I didn't know that was happening as it was happening and it wasn't until I learned about discrimination and so forth. I found myself very angry a lot, having to justify myself. I even had a TA with my statistics class say, "I'm really mad because you deserve an A, but because of the student, he was always in the professor's office, the professor . . .

> because the professor did a bell curve, he decided to give this other Caucasian male the A even though I know who was more participatory and who really knew the subject because I had you in my class." I was like, that's also what first-generation students go through. Then I felt that. The disadvantages of first generation.

As a first-generation college student, Bella was not aware of the importance of what she called "networking," something she felt this White male student knew how to do. It was not until her 4th or 5th year she started to engage in that. She said, "The whole concept of networking and making sure that the professors knew your name and making sure you'd become personable, all of that I learned late in the game and all of those skills I'm going to teach my daughter."

As Bella felt "confronted" by these issues of identity, of being a first-generation college student, she felt she "had to find a group so that I can feel a part of a subculture of [the university] so I didn't feel so alone even though there were other ways I could have done it." Bella felt that compelled her to join with fellow Latino and Chicano groups, but was somewhat uneasy with this type of connection, a connection to others based solely on her ethnic or racial background. She stated, "Had I been a musician, I could have been in the music department, had I been a dancer, I could have been in the dancing department." Even with this uneasiness, she did affirm her connections to these groups had many positives. She stated she believed it "was important for us to put a stamp and to say we're doing this as a way for us to see what the fabric of our society looks like" but she continued on to say sometimes these groups almost encouraged as sense of "reverse discrimination" in their practices as well. Bella clarified her statement by adding:

> Because even within the Latinos in college, they had this debate of we can't hang out with other Latinos because they don't understand the Chicano class and I'm just like, "You know what? What's the human cause of this all? What are we fighting for? Because let me tell you, the first people on that frontline over there helping the people in central America were nuns and priests and they were not all necessarily Latinos. They were from all . . . There were some nuns that were killed because they were caught by the death squads and so forth.
>
> There were some Argentinians, some Chileans that were just down for the cause as well, but they were ostracized by the Chicanos and I wasn't down for that. I think if we all are for the same cause as making sure that we're all treated with respect, we're all treated with. . . . That we're all in this fight against social injustice, then it doesn't matter where you come from.

For Bella, the term Chicano was complex and more all-encompassing than a word used to simply describe one's ethnic background. She continued to share:

> In fact, if you're White and you want to do that, you're a Chicano too. For me, Chicano is not a racial term or it doesn't identify my culturally, it doesn't identify me racially. It identifies with me politically. That's how I see it. As I got older, I'm a mother. You're going to ask me how I identify myself? I'm a mother because I don't care where you come from, we're all human beings.

One of the groups Bella joined in her freshman year in college was the staff of the Chicano-Latino newspaper called *La Gente*. The staff of the newspaper was small, and to her surprise, she became an editor at the end of her freshman year. Bella did not consider herself a

writer, but because she had great organizational skills and knew how to delegate tasks, the newspaper staff looked to her for guidance, much to her chagrin. She spent nearly every day at the newspaper's office, oftentimes going in on weekends to keep with the newspaper's publishing schedule. Although Bella questioned how, as a freshman, she could possibly obtain such a high-level, demanding position, she also stated, "I've always just naturally inclined to leadership positions."

When it came to declaring a major, Bella felt somewhat lost. Although she had done everything she felt like she was supposed to do, no one had explicitly explained to her the process of deciding what is was one wanted to study, let alone do for the rest of one's life. She stated:

> I got here because that's what I was expected to do. I was like, "Okay, after elementary school, it's middle school. After middle school, it's high school. After high school, it's college. After college, it's graduate school." That's all I knew ever since I was little. Then after that, I just didn't know. I was stuck. I was like, "Why didn't you guys tell me?" It's like, "I don't know what I want to study." My siblings said, "Just whatever you're passionate about." I was passionate about history. I was passionate about Spanish. That's what I majored in.

By junior and senior year, she started to wonder, "What am I going to do with this?" Again, she sought advice of her siblings who encourage her to continue to seek her passion and that has continued to resonate with her throughout her life and in her career. Whenever she feels she might be in danger of losing perspective or focus she has thought, "What are you passionate

about?" Answering that question, keeping it at the forefront, she said, "has led me from point A. Passion, passion, passion."

Teacher-Leader

Bella decided she had a passion for teaching and had initially wanted to become a Spanish professor. When she was not able to secure a spot in a graduate program, she briefly "veered off to urban planning and then [she] saw the politics that that involved." After that experience, she decided the "next best thing" to teaching in college would be to teach in high school. Right after she obtained her bachelor's degree, she worked as a researcher for one of her Chicano Studies professors and was later able to teach some of their undergraduate courses. This experience helped to solidify her desire to become a secondary school teacher and reached out to one of her brothers who was teaching at a large high school in the Southeast Los Angeles area. He notified her of an open teaching position, took the California Basic Educational Skills Test and began her career 25 years ago as a Spanish teacher on an emergency credential.

Bella immersed herself in her job as a teacher, inside and outside of the classroom. Bella was the type of teacher who not only strived to ensure her students were taken care of in the classroom, but the school as whole was functioning well. At her first school, she was hands-on when they decided to install internet access point. She recalled, "I helped with the first internet connection. I did that. We were pulling wires, hard-wiring and stuff." At her next school, she focused on being an innovative teaching practices, such as project-based learning lessons, and giving her students real-world experiences, such as having her students present projects by creating a café or drama performance. She also became cheerleading adviser; she was an all-in educator at her schools.

When she was younger, Bella greatly admired the principal at her local public high school and described him as "exemplary." She knew she one day wanted to be a principal like him, but she always saw that as something she would do when she was much older, right before retirement. Not long into her teaching career, however, one assistant principal at her school asked her to consider applying for another position. She remembered him saying, "Hey, there's a coordinator position open, those are very. . . . They don't come very often because people tend to stay there forever because they're very coveted." He told her, "I really want you to think about being an administrator." Bella said she felt like he really opened the door for her. She also recalled how a woman, who was an interim principal with whom she worked with for a short while, encouraged her to apply to a fledgling administrative credential program that was about to begin a new cohort-style program in the local area. She told Bella, "I want to nominate you for this position. I think you'll be a very good principal one day." At the time only 29, Bella did not immediately take her up on that nomination, but she did apply and was accepted the following year. Bella, looking back, shared some of her thoughts at that time about becoming an administrator, saying:

> I saw APs and principals being 50 or . . . you know what I mean? I was like, "I'm not ready. I'm having too much fun doing what I'm doing." Because nobody in my family has been in administration before, that was new terrain for me, right? Then my friend did the program and she was raving about how she loved that it was all [district] people and how the teachers were also in [the district]. She's like, "Now, I understand the administrative point of view." I thought, "Oh, that's interesting." Then my couple of friends and I applied for the second year of cohort program and I loved it. I just, it made

> it seem like, "Oh, it doesn't have anything to do with age or. . . . And I have all the experience. I just need to experience other coordinatorship positions to really thrive as an assistant principal."

After she received her administrative credential, she did not feel the need to immediately seek a position in administration. She had the credential, knew she had the ability and knowledge to become to an assistant principal or other administrator, but decided waiting until she was older, closer to the end of her career, might be the best course of action. She remained a coordinator for a few years, but over 10 years ago, several former colleagues approached her with an offer. A group of teachers at her former school wrote a plan to start a new, innovative small school on a newly built site that would house several small schools. When the plan was accepted by the Board of Education, they were tasked with finding a principal and approached Bella. She shared:

> All of them knew how I ran my coordinatorship program and they knew that I would be the candidate to help them start the school. They said, "Bella, you will be in charge of operations and we'll be in charge of instruction and then until you feel comfortable doing both, then we'll work as a team."

After some consideration, she decided to take a shot and even though she did not have any previous administrative experiences, she was hired. She said:

> I don't know how many candidates they talked to, but I went in there doing my best and I ended up getting the position and I said, "Holy macaroli. How am I going to do this?" But I've never done anything easy. A freshman . . . coeditor of a newspaper, usually seniors have that position. I've never done anything easy because I always figure it out

> with the help of the people who trust me. I trusted these teachers weren't going to make. . . . They were going to make sure that I was successful because collectively, we're going to make this successful.

She recalled thinking the same thing about the editor of her college newspaper, *La Gente*, and said, "I knew she wasn't going to let me fail because she brought me on knowing that I had a certain skill that complimented her skills, right? Then I just said, 'Let's just do this.' Here I am."

The Principalship

Her first experience as an administrator was being the principal at this small high school on a shared campus that housed three other district schools and a nondistrict charter school. The learning curve was steep, but the excitement of starting a new school was energizing, certainly at first. Unfortunately, she did not feel very supported by one of her early supervisors. She recalled:

> I had one director which will remain nameless who made me feel inferior, who made me feel like my school was not to par with what exemplary instructional strategies look like or what an exemplary school looks like. It doesn't matter that we hit 756 API out of the gate our 1st year, it doesn't matter that our staff is so cohesive. It doesn't matter that we were so well organized and we passed WASC the 1st year with flying colors. That didn't matter.

Additionally, she would later come to realize many members of the staff felt their needs, not needs of the student body, not collective needs of the school community, should come before anything else; there were too many adult agendas that did not fit well with Bella's vision for the school. In addition to managing her own staff and their unique needs, she had work with and manage relationships with other administrators who shared the site with her.

Bella described her first principalship as managerial; there were so many district mandates, teacher and school initiatives, and expectations. She recalled:

> I got to see the parents who made their way into parent events and I really had a general overview of what the needs where and how we can go ahead and address those needs and we did it to the best of our ability. I just felt like every day I was like, "Check, check, check, next." I was very robotic. Yes, I did it with passion, but I didn't do it with heart because there was no time to really diagnose, dig deep like, "Let me see. Let me see this marinate. Let me enjoy it. Let me view it. Let me diagnose it and let's get to the grime of it. Let's get down and dirty and let's figure this out and let's polish it." Right? You don't have time for that.

After a few years, it became a frustrating endeavor and then, to Bella's complete amazement, she became pregnant.

For Bella, finding and realizing her passion was of ultimate importance to her, she let it drive her in college when searching for her major, she let it guide her to a career, but, she said, "For some reason family was never part of that equation. It was always career." Having her first child as an older, single mom was life-altering. She started to reconsider her position as a high school principal charged with not only leading a school's instructional program, faculty, and staff, but having to do some typical high school duties like staying at school until 10:00 p.m. for football game nights, school dances, prom and hosting late-night parent and community meetings. Although they never bothered her before, she felt they took precious time away from her newborn daughter. Bella shared:

> I became a mother at the age of 43. As I was feeding my daughter when she was a newborn, I was like, "How in the heck, why didn't I? . . . Why wasn't this in my mind sooner?" Why didn't I think. . . . All my friends were like, "Get a boyfriend, get a husband. Have a baby." Why wasn't that part of my thinking, right?

Although the school had its issues prior to Bella having her daughter, it was the realization she would have to sacrifice more than she was willing to as a mom and decided she was going to leave for a position that would better suit her needs as a mother, an educator, and as a leader. One of her biggest frustrations at the school was how they handled, or failed to handle, their students who were not succeeding, students who were receiving D and F grades. Bella called those students "at-promise youth" instead of the more commonly used term, "at-risk youth" because she believes labeling students "at risk" only exacerbates the stigma associated with being underperforming. She knew there were continuation schools in the area serving these students, but there was never any real connection between them and the traditional high schools. She said they were all in their "silos." Not really knowing much about their programs, and not knowing how to connect with them, Bella yearned to become part of a program geared toward better helping these students most in need. She recalled:

> I prayed, I prayed and one day I got a call and say, "Hey, you want to be a continuation school principal?" I said, "What?" I think I mentioned it to somebody and then this opportunity came up. I had an interview and unfortunately, I was not the teachers' first choice. They wanted somebody else because the previous principal handpicked that other person so they're like, "Okay." They were a little furious. I was dealing with that, right?

> There was a lot of things that I came into. They didn't feel like they had a voice in picking me. They had eight principals in the last 15 years.

Although it was certainly going to be a challenge, Bella made a move that would, hopefully, be better for her daughter and for her own need to find passion, motivation, and meaning in her job.

Continuation School Principal

Bella had been the principal of a continuation for over 5 years at the time of this study. In many respects, her job as a continuation school principal had much in common with her former position. She evaluated and supervised teachers, counselors, and classified staff; she did positive behavior support and disciplined students when needed; and she met with parents and the community. The scale and scope were completely different, however. Her staff consisted of only a few teachers, a clerical support person, and one custodian. Her counselors worked just 1 day at her site and traveled to other locations throughout the week. She described her role as continuation principal:

> Here, [I teach] every day. Every day for two periods. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and then Tuesday, it's all day I'm teaching. In addition to that I am—here we go—social worker. Yeah, I'm everything and I'm a counselor. I tell my kids officially, unofficially this is what your credits are and this is your prospective grad year. Officially, you need to sign up and see the guidance counselor. He only comes once a week which is Fridays and then, so kids are just like grieving or have PTSD or depression or drug use, peer pressure, relationship issues, parental relationship issues. Of course, that's why my office is like this because I'm just like, but I'm also the Title I coordinator.

She does make it known it is definitely a team effort. Although she also coordinates her English Learner program, she has a teacher going to mandated district meetings so she can spend more time on site.

A continuation school, although small, is still required to complete all of the district's compliance requirements and ensure students have access to a regular school program. Bella said doing this is "challenging but doable." She said she has asked the district for help and when she could not complete a task or is in danger of missing a deadline. A moment after talking about challenges, she said, "but it's fulfilling because, for instance, the students really feel connected to all of us and they're open about their needs." She described her school:

> This is a place for kids who are not progressing academically and who just need a little bit of TLC whether it be a probation student, a student that's on probation, whether it'd be a student who had frequent 5150s. I have kids here who are suicidal.

Bella made it a priority to create and bring programs to her school that focused on social emotional learning needs of her specific population. She believed whole-heartedly in restorative justice, a philosophy and initiative that seeks to build community and student advocacy and reduce punitive measures such as suspensions and expulsions. She also brought mindfulness programs to her schools to help students refocus their fears, anxiety, and negative emotions. She shared:

> I had a situation today, the kid came in with various 5150 transports who is now graduating, who has gone through our mindfulness program, who has gone through our restorative justice program. I was crying because I. . . . We had a new student who was her version 2 years ago when she came in. She knew exactly what the little girl was going

through. She asked if she could bring her to my office and she brought her breakfast. She goes, “Miss, can I do some mindfulness work with her?”

At the time of this study, the school’s mindfulness program was being taught by her students; they assisted in creating the curriculum for the program, which made Bella incredibly proud. The work she was doing in the school fed her soul in a way her other school could not. She said more about how she felt about the student who wanted to help the younger student:

> I almost cried because that means our programs are working. That’s what we want for them. We want to take them beyond the classroom. What we did for her, she did for this little girl. I put on spa music and she did the breathing and then she started talking to her like, “Would you like to draw?” She’s like, “Yes.” She started drawing.
>
> She goes, “What are you drawing?” I just cried. I cried and I said, “Yes.” This is a beautiful thing. I wouldn’t know that if I weren’t so invested in their day-to-day activities. That’s the difference. I know my kids inside and out. I know when they’re lying and when they’re not lying. I know what’s working and what’s not working. I can trust them, right?

Leadership Style

When I asked Bella about her leadership style, she told me something she learned from her university leadership program: “You’re only as good as your reflection.” Bella saw herself as a constant learner, always evolving, always trying new things. She believed so strongly in reflection that she did it with her students and staff:

> Whenever I see frustration on the student’s part, on the parent’s part, on the teacher’s part, that to me is telling me either my leadership style is clashing, something’s wrong,

> I'm not communicating or that my initiatives are not working, why. I see any things that are not working, I need to reflect on it and I need to improve on it. I think we always have an opportunity for growth. When I don't clash with a student, then I've been successful as a principal. When my teacher feels supported, when it's needed, then I am successful. For example, one teacher likes to push me all the discipline issues like I need to discipline.

When things do not go her way, she relies on *Adaptive Schools'* (Garmston & Wellman, 2013) strategies to help her be reflective, she uses their Seven Norms of Collaboration to help her work through problems as they arise. She relies on this to help her see past any potential oversights on her part, any shortcomings in her thinking. She said:

> I don't see it as a failure, I see it as a growth. Whenever there's an issue, "Okay, reflect Bella. What do you need to do? What didn't you do? Did you listen?" I just go back to going down the seven norms of collaboration. Did I pause? No. Then I need to pause. Did I put positive ideas? Did I put ideas on the table or was I being a directive type of person?

Bella gave an example of how she works through a potential problem. Some time ago she insisted her teachers use an online standardized assessment for their students and her staff was resistant. She asked herself what she could do instead. She decided she may have been too rigid and instead offered her teachers a choice: create your own assessments or give the standardized one. One teacher initially tried to create her own, but now everyone simply gives the online one; they just seemed to glad to have the choice.

Bella is not afraid of asking for help and assistance. When Bella first arrived at the school, she asked coaches and mentors she knew to come visit her at work and provide her with feedback. She recalled:

> I said, "I'm struggling. You need to model this for me." They not only did teacher observations, but they also did Bella observations and they gave me feedback. He actually said, "Okay, how would you have addressed this differently?" Having the coaches that knew adaptive schools and adaptive leadership and having them personalize that coaching for me is what has had helped me. I didn't have those skills at my previous school. Had I had them in my previous school, I would have addressed the righteous attitudes of the teachers differently.

Looking back at her previous school, she recalled at the very end, she invited some of her teachers, especially the one she butted heads with, one by one, to her office to share some of her insights on their behavior. She, in turn, asked them share insights they might have on her leadership, advice she could perhaps learn from:

> One of the things that they said which now I highlight, I need to pause more. I need to pause more and what was the other one? Being transparent about what's district initiative, mandated and what is not. Making sure that we make a collective decision as to how we approach that. That's the skill that I brought here and it was a little bit difficult to polish that delivery because as a principal, we're just given the directives, but as a seasoned principal, you know how to address it.

Sonia

Background and Early Years

Sonia is a first-generation Mexican American, born, raised, and until recently, lived in the south Los Angeles area. Her parents were from the same town in Mexico, but they did not meet until after they moved to Los Angeles. Sonia's mother worked for a family who had trouble pronouncing her name, so when Sonia and her twin brother were born, her mom declared, "We're going to name them American names so they can say their names!" Sonia described her family's economic and immigrant struggles as "[her] push and [her] energy and [her] heart that has driven [her] to where [she is] at now." She recalled this childhood memory of her home in south Los Angeles:

> We shared an apartment with an uncle, and then we had to hide because you know, the manager couldn't see us because the apartment was for a single male, not a whole family. So, you know, our housing was in jeopardy for a couple times. We were able to find a one car garage in south LA off South King. We were there for 7 years, and I loved that we lived there because it was our little home, and we had everything. You know, our little shower, our little toilet, our little sink and everything. We had one table, and that table my mom used to prep the food, and that was our homework table and our folding table, and everything was on that table.

The love for her for garage home, was, however, short lived. As time wore on, she became resentful of her living situation. She said:

> But as I grew older, like my middle school years, I hated that place because I couldn't invite my friends. I didn't know what it meant to be poor. I hated being poor, and so I

> remember I had an incident, and my mom was like, "Get your education. Stay focused. You know, you want a better life, you gotta work for it."

Sonia described her mom as both modern and old school; she encouraged Sonia to excel in school and although her mom took on the traditional female role at home, cooking, cleaning, and tending to children, she never asked Sonia to help. She recalled:

> She never forced me to do chores or taught me to do the Mexican dishes, traditional or anything. Her focus was like, "You focus on school, and I'll take care of all the house chores, and you just get your diploma, and that's how you are gonna repay, and that's what your job is." So, you know, I never had to lift a finger or cook or anything. I just did my homework. Took care of business. Was a good student.

During the 7 years she lived in the garage home, Sonia's father suffered injuries from an act of violence and was bed-ridden for nearly a year. She described the incident as having a very negative effect on her father, but she recalled her mom pushing the family forward and keeping them all "focused," as Sonia said. She never brought friends to visit her at home, because the space was so tight; in addition to her twin brother, she had one other younger brother at home.

Schooling Experiences

Sonia attended the local elementary school; her mom would walk her and brother to school until they were old enough to walk with their friends. She looked back fondly at her time at the school and still keeps in touch with some of her former teachers. She recalled:

> Those were all great teachers, and there was a clerk there that took me under her wing and gave me a summer job. So during my 7th year of middle school, I was working a summer over there. You know, delivering, laminating. Things that I wasn't supposed to

be doing, but I was doing for the elementary school. But she would invite me to work every summer, and she would also invite me to go with her to her family Thanksgiving. That was the first time I had a real Thanksgiving, and it was like an African-American Southern Thanksgiving, so that was even different. That was the first time I had sweet potato pie, and you know, other stuff. A real turkey, not a Mexican way of Thanksgiving. Those little things. Those powerful educators have helped me stay focused.

Her middle school years, however, were not as positive as her elementary years. Her school had a magnet program and although she was not a magnet student, she often took classes with those students because they offered an honors program. She remembered:

> I was in the high classes with magnet kids, in geometry, for example, I had a really tough teacher who didn't see us as worthy of being in her class, so we were in the back. I kind of lost my love for math there a little, but I still kept at it because my mom kept pushing me. "You got to stay focused. You got to graduate."

She did not share much about middle school, it seemed perhaps either too painful a time for her to remember, or just not particularly noteworthy.

In contrast to her memories of middle school, her high school years were much more fondly remembered. Her high school was a large, comprehensive school with various smaller programs. One of her friends had a sibling in the Humanitas program and urged her join along with her because, her friend said, "the teachers are really great." She described her school's three main academic programs, saying:

> We were in little academies- Humanitas, Early College, and Perkins. So Early College housed all of the AP, the honor kids. The smart kids. Perkins housed all the

career/vocational path kids, and Humanitas, we were like the middle of the pack. But even though we were the middle pack, we kept competing with Early College. We were like, "We go to college. No, we're tough." That helped. The teachers were really great. They were like a little family. They had issues, but they still loved us. We had issues, and they still loved us.

The teachers, Sonia said, guided and pushed them to be their very best. They went above and beyond the call of duty at every turn. She recalled a teacher who taught them how to participate in mock trials. When they competed at the superior court with other high schools, she loaned Sonia a dress because she did not have any professional-looking clothes.

Sonia credited her involvement with the Humanitas program for helping get her into a special program at the University of California, Santa Barbara campus over a summer. She said:

> Being in Humanitas, in that family and that support really helped me stay focused. Then I don't know who exactly, but one of them found an opportunity where high school juniors during their summer year between junior and senior year can go study at UC Santa Barbara. Take summer classes. I don't know how they were able to swing it, but they were able to get the UC rep to pay for three of us to go to UC Santa Barbara for the summer and take two college classes. Everything paid for.

Sonia felt her involvement in Humanitas, her high GPA, her extracurricular activities in marching band and student government helped get her accepted to one of the University of California campuses right out of college, despite her somewhat low SAT scores. She also gave credit to her fellow friends in the program; they all pushed and supported each other throughout high school.

Wanting to Help Her Community

Sonia majored in English and Chicano studies in college. She was heavily involved in a program that did outreach for high school students and helped them to apply to the university; she was involved with the program herself as a high school student and like the idea of giving back. She recalled, fondly, "The reason that job was also great was all the workers were students of color, and we supported east LA schools and south central schools."

During college, Sonia realized she wanted to continue helping young people in neighborhoods like her own and decided she would become an English teacher. She applied for and was admitted to the teacher education program at the same university. When it came time to select a school where she would observe and student teach in, she was disappointed to find, as a university that stated social justice was there main driver, they did not work with schools in the south Los Angeles area. She and a group of other students petitioned to get placed at a school in the area and was told she would need to find three other candidates and a school that would take all four of them. Sonia, excited, saw this as a call to action; she shared her story:

> I call the principal. I ask her, "I want to bring teachers here from TEP. I'm an alum. Can I bring them?" She's like, "Yeah, yeah. How can I help you?" So we agreed. My mom, I asked her if she can make *comida*. She made *bocadillos* and food, and so I gave them a tour of South Central, the school. The principal helped me give a tour of the school. Talked to some of the teachers. Meet some of the ASB kids, and I was able to get six teachers from the program into the school site.

Sonia said, proudly, those six teachers helped bring a "wave" of progressive and socially just teaching into her former high school. She, along with her classmates, stayed on after student

teaching and became teachers at the school. In the next few years they became a partner site with the university and brought in even more new like-minded teachers.

Beginnings of a Teacher Leader

Sonia began leading almost immediately. In her 2nd year she became the English department chair, often working as a leader over teachers she knew as a student. Although she was a new teacher, she saw right away there was a lack of communication and overall disfunction in the department. She said, “I was frustrated with what was going on. We’re not even talking. We’re not purchasing novels, and we should be purchasing novels at least. You know, little things. That was frustrating.” As a multitrack, year-round school, students and teachers would come and go every 16 weeks; Sonia wanted to make sure that constant turnaround did not get into the way of doing what they needed to do as a department. Her attitude was, “No, we can get it done. We can do it.”

As a teacher in the early 2000s, Sonia was aware of negative press depicting south Los Angeles as prone to gang conflicts and fights. She saw there were tensions between Latino and Black students, and she and her progressive colleagues strived to do more for them. In 2005, an assistant principal encouraged them to apply for a New Tech grant and become a small learning community of their own. The north end of campus had been vacated after vocational classes lost funding, so she and a few teachers thought they could use that space for their own small school. She recalled that time in her history, saying:

> That group of teachers, when we met, we worked for 3 years on the New Tech plan and becoming and converting our little group into our own little school, and finally, we did it. We’re a New Tech school. There were seven of us that opened that year. You know, the

> New Tech system. We were good for 7 years. Working. Functioning. At one point, our API— when they were using the API system of scoring schools or valuing schools. . . . I call it degrading schools. We made it to 721, and so for 721 for a hood school, that was different. We made it into the L.A. Times. You know, our kids' faces were there. My face was there.

Sonia looked backed on those years fondly. She likened it to the experience she had in high school, when she felt like Humanitas was like a family to her. She shared:

> It was a whole different little school, and it's what I had when I was a high school student. You know, that little family? So we were family at New Tech. We knew all of our kids. All our teachers knew each other. We backed each other. We fought each other. We cried with each other. It got intense at times and heated, but I think that's also what led to our burnout. We weren't really getting any support from local district with enrollment, so the tension and low enrollment. A school survives by enrollment, and if you don't have it, you die.

Although she loved it, when the school decided to apply to become a charter school, she backed away. She remembered, "I said, 'Nope, not me because I believe in public education. I believe in helping all kids, not select kids.' So I displaced myself and put myself on the list."

New Leadership Possibilities

When Sonia applied to another school to become an English teacher, she remembered the principal telling her, "I'm going to hire you, and you're going to take over." As lead teacher at her former small school, she was used to doing many things most teachers are not asked to do, much like a school coordinator and dean, which her new principal saw as a strength. Her new

school was not far from her former school in South Los Angeles; it had only been open a short time and was colocated with four other small schools. The new principal encouraged her to become lead teacher at her new school. She remembered:

> So, my 1st year here, I was an English teacher, and he would ask me, "Can you do this?" "Yeah," and I would do it. Running reports or meeting kids or preparing a PD [professional development] or PBL [project-based learning]. Whatever, you know. I would do it. That's when I was single too, so I was like, "Yeah." I was here from 7:30 a.m. until sometimes 7 p.m. because, you know, I loved it. I loved it, and I still love it.

She came to her new school much of the same enthusiasm she had at her former school; she did not wade in cautiously, she dove right in. She said, "When I came over here, I always found myself helping and assisting and creating and doing. I just felt of being the team player and getting it done for the benefit of everyone. Just get to it!" Her principal began to groom her right from the start. She would join him to supervise students during lunch and activities and would even encourage her to use the walkie-talkie to call for extra support. When the principal promoted to another position just a year later, he told Sonia she needed to apply and although she resisted at first, she decided to take a chance. Recalling their interaction, she remembered:

> I'm like, "No, I'm not going to get it," and I had my admin credentials since '07, but I never activated it, and he was like, "Activate it. Do it." I'm like, "Alright, let's see." So I prepared my stuff. I remember for the day of the interview, because we're a pilot, it's parents, students, the local district, and teachers that are part of the focus group panel for the interview. I came in with my little cart with all of my evidence for possible questions because I was a WASC [Western Association of Schools and Colleges] chair. You know,

> I had my old WASC book that I wrote with the staff, and I had all of these other things. I had senior class pictures, my cheer squad, my MEChA kids. I had all of these evidence pieces, regalia or whatever, so whenever they asked a question, I was like, "Oh, yeah," and I busted out and like, "Yeah, I did this. And oh yeah, these kids. And oh yeah, these parents."

Although she had not yet been assistant principal, or other comparable out-of-classroom administrator or coordinator, Sonia was hired as principal of her own small high school. She felt her unique background and experiences and her specific knowledge of the school helped solidify the committee's decision to hire her. She recalled:

> So I think what really benefited me was the fact that the members had known me for a year and known my work ethic and my commitment as a teacher, and they had seen that from me. My previous evidence, I think, solidified their decision because the other candidates, I saw them. We were all waiting in the same area. They just had a folder or a portfolio. Maybe a binder, but I had all these objects and trophies and plaques and pictures to prove what I'm capable and able and determined to accomplish.

When she was hired as the principal, Sonia saw it as almost a culmination of her years of hard work; being on the ground floor of latest district innovations, being a doer, and getting things done had paid often. She recalled moments after her selection:

> But to officially become a principal, that was a big aha moment for me. My big Oscars trophy for me. You know, all those years. All the work, and it validated that I do know, and I do care. I can be this. There were times where I doubted like, "Oh, can I do? Can I be that?" There are sometimes where I still pinch myself like, "Oh my God. I'm a

> principal. All these adults, and all these millions of dollars that I have to make sure used correctly, and make sure everything's taken care of."

Sometime in her 1st or 2nd year in the principalship, Sonia was given business cards and she showed them to her family; she remembered thinking, "This means a lot."

Developing a Leadership Style

Sonia's view on leadership was in contrast to what she saw at her former large, comprehensive school which often felt almost transactional and disconnected. She thinks a successful school leader "creates an environment that is happy, supportive, collegial, and for the sole interest and purpose of student needs and students." Although she and a small group of colleagues at her former school attempted to create a school-within-school community that was supportive and collegial, it had become toxic over time and she felt it affected her ability to do her job well. She shared her beliefs about leadership in this way:

> I don't want that for any of my staff, and so I try to prevent that. I try to squash the fires and figure out what's going on. A leader is someone that keeps the kids in mind. Keeps the staff in mind and creates a good environment because if the teachers are happy, the kids are happy; the kids are happy, the teachers are happy.

Creating this type of environment was a challenge, and Sonia recognized that right away.

Sonia called the principalship a lonely job. She held a great deal of information about her staff, but she could not share that information with others. She compared her job to that of being a mother, saying:

> Because I'm like the mom for this place. I have to keep in mind everyone's plate and what they're handling, but I can't share it. I can't say I'm going to make this decision because I know this, this, and this about this person. So, I have to balance.

She also felt she did not have network of other principals or administrators with whom she can bounce ideas off of or just simply commiserate. Although she sometimes discussed her work with her husband, it is infrequent for her to do so. Sonia said her job required quite a bit of balancing and finesse she sometimes finds difficult, but manageable. She shared:

> I wish I could throw it back to people when they're throwing it at me, but I can't because I love my job. That argument is not worth it, worth losing my job. Not being able to spew it out when I'm getting chewed out by a parent or a teacher or somebody else.

Sonia described her leadership imperative as "being visible;" it was the most important aspect of her job. She said she loved when students noticed when she was away from school and asked her where she was; her presence was missed. She shared one year a student was arrested, and she felt she needed to speak to the entire grade level. She told them:

> There's no need for anyone to be getting and catching a case. If you need a dollar, tell me. I'll lend you a dollar. I'm not going to be giving you money every day. I'll joke around with them, but you got to stay safe. You got to be here. Just being visible and being there for them because I had people like that for me. Being visible.

She was so insistent on being visible she had a small rolling desk she would wheel out to the third floor to do supervision while she worked.

Sonia's beliefs on be visible meant she was out there, every day, walking the campus, pounding the pavement. She remarked she does not dress "super professional;" instead, she

usually wears her school uniform, a black polo, khaki slacks, and tennis shoes; she stated, beaming, “I wear it every day with pride and take care of business.” Sonia reminisced about her first few years in the job and remembered going to principals’ meetings and wearing dresses and high heels and feel uncomfortable the entire time. Now, she said, she will just wear penny loafers, black pants, and a nice blouse. Sonia said, emphatically:

> Yeah, and my reality is, I need to run if something happens, so I’m going wear tennis shoes, and I have stairs. I am not going to wear heels. If I need to run upstairs to get a phone or open a door or something.

Leadership Strengths

Sonia believed leadership should not be a one-person job, she valued input, especially from trusted individuals. She shared:

> I’m sure it’s a term, and I forgot the leadership term, but I consider myself as I like to share. I kind of tend to pull a couple people and hear them out. Bounce things to them, and I value them, and the people I ask are hard workers. They’re the teachers that I know love the kids, so those are the ones that I’ll share out and explain or ask.

Those faculty members were not always those elected by staff to be on her School Governing Council, which she said, she did not always value all of their opinions, she made sure she collaborated with individuals who put students at the forefront. She stated:

> Even though some teachers might feel that I’m the dictator, which I’m not. I try to remove as many of the challenges or barriers of just junk away from them, so I’ve been the testing coordinator at the site for 6 years because I was testing coordinator as a teacher, and I’ve been the testing coordinator each year. Little things like that. If someone

needs coverage, I don't send a counselor. I'll go cover for the restroom or whatever. It's a shared leadership.

Sonia had high standards for her teachers and staff, but she ensured they knew she was there as a support to them. She made sure to give her cell phone number out and told people to keep her informed about any obstacles or challenges they were having. She said, of her and her staff, "We're not perfect. So many things land on our plates." She made sure she was a resource, a support for her staff.

Although Sonia spoke of her own schooling experience as being generally positive, especially because she was in the Humanitas program, she does acknowledge she feels some of her experiences in high school were less than ideal and has had an impact on her leadership lens. She shared:

> You know, I had that anger and self-hate when I was younger because I didn't know. Going to my Chicano studies classes, going to my theory and pedagogical classes in grad school, and then going to my admin classes and seeing the social factors, political factors, the educational factors and issues and laws has kind of created my big puzzle of my anger. Oh, now I know why this doesn't work. Oh, now I know why this happens, or now I know why I had that teacher that always gave me handouts, you know. Now I can see it. I remember when I was a freshman at UCLA, I went to [her high school] to visit my teachers, and I ran into someone there. I kind of spewed out something negative to that person because I was angry that they didn't prepare me. I regret it now because I realize that that person did the best they could.

As a principal, Sonia's perspective has been more nuanced and complex. Supervising and evaluating staff is an important part of her job she had to, many times, consider whether or not to let a teacher go. She said:

> I can see both sides. It angers me sometimes when [others] think very low of our kids or low of the profession or low about what they need to do, and so as a principal and as a pilot school, our removing or keeping of teachers is very different than a traditional school. So I always think: is keeping this teacher a real benefit for my students or not? I try to put myself as, "Okay, if I was that student, would I benefit from that teacher?" If I'm not benefiting, learning, growing, supportive, being loved, taken care of, then I don't want that teacher here.
>
> It's been a struggle in moving teachers, especially my 1st year because . . . how do I have that tough conversation with that teacher? Yeah, I look young and having to tell another older person, "Okay, you need to think of another school site because it's not working. Mission, vision; you're not following." Whatever the reason.

When faced with this decision, she said she often reflects on her own experiences growing up in the same community. She also thought about her child and her relatives' children, some of whom even attend her school. She shared:

> I always think back. My kids only have one chance in that class. This person already has a profession, a career. They can go get another job. My kids can't get another diploma or another class, so I make the tough call and move people.

Sonia has wondered if being a Chicana impacted her leadership. She shared:

> You know, it's only a few years ago that I learned about micro-aggressions, but I'm like, "Is that one for me?" Because I'm a principal or because I'm a Latina, a Chicana, or maybe because I'm young looking or what? I don't know.

Leadership Challenges

Sonia recalled she had experienced negative interactions that made her wonder if her gender, age, or ethnicity had been a factor. She shared:

> When I've had to deal with older people, whether parents, other administrators, it does bother me because I think, "Hey, we're in the same profession. Why are you doubting me? Why are you questioning me? Why are you even attacking me, you know?" I feel like I have to do double the work to prove myself.

She has experienced parents, moms, who have been dismissive of her because they perceived she was too young and must not know what motherhood is like:

> I've been a mom now 3 years, but before, some parents would even throw in my face when I'm like, "Okay, I need you to do this," or their child was having difficulties at my school, they'd say, "Well, you don't understand. You're not a mom." I'm like, "That doesn't matter. I'm not replacing you." I'm trying to understand this mom's comment, but that's where way of defending themselves in whatever the situation is, but I have to defend myself as a mom, as a woman, as a professional.

She has also seen, firsthand, her gender, and possibly her age, has been a factor in how she treated, especially in the district:

> I've been at district events. You know, the males will do the whole hug-shake thing, or they'll cluster together and talk. For me, not that I'm saying, "Oh, give me a hug," but the

> same acknowledgement or, "Hey," or something. It doesn't take place, so I'm like, "Okay, whatever. Cool. Whatever. I felt bad, and I'm like, "If I was a male, would I get that handshake, too or continued to be ignored?" Or is it because I'm young in this profession as a principal or I don't know a lot of people or what.

Even after 6 years as a school principal, she encountered experiences like these fairly regularly, but, she said, she handles things differently. She said, "Now I kind of throw it off. I just gotta push forward for my kids. My school. But I have noticed just how being Latino/Latina. . . . I'm short, too, so I'm like, 'Is it my height?'"

Sonia was somewhat surprised about the number of challenges she encountered with women on her site. She recalled:

> It's been females that I've had the most conflict with. Female teachers. Former female coordinator, and female campus aides that undermine my requests, our plan. They see it differently, because even male teachers, yeah, I might have had a discussion, but it hasn't even been an argument. As in with females, it's frustrating like, "C'mon, let's back each other up. I'm trying to support you. I'm not doing it to ground you or stomp on you. It's because this needs to be done for the kids. For the school. For safety or whatever the reason."

Sonia had been told she was "too nice." She rejected the notion and said she simply strove for understanding; she wanted to make sure people felt heard and listened to. She did not believe in she needed to "chew a person out" or use profanity. She believed talking, working things through made the most impact. She noted t her assistant principal was always quick to suggest a teacher or staff member be written up and when arrived, it threw teachers off-balance. Although she

allowed him to have difficult conversations with teachers and staff, she has also worked with him on toning down his more aggressive style. She shared this about what she has noticed about leadership expectations:

> It's hard because a lot of people have an image of what leadership looks like or what it should look like. You go to the district meetings, and it's black and white. You did it wrong? Write up. Write up instead of, "Well, what's gonna happen after that, right? What kind of relationship are you gonna be left with if you write everybody up?" Because I think almost all of us have done stuff to be written up, according to the district. Who wants to live that unkindness? The other thing is, writing up is not an easy thing. The legal jargon that needs to accompany that document, the process. I always try and okay, is it gonna be something fruitful? Or is it just gonna create toxicity?

Sonia also found challenges with the district's leadership on supporting schools with instruction. Almost as soon as she started as a principal, the state was transitioning to align to Common Core State Standards and changed the standardized tests from California Standards Test to Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Her teachers, she believed, were largely unprepared for the new level of rigor. She shared:

> I feel like the district hasn't done a good job of supporting the schools with Common Core, and at the same time, I know we came into the wave of like, "Oh, now schools can pick your own textbooks." But the textbooks aren't in line. I know the teachers, when it's burn time/stress time, they'll just depend on the book and just straight teaching from the book. I understand that because I know what it is to be in the class, but we haven't had

> something solid- strong, that says, "Okay, this is the Common Core. This is the SBAC [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium]. This is how we should do it."

Prior to the transition, Sonia felt she and her staff had instructional strengths and the change sent them into a bit of a tailspin. She stated:

> We were so good before. We knew how to do it before, you know? CAHSEE [the California High School Exit Exam; no longer a requirement] and everything. We knew how to prepare, but now we're still scrambling, and now it's changing again.

Sonia spoke frustratingly about the new California Department of Education's Dashboard, its focus on college and career indicators had her wondering how she could increase her graduation rates, her college-college rates when the district only provides one academic counselor, not a college counselor. Although she shared she was generally pleased to have a budget that allowed her to make some purchases for extra personnel, she also struggled with finding qualified candidates for instructional coaching or even teaching assignments.

In the last 5 years, Sonia has had three directors and currently has the same director she had when she first started; it is someone whom she admired. He helped her think through her decision, but was not someone who was directive or heavy-handed, something she recognized it is not necessarily the norm. She recalled her very 1st day of school in the 1st year:

> That day, seeing that kid get crazy on me, and then knowing that I had more than the limit of kids with no schedules, but he still trusted me to take care of the job. I really respect him. He's really good.

Sonia also recognized it was important for her, as an instructional leader, to supervise her teachers' instructional practices, but she found it a great challenge to do this well. She shared:

> I'm also dealing with logistical things, paper things, deadline things, and I'm not in the class as much as I wanted to. So that's frustrating, but I have a general sense of what's going on, and I make my observations.

She did acknowledge, however, her goal to visible and present helped her engage with instruction, even without always being able to be present:

> Because I'm out there, the kids come and tell me things. They'll tell me, "Miss so and so cussed at us. Miss, we're not doing anything." So, I'll walk through, and they were on their phones. Okay, no learning's taking on here.

Even though Sonia found it difficult to supervise instruction and ensure her students were getting the most effective teachers, it was operational things such as budgets and master scheduling she struggled with the most. Coming straight from the classroom, she felt she lacked knowledge in areas that would have been learned had she been in coordinator or assistant principal positions prior to taking on the principalship. She did, however, acknowledge her experiences were generally enough to understand the big picture, the vision, and this was most important, even if she did have to get help with operational aspects of her job.

A New Beginning

Sonia revealed, as she teared up, this would be her last year at the school and her last year living and serving in the community she lived in and loved for so long. She and her husband recently purchased a home about an hour outside of the city. He had been commuting about 3 hours each day and it was taking a toll on both of them. One day over the summer a year earlier they had been driving around a new area and saw a house near a cute elementary school in a quiet neighborhood. On a whim, they put a bid on the house; they have spent a year fixing it up

and plan to move in at the end of the school year. She told her director she will not be back in the fall, the commute would take too much of a toll. She said:

> So, I've made the decision. It finally came out of my mouth, and I was sitting with my director this fall, this school year. I started crying because it hit me. I might not be able to be a principal anymore, for quite a while, but then at the same time, I realized, I need to do this for my daughter. At the same time, a big old piece of me is gonna be gone because this is who I am for the big part because my mom, she helps me with my daughter, and I can beat this. Maybe this is a whole mother thing, but when I gave birth, it was really tough because I have to be a mom. This job. But it's gonna be a whole switch, so I don't know what I'll be. A coordinator. A teacher. I don't know.

Although Sonia would remain in the district, because of its size, she would be going to another part of it and had no connections with the leadership in that area. She did not think she would be able to find a job as principal when she moved.

Although she relayed this through tears and pauses, she was adamant this was the best thing for her and her family. She shared:

> I want it for them; I want to be able to see my daughter's 1st day because I know she's in early center, but kindergarten, first grade, all her shows, or for conferences. I want my husband to be home because now that's going to cut his commute to 20 minutes. Now he can go to sleep/wake up at a regular time, and we can have dinner together and do that. My mom's even sacrificing, my parents. They're willing to move from south central over there with us. It's big move, and it's for our daughter. For our granddaughter.

Sonia expressed she has been lucky to have married a man who has accepted her calling to lead even though, as her father warned him when asking for Sonia's hand in marriage, she hates cooking and never does it. She is genuinely glad for all of the familial support she has surrounding her.

Future Plans

When asked where she sees herself in 5 to 10 years, Sonia answered unequivocally, she sees herself staying at the school site. She said:

> No matter what, with the students, because even as a principal, I might now make instructional changes or budget amazing or some future amazing thing, but with the kids, I'm making a difference. They're safe. They're okay. They have a path. They feel cared, loved. So with kids. They're the ones that keep me connected. Give me a purpose

Sonia saw her position as incredibly important; being a principal really meant something to her. She shared:

> I'm honored to be in this position. I thank my lucky stars. I'm telling you, sometimes I don't believe that I'm a principal because that's such a high position. I want to be here. I need to be here for my kids to see me as a role model. For my females. For this community.

Although excited about what her future may hold, Sonia ended by wondering how her new community will look in comparison to where she has lived and worked all of her life. She said:

> That's another thing. I'm going to a predominantly other culture/ethnicity group. Socioeconomic group. Way different than this, so it was like, "Ah! I do have anxiety. Uh

oh. How is it going to be over there?" Parents are going to be super different over there than here.

Julia

Background

Julia is a first-generation Mexican American. One of six children, her parents were pregnant with her when they arrived in the United States in the 1970s. Julia described her childhood as rough; domestic violence her constant reality. Her father was an alcoholic who controlled her mother's every move. She was virtually alone in the country, and he did not let her contact her family; Julia said her mother was very "isolated."

Julia grew up first in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles and then moved to South Los Angeles, then known as South Central. She described the former neighborhood as "more of a working class, but still poor immigrant community" and the latter as "a super poor mixed community." In the seventh grade, her father removed her from school to make her work. The ongoing abuse and neglect she and her siblings suffered landed her in foster care by the time she was 15; at 16 she ran away from home. In addition to those schooling interruptions, she survived a terrible car accident when she was 10 years old and was out of school for a year. She called her educational history "spotty," but when she eventually returned, in high school, she did remarkably well. She was accepted to a prestigious university out of state, but she decided to reject that offer and attended community college. She had her first child at 19 and her second at 21. After community college, she attended a local private university and became a teacher when she was 25. She has worked for the district for almost 20 years and has been a teacher,

instructional coach, parent and community coach, and assistant principal; at the time of the interview, it was her 1st year as principal.

Julia identified herself as Chicana/Latina. When asked to describe any other identifiers, she also stated:

> Chubby. I think probably a little insecure. I don't know if I portray myself as insecure, but I know that I am. In my head, you know. . . . I used to say broke, a lot. I used to describe myself as broken. I don't think I do that as much anymore. I'm not really sure why. I think it helped me to fit in.

Her mother, she said, still identifies as Mexican, not Mexican American. Her siblings, she said, are split; some view themselves as Mexicans, others Mexican Americans. She stated:

> Yeah. I think they're a little mixed. I think my brother probably identifies as Mexican American. His family doesn't. His kids, his wife, they identify as American. I think my kids probably do think Mexican American, and then other sisters that their kids, they self-identify as Mexican. It's a little mixed. Depending on the educational background. The ones that have a little more education are more like Mexican American. Yeah, the ones that didn't graduate high school, they're like, "Mexican."

Julia's upbringing was certainly not ideal, but when asked how her upbringing influences her current life, both personal and work-related, she shared:

> It influences pretty much everything. I think, maybe in the last 10 years, more positively than negatively. I think it used to be more of a barrier, but it was more personal because I hadn't had recovery or therapy or anything like that. Now, I think with this kind of accepting that that's just my experience and it's maybe not as fun as somebody else's

> experience, which is not something that I could change. . . . Maybe more accepting of those things and also kind of trying to find the places, or like the things, the places where I'm stronger or the things that I'm better at because of those experiences.

Julia believed her background and upbringing have helped her create and cultivate positive experiences with her students; she had always been able to maintain good relationships with students as both a teacher and as an administrator.

Growing up as a Chicana/Latina, Julia felt, had an impact on her progress. She described what was expected of her:

> Being Mexican, you have to be a certain way at home. Like you still have to cook. I still better know how to do this. I still better know how to clean. Got to go home and clean. You have to be everything to everyone. That's what I feel. I don't know that it's true, but like my mom doesn't think that you're a real woman if you can't cook. Or you're not a real woman if your house is dirty.
>
> The house better fucking be clean. Yeah. God forbid you should pay somebody to do that. That's not ok. I think the impact on my identity is that I don't feel that I'm good enough. This could be all in my head, but I think like counterparts, people who started at the same time that are from a different race, and, for sure, gender. . . . If they're of the same race and they're male it's a way different experience. They can hand off to the wives. With the same . . . different race, same gender, they don't feel that sort of less . . .
>
> Second class. That's what it is. Second class. No matter what. Second-class citizen.

These expectations, Julia felt, had a way of slowing her down.

Becoming a Teacher-Leader

Julia described herself as falling into leadership. She applied to a competitive administrative credential and master's program in education and was surprised she was selected because she did not feel as if she met all requirements. During that time, she had to complete projects at her school to satisfy the requirement of the program and that, she said, helped her become a teacher leader. She said:

> I had to take on some projects that I probably wouldn't have taken on before that. I became chairperson for the department and I was selected into School Site Council. I . . . I just did things. I would learn how to do something and then just do it and try and do it well.

Even after all of this, Julia still did not see herself as real leader. She shared:

> I just thought myself as a hard-working person who they can dump a lot of work on. They probably knew it. When did I begin to identify as a school leader? I think that took a little bit longer. I think that's the two things that kind of go between just a hard-working person that people can dump their work on or like I do have a valid voice and insight into school leadership. Especially in this particular community. I think I would be a school leader in any community, but I think especially in this one.

Although she did not always see it in herself, Julia's students often saw her as a leader. A student once told her she should be a counselor because she would have influence over so many more students. When she went back to the classroom after she had been a coach, her middle school students would tell her she should be a principal; she would make a good one. They, she said, saw her leadership abilities before she did.

Julia's first out-of-classroom position was as literacy coach at the same site she had been working at for the first 5 years of her career. Julia did not believe she was the best person for the job, she did not feel qualified for it. She shared:

> I was offered a position as a literacy coach, and I didn't think I should be a literacy coach, but the person who had the job before me was not a very hard-working person so at least I thought I could be a hard-working person. I didn't see myself as a literacy expert at all.

Julia felt her hard work, if not expertise, was what made her a desirable candidate. This position, however unqualified she felt when she entered it, proved to be the most helpful to her in terms of gaining knowledge in all aspects teaching. The training was extensive and, she believed, it was the best of her career. She said:

> At first I thought, being off campus that many days, but that's because I still wanted to be of service to the school, but going to all that training and coming back to the school sites trying to implement some of those things in between helped me to learn a lot more about being a teacher. Being a good teacher. Then the other thing that we did with literacy coaching is we observed at all the schools in our local district, which is, I think, six or seven, at the time. Six or seven high schools and just being able to visit about 100 different classrooms. People teaching the same subject and it didn't look the same anywhere. Some of the good things were common and some of the bad things were also common. I think that was probably one of the best experiences and it did help me change how I viewed myself in the building, but also how I viewed the work that I needed to do.

Julia was trained not only in observing and coaching teachers, but in lesson development, something she felt teachers never quite learn to do well in teacher training programs before they

are thrown into classrooms and certainly not something she was taught after becoming a teacher. She recalled:

> The training was for lesson development, but they developed lessons that we then have to kind of digest so it helped me to see, understand the why. For why you would put this piece of literature versus this piece or whatever. For language arts. It just is solid, solid training.

What impressed Julia most about her trainings as a literacy coach was none of them were a "one and done" style; all of them required constant practice and reflection. Trainings were spread out and she was expected to practice in between. She would practice coaching at home on her own children.

Julia was grateful for what she learned as a coach and attributed much her knowledge of curriculum and instruction to the professional development she participated in during that time, but also felt the position lacked broader leadership development she wanted. She shared, "Two years in I felt that I hit a wall. Like I'm not going to have any more influence in this job. I need to move on. Then trying to find where I need to move on and why."

After she left the coaching position, she became and Title I coordinator at the same high school. The job included not only managing the school's extensive Title I budget, School Plan, and teacher assistants, but working closely with parent stakeholders. Although she entered this position with high hopes for increased learning and budget experience, sheer tediousness of details and lack of common vision from her principal, led her to return to the classroom for a time.

Returning to the Classroom

Her return to the classroom, this time at a middle school, was far easier than her first go around as a teacher. She was able to leverage her experience as a literacy coach to fast become one of the top teachers at her school. In the short time she was there, she worked under three principals, all of whom appreciated and praised her work; two have remained mentors to her. She described this period in her career as successful and enjoyable and, because she was able to manage her planning and grading far better than she had when she first taught, it allowed her to be more present at home for her two children, both of whom were in their teens at that time.

After a few years in, and after her children were older and heading into college, Julia felt a strong need to once again leave the classroom to find a position where she could have more influence. She had gotten her administrative credential years earlier and she wanted to begin to use it. Looking to broaden her experience, she accepted a position as a parent educator coach, but was able to land an assistant principal position, at a school not far from where she started, the following year.

Becoming a School Administrator

Julia was an assistant principal for 5 years at a shared campus of small schools; she worked under four principals. The first 2 years, she felt, were incredibly taxing, simply because she was learning so much, but they were also the most exciting. Her assigned duties included all things operational and almost nothing instructional. Spending the first 15 years of her career steeped in the instructional side of schooling, this position allowed her to expand her expertise. After 2, maybe 3, years of this, however, it became rote and mundane. Although a couple principals, after her urging, allowed her to observe and coach teachers, it just was not enough

and she began to take steps to qualify to become a principal. Shortly after she successfully completed the district's program for prospective school principals and had begun to apply for positions at schools, one principal left the site and she interviewed for and was selected for the job.

The Principalship

Although Julia was only a few months into her new position when interviewed for this study, she had much to say about challenges of the job. Early on, she noticed her staff had their own ideas about what her position looked like. She said:

> I think people wanted to find my work for me. Like what my work's supposed to be. Everyone wants to call me for everything. A lot of it is just incidental things like this kid doesn't want to give up the phone or this kid is doing this or this kid is doing that.

Although she understood the job to be all-encompassing, she knew those little fires are not the most important aspects of her job. She shared:

> I'm trying to pull away from that because I think that the most important aspect of the job is to supervise instruction and give feedback to teachers. I'm still trying to figure out what that looks like so that it's digestible. I think people struggle with feedback.

Julia described her mission as a principal is to help teachers become better at teaching; she wanted to see improvement in curriculum and instruction as well as in the creation a caring, nurturing environment for students who are often suffered from trauma and low expectations. She stated:

> I would imagine that I could, in a happy world, visit maybe three to five . . . maybe three to six classrooms a day for not the entire period. Maybe like see a whole bunch of the

beginning periods, and then give feedback on what I see in the beginning of the period. How the transitions, the organization, how quickly the kids get started, what the routine is? Some of the routines might be for kids who are tardy, maybe kids that show up after an absence or many absences. How do they get integrated? Then tackle that with the staff. This is what I'm seeing, this is what we're doing, this is what we might consider doing, and then move on. Just different things, different weeks.

Maybe even like do one thing for 3 weeks. I think we tried to do that a little bit, but I don't think it was as effective. The teachers were giving each other feedback and I don't think they know how to give each other feedback.

Julia believed coaching and feedback are incredibly important aspects of her job and yet they are the most difficult because most teachers and staff rarely know what that looks like. She shared:

Seems to me like most of the teachers are aware of some of those gaps. I have one in particular who's struggling with interactions, and so I don't know. . . . I don't think that she knows any different, so she interacts with kids the way she thinks she's supposed to. I think, with her, I think that cognitive coaching would be a good approach because here's where you are and where do you want to be and what kinds of things might we do to get there. Perhaps, trying to have a menu of options for her. Things that she might consider. There's videos that are online. There are other teachers.

Then yes, coming back, maybe in a week or 2. I think it's very similar to what I was just saying about my own training, that you hand off some homework or some little things that are doable, then come back and see if they're happening. I think because

> they're . . . it's going to be like the little spaces of success in that that they might adapt. I don't think anyone wants to be unsuccessful.

Julia believed if given the time to really work with her staff in coaching and giving feedback, they would be able to see some success and this, in turn, would make them want more coaching and feedback.

Leadership Style

Julia saw herself as a servant leader, she is firm in her belief she is in this position to give of herself to others. She said:

> I do see myself as being in service to the community and so I think that even if I wanted to be like this directive leader. . . . One of my counselors is always like, "Hey, boss. Hey, boss." I can't stand it. I can't stand that shit because even. . . . Same person in the beginning was like, "Oh, there's a new sheriff in town." I'm like, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about. Sheriff? Who's that?" I don't see myself that way. I think my leadership style is and has been, up to now, trying to model the practices that I want to see, but I also think . . . and I'm working on that . . . that's because it's been the first break . . . having clarity about things.

Julia disliked that walking into her first principalship there were few assigned roles at her school, no staff responsibility list; people just seemed to take things on here and there. She described her frustration:

> There's no faculty handbook and some people do whatever they want, even though they know what the district policy is, a lot of them, they still kind of don't. . . . It hasn't been

outlined for them, and so I think some outline and some support and some kind of clarification for people.

She continued by describing her personal leadership style as something she had to make sure she could live with, easy or not easy. She continued:

> I feel good about myself. I could sleep at night. It's actually hard because the other part of my quote, unquote style is that I think I have to be honest, and sometimes honesty's not nice. I have to be careful what that looks like. Again, I have this . . . a different teacher who's not doing so well. Probably hasn't been doing well for a very long time and maybe got some feedback but didn't get specific feedback. He's getting very specific feedback about his practice right now. That actually weighs heavily on me in a way that I don't necessarily think it should. I also feel positive about it because I did my part. That's the thing. I need to do my part. What other people do or don't do, I don't think I can take responsibility for it unless I didn't support them.

Challenges of Leadership

Julia perceived many of her challenges as leader to be gender-based. She recalled many years ago, prior to landing her first out-of-classroom job, Julia set her sights on becoming a dean of discipline, something she thought she could not only with passion, but with compassion. Unfortunately, when she expressed interest in the position, she did not make the cut. She remembered:

> Early on, before the literacy coach position I wanted to be a dean. I don't know. There was no other reason to choose the other person other than they were a male. I don't know

> if people think that for that particular job you need to be a male of what, but I felt that . . . that's not okay.

Julia not only felt being a woman who wanted to be a dean was unacceptable to the powers that be, but simply being a woman who wanted to move out of the classroom was more than a little frowned upon. She shared, "In education, the most noble job is to be a classroom teacher. A lot of people, when I first wanted to leave the classroom, gave just all this negative feedback." This thinking, she felt, was especially true for women; a woman wanting to leave the classroom, especially one who was young, was perceived negatively.

Even after becoming an administrator, she struggled with perceived gender roles and often felt she was treated differently as a woman, especially as Brown woman. As both assistant principal and as principal she often found herself being the go-to person for bringing food, setting up for meetings, and cleaning after everyone. She shared:

> I don't know if it's because of being Latina or Chicana, but like I said earlier about being of service. I think there's that borderline between being of service and being a maid. I do actually try and pay attention to that. Like am I washing dishes because no one else will wash them or why isn't anyone. . . . Just dumb things like that. There's things that I feel like, "Is this why I went to college?"

She was quick to say she enjoys being thoughtful and making sure every meeting has snacks and people are able to take care of their personal needs, but she questions why it often feels more like a burden, why no one, especially men, want to pitch in and help. Her predecessor, a Latino about the same age as Julia, seemed, to her, to be "stingy;" he simply did not want to waste time or money worrying about needs of others.

When asked about what she believed attributed to her some of her successes, Julia answered:

> I don't know how to quit? When I have had experiences that are full of failure, I don't just give up or . . . I try to take apart whatever happened and try to find my part, try and find whatever somebody else's part was, and figure out how to navigate and get better. I think that has taught me a lot. I don't quit.

Reflection

Julia was not able to sit down for a second interview until a few months after the initial one because she was so busy. We waited until just after the end of her 1st year as principal. When she reflected on her how she would describe her leadership identity after reading through her first transcript, she said, "I think I am still working that out." After having held various positions in the district for 20 years prior to entering the principalship, she felt none of them really prepared her the job. She elaborated:

> No, they didn't prepare me for anything. It was helpful to have those experiences. It's helpful to have experiences that you can reach for or recall just because being a principal feels so far away and so outside of anything that's any kind of comfortable. So if you recall your teaching days, you kind of come back to your comfort zone a little bit, at least in your head. It's grounding. Those things help ground how I feel, but if they don't feel like they prepared me for the reality of the job or the magnitude. I think about it, like it's only 450 kids, what's the worst I can do as a leader? But for whatever reason, in real time, it just feels oppressively gigantic.

After taking over for a man who had held the position for 6 years, she also found it frustrating many of her staff still felt his way was the right way, even though she felt she was much better about following education code or district policies. She perceived many of these conflicts as "related to gender more than newness." She felt he had created this fatherly persona and people felt everything he did was morally or ethically correct, even if it was not. On the other side, she found herself to be more detailed and goal-oriented than he was. She felt she was adept at anticipating where things might fall apart or where they may be gaps in thinking. Like a mother, she said, "If your kid gets sick you know you're going to take care of that kid. So you plan ahead so that your kid doesn't get sick." This was her style, she concluded, because "it's part of just surviving."

Reflecting on Leading as a Chicana/Latina

Julia's ethnicity had a "huge impact" on how she led in her 1st year as a principal. She shared:

> I noticed my Brownness more this year than ever before in this community, in large part because our staff is so White. I also think our school mission and vision is very much aligned to a different view of the world that's not Brown. And so I think again trying to navigate. . . . I agree with a lot of the things that are part of our mission and vision. I don't necessarily think that the way that we've approached this population matches what they've been doing.

Although she was glad her school did well on standardized tests in her 1st year, especially in comparison to other local schools, she was uneasy about the number of students who did not do well and the vast majority of them were her underserved students (e.g., her English learners,

those in special education). She said she had begun to address this with her staff; she had been working on ways to individualize the school program for each student by asking teachers to really get to know their academic and social emotional needs. Julia struggled with some of her staff's perceptions of her students' community, family, and friends. She said, "We're selling them a good product, college, but we're selling it through that White lens." Some of her students, she believed, were not buying it because her teachers did not know how to make it accessible to them.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Her Leadership Identity

Julia believed her adverse childhood experiences had a great deal of impact on her leadership identity. "Being super jacked up," she said, "helps me see things in a differently light." She elaborated:

> I don't have answers for how to make that better because the reality is I can't change a kid's life, but I could see the kid as a human being and not as a collection of really jacked up behaviors when it shows up that way. I think that that's kind of been the one thing that I'm in the middle of trying to figure out how to embrace.

Julia shared she had not always wanted to, or been able to, embrace these painful experiences, and even went as far as removing some of her tattoos because, she said, "in my mind I'm still trying to wash myself, clean up that ghetto." Looking back, she regretted the removal and realized it was "such a waste of time" to think that way and has lost interest in trying to cleanse her past.

In her position as principal she had become more aware of her language choices and many times she often had to code switch and use "less aggressive language." Although she often

taught her students to code-switch, she also wanted to "normalize the language choices" of her students, to make them understand language such as profanity is not inherently bad, she wanted them to understand they had to navigate societal "boundaries." She shared:

> I think it's tough because it's confusing for your own identity. . . . It's tough, I think because I'm 45 and have an addiction to comfort, have stronger sort of sense of self. I'm in a place where I am okay with my level of Brown or my degree of ghetto. I'm okay with it. And it comes out. It will come out in meetings sometimes.
>
> I think that's the biggest difference for me this year from even last summer is that I'm not apologizing for everything that I am. And I'm also not putting it in people's face either. I'm not just going to turn all ghetto when I'm talking to some of my teachers or the kids. I personally try, I guess in some ways, to be very clean, [Taylor] Swift, vanilla, but more because it's shared space.

Next Steps

When asked what career moves she saw in her future, she said, "I think I could do this until I retire. I would like to." She quickly followed up with, "However, I did used to think this way about teaching." She shared she liked many aspects of the job, the responsibility of working in an underserved community, being able to help teachers improve their craft, and improving the schooling experiences of her students. What she did not like is the lack of resources she believed a school like her needed to really be successful. She said:

> I think I could be a principal for a while. I don't know that I can be a director. I know that I cannot be a principal if the conditions stay the way that they are for long. I think I might have a 3-year shelf life if things stay the way that they are. . . . At least in high school

with how they operate, how they perceive . . . not just the admin, but the classroom staff. And I think we have to have a bigger team for the work that we have.

She believed too much of the job involved clerical or menial tasks, like having to answer so many emails from the district or upload documents they could easily locate themselves. As a new principal, it was difficult for Julia to really imagine her next job or career move, but she did share she would someday like to pull from all of her experiences, gather what really worked for her, and then work with schools to help them create lasting change. She concluded:

> So trying to figure out how to go from idea to implementation with fidelity to implementation with your own sort of style now embedded, having some kind of systematic way to roll that out, I think that that's where I would want to see my impact.

Stella

Background

Stella was born in East Los Angeles in the 1970s. Her mother was from Mexico but moved to the United States when she was 4 years old; her father was born and raised in East Los Angeles. Her maternal grandparents were Mexican; her grandfather was close to 40 when he arrived in the United States and never learned to speak English, but her grandmother, at 16 years his junior, was only in her mid-20s when she arrived and learned English. Stella's paternal grandmother was White and grew up in a small farming community in central California; her

paternal grandfather was from Mexico and immigrated to the United States when he was in his late teens.

Stella remembered living in the east Los Angeles neighborhood her mother grew up in until she was 7 years old. She recalled her parents were very open about their dislike for the neighborhood, and they often expressed they did not feel it was safe. She recalled:

> I just remember at a young age they wouldn't let us really go outside. We had to, you know, we're either at school and home and that's it. There really wasn't a lot of interacting in the neighborhood. They just considered it to be a very unsafe neighborhood. We actually lived across the street from my grandma and, at the time, my mom and her mom did not speak to each other. So we would see them and wave hi but we never interacted with them. I don't know if that was part of the situation as well.

Stella shared both her parents had strained family relationships and wondered if was also an impetus for moving away from the area.

Stella identified as a Chicana, but she shared that identifier was something she chose for herself well into adulthood. She shared:

> The more I learned about it, it's something that you have to adopt. It's not just who you are or where you come from because even if you are Mexican American, you have to call yourself Chicana. You have to adopt the ideals of what it means to be someone who feels like living, in part, in these two worlds

She said she struggled with her identity and never felt "Mexican enough." Her mother spoke Spanish but she did not speak it at home and although many of her family members were fluent

speakers, she spent little, if any, time with them because of her parents' estrangement from their parents and siblings.

Stella also now identities strongly with her professional role as a principal. In the past, she said, she struggled with calling herself an administrator and, even years after leaving teaching to be an assistant principal, would still say she was teacher when asked what she did for a living. She said she now feels confident in taking on the role and proudly proclaims she is a Chicana high school principal. She also said being single with no children is something she comfortably identifies with. She said being a "never-married women in her 40s is shocking sometimes to people," but she has taken it on as a part of who she is and a choice she has made. She said even though her parents married and had children young, they never encouraged or discouraged marriage and family; and although they did not attend college, they strongly encouraged both her sister and her to finish school and have a career before considering marriage and family. She shared:

> I don't know what their intentions were but for me, I think I saw it as if there was no pressure to marry. My sister and I are both not married. Never, out of my mom's mouth, has she ever asked about us getting married. I don't know if she had to bite her tongue. I don't know what her inner thoughts are. She is amazing at not putting pressure on us. I have no idea why. Both of them are like that.

When Stella was 7 years old, her family moved to a suburb of Los Angeles, less than 30 miles away. Although it was not geographically far away, it seemed so incredible foreign to her. She described her 1st day of third grade as "shocking" because she had never seen such a "sea of blonde people." Adjusting to schooling in the suburbs was also different because in Los Angeles

she was enrolled in a before and after school program, her new school did not have such a program. She shared:

> I remember the elementary school in Los Angeles. There was an attached daycare center. So you go early, parents could drop you off really early. You could stay late for working parents. But here you're on your own. You get there before the school bell rings and then you got to go home at 2:30 or whatever it is, right? My parents didn't have any more money for a baby sitter, they just put everything that they had into getting this house. We were basically latchkey kids. We would walk to school. My sister and I would walk home. So you've got these little 8- and 9-year-old kids walking home every day like, I don't know, maybe a mile away from home. I just think that's so funny. But my parents thought that that was a better solution than staying in LA, which I thought was really interesting.

She shared although her parents made it clear safety and security were the main reasons for leaving the city for the suburbs, she admitted she never knew what drove that thinking, why they felt that.

Stella felt she and her family stuck out in this new community. Even though they were light-skinned and not always automatically identified as Chicano or Latino by others, she said she always felt their dark hair, east Los Angeles "accents" and clothing made her feel people knew they were not part of the community. In retrospect, she felt much of her feelings of being the outsider were coming more from within.

Schooling

Stella said she never integrated well into the community and although she completed most of her K–12 schooling and went to community college there, it never felt like home. She remembered one incident during her 1st year at her new elementary school:

> This one girl, she's really sweet and she didn't mean, . . . I remember the tone of it wasn't negative and she was like, "How come you guys talk like that?" I'm assuming she meant—now looking back—that east LA accent that I probably can't do anymore at all. My sister, I remember consulting with her walking home afterwards, "What does she mean?" She said, "We have to change the way we speak and we have to make sure that we have to fit in." It was all about trying to fit in and I think by the time I reached the end of middle school, I realized that that wasn't going to happen for me. My sister was able to assimilate well, but I just went all out and became a goth kid. Dyed my hair super black. Didn't go out on the sun ever. Wore all black all the time. We were those kids that were out in front of the middle school smoking cigarettes every day. So I just decided, "Why even bother? Why even bother fitting in?"

Although Stella felt her schooling experiencing were not overall positive, especially socially, she did like learning and she credits some close friends who were able to help her through high school. She said:

> I liked school, I did. I had a very strange relationship with school because I think . . . I had friends that were really high-achieving. Just a couple of friends. I actually had a lot of fuck-up friends but then I had a couple of good, high-achieving ones. One of my friends, she was just so brilliant. She was so smart but she was really kick-ass. Nobody messed

with her. Nobody fucked with this girl. She looked tough. She acted tough but her writing was amazing. I had two friends like that that helped me navigate like, "You should apply for this program or do this class." So I would take some honors classes throughout but I just never really thought much about it. I just did it because my friends were doing it.

Looking back, she never recalled a teacher or a counselor giving her any advice on selecting honors classes, even though she scored well on standardized tests.

Her sophomore and junior years of high schools were especially rough for Stella. She suffered from depression and skipped a lot school. In her junior year, she decided to take the California High School Proficiency Exam, a high school equivalency test, and left high school without starting her senior year. She took a year off, got a job at a retail store and, again with the convincing of one of her high school friends, went to community college. She took four classes her 1st year; only one of which was considered a "transferrable" class. At the end of the year, however, she started to get serious. She shared:

> Now, at end of that year, this is like 2 years out of high school for me and I'm making like $5.50 an hour and I'm just like, "This is not working." So I tell one of my friends, "You know, I think I'm going to go back full time. I think this is . . ." and she's like, "Yeah, me too. That sounds like a good idea." We both just took four, five classes a semester, went to summer school, did what we had to do and then I transferred in 2 years after that. I transferred to UCLA. I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to be going out. . . . I know no one." I'm a transfer student going to UCLA. But I did it, and I left, and I went to UCLA and I majored in English.

She had done really well in community college, earning all As in her English classes, but transferring to the university was "hardest transition" of her life. She struggled to get Bs in her English classes, and by Year 2 almost left college completely. She recalled:

> In my 2nd year, I think it was winter session, I dropped a class, and then I dropped another class, and then I dropped my third class and, essentially, withdrew for the quarter. I told no one. Not my friends, not my parents. I was living with somebody at the time and I told him but that was it. Nobody else knew. I was so embarrassed, I was so ashamed and I just thought, "This is it. I can't."

Stella said by the end of that quarter she "regrouped" and decided to return for the next quarter. She continued to struggled in her English classes, but she was able to balance those with other subject areas such as psychology, women's studies, and foreign language. Although her grade point average was not as high as she had hoped it would be, she finished her bachelor's degree at the university in little over 2 years. As soon she finished, she applied to and was accepted into a teaching intern program at the district where she is still employed. This program would allow her to begin teaching without a credential and would provide her with the coursework to complete her California teaching credential, at no cost, within 2 years. Less than a year after she completed her degree, she began teaching a large inner-city school in the downtown Los Angeles area.

She was hired 6 weeks after the school year began and taught 10th and 11th grade English to students who had begun their year with a series of substitutes. Although beginning teaching with only 3 weeks of a summer pre-intern program training was overwhelming, she loved working at the high school and stayed for 8 years.

Teacher Leader Beginnings

Within weeks of starting, she was encouraged to join one of the school's "academies" and selected one she thought was most aligned to her teaching interests. The school, one of the largest in the state, had begun the process of creating smaller schools within the school, called academies. The mission of the academies was to foster collegiality by allowing teachers to work in small groups, better provide personalization to students, and, ultimately, raise the level of academic achievement and graduation rates. After working with this academy for 3 years, the lead teacher, an experienced veteran, decided to step down. Stella and her colleagues were stunned; the lead teacher had been the main driver of the academy's theme and mission. She and another colleague, also a fairly novice teacher, spearheaded the effort to continue on as an entity but rebrand with a new theme that better fit their expertise and interests. She and her colleague became the new lead teachers and started the new academy the following year. She felt a great sense of responsibility as a leader of this academy. She stated:

> They gave you an extra conference period, so I felt like I had to use that wisely. I remember always memo-ing everybody. I was sending memos to my little school all the time. I was sending memos to them about all kinds of stuff. . . . I would collect all of the transcripts. They used the continuous feed printers and I'd come back with this big stack of stuff and I would give it to the homeroom teachers.

The lead teacher position was her first real leap in to teacher leadership. In the first few years of teaching she also became Senior Cabinet advisor and Yearbook teacher. In her 4th year she was elected to the School Site Council, a governing body at the school that oversaw budget.

She was one of four teachers, in a school of over 200 teachers, elected to the council in its 1st year of creation. She shared:

> I ran and got placed on the school site council, and I remember the coordinator telling me that I got the most votes and I thought that was very interesting because I was a 4th-year teacher. But I think because I did also the yearbook and student government stuff and so I don't know if people just knew my name. I was a busy body.

She was elected as the council's first chairperson and held that position for 3 years. Stella embraced her leadership roles as a teacher. She recalled:

> I knew then that even as a teacher that I felt like a leader and in fact, when I became an assistant principal, although I was actually given the title as leader, I felt like I had, in a sense, more power as a teacher leader because I felt like I didn't have to watch what I said. I remember one time I said something that pissed off the principal. They misspent some money. . . . Anyway, I said something and the principal stood up, banged his hand against the table and he was like, "Who do you think you are?" I think he just had it with me.
>
> But in many ways, there weren't very many repercussions for teachers. You can say that he didn't like me very much after a while. I definitely was passed over when there were out-of-classroom openings. In many ways, I think I would have been a logical choice having done all of these things. One woman he hired, she and I started together and we had the same mentor. Same amount of experience but I did probably 10 times more than she did. But I think he thought she was quiet, she could be trusted. I think he

> saw me as somebody that couldn't be trusted. Still I felt like there was a lot of power. . . it felt empowering.

Transitioning to Formal Leadership

Stella had entered an administrative program fairly early in her career, when she finished her 6th year of teaching. She knew she may one day enter school administration and had wanted to continue her education to move up the salary schedule and earn a master's degree. She felt she could have the administrative credential in her "back pocket" and use it when the time came for her years down the road. In her 8th year of teaching, much earlier than she imagined, she secured a job as an assistant principal working with the same group of teachers and students at a new high school that opened with three other academies, now called small learning communities, just a few blocks away from their current site. Although excited to become an administrator, her new role was not an easy transition for her. She shared:

> When I became an assistant principal, I didn't really know how to act. Trying to find my voice was difficult because you're sort of like this at-will employee; you are the assistant to the principal so if you didn't really agree with the principal, you have to be very careful because you can lose your job.

As a teacher, she said, she felt empowered to do or say anything. As soon as she became an assistant principal, she knew she would have to be savvier. She learned, she said, to become much more "diplomatic" in her approach.

Stella was an assistant principal for 6 years under one principal. When the principal retired, the district insisted the two small learning communities at the school separate into two small autonomous schools. The two new schools would be colocated on the same campus with

two other small schools, all completely separate with their own principals. Although she did not feel ready to take the leap into the principal role, her staff encouraged her to apply and she was selected.

The Principalship

Stella says she went into the principalship "kicking and screaming," and felt more compelled to do it, rather than choosing to do it when she felt ready. She enjoyed the hard work of being an assistant principal and had begun to enjoy being "second." She enjoyed being a school leader and felt like the face of the small learning community, but liked the idea someone else was really the face of the school in the eyes of the district. When asked what her job entails she laughed at first and said, "Paperwork. Compliance." After some thought, she continued:

> Now, this sounds funny, but I feel like . . . it's not a cheerleader, but you have to remain that calm, steady face. There was this one teacher I had for years and she would look at me sometimes, "What's wrong?" She could tell when something was wrong, it was on my face. It would scare her because if the leader's scared, then there's something to be scared about.
>
> So it's about always managing to . . . sometimes, if you need to pump up the energy. . . . I'm not a believer in scaring anybody, but if you need something, like if things aren't happening and you want them to happen, you have to pull everyone together, build that morale, and build a reason why. "I'm going to tell you why you need to work 2 more hours a week because we need this." You have to be that person that's constantly reading the room. It's almost like this constant calming people down but also lifting them up. I don't know how else to put it. If anyone thinks that you're not treating

them with respect, whether it's parents, students, or teachers, obviously the district, then you're dead in the water, I think.

A few years ago I would have said, "Getting all the paperwork done. Making sure kids are here, the class sizes are low. Just no more fights." All of that, I feel like I can handle now. Last year I felt like I had a million fights and it's like as long as I don't . . . if I'm running around like, "Oh my god, my school's so unsafe because I've had 10 fights," then I'm my own worst enemy. Now, it's like, "Oh, we had 10 fights. Let's see why. Let's talk about why." I think you have to be that kind of person as a school leader. You have to constantly, like I said, pull everyone up even if your scores are in the shit hole. You can't make people feel like they're shit because of it. So yeah, I think it's that balance.

Stella felt successful leadership meant focusing on all stakeholders; it cannot be all about student achievement. She shared:

I used to have this professor that would talk about the "sweet spot" where it's like you've got your clients, you've got your students, you've got your teachers, and you've got you, your needs, and it's the middle—you're really trying to hit that. You're trying to satisfy these three things at the same time and really hitting them. I feel like sometimes, the way it's thrown at us, is like it's just about the students. Teachers are almost like this necessary evil. I think it has to be just about as much about the students that we serve as the people that we employ. We are serving a very difficult population of students and it's not who they are. It's not that they're awful or difficult people. Many of them have difficult circumstances. I just took a survey recently that somebody sent out about how

> many students we perceive have witnessed traumatic experiences or violence and I'm thinking it's got to be like 60 to 75% or more. I don't know.

Stella feels, as a leader, she had always wanted to do well by both her students, teachers, and staff. Their jobs are exhausting and overwhelming and they rarely get support and resources to do it well. She shared:

> It seems like almost every student has a story of some sort of violence that they've witnessed either in the home, on the streets, somebody they know who's been affected by some sort of violent situation and then even now, when we have so many of our students who are new to the country. Fifteen to 20 years ago we had students coming with their families to the country, leaving wars, coming to the U.S. Now it's a different kind of war. It's a war of violence, street wars, and the kind of atrocities that they're seeing, it almost seems more horrific than what we had seen 20 years ago. So our teachers are on the front lines and again, of course, our students are important, of course our students are number one, but if you're employing people and you want them for 25, 30 years in the system, you have to be . . . to understand that it's hard to manage, they're on the front lines. They're in the classrooms hearing this stuff, dealing with the emotional and behavioral problems every single day.

Leadership Style

Stella called herself a compassionate and empathetic leader, which she sees as ultimately one of her greatest qualities, but also one of her biggest challenges in this position. She spoke of a recent interaction with a new teacher. In just a few months of starting the job, she was diagnosed with a difficult-to-manage condition and her doctor told her she would need to take at

least 6 months off for treatment. Although she knew many of her colleagues would be upset and angry a teacher would leave midyear, Stella did not feel that way. She shared:

> Part of it is . . . like if my doctor says that I have this condition that may be more serious than they initially thought and wants to keep me out 6 months, would I want somebody to say, "Oh, I can't believe you're going to do this to me in the middle of the year?" You know what I mean? I would never want someone to do that.
>
> I talked to her, I said, "HR says—and I agree with them—that they don't want you to make any decision that would jeopardize your health benefits." She's like, "I'll resign if you need me to." My first instinct is, "protect yourself first." That sounds great to have her quit and all so that I can quickly hire someone, but, at the same time, this is this person's life.

Stella often felt sometimes she was expected to act in a way that was colder, more heartless than she was comfortable with. She understood she was hired to ensure her students were given a sound instructional program, but most teachers never found complete instructional success; many were utterly dismayed by their standardized test results their students received or simply day-to-day frustrations of failure in the classroom. She found it difficult to be extremely harsh to teachers who were trying their best under less-than-ideal circumstances and without the level of support she felt they would need.

At the same time, Stella also understood this way of thinking is not the norm, and even sometimes those who have been recipients of kindness, often got frustrated she is "too nice." She recalled:

> So the same time you might be compassionate with them, you might have stuck your neck out for them in times of need. So there can sometimes be a negative side to . . . people want compassion for themselves but they rarely see that as a thing to just be widespread about. It's just really hard for me to give up on people. It's really hard for me to say, "You're a terrible teacher, you've got to go."
>
> There's always for me something that I think most of the teachers have . . . and I think also because I know there's no silver bullet out there. There aren't these perfect teachers. We can just keep hiring, and firing, and firing, and trying to find others that could . . . I've been in this business for 20 years. It's not going to magically appear. Am I missing something? Once in a while you'll get lucky . . . but really you're better off trying to make people better. I think that is a flaw within the design.

Stella felt although she was better off trying to lift up her staff, the message she received often was being nice or compassionate was not part of her job description.

Leading as a Chicana

When asked about any challenges she has faced in being a Chicana school leader, Stella paused and shared in the beginning she had a difficult time fitting in with White women she met in the profession, many of whom were teacher–leaders at her school site. She stated:

> When I think of the White women that I know, I always think of myself as not being as smart as they are. Like I haven't learned enough. They seem so much more well-read plus their schooling was, you know. . . . I clawed my way through. Community college and then making it through UCLA, like just struggling. So I come across these really smart, amazing women and they're confident.

She shared her early experiences with them were not positive, and often felt shunned by them; certainly not allowed to fold into established groups like many other, predominantly White, teachers in her peer group. Although she looked upon this experience as negative, she credited it for allowing her to take charge of her own leadership direction without having to rely on their help, or, even more importantly, not having to ask for their advice or permission when she wanted to make a career move.

As a principal, Stella said, she has found many of her female colleagues of all ethnicities seemed somewhat insecure, at least in comparison to men in the profession. She said:

> I definitely think that the women that I've met and the principals that I've worked with when I meet them, I don't think any of them are as confident as most of the men that are in this position, at least how they present. Most of the men present as if that this is the job they were born to do. I could be wrong, but that's I think what it seems like.

She said most women she knew, when they read a job posting, felt they have to be confident they meet all expectations of the job; whereas, men did not seem to have that same expectation. She said, "They're okay with not being 100%; whereas, I think, for women, we always feel like if it's not perfect, it's nothing."

In her 2nd year as principal, Stella's boss recommended she apply to a fellowship with a local university for school leaders. She credited this fellowship with allowing her to get to know other administrators in her district, mostly Latina or Chicana women, more intimately. Although she enjoyed the fellowship at first, she soon noticed, along with other women, it was men who dominated conversations and were even offered jobs to teach at the university. She shared:

> There were women that were running this program, all women, not one man. I mean, they have men consultants but the leaders of the program, they were all these wonderful, older women whom I think when they came up, they were probably the few women leaders. So I think they worked with a lot of men so I think, in many ways, they didn't even see their own bias. From our group, they selected these men to teach in their programs, and not just one. Why men, right? It was interesting. We ended up starting to do these dinners after the meetings and we would talk because, I don't know if it's just like we didn't have the voice, but it was hard to get a word in edge-wise and it just seemed like we couldn't say shut up. We would listen and then we would go and we'd have these dinners together, these lunches together.

In addition to forming this informal group, Stella has also been part of two other formal professional groups for school leaders, one of which she had been a member for almost 10 years. Although men are welcome in these groups, they are heavily dominated by women. Although she valued these groups because they provided her with much-needed reflection and strength, she said she has noticed her conversations with her mainly Latina or Chicana colleagues are different with her other groups, whose members are ethically mixed. She stated, "I do feel a difference between when I'm with predominantly a Latina group versus . . . it's probably in my own mind like I feel that our discussions are just more raw. Lots of cussing and laughing." She contrasted her group of predominantly non-Latina principals with her Latina colleagues by stating, "It's like iced tea and dinner while others it's like tequila and beer."

Reflection

A few weeks after her initial interview, Stella read through the transcript and was interviewed a second time. When asked about how she made sense her of leadership identity, she stated she had, for many years, related to this idea of "imposter syndrome." She shared, "it's like there's this piece of me that feels like I just sort of fell backward into things." As she reflected on her journey and leadership identity, she recognized she had made her own way, but there were also things that happened in her life, which provided her with stepping stones that helped lead her to where she would eventually go. Her leadership identity, she felt, was nontraditional. She shared, "I'm here to serve others. I'm not really here for my own. . . . I shy away from the spotlight when I can. . . . I feel like my job is just to kind of help facilitate the smooth operation of things." Feeling like an imposter for so many years, she said, "actually helped me to become a better leader, to become a humble leader. I think that, that's so important." Avoiding the spotlight, shying away from traditional leadership attributes like always opening assemblies with speeches or being the face of the school allowed others to take a greater stake in the school. She shared:

> Either I lucked out or maybe it's affirmative action that got me here. I don't know. I think it grounds me, I think this idea that if I were to think, I don't know if this is true or not, but if I were to say, "Yeah, it's because of me, I did this. I'm the one that made this happen." That to me just seems very egoistic. Like this, "Oh, I'm the best, I can do anything I put my mind to." I think that if you kind of go through life thinking that it's not really . . . it's layers of things that have happened. Some of that, sure by my doing, others by the experiences and . . . then I think it just, it places you in a position where you

> can be more humble, that you can feel that sense of, it's not about all that I've done, this extra work to get here. That the experiences you've had and the people that have helped you along the way have placed you in these positions. I think it gives you a sense of, kind of takes it down a notch. And I think that can be good.

Stella believed most her teachers appreciated her attempts to be collaborative and have a flat leadership model, she felt, allowed for many perspectives; but some, she conceded, did not and often wanted her to be more directive and top down, which was a struggle for her. She felt her leadership style was more female than male and said, "I definitely lead with a lot more nurture, care, compassion." Although she felt she was definitely not a traditionalist ("I'm not a mother. I'm not married"), she embraced caring and nurturing traits often attributed to women and wondered why they were not seen as positives in leadership. As she was coming up as a teacher and assistant principal in the district, she felt women leaders she knew would encourage leadership in the form of "top down, heavy handed, shoot from the hip;" they had embraced what male leaders were doing and had adopted it. Stella said she "never got the hang of it." She shared she disliked how "women leaders are told very early on that we need to shed some of those caring traits and characteristics" because she felt those were strengths, not deficits.

Reflecting on Leading as a Chicana

Stella felt unsure about how being a Chicana has affected her leadership style. She said she did not "have a clear vision of what that looks like." She said she has always felt like a bit like an "outsider" among Chicanxs and Latinxs she knows, having grown up in a predominantly White neighborhood in the suburbs and being estranged from most members of her parents' families. She shared her and her sister's attempts, as young people, at assimilation and adopting

traditions and styles of those around them made her feel terrible, especially after going to college and later embracing her culture. Stella shared:

> And so it isn't until much more recently, in the last 10 to 15 years, that I've attempted to try to come to peace with not feeling Mexican enough, not feeling Chicana enough, not feeling Latina enough and just being open about it and accepting about it, but still wanting to as much as possible, kind of integrate a little bit into that world.

She also shared these feelings did not necessarily come from those around her, they were more internalized notions from embarrassment over not speaking Spanish or knowing traditions or colloquialisms others knew.

Reflecting on Life Choices

Stella said not being married and not having children had a great deal of impact on her leadership. She shared:

> I think that not being married and not having kids has been a bigger factor in how I run my life I think and how I've become a leader . . . my leadership story, more than I thought. And I think like looking back, it's interesting. I'm going to be 45 this year. It feels like from 35 to 45 was like 10 seconds. And I remember when I would tell kids or people in the community that I wasn't married and I didn't have children, it was like, "Oh, how sad. But there's still time." And now I think that when you get to the point where there's no time, there's not going to be a time, that's too old to have children at this point. It's such a strange thing, now people are just like, "Okay, that's interesting."

She laughed and continued:

> But I think it becomes like, "Oh okay, no wonder you can be a principal." Or "No wonder you can be pretty calm because you don't have to do." It makes sense to them.

In her 1st years as an assistant principal, Stella worked with three other women administrators, all at least 10–15 years older than she, and none of them had children. They all had partners, but none were married at the time. She said:

> And I remember thinking like that's so interesting, how this job kind of finds . . . people like me sort of find these jobs because it becomes like, "this is our path." And it's a much easier path to do this without children. I mean, I became an assistant principal when I was 31 which was pretty young I think. And I don't think I could have done, I mean most of the people, most of my friends at that age, they were either having children or looking for a husband they can have children with.

As she reflected, she was quick to say she did not regret not having children, she did not think she "would have made a good mother," but wondered if stepping into leadership was about legacy. She shared:

> I think for most people who have children, there's a sense of, "I'm leaving a legacy." We are only here for a certain number of years and after that all we have to speak about us are our children or what we leave behind. I think for me that's become work. So really that will be my legacy and I'm okay with that. I think that, that's . . . I don't think I need children because I have work and that sounds weird.
>
> And that's why sometimes when I feel like my job is in jeopardy I get so overwhelmed and full of anxiety and depressed because it is who I am. And so how do you . . . it's like saying someone's going to take away your family. What if someone took

> away this job? That's like taking away my family. It becomes like really tied into who you are and your identity. It's pretty scary. So anyway, I guess that the idea is I sort of, like other people would have family as part of their identity. I feel like work has become my vocation, my job, but it's also become like a part of me.

Not having children and a husband made Stella feel like she "could be a lot more present in my job." She did not mind times when she got late-night calls from district police when the school was broken into or when she had to stay late for athletics and dances, she accepted it. She shared:

> Those types of things I think I've totally accepted; it doesn't really even phase me all that much. When a girl had a seizure a couple of weeks ago and I had to go to the hospital and had to miss an important appointment and I was like, "well, it's just what it is." You do it, you take an Uber back to work to get your car and you move on. I think that has helped me. . . . I'm almost fully in, I don't know how else to put that.

Stella felt the responsibility of being the principal was overwhelming and "heavy," something she recognized as soon as she stepped into the role after being an assistant principal for 6 years. What made it easier for her, she said, was she knew this job, not family, was her "number one."

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

> *In a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways,* la mestiza *is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values on one group to another. Being trilingual, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of constant perpetual transition, the* mestiza *faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?*
> —Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 100

The *testimonios* of six high school principals in Chapter 4 represented data collected for this study on how race/ethnicity informs leadership identities of Chicana/Latina leaders in a large, urban school district. Although *testimonio* is often written as first-person narratives (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012), they are presented here in third person. Due to time restraints on the busy lives of these professionals, most of whom were also mothers, wives, and/or students, each participant was interviewed at length at least once; four were interviewed a second time. Semistructured interviews were transcribed, read and reread multiple times, reordered in terms in chronology and theme, and written in the third person. To ensure each participant's voice was ever-present, extended quotes from conversations were included throughout. Each participant was given a copy of their *testimonio* to read and revise if needed. Careful attention to was paid to ensuring each participant's tone and voice were captured accurately.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the first analysis framework used was taken from Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Methodology created for her dissertation. This study adapted Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Methodology by using the Mestiza Consciousness Framework as a guide for data synthesis, analysis, and interpretation by identifying three common areas of duality, or "where intersectionality has been split in opposition to one another" (p. 298) found across *testimonios*.

These common areas are duality of family and culture as a strength and as a weakness, insider/outsider duality, and duality of trauma and resilience. Each duality was identified and described, then analyzed in *Nepantla*, the "space between the dualities . . . where each side of the duality is visible" (Cordova, 2018, p. 298) and then interpreted in *El Cenote*, "the source of knowledge generated from a conscious awareness of the intersection of dualities and/or from attempts at merging dualities into a complementary form" (Cordova, 2018, p. 298).

In conjunction with Mestiza Methodology, *testimonios* were analyzed using the lens applied critical leadership (ACL), a theoretical framework created by Santamaría and Santamaría (2012), to specifically interrogate participants' leadership identities. ACL is a "strengths-based" framework that urges leaders to "identify and consider the positive attributes of their identities that contribute to their leadership practices" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 5). ACL leadership qualities offer "an alternative to the status quo educational leadership practiced in our schools today" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. xiii). Three ACL leadership identities and qualities emerged as themes from the *testimonios*. Principals led with a social justice lens and cared deeply about their school communities. Principals were reflective and self-aware. Principals worked as a member of their teams, as servant leaders and coconspirators.

Mestiza Methodology

Duality of Family and Culture as a Strength/Weakness

For these six women, family and culture proved to be spaces of both strength and turmoil. Most spoke at length about their upbringings and childhoods and the impact they had on their futures. With the exception of Julia, whose abusive father pulled her out of school to work, all expressed feeling their parents and families supported their schooling and learning, but mostly

theoretically. Although most women's upbringings were grounded by their parents' desire for them to become educated and successful, their sense of family and culture was heavily influenced by not only what their parents said, but what they saw around them and the push and pull of what it meant to be a daughter, a woman, and a leader while honoring their culture and families. Becoming mothers and partners, for some of them, brought both reward and challenge, enriching and complicating their lives.

In their professional lives, this duality showed up, both expectedly and unexpectedly. Paola's description of her mother as the "hardest working female I know" seemed to resonate throughout *testimonios*. Collectively, these women felt a deep need to excel and although their vocations were not working-class ones of their mothers and fathers, they embodied their hard-working ethics, sometimes to personal or professional peril.

Nepantla

Interrogating the space between duality of family and culture as a strength and a weakness, it was evident principals in this study felt the opposing forces throughout their lives. Families focused on education, even though emotional support and platitudes about education and college were often all their parents were able to impart. None of their parents had more than a high school education and were unable to fully guide them through their educational pathways, especially navigating through the college process. Having only a third-grade education, Paola's father could not read, but insisted on pretending to read the newspaper every day while she and her siblings did their homework. Sonia's mom told her, from a young age, her only job is school; she would insist on doing all of the cooking and cleaning while she nurtured Sonia's love for education. She told Sonia, "that's how you are going to repay, and that's what your job is."

Bella, Alma, and Stella also expressed their families supported their educational aspirations. Only Alma travelled more than 50 miles away from home to go to college; the other five remained close to home, close to family.

Four of the principals had children of their own and noted the great sense of joy and complication they brought to their lives. All came of age in the late 20th century, long after it was expected women could "have it all;" indeed, all of their mothers worked outside the home. Having to work as a school leader, however, is not a 9-to-5 job and pressures and expectations often conflicted with their plans for being "good mothers" and/or "good wives." Sonia's father worried her engagement would end when he told her fiancé she did not know how to cook. Stella, who became an assistant principal in her early 30s, expressed she felt by not having children it made her more easily "be totally in."

El Cenote

Although duality of family and culture as a strength and weakness was often felt as an opposing force, further interrogation locates possibilities of areas of complementary, not competing forces. Paola, who decided to dorm at the university a few miles from home for her undergraduate degree, was excited to move to New York for her graduate degree, but made the decision to remain home to be an aunt when her younger sister announced she was pregnant. Her disappointment with not being able to attend the graduate school of her dreams was overshadowed by her desire to be a loving sister and aunt to the new baby. Stella, whose initial start in community college near her parents' house was slow and unsteady, when ready to transfer after hitting her stride as a student, expressed fear and trepidation when she transferred to a large university only 45 miles away. Although she almost quit halfway through by

withdrawing from classes one quarter, she persisted after "regrouping" and started teaching less than a year after graduation. Although she now holds a master's degree and is currently a doctoral student, she never divulged to her family she nearly quit college altogether, something she laughs about now but says she likes to have her secrets.

Four women had children and most of them spoke of the need to balance work and family and expectations from both. Bella, who had not always put children and family at the forefront, wondered why, after having a child at 43, she did not make it a priority when she was younger. Becoming a single mom made it difficult to continue working at high school, which often meant late nights for events and athletics. She made the decision to move to a smaller alternative high school, which, although ensured a cut in pay, also allowed her more time with her child. In becoming a continuation school principal, Bella built bridges with the district and community, often not common in this setting. She strove to bring programs and services to her students to ensure they received more than their traditional school counterparts, not less. Julia, who entered the principal role later than the other women, did so after her children were older. As a single mother who commuted from a working-class suburb 15 miles outside of the city, she was uncomfortable with becoming an administrator, although she had been credentialed for years, because she knew obligations would pull her away from her family. Now remarried and living with only one child who is attending college, she felt she was making a difference in lives of students and working to better her school and organization, but she expressed she still sometimes felt uneasy about spending so much time away from home because her family still needed her and she enjoyed making dinner for them and felt guilty when her job prevented her from doing so. Sonia cried when she spoke of leaving her long-time community, her school and, through

tears, said she needed to do this for her daughter and her husband, even though doing so would require her to leave her post as principal and start over in a teacher role or out-of-classroom teaching position. Rising to the principalship was a great accomplishment for her and leaving it was heartbreaking.

Being raised by strong, hard-working parents, especially their mothers, principals often found they channeled these reservoirs of strength. Although often finding it difficult to easily recognize when strength became a burden, when finally acknowledged, change almost always led to something better. Paola reflected her decision to leave the principal position should have been made years earlier; she knew the job was an unhealthy one. Quitting, to her, initially seemed like failure, as if she was not working hard enough; she had grown up with a mother who had worked hard even under the "worst of circumstances." She had learned from her mom, "Don't give up, stick through it." It took her some years to realize she needed to "re-steer this ship," and when she did, she did not express regret for the past, but for love of her former school and gratitude for the ability to positively effect change for her students and their community. Although still enjoying life after the principalship and did not know where she may ultimately land, Paola was hopeful for her professional future and in working to support teachers and students. Alma spoke of her mom having a great deal of pride in her work and was very principled. When her company tried to demote her at the end of her career, she opted to retire early because she knew she gave everything she could and they were simply being vindictive. She recalled her mom telling her she could sweep, she was not above that, but she would not do it simply because it was not right for them to do what they were doing. Alma carried this same sense of pride and determination with her as a principal, never shying away from controversy or

hard subjects, even if it might not be politically savvy for her doing so. More recently, however, she and others noticed she had become better able to navigate structures of the district and honed her interpersonal skills in such a way that made her able to continue being a champion for social justice, but doing so with greater skill and poise.

Duality of Insider/Outsider

The principals all spoke of generosity, kindness, and inspiration of others such as older siblings, teachers, friends, mentors, and role models to whom they are indebted for helping them navigate worlds of school, teaching, and, sometimes, leading. These role models and mentors often brought them into a world that may have otherwise been hidden from them or simply inaccessible. Paola's high school teachers, all White women, encouraged her to seek out Chicana/o organizations, go to a Chicano youth summer conference, and start a club in her senior year. Bella, the youngest of 11 children, relied on her siblings to steer her toward getting ready for college and being a college student. Sonia, Alma, and Paola all spoke of teachers throughout their schooling experiences who reached out to them and pulled them over into the realm where the "good students" reside. All six women shared intimately how appreciative they were for many of these role models and early mentors who allowed them glimpses to inside workings of school, work, and life.

On the other side, the women shared stories of teachers, bosses, colleagues, and others who blocked, or attempted to block, their entrance to worlds known and unknown to them. Stella relied on a high school friend to encourage her to join honors programs because she was overlooked by high school teachers and counselors, even though her test scores and grades were quite good in middle school. Bella's lack of mentors and guidance in college left her floundering

for some time. In her 1st year as principal, Julia expressed frustration her teachers dismissed her suggestions for improving literacy, but readily engaged with an instructional coach with far less expertise than she held. She thought perhaps because she still had "some language acquisition hiccups with fluency," especially with idiomatic phrases and colloquialisms, and the other woman spoke with more confidence and authority her teachers more readily dismissed her ideas. Even Paola, Alma, and Sonia, all of whom spoke of mentors who helped them navigate the world of grade school, high school, and college, found few people in the workplace who took them under their wings to help guide them through complexities of leading.

Nepantla

Although many women expressed their love of school, their status as the dutiful, "good" student, and their connection to school employees made them feel part of an inner circle throughout grade school, high school, and sometimes college, all of them experienced detrimental effects of feeling like an outsider and lacking consistent role models, mentors, champions in their professional lives, or people who simply made them feel welcome in new spaces. When Alma, upon first returning to Los Angeles after a long absence while at a prestigious university and subsequent internships and volunteer work, interviewed at an elementary school, a male principal asked her why she wanted to teach "because, you know, you guys, you come here with your little tank tops . . . you think you know everything." Alma, who had worn a suit to the interview, was outraged by his rude behavior; because she was a young Latina from a good university he labeled her as unfit for the community.

Certainly, all women shared uplifting stories of colleagues and leaders who had admired the work they did and encouraged them to continue forward. Bella spoke of being "tapped on the

shoulder" a number of times to encourage her to promote and seek jobs in administration, even though it was something she initially did not want to do until the last few years of her career. Paola, Sonia, and Stella all became lead teachers of small learning communities, although they all expressed a sense of naïveté about entering the realm of leadership, thinking perhaps they were selected because no one else wanted to do the work. Alma, Sonia, and Julia spoke of principals who admired their ingenuity, hard work, and creativity and propelled them into thinking about the next step in their careers. Unfortunately, once becoming school leaders, most found many of their new bosses—in positions considered to be gateway to upper district leadership, the revolving door of directors meant they had many, many bosses between them—were not only unsupportive and ineffective, some threatened damaging their careers and mobility. Paola, who valued relationships above all, lamented difficulties in working under directors who lacked the desire to build any sort of real relationship. She wanted someone she could reach out to when she needed to bounce ideas off another person, but did not do so, worried she would say something to get her into trouble. Sonia, Julia, Stella, and Alma all alluded to clear gender discrimination in the ranks of principals. Alma said, "I do think men do get away with a lot of things that women would never be able to get away with. Even the way they dress." Sonia echoed Alma's comment and talked about male-only "cliques" at her high school principal meetings where they clustered together and give each other "hug-shakes" and not acknowledging her or many other women principals. She described dressing comfortably, and, unlike many women in positions of leadership, never wore high heels or carried fancy purses or bags. Julia and Stella both recalled incidents at meetings where they found themselves keeping minutes, setting up, or bussing dirty tables as all male administrators conveniently

arrived late, left early, or said their typing and writing skills were poor. Insider/outsider duality weighed heavily on these principals' sense of selves, often making feel them feel more servile, underprepared, and fearful than their male or White counterparts and wondering how to "get back" in the good graces of those in positions of power above them.

El Cenote

In reading and rereading *testimonios* of these women leaders, evidence of positive and negative contributions by mentors and anti-mentors was present throughout their journeys. With the exception of Stella, who never revealed any mentors or role models other than peers, all principals spoke of gratitude toward individuals or groups of individuals who nurtured them in new spaces, spaces like school and college where their parents or families lacked knowledge or social capital to teach them how to navigate, helping many of them wade through complexities of those institutions. As teachers, however, mentors and role models were hit or miss; some reaped benefits of being under the guidance of role models; whereas, others were never able to secure a meaningful role-model relationship. As school leaders, a consistent theme emerged; nearly all lacked support and guidance from their superiors in the district where they worked, often making them feel like outsiders, not part of the "club." Several spoke of the principal position as a "lonely" one. Although they expected those whom they supervised would sometimes push back on their leadership, some of them had done so themselves when they were teachers, they did not expect those who were charged with supervising them would be more inclined to instill a sense a fear and anxiety than comfort and calm. In delving deeply, it was apparent most of them found ways to mitigate disadvantages of the insider/outsider dichotomy.

Nearly all women have found strength and an improvement in their quality of lives by cultivating and maintaining peer relationships, some in the form of female friendships, some in more formalized group structures intended to bring school leaders together to build self-efficacy and leadership skills. Although initially starting her principal career with two male principals at her site whom she considered "brothers," when one of them left without telling anyone and was replaced by a woman principal, Paola realized how much the men had relied on her for menial jobs that kept her busy. The new woman principal, both a friend and colleague became a lifeline for her, a partner. When in the midst of a meltdown on campus, the colleague dropped what she was doing to help Paola through it. Paola wondered if she had worked with her from the beginning of her tenure would she have stayed in the position, but by the time she arrived, the unequal workload she had endured had become too exhausting. Alma, Julia, and Stella belonged to university-sponsored groups that allowed them to share openly and candidly about their lives as school leaders with other school leaders and aspiring school leaders, nearly all of them women, although men are not discouraged from membership. When Alma was facing possible demotion, it was two women in her group, both of whom hold high-ranking positions in their districts, who helped her through the ordeal because they too had been disciplined when they were principals. They helped her work through shame and anxiety her superior attempted to impart. Stella said in addition to more formalized peer groups, she often had dinner with principal colleagues, all women, she has met throughout her 7 years as principal. They often held after-the-meeting meetings to debrief, commiserate, and feel less alone in the job. Bella, who had been part of a fellowship for principals a few years back, went above and beyond to ensure they gave her one-on-one guidance and assistance. When she moved to her new school and knew she

was not teachers' first choice, she invited her mentor from the organization and one of the group's leading authorities on group dynamics and interpersonal skills, to join her in analyzing her new school's culture and climate and worked with them on devising a plan of action. Only Sonia, who shared it was difficult for her to find time to socialize with other principals or join groups, did not appear to have systems for debriefing, sharing, and brainstorming with others outside of what was typically offered through the district.

Although some women learned to network in high school or college, others struggled to build a network of supporters, sometimes with unfortunate consequences. In her recollection of her college experience, Bella expressed she had learned how to network "late in the game" and, in doing so, she sometimes received lower grades and spent more than 4 years as an undergraduate. She said she will make it her priority to teach her daughter how to network, how to hone her interpersonal skills and know and understand this sometimes "hidden" curriculum of navigating more than simply one's studies in college or hard work in one's career, but how to leverage relationships that could elevate her in life. Along this vein, Julia shared after years in the district she was able to meet leaders who did help and support her and more than simply being grateful in the moment and accepting their help while in the job, she worked at building long-lasting relationships. She shared, "What I do now and I didn't before is just stay connected to those people." Learning to build a support network was crucial to the women.

Duality of Trauma/Resilience

For these six principals, teaching and leading in urban schools were their life's work—sources of pride, stimulation, love, and comfort; however, throughout their careers, they often experienced moments of great pain, sometimes traumatically so. Duality of trauma and resilience

was, perhaps, best encapsulated by Paola, who said her years as a principal were "the most challenging, draining, difficult years of my life, but they were the best, which is so crazy." As principals in urban settings, all of these women spoke of difficulties of caring for students who have attempted suicide, who have been incarcerated, who have suffered life-altering tragedies such as violence and deaths of loved ones. In contrast to this trauma, they have witnessed students overcome incredible obstacles and have found academic success, emotional stability, and personal triumph.

Paola recalled helping an angry parent who told her she will be leaving her child at the school after a parent conference that did not go well. Bella worked at a continuation school that enrolled students who are unsuccessful at other schools, students who were on probation, who experienced mental health issues, and who have been disenfranchised by the traditional school setting. Alma had a student who went to prison for murder and described feeling "destroyed" the moment a police officer showed her his picture and told her he was the suspect. When Sonia learned one of her students was arrested, she felt compelled to speak with the entire grade level and tell them they need to reach out to her if they need money or support; none of them "should be catching a case." Two of Julia's seniors, both in the top five of their class, started to drink heavily in their last few months of school, both having a difficult time imagining their place in the world outside of what they have known, a place where their good high school grades may not be good enough. Stella spoke of serving a large population of students, many undocumented, who endured grueling, months-long journeys to the United States, often with large gaps in the educational careers, fleeing violence and oppression in their home countries. Although she and her team worked to overhaul their English language development program and provide more

counseling services, the high number of those who drop out or have negative schooling experience weighed heavily on her.

In their *testimonios*, many of these trying moments were juxtaposed by examples of resiliency or success. Although, at first, Paola's angry parent said she did not care if police were called to take her daughter to child services, Paola was finally able to convince her to stay and participate in a restorative circle late into the evening. Although she had no illusions the single incident would change their relationship altogether, she left feeling at least the young girl would have a home to go to that evening. Bella spoke of students who arrived to her school facing emotional, social, and academic problems but, after being cared for by her and her staff, would later become mentors and teachers to other newly arrived students struggling with the same issues. Alma and Stella spoke of having an endurance for work they wanted to continue to do. Although sometimes overwhelmed with stories of trauma endured by their students, especially in the beginning of their careers, they have found ways to embrace or lean in to the work. Julia and Sonia, both of whom grew up in neighborhoods where they would eventually work did everything in their power to keep their students' social-emotional, not simply academic, needs in the forefront. Sonia, who wondered aloud if her instructional or budgetary decisions were always on track, knew, for certain, her students were "cared for, loved" and she made a difference in their lives. Julia, whose own "multiple layers of adverse childhood experiences" helped her see students differently than her colleagues, said she could see a student "as a human being and not as a collection of really jacked-up behaviors."

Nepantla

A common thread for many of these women spoke to highs and lows of their work in urban high schools, often, as Alma pointed out, experiencing vicarious trauma as they served students whose needs were often difficult to meet. Although often expressing feelings of overwhelm and anxiety in their responsibilities, they all conveyed an unwavering commitment to their work could almost be compared to the devotion to one's family. With the exception of Julia who was in her 1st year as principal, the other five principals had been in their positions at their school sites for over 5 years. Even though she was new to her position, Julia had served as an assistant principal at her site for 5 years. Their schools had become extensions of their beings, a part of them.

Time and again, principals described their need to care for their students, to provide safe spaces, to be protective and respectful of their communities, and to work with teachers and school staff to improve students' learning experiences. They spoke little of standardized test scores and meeting district achievement goals not, presumably, because they were unimportant, but because there were more important aspects of their jobs, such as emotional and physical safety of their students. Both Alma and Sonia have children of friends and family members who attend their schools, who wanted their children to be taken care of by women whom they could trust. Those children were happy at their schools, even though they may not be the highest performing in the district.

When conditions of working in south central Los Angeles became untenable for Paola, and nearly daily student traumas she saw or heard about had become overwhelming, she made the decision to leave not just her school, but the position as principal altogether. Paola felt her

students were dealing with “life or death” situations and her focus on building community, building a safe space, and keeping her kids alive and thriving had taken a harsh toll on her mind, body, and spirit. Sonia, who also left her school and returned to a teacher-level position, needed to make a choice for her family and the job she loved and felt so honored to have. Living and working in an urban area became difficult to justify after having a child; although she loved her school and her community, exposing her own child to some traumas and realities of urban life did not seem like the responsible choice now that she had means to move to a part of town that had a reputation for quiet, suburban life and higher achieving schools.

El Cenote

Throughout the *testimonios* it was abundantly clear, for these women, the position of high school principal in a large, urban district was something they did not enter into lightly. Although some like Paola, Bella, and Stella, did not initially feel they were ready for the job, their experience and training suggested otherwise. It was the culmination of years of building their instructional practices, refining their interpersonal skills, and creating their leadership identities. Once in their positions, they immersed themselves into the school community and found a constant push of negative incidents affecting their students, staffs, and school communities and pull of experiences that were uplifting, enriching, and gave meaning to their lives. Exploring and analyzing this duality in *Nepantla* revealed work these women engaged in was powerful and life affirming, but it was also draining and overwhelming. Stella, who had been at her site as an assistant principal for 6 years prior to becoming a principal, found the difference between the two positions came down to “stress and the idea that everything will fall on me.” The weight of the principalship was something for which she felt completely unprepared.

The trauma principals experienced in their positions often made them feel principalship lacked sustainability. Each principal expressed a great deal of love for their work, but recognized costs. *Testimonios* did not reveal a clear path to reconciliation of this duality felt by principals, at least not if they continued to approach their work in the same ways or if the position continued to call for these same structures. Even though just a 1st-year principal, Julia said she could imagine staying in this job, but only if conditions changed. Alma, who had recognized more Chicanas and Latinas had been joining the ranks, suggested a need to "unify our voices to really critique the system."

Summary

Following Cordova's (2018) method, each duality identified was described then analyzed in *Nepantla*, where "knowledge is gleaned from analyzing the effects of living in the constriction of a binary space" (p. 298), and then interpreted in *El Cenote,* where "the source of knowledge generated from a conscious awareness of the intersections of dualities and/or from attempts at merging dualities into a complementary form" (p. 298). These dualities of family as strength/weakness, of being an insider/outsider, and trauma/resilience, when analyzed and interrogated in *Nepantla*, revealed the first two dualities, these lived experiences, however oppositional, provided passion and drive for these women. Family expectations and connections, although they sometimes lacked in stability, lacked awareness of dominant cultural customs, or simply caused exhaustion and a sense of overwhelm, gave them purpose and drive. Although principals of high schools, a high-level, respected job, being women, Chicana/Latina, often made them feel like they were on the fringe, but because of this, or perhaps in spite of this, nearly all created their own networks of support and inspiration. Analysis and interpretations of

testimonios also revealed traumatic experiences in the position and resiliency they brought to their work.

Applied Critical Leadership: Leadership Identity

As a complement to Mestiza Methodology, *testimonios* were analyzed using applied critical leadership (ACL) to uncover and highlight strengths and assets of the principals. The ACL framework, proposed by Santamaría and Santamaría (2012), applies principles of transformational leadership, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory (CRT) to create strengths-based model of educational leadership. *Testimonios* revealed many individual assets and strengths of the principals; many of these strengths were a common thread among the leaders. Three overarching leadership identities emerged: (a) principals were social justice leaders, (b) they were self-aware and reflective, and (c) they were team-oriented and committed to shared leadership.

Leading With a Social Justice Lens

Testimonios revealed all participants were deeply committed to their students, to communities they worked in, and to ensuring social justice was at the forefront of their work. Each principal worked in predominantly low-income schools serving populations that were almost exclusively Latino and Black and they did so deliberately. They brought social justice-focused programs and pedagogical practices to their schools, such as restorative justice, mindfulness, and full inclusion for special education students, and insisted students were the center of the work. Three principals sought out and attended an administrative credentialing program that focused on social justice; two attended doctoral programs with the same emphasis.

All principals identified a strong calling to social justice throughout their careers and it was often something they had been called to prior to becoming principals or even teaching. Bella, the youngest of 11 children, recalled going to marches as a child in the 1980s to protest for Central American nations experiencing social unrest and upheaval. In college, she wrote for and edited the Latinx newspaper on her campus. In high school, Paola started a MEChA chapter at her school after attending the summer Chicano Youth Leadership Project program where she learned to become an activist and leader. Sonia, as a student in her credential program, petitioned the board at her college to allow her and other credential students to conduct their student teaching in south Los Angeles, an area neglected by this program, so she could student teach at her alma mater, where she would later be hired as a teacher. When she was an intern just out of college, Alma worked to organize against antibilingual Proposition 227 and, as a young teacher, she collaborated with another teacher to reorganize the English learner program that was not working for their students. She and her colleague did not always focus on district policy and procedures, opting to do what made sense for their students. In her 4th year of teaching, Stella and several colleagues created an academy, a school within a school at their large comprehensive high school, because they were frustrated with other academies who wanted to serve only gifted or high-achieving students; they created a curricular and instructional program with a social justice theme.

As principals, all of them led with social justice at the forefront, it was the way they did business on a daily basis. Paola, who recognized detrimental effects of a negative disciplinary system and out-of-control suspension rates in her 1st year in the principalship, called restorative justice a “transformational piece of my leadership.” She insisted on learning and implementing,

along with her staff, restorative justice circles and conflict resolution. When Bella became principal at a continuation school, she served students who were often getting their last-chance to earn a diploma and because she knew so many had faced traumatic experiences, she insisted they embed mindfulness practices (e.g., reflection, therapeutic art, breathing techniques, and meditation) to help students focus and stay calm when stressed or overwhelmed. In a moment of triumph for her, she watched a student demonstrate the practice to a newer student who was experiencing a crisis. Sonia, who prided herself on championing her teachers and worked to ensure they were successful in their practice, said when she needed to make a call on helping a teacher or student, she always made the call that would best support and uplift her students. Her kids, she said, only had one chance to be successful in high school, a teacher already has a degree and can get another job.

Often, principals felt they were called to insist on or push for social justice practices, even when others pushed back. Alma, who returned to work in the neighborhood where she went to middle and high school, continually challenged herself and others to rethink systems of oppression. In an interview for a staff position that would be shared among schools on campus, she made an argument for hiring a Latino who had grown up in the area; she felt representation should be a strong indicator of a successful applicant. Even when others on her interview team, including her superior, chastised her for bringing up the applicant's ethnicity, she insisted her comments and opinions were valid and should be considered. Julia, who had just finished her 1st year at school considered high performing in the area it served, noticed almost immediately many students were still falling through the cracks, and the majority of those were English learners, in the special education program, or had behavioral difficulties throughout their

schooling. She had begun to have conversations around these disparities, even though her largely White staff were often uncomfortable with them. In a similar vein, Stella, whose staff she felt was more socially just-minded than most, spoke of one teacher with whom she clashed. The woman, who was White and grew up poor, held a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality because, in her mind, she was able to do so. Stella continually challenged her privileged mindset and the teacher left the school just after a few years.

Self-Awareness and Reflection

The six Chicana/Latina principals did not shy away from personal inventory and introspection; in fact, they constantly questioned themselves and reflected on next steps when they encountered obstacles or even failures. This self-awareness was not always easy, but vulnerability often led them to find answers or, at least, a sense of peace, when confronted with making difficult decisions. Principals shared moments throughout their tenures when their superiors, colleagues, and staff expressed dissatisfaction, anger, or disagreement with any number of the principals' policies, practices, and even personality traits, but they strived to remain focused on what mattered most to them, despite barrage of advice-giving and even criticism.

Early in her career, Alma's first director told her, on more than one occasion, "You need to have a spine" when dealing her new staff. Alma, a new principal who had hoped to learn from her new director, felt this advice would not work for her. In fact, Alma stated she had no problem being tough or firm, but she said, "I always think . . . what's the purpose of this . . . is it just about me and my ego?" As much as her job required she be firm, she believed it required she be a listener and leverage peoples' skills for the good of the whole. Although her current staff

initially pushed against her, she looked backed on those sometimes-painful early days as moments of growth and learning. Their pushback, she shared, helped her to grow as a leader, made her braver, and even taught her how to push back when needed. Working together with her staff, pushing and pulling, helped her to develop a leadership style that worked for her, her team, and her students and families.

Sonia became a teacher–leader in only her 2nd year as teacher; she became chair of one of the largest departments on campus, leading teachers who had taught her while she was in high school. She learned quickly she had entered a school environment where many teachers were unwilling to work as team. Although her nature was to work hard and get things done when others would not, toxicity, she realized later, had begun to negatively affect her health and mental well-being. When she entered her administrative credential program she was looking to "know what needs to be done correctly." A leader, she said, "is someone that keeps the kids in mind. Keeps the staff in mind and creates a good environment because if the teachers are happy, the kids are happy; if the kids are happy, the teachers are happy." As a leader, Sonia always maintained her energetic, problem-solver style; she would cover a teacher's class in pinch or pull a desk out in the hallway to supervise students while getting her work done, and she also strove to share responsibility with her staff. She valued her teachers' opinions and bounced ideas off of them. She removed obstacles whenever she could so they could focus on student learning. Although she had been accused of being "too nice" at times, she felt, like Alma, being open and compassionate as opposed to hierarchical and inflexible, allowed her to develop her staff in ways that would lead to a healthier school environment. When weighing if she should "write up" a teacher, she would ask herself, "Is it going to be something fruitful or is it just going to create

toxicity?" She often preferred to turn mistakes in conversations that could help people grow; she endeavored to build people up whenever she could.

Julia was also task-master, who, much like Sonia, became a teacher–leader early on in her career at the high school where she was a student years before. Similarly, she had become a department chair to teachers who had taught her. She initially did not see herself as a leader, she simply thought they saw her "as a hardworking person who they can dump a lot of work on." Over time, however, she did begin to see she had "a valid voice and insight into school leadership," especially in that particular community, where she had grown up. Her students, she said, often encouraged her to have a wider influence, and told her to become a counselor or principal; they pushed her to see herself as a leader. In her 1st year as a principal at the time of the interview, she was unsure how she would define her leadership style at that point in time, but she knew "being of service to the community" was her mission. She realized right away some of her staff wanted to see her simply as their boss, their supervisor, but she knew she wanted to be a leader who could model practices she asked of her teachers. Although she had worked as an assistant principal for 5 years at the same site, she was surprised at how difficult her 1st year was, but she also knew she would figure out how to be successful at this job because she "didn't know how to quit." When faced with failure, she said, she would "take apart what happened and try to find my part . . . and figure out to how navigate and get better." Confident in her skills as an instructional leader, she struggled with giving teachers feedback. She valued honesty, but, she said, "sometimes honesty's not nice." She wanted her teachers to grow and improve, not feel torn down and overwhelmed.

For Paola, who left the principalship after 5 years, careful planning and reflection were activities she valued highly and, for her, the job often did not allow for it; the pace of her work rarely gave her a moment to stop and consider and reflect. Although she was not afforded opportunity to reflect as often as she wanted to, it was clear she knew what was important to her and acted accordingly. She said during her time as principal, she did not feel she was a great instructional leader, but she felt she was "more of a cheerleader" for her good teachers and a real friend to many of them. When she sometimes had to discipline her teachers, she admitted it was difficult for her because she liked "to live my life with love at the center" and disciplining teachers felt contrary to that instinct. She also lamented that although her school's standardized test scores were not high and this caused them to be labeled low-performing, she was also well aware of what mattered most to her. She stated:

> Let me say this first. It's not that I didn't have a vision. I had a very clear vision. But my vision was never about data. It wasn't about the test scores or the graduation rate, that piece. My vision was based around the vision of the teachers that wrote the plan of the school, and their vision was to bring healing to this community. Personalization. Restorative justice. The social-emotional support. That shit, we had down. Nobody can ever say we didn't know how to support our kids in that piece.

On more than one occasion Paola spoke of her core values, two of which were living her "life with love at the center" and being her "authentic self." Keeping her values at the forefront was nonnegotiable for Paola.

Like Paola, Stella wore her heart on a sleeve and valued relationships above all. Her empathetic nature led her believe once she knew what motivated people, she was able to help

them grow and improve. She felt her teachers often needed the kind of patience and compassion she would give to her students; she felt it difficult to "give up on people." Like many of the others, Stella was often accused of being "too nice" or letting things go, but she was comfortable with that, knowing sometimes those same people had been recipients of her compassion when they needed it. Stella said she had often struggled with "imposter syndrome" and wondered how she was able to become an assistant principal and then principal. This inner struggle with confidence, she felt, may have actually made her a better leader; it was important, she said, to be humble. The title, the recognition, were not important to her and her leadership identity was "just about working for others." Although she recognized her compassion and empathy sometimes led people to believe she was too soft, her desire to be a servant leader ultimately guided her actions.

Bella was forthcoming about ups and downs of her first principalship. Although she liked the collaboration-centered vision written into the school plan, over time she did not feel others were working toward that collective vision and were, instead, focused on their own agendas. Realizing she could not stay in that environment, especially as a new mom, she opted to leave for a smaller, continuation high school. At first, she seemingly left one toxic environment for another, but over time she was able to make some positive inroads by following her instincts and doing what she felt was right. Although she inherited a group of teachers who had seen many other principals come and go in a short period of time, she knew she wanted to be there for the long haul. She believed, she said, in "leading with heart" and actively sought out tools that would allow her to collaborate better with her staff. Realizing she needed support to bring this vision to fruition, she sought out trusted mentors and coaches. She told them she was struggling and asked them to model for her. She shared:

> They not only did teacher observations, but they also did Bella observations and they gave me feedback. He actually said, "Okay, how would you have addressed this differently?" Having the coaches that knew adaptive schools and adaptive leadership and having them personalize that coaching for me is what has had helped me. I didn't have those skills at my previous school. Had I had them in my previous school, I would have addressed the righteous attitude of the teachers differently.

This self-awareness was a critical step for Bella who, with hard work and constant reflection and adaptation, has led her to garner trust and respect of her staff which has, in turn, allowed her to bring crucial services to her school community.

Building Teams and Coconspirators

All participants strove to build team-driven leadership at their schools. They all worked, by choice, in small school settings that believed in a teacher-led approach or in a small, alternative setting that demanded it. Three principals, Sonia, Stella, and Paola, had previously been lead teachers of small learning communities in their large, comprehensive high schools and sought to be a part of teacher teams that worked together to give students a more personalized experience. All of them approached leadership as a collaborative effort, one where they worked alongside, not in front, of their colleagues. Building a team-driven environment was not always easy or even attainable, but it something they all valued.

The principals felt a need to create connections with their staffs because they believed their schools could not be successful without true collaboration. When Paola became a principal, she immediately sought out a team of teachers who would become a part of her inner circle, and she "worked side by side with them as much as [she] possibly could." As a semi-autonomous

school in the district, she felt she and her staff used their leadership autonomy the most effectively. She built an instructional leadership team that would become her consultants and coconspirators; she would confer with them on any major decisions. Bella, when describing her success with a recent accreditation visit, described her teacher team as her "partners" and felt she was the most successful at her job when she was working collaboratively with her team. Julia shared, while in a district principal preparation program, one of her mentors told her it was important to create a "culture of care" for her staff, and that resonated with her; she had always believed in creating that for her students as a teacher and found it empowering to do the same as an administrator—to create a positive, caring culture for her team. In her 1st year as principal she worked to ensure her teachers were "working smarter, not harder" because she was concerned about teacher burnout and believed teacher longevity was important. As a teacher–leader, Sonia was one of those teachers who nearly burned out; she poured all of herself into the job, which she described as "intense." As an administrator, she believed rolling up her sleeves and diving in was strength for her. She said, "I always found myself helping and assisting and creating and doing . . . being the team player and getting it done for the benefit of everyone. Just get to it." Instead of giving a coordinator or assistant principal one more duty, she took on the task of testing coordinator and continued doing it each year. When her teachers went on strike, she saw their actions as a "sacrifice" and wanted to make sure they knew she valued them by having a poster made with the school's name and the word family on it. She said wanted her students to know when they returned, they would continue to work as a cohesive team. She said, "I want them to remember that. We're still here. We're still going to work with each other. We're going to return." For Alma, whose staff had initially clashed with her, working to build a team was a

win-win. She had told a friend how much she loved her job because she is not on her own; she had learned to "engage with others in a way that builds their capacity, they feel involved, and I'm not doing everything." Like Stella, who described herself as more of a behind-the-scenes leader who embraced taking a back seat, Alma said she was humble and believed in sharing leadership, even if doing so meant going against traditional, stereotypical leadership identity.

Though all at different stages of their principalship, all principals did understand making efforts toward true collaboration was sometimes seen as a negative or even radical idea, but they persevered because they valued it highly. Julia sometimes found it difficult during her 1st year to build a team culture, citing perhaps many had become accustomed to her predecessor's more patriarchal style. It was important she provided a space where they could actually collaborate and exchange ideas. She wanted to create a family-like atmosphere by bringing snacks and hot food for her team, but she also wanted them to push each other's thinking and even disagree. A true team, Julia believed, was not always polite; they should challenge each other to do what is good, ultimately, for the school community. Although Sonia believed some of her staff might think of her as top-down, she felt they simply found it difficult to believe the nature of the teacher–principal relationship could be one of shared leadership, which is what she aspired to. All of her teachers had her personal cell phone number and she insisted they use it; she wanted them to not be afraid to reach out when they needed help, she wanted them to feel like they were going through the good and the bad together. Stella spoke about teachers who appreciated her style for "opening doors" for them, letting them have freedom to experiment with leadership and decision making, but those same teachers would sometimes chastise her for not being more "heavy-handed" with others. For Stella, she said it was as if teachers believed "it is ok for you to be like

that with me, but this person over here needs the top-down approach." She recognized some wanted her to be more directive, but she felt doing so would only give a temporary sense of accomplishment. Paola believed working collaboratively, even across schools at her colocated site, helped to bring more resources (e.g., counselors and social workers) to her school. Although she agreed it would have been "way easier to just run my little school and not have to run every decision by the other two principals," she knew bonding together with them would help serve the greater good, for all of their students, by pooling resources. When reflecting on how collaboration had worked for her, Alma felt it was unfortunate many others did not value it. She lamented, "the system in the end keeps producing the same things." She believed shared leadership produced a deeper sense of real ownership in the community.

Summary

Obtaining the position of high school principal was not a simple or easy journey for any of these leaders. Julia and Stella, who did not fare well in their own high schools, found it difficult to believe they were able to graduate from college, let alone thrive as educators and obtain graduate degrees. Although others' educational journeys were more traditional, their journeys were not always smooth. Personal and professional strengths (e.g., compassion and care, collaborative and open, honest and reflective) did not always translate well in the work environment. These nontraditional leadership qualities often confused their teams and frustrated their superiors. Using an ACL approach to analyze their words and thoughts, however, did indeed reveal their leadership styles and traits as positives. Their insistence on social justice pedagogies and practices in their schools ensured they will never accept complacency, their

efforts on reflection and introspection led to constant learning and revising, and their focus on team building and building up others ensured a shared vision and legacy.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTION

> *What would education look like if we all met in Nepantla where no knowledge, shape of that knowledge, or configuration of knowledge was placed in a duality of right/wrong, inferior/superior, or understood/misunderstood. It would mean intuitive knowledge, lived experiences, and subjectivity could add to a fuller, more humanizing education where intellect has no bounds.*—Cordova, 2018, p. 338

The demands and stresses of a high school principal are many. At the minimum, high school principals are expected to create and oversee the school's vision, supervise teachers and monitor a rigorous instructional program, demonstrate yearly improvements on standardized state exams, create a caring, yet demanding, environment for students conducive to both academic and social emotional learning, oversee extracurricular activities such as athletics and performing arts programs, and ensure adequate support is given to families and the surrounding communities (Fullan, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2005). In an urban setting, these demands at times are overwhelming. My positionality as a Chicana and a current high school principal in an urban setting who has felt both overwhelmed and overjoyed, often simultaneously, in this profession piqued my interest in studying other Chicana/Latina high school principals.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how race/ethnicity and gender of Chicana/Latina principals who were serving or had served in urban high schools influenced their perception of who they were as leaders. The research question that guided this study was: How do Chicana/Latina high school principals understand and express the ways race/ethnicity and gender influence their leadership identities and practices?

Using Chicana feminist theory/epistemology and applied critical leadership as theoretical frameworks to guide the study, I interviewed five Chicana/Latina principals, all of whom I knew

through professional networks. I also participated as the sixth participant; I was interviewed by a colleague and friend who had been in the same doctoral program completing his own dissertation. Chapter 4 of this study contains *testimonios* of six principals. To capture the power of their voices and personal stories, *testimonios* are free of analysis, interpretation, or commentary. To analyze findings of the study using the lens of Chicana feminist theory/epistemology, I borrowed heavily from Cordova's (2018) Mestiza Methodology where I identified three common areas of duality: (a) family and culture as a strength and as a weakness, (b) insider/outsider, and (c) trauma and resilience. Each duality was identified and described, then analyzed and interpreted. I also analyzed findings using the lens of Santamaría and Santamaría's (2012) applied critical leadership (ACL) framework, to uncover transformative leadership practices common among principals. Those practices were leading with a social justice lens, self-awareness and reflection, and building teams and coconspirators.

Discussion and Recommendations

Voices (i.e., *testimonios*) of six Chicana/Latina principals revealed insight into their backgrounds, family lives, strengths and challenges, and successes and failures. They told their stories with a sense of openness and willingness and often went beyond the scope of the interview questions. Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) asserted:

> The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action. Thus, in this manner, the *testimonio* is different from the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, oral history narration, prose, or spoken word. The *testimonio* is intentional and political. (p. 525)

Testimonios, by themselves, are individual stories, complex and compelling on their own that, like Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) proposed, shed light on wrongs that have occurred in women's lives and illuminated points of view not often studied. Throughout the previous chapter, my analysis attempted to do the same, by finding common ground among participants' leadership identities. This final chapter, a discussion of findings and recommendations, aims to create a call to action on behalf of participants of this study, other Chicana/Latina educational leaders, and for any educational leader who strives to lead for social justice and understands one's life story and positionality is inextricably linked to one's leadership identity.

Develop Personalized Systems of Networks and Supports

Prior to becoming principals, most women found mentors or systems of support from a variety of avenues, albeit spotty at times. Almost all of them counted their families, specifically their mothers, as role models who provided them with motivation. Their mothers' support, and beliefs in their daughters, helped provide a sense of strength—even though they were often unable to provide tangible supports such as help with schoolwork, assistance with college applications, or know-how about navigating their career trajectories. Some principals named teachers and friends in secondary school and college who helped to fill these spaces and nurtured a love of schooling, activism, and college aspirations. As teachers, many spoke of being encouraged by colleagues and administrators to assume leadership roles and even out-of-classroom positions that helped prepare them to step into the role of the principalship years later.

Once finding themselves in the role of principals, however, mentors and support systems were hit or miss. One of only a handful of administrators on a campus, many described the job as

a lonely one. As a teacher, one need only go next door or down the hall to find a colleague to confide in; a school principal must seek out such support and, given the nature of the work, finding a trusted confidant is not something these principals took lightly. The principals, who valued reflection and strove for self-awareness, wanted guidance, support, or sometimes simply someone to listen to them vent their frustrations in a safe space. Some joined groups not affiliated with their school district, which gave them support structures and helped them to build a network, some found like-minded colleagues in their district networks, but others expressed continued difficulties in finding support networks and mentors.

Creating and finding a network of trusted supports, preferably a network of other women principals and/or instructional leaders, is an imperative for this work. Four principals specifically mentioned finding a woman mentor or a group of women colleagues they leaned onto for support and guidance. All women spoke of periodic difficulties of finding true camaraderie with some men in their networks; they never felt quite part of the "boys club" and felt men often did not engage in reflection and self-awareness, preferring to espouse a sense of know-it-all leadership. Of the two principals who left the position, one, who was grateful for having worked with a trusted woman colleague after a few years of working closely with only men, lamented she did not meet her or another woman earlier in her principalship; she wondered aloud if she would have continued on in the profession if she had. The other, who left the principalship to move to another part of the city too far away to commute to her school, never quite found a trusted network or colleague. Although she did not connect not having a network or mentor as being a factor in this decision, it certainly would have been helpful for her to have someone on her side to regularly debrief ups and downs of the profession and strategize next steps and endeavors.

Although some leaders expressed having had trusted bosses who had encouraged them to open up, be reflective, and in doing so, were supported and nurtured, even when they were experiencing difficulties, all of them reported this no longer seemed to be a norm in their district. Their directors, or immediate supervisors, according to the principals, focused on increasing graduate rates, standardized test scores, attendance goals, English learner reclassification rates, and a myriad of other state and district-mandated measures. The job of their supervisors appeared to be simply management, not support. In this reality, school leaders, especially Chicana/Latina school leaders, who are often pulled by an insider/outsider duality, must make it a priority to seek out peer mentors and support networks, preferably another woman and/or group of women, to guide them through not only cognitive demands of the profession, but emotional demands as well.

Although these networks often have to be created by individual principals, which can make them powerful because individuals may have a deeper investment in the group, creating and maintaining a professional network requires a great time commitment many principals, especially women who have children or family obligations, simply do not have. It would greatly behoove school districts and university administrative programs to help facilitate creation of these necessary support groups, which have potential of creating greater sustainability and growth among their principals and graduates—as long as networks maintain strict confidentiality protocols, are voluntary, and care is taken to connect like-minded participants. Three principals attended, at different times, the same university administrative program that offered small groups upon graduation to connect graduates from various cohorts in an effort to provide a monthly

space for reflection, camaraderie, and support in both participants' personal and professional lives. All three of them have taken advantage of the program for many years.

Prioritize Building a Team of Social Justice Educators

Leading with a social justice lens focused on the whole child was a moral imperative for participants in this study, all of whom purposely chose to work in urban high schools that served predominantly Latinx students, the majority of them first-generation, many new arrivals to the country. The vast majority of their students lived in poverty, often living in cramped spaces with extended family members. Schools they served had high percentages of students in the foster care program or who were experiencing housing insecurity.

The principals in this study, most of whom sought out teacher education, administrative, and/or doctoral programs with a social-justice focus, led with their students and community at the center. They believed creating an optimum school environment meant their team of teachers and support staff must share this mindset and vision. When principals shared stories of their work, they spoke little of graduation rates, but shared success stories of students who made it to graduation despite incredible odds. They dismissed importance of standardized test scores, but praised practices such as restorative justice, mindfulness, and leading with an ethic of care. Leaders spoke of compassion fatigue and the physical and emotional toll of their jobs, but when they were surrounded by like-minded teams (e.g., teachers, counselors, and support staff), who believed in transformative, social justice practices, they were better equipped to embrace challenges.

As participants of this study revealed, building a team requires time and patience and is an ongoing endeavor. Having often felt effects of an insider/outsider duality, these principals

sought to be inclusive, open, and thoughtful even as they sought to challenge oppressive systems. Building personal and professional connections with one's team is challenging as it must be practiced and applied over time. It requires dedication to working collaboratively and avoiding a top-down approach, while concurrently maintaining a strong vision and mission consistent with principles of social justice. Dedication to providing one's team with literature and study around race and equity, inclusion and representation, privilege and power, must be prioritized as part of the school's mission and embedded in the professional development program, alongside any instructional or behavioral program mandated by the school district, state, or other entity.

Prioritize Positive Reflection

The job of a school principal requires dedication and devotion to students, staff, and community, which, despite even the best of efforts, can mean not only long working hours, but inability to disconnect from work. Sleep is often lost to worry and anxiety and negative health effects are not uncommon. In analyzing and interpreting the trauma/resilience duality, it was difficult to find a path of reconciliation for these two forces, it was challenging to find a sense of balance. Although participants in the study often felt building in time for reflection was not easy, it was clear they strove to be self-aware and were vision and mission driven. They did not shy away from taking stock of their successes and failures, and in fact, contrasted their constant inventorying of their perceived blind spots and shortcomings with the seeming overconfidence of their male peers. Focus on quantitative measurements like standardized test scores, attendance rates, and graduation rates made it difficult to take notice of positive and innovative structures, policies, and programs they had implemented but did not necessarily translate to immediate increases using typical measurements.

It was through storytelling—reciting many specific instances in which they supported a student who was contemplating leaving school to work, a family who needed support after a student was hospitalized for suicidal ideation, or a teacher who was ready to quit because he or she felt so overwhelmed—principals were enabled to shine a light on all they have done. The overwhelming majority of their work was in service to others, working with their school communities to have a positive impact, making strides toward realizing their school visions and missions, almost always focused on creating safe emotional and physical spaces, inclusive, socially just schools that made room for all students, and fostering a true community of learners. Although principals are often called upon to reflect on their own progress and progress of the school in quarterly data chats and goal-setting conversations with district leaders, reflection is all too often simply tied to quantitative measures (i.e., test scores and ever-increasing benchmarks set at district, state, and federal levels).

Principals, especially Chicana/Latina principals whose own lives may have been affected by traumatic experiences—who may have overcome odds to secure their current position, and who perceive the principalship as not simply a job, but an extension of themselves—need to practice a reflection process that captures their whole professional and personal stories. This kind of positive reflection can be done with a group of others, perhaps in a supportive network of like-minded colleagues, reserving time to share specific instances that reflect how one's vision and mission is realized in real life and has left a positive impression. It would also be a powerful step to dedicate regular time and space to write or record one's own story as a way to reflect on what sustains a Chicana/Latina principal in this often seemingly unsustainable job. Engaging with stories of this group of amazing Chicana/Latina leaders, it gave me hope one day the time will

come when focus on successes and failures does not simply rely on ever-changing standards and targets that cannot fully measure a whole child, a whole teacher, and a whole school. But, until the time is realized, it is imperative they practice positive reflection to document their successes, however fleeting they may seem, to renew their dedication to the vision and mission and replenish their spirit.

Suggestions for Future Research

As the number of Chicanx/Latinx students continues to rise in California and across the nation, so should the ranks of Chicana/Latina high school leaders. Chicana/Latina high school principals are reflective, social justice advocates who prioritize the collective over the individual; future studies on their leadership may help ensure they enter and thrive in this profession. Although it was not a focal point of this research, nearly all participants were principals of small and/or alternative schools; a study comparing benefits and challenges of leading smaller high schools and larger high schools merits some attention. Additionally, a study examining differences in leadership styles of Chicana/Latina principals who were born in the United States and those who were born in other countries would further elucidate how one's upbringing, heritage, and family life influence leadership. Finally, further study on administrative credentialing programs that prepare aspiring Chicana/Latina administrators to become socially just, culturally responsive, and reflective leaders deserves further examination.

Final Reflection

> *Every increment of consciousness, every step forward, is a* travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing," I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens, I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before*.
> —Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 70

Midway through my doctoral program, I experienced one of the worst years in my tenure as a principal. My staff began to divide and, by year's end, I lost nearly half of my teachers. Although I tried to mitigate damages by telling people my teachers were leaving to take leadership positions elsewhere, which was partially true, I knew this mass exodus was viewed negatively. I blamed myself for centering my efforts on my own education, for shifting my focus away from my beloved school, one I had helped to create many years ago, and onto myself. Becoming a principal had been such an honor, such a gift; it had elevated me to a status, although I am embarrassed to admit, I did not think I could ever attain. Who was I to think I deserved to leave work earlier than I used to attend class and complete my studies? Who was I to dare to think I could be a doctoral student and, eventually, become a doctor of education?

This experience, and subsequent rebuilding of my staff and school culture, the revolving door of directors and superiors whose foci changed with the seasons, and, who can forget, the COVID-19 global pandemic, when, for the first 6 months, I was too overwhelmed to write, have derailed my timeline for this dissertation longer than I care to admit. As I struggled with my career, with my own identity as school leader, I not once thought it was an option to quit, to abandon my research. Soon after I began to experience my professional crisis, I reached out to my dissertation chair, Dr. Elizabeth Orozco Reilly, to explain my lack of progress. She listened, she expressed just the right amount of outrage, and, as a former K–12 school leader, she empathized with my plight. She also said something I have not forgotten, something that sustained me through this process: "Nova, your study is important. These women need to be heard, their stories need to be told, and you are the person who needs do this." From that point on, I knew I would continue, however long I would need.

I am truly honored and humbled to be in this profession because of these women who have participating in my study and many others like them. I have known them over the years, most of whom I met after becoming a principal. I met them in large meetings, as they motioned that there was an empty seat beside them when I looked lost. I gravitated toward them after watching them challenge presenters and colleagues with grace, kindness, respect, and yet an assertiveness that made their presence known. Their honesty, their stories had remarkable parallels in their varied upbringings, schooling experiences, and career trajectories. I hope I have conveyed their stories with complexity that matches their complex, duality-filled lives and careers—their courageousness and fears, their hopes and despairs, their strengths and weaknesses, their victories and setbacks—and their unrelenting attempts to bridge those dualities, to find that state of *Nepantla*.

Leaders who attempt to find reconciliation and a merging of their dual natures, who attempt to find balance and understanding in this multifaceted world, are often admonished for their lack of decisiveness, lack of a take-charge nature, lack of the binary right/wrong standpoint. Those who live in and lead in the margins, however, "can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 101). Anzaldúa (2012) asserted we can indeed live comfortably in ambiguity and eschew rational reasoning for "divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes, rather than excludes" (p. 101). This *mestiza* consciousness positions us for a future that will no longer tolerate an unyielding stance, that will no longer accept a singular, dominant culture "ideal." We are prepared to transcend these dualities, to rise above them to view the vastly complex world more wholly.

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

In the Principal's Office: A Narrative Inquiry of Latinas Leading Urban High Schools

Nova Meza

Guiding Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Research Question: How does the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender influence the leadership identities of Latina high school principals in a large, urban California school district?

Interview One: Focused Life History

1. Tell me about your family background, education and career.*
2. What identifiers do you use to describe yourself?
3. How does your background influence your current identity?
4. Describe any experiences that your race/ethnicity and/or gender had an impact on your identity.

Interview Two: The Details of Experience

5. How did you begin participating in school leadership? When did you begin to identify as a school leader?**
6. What does successful school leadership look like to you?*
7. Describe any personal or professional experiences that have enabled you to be a successful educator and school leader.*
8. Describe any personal or professional experiences that have hindered or obstructed your success as an educator or school leader.*
9. Describe your work. What are the most important aspects of your job?**
10. Tell me about your leadership style and practice. What are the positives of your leadership style? Do you have a story or an example of how you apply your unique leadership style?***
11. Describe any challenges you may have faced because of your leadership style. You may want to give specific examples.
12. Describe other challenges, if any, that you face as a Latina/Chicana school leader.*

Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning

13. Given what you have shared about your experiences prior to becoming a principal and your experiences now as a principal, how do you understand, or make sense of, your leadership identity?**
14. How does gender have an impact on your leadership style and practice?***
15. How does your identity as a Latina/Chicana have an impact on your leadership style and practice?***
16. Are there other aspects of your identity (spirituality, sexual orientation, economic status, etc.) that have an impact on your leadership practice?

The interview protocol follows the three interview series outlined in: Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

*Questions taken/adapted from: Moorosi, P., Fuller, K. & Reilly, E. C. (2018). Leadership and intersectionality: Constructions of successful leadership among Black women school principals in three different contexts. *Management in Education*, *32*(3), 334-353.
**Adapted from Seidman (2013).
***Questions taken/adapted from: Santamaría and Santamaría (2012). *Applied critical leadership in education: Choosing change.* New York, NY: Routledge.

17. Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future? Where do you see yourself making the most impact as an educational leader?
18. What other comments would you like to make about your role as a Latina leading a high school in a large, urban district or about the role of Latina school leaders in general?

The interview protocol follows the three interview series outlined in: Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

*Questions taken/adapted from: Moorosi, P., Fuller, K. & Reilly, E. C. (2018). Leadership and intersectionality: Constructions of successful leadership among Black women school principals in three different contexts. *Management in Education*, *32*(3), 334-353.
**Adapted from Seidman (2013).
***Questions taken/adapted from: Santamaría and Santamaría (2012). *Applied critical leadership in education: Choosing change.* New York, NY: Routledge.

APPENDIX B

CERR Tentative Email Approval

LMU|LA
Student Email

Nova Meza <nmeza3@lion.lmu.edu>

Proposal 600
1 message

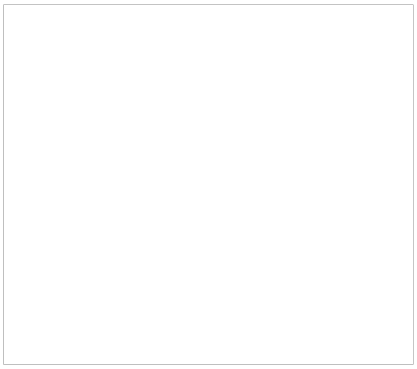
Fri, Jul 27, 2018 at 4:55 PM
To: "nmeza3@lion.lmu.edu" <nmeza3@lion.lmu.edu>

Dear Researcher:

I am pleased to inform you that the proposed study 600, "In the Principal's Office: A Narrative Inquiry of Latinas Leading Urban High Schools," was approved by the Committee on External Research Review. Once we have verified IRB approval from your institution, our office will follow with a formal approval letter. You are free to proceed with data collection once you have received the formal approval letter.

Please be aware that this approval is valid for one year's time at which point our office will follow up with the sponsoring institution to learn about the study's progress and findings of interest to the district. You will have the opportunity then to renew approval of the proposal should additional time be required for data collection or if modifications to the original proposal are necessary.

In our effort to document burden on schools, please let our office know the names of the schools where you will be collecting the data. We understand that you may not have selected your final sample schools nor have gotten permission to collect data, so we will be patient. However, we will need to know as soon as you know. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or thoughts. Thanks.



APPENDIX C

Rev.com General Non-Disclosure Agreement

CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT, effective as of the date last set forth below (this "Agreement"), between the undersigned actual or potential client ("Client") and **Rev.com, Inc.** ("Rev.com") is made to confirm the understanding and agreement of the parties hereto with respect to certain proprietary information being provided to Rev.com for the purpose of performing translation, transcription and other document related services (the "Rev.com Services"). In consideration for the mutual agreements contained herein and the other provisions of this Agreement, the parties hereto agree as follows:

1. Scope of Confidential Information

1.1. "Confidential Information" means, subject to the exceptions set forth in Section 1.2 hereof, any documents, video files or other related media or text supplied by Client to Rev.com for the purpose of performing the Rev.com Services.

1.2. Confidential Information does not include information that: (i) was available to Rev.com prior to disclosure of such information by Client and free of any confidentiality obligation in favor of Client known to Rev.com at the time of disclosure; (ii) is made available to Rev.com from a third party not known by Rev.com at the time of such availability to be subject to a confidentiality obligation in favor of Client; (iii) is made available to third parties by Client without restriction on the disclosure of such information; (iv) is or becomes available to the public other than as a result of disclosure by Rev.com prohibited by this Agreement; or (v) is developed independently by Rev.com or Rev.com's directors, officers, members, partners, employees, consultants, contractors, agents, representatives or affiliated entities (collectively, "Associated Persons").

2. Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information

2.1. Rev.com will keep secret and will not disclose to anyone any of the Confidential Information, other than furnishing the Confidential Information to Associated Persons; provided that such Associated Persons are bound by agreements respecting confidential information. Rev.com will not use any of the Confidential Information for any purpose other than performing the Rev.com Services on Client's behalf. Rev.com will use reasonable care and adequate measures to protect the security of the Confidential Information and to attempt to prevent any Confidential Information from being disclosed or otherwise made available to unauthorized persons or used in violation of the foregoing.

2.2. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, Rev.com is free to make, and this Agreement does not restrict, disclosure of any Confidential Information in a judicial, legislative or administrative investigation or proceeding or to a government or other regulatory agency; provided that, if permitted by law, Rev.com provides to Client prior notice of the intended disclosure and permits Client to intervene therein to protect its interests in the Confidential Information, and cooperate and assist Client in seeking to obtain such protection.

3. Certain Rights and Limitations

3.1. All Confidential Information will remain the property of Client.

3.2. This Agreement imposes no obligations on either party to purchase, sell, license, transfer or otherwise transact in any products, services or technology.

4. Termination

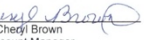
4.1. Upon Client's written request, Rev.com agrees to use good faith efforts to return promptly to Client any Confidential Information that is in writing and in the possession of Rev.com and to certify the return or destruction of all Confidential Information; provided that Rev.com may retain a summary description of Confidential Information for archival purposes.

4.2. The rights and obligations of the parties hereto contained in Sections 2 (Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information) (subject to Section 2.1), 3 (Certain Rights and Limitations), 4 (Termination), and 5 (Miscellaneous) will survive the return of any tangible embodiments of Confidential Information and any termination of this Agreement.

5. Miscellaneous

5.1. Client and Rev.com are independent contractors and will so represent themselves in all regards. Nothing in this Agreement will be construed to make either party the agent or legal representative of the other or to make the parties partners or joint venturers, and neither party may bind the other in any way. This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of California governing such agreements, without regard to conflicts-of-law principles. The sole and exclusive jurisdiction and venue for any litigation arising out of this Agreement shall be an appropriate federal or state court located in the State of California, and the parties agree not to raise, and waive, any objections or defenses based upon venue or forum non conveniens. This Agreement (together with any agreement for the Rev.com Services) contains the complete and exclusive agreement of the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all prior agreements and understandings with respect thereto, whether written or oral, express or implied. If any provision of this Agreement is held invalid, illegal or unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction, such will not affect any other provision of this Agreement, which will remain in full force and effect. No amendment or alteration of the terms of this Agreement will be effective unless made in writing and executed by both parties hereto. A failure or delay in exercising any right in respect to this Agreement will not be presumed to operate as a waiver, and a single or partial exercise of any right will not be presumed to preclude any subsequent or further exercise of that right or the exercise of any other right. Any modification or waiver of any provision of this Agreement will not be effective unless made in writing. Any such waiver will be effective only in the specific instance and for the purpose given.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Agreement to be executed below by their duly authorized signatories.

CLIENT	**REV.COM, INC.**
Print Name:_____	
By: _____	By: 
Name:	Name: Cheryl Brown
Title:	Title: Account Manager
Date:	Date: June 4, 2018
Address for notices to Client:	Address for notices to Rev.com, Inc.:
_____	222 Kearny St.
_____	STE 800
_____	San Francisco, CA 94108
_____	

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