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“Si No Yo, ¿Entonces Quién?”: Testimonios of Latino/a Catholic School Teachers in Under-Resourced Urban Catholic Schools

Antonio Felix
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by

Antonio Felix

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

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This dissertation written by Antonio Felix, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Mis primeros y favoritos maestros.

To my wife, Angélica—

Tu apoyo y amor me da la energía para siempre seguir adelante.

To my children, Amy, Alejandro, and Adrian—

You inspire me to give my best every day. You are my life!

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ABSTRACT

"Si No Yo, ¿Entonces Quién?": *Testimonios* of Latino/a Catholic School Teachers in Under-Resourced Urban Catholic Schools

by

Antonio Felix

There has been a significant increase in the number of Students of Color attending Catholic schools in the United States in the last forty years. However, only 17% of the professional staff in Catholic schools nationally are Teachers of Color (with about 9.6% identifying as Latino/a) (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). The racial gap between Students and Teachers of Color is a social justice issue (Berrios, 2016), and yet, research on why Teachers of Color are choosing to teach in Catholic urban schools and the motivating factors that sustain their work in hard-to-staff Catholic schools is limited.

This qualitative research study was conducted using a Critical Race Methodology (CRM) grounded (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) in two overarching theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). Critical Race *Testimonio* was used as a counter-story method to document the experiences of Latino/a Catholic school teachers who serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools (Perez Huber, 2008). This study was guided by three research questions: (a) what factors do Latino/a teachers describe as encouraging them to choose and sustain their urban Catholic school teaching profession; (b) how do Latino/a teachers

describe their racialized experiences in urban Catholic schools; and (c) how can urban Catholic schools enhance recruitment and retention policies and practices to diversify their teaching workforce?

This study explored the racialized experiences and factors which motivated, sustained, and contributed to Latino/a Catholic school teachers' choices to work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools and highlighted the authority of Latino/a teacher epistemology and ontology to understand that if the demographics of Catholic schools continue to shift, the recruitment and retention practices of Latino/a teachers must also change to meet the needs of all students in urban Catholic schools.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although there has been a significant increase in the number of Students of Color attending Catholic schools nationally in the last four decades, Teachers of Color in Catholic schools only accounted for 17% of the full-time and part-time professional staff (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). As noted by Berrios (2016), data showed that there was a shortage of Teachers of Color across all educational sectors in the United States and that there was a consensus among top education officials and organizations that promote the notion that more Teachers of Color are needed in American classrooms.

Catholic schools in Los Angeles, the largest Catholic school system in the United States, showed a similar trend in their reflection of the city's diversity and cultural richness (Martin, 2013). However, as noted by Martin (2013):

> The history of the Catholic schools [in Los Angeles] has been tied in many ways with that of the city—rapid growth, tremendous diversity, and the challenges and opportunities that come with being in one of the world's great urban centers. (p. 165)

While there are many challenges that plague Catholic schools, such as an antiquated finance structure, the decline in student enrollment, and increasing options for parents' educational choices for their children (University of Notre Dame, 2008), there are some additional interrelated challenges that are often not addressed in scholarship. These challenges include fundamental demographic shifts, the high attrition rate of teachers (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Przygocki, 2004), and the lack of diversity in the teacher workforce (McDonald & Schultz, 2020).

Background

Since their development in the early-to-mid nineteenth century (Walch, 2003), Catholic schools have been committed to serving families living in poverty within American cities. Walch (2003) described how the immigrant parish communities in particular, embraced Catholic schools and for many years filled their classrooms with students. He credited immigrants' desire of cultivating and preserving their native language and religious faith as key components of early Catholic school success (Walch, 2003). Like the European Catholic community in the early nineteen hundreds, the modern era of Catholic immigrants have continued to see Catholic schools as a way of continuing to strengthen their children's faith and as an excellent way of helping their children assimilate into the American way of life by ensuring cultural and educational pluralism (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997).

The Sister-Teachers

It is impossible to tell the story of Catholic school staffing in the United States without putting at the forefront the religious men and women who were instrumental in founding and developing Catholic schools as we know them (Caruso, 2012). As highlighted by Caruso (2012): "The gradual or sudden departure of women religious from Catholic elementary schools is now a part of the historical record" (p. 107). As noted by Walch (2003): "No group made greater sacrifices for Catholic parochial education that did women religious" (p. 134). Due to the long hours and their willingness to teach classes with as many as 100 students, the sister-teachers made it possible for the parish school system in the United States to grow as large as it did (Walch, 2003). The affordability of the sister-teachers alleviated the financial obligations that Catholic schools have struggled with in sustaining a lay faculty and staff. Besides the obvious

economic advantages that parishes gained through the service of the sister-teachers, their presence was their greatest contribution to the religious mission of Catholic schools (Caruso, 2012; Walch, 2003).

In the wake of this staffing transition, however, Catholic schools have encountered challenges that were non-existent before this shift in staffing. And although much of the foundational principles of Catholic schools in America have remained constant, Catholic schools have had to evolve and shift with changing demographics and human resource practices that were non-existent in their formational years. For example, when compared to their public school counterparts, the concepts of teacher recruitment and selection in Catholic schools is rather new. Prior to the decline of the number of sister-teachers, Catholic schools did not need to worry about their teaching workforce. Catholic schools were infamous for hiring teachers without proper certification and often hired people they knew without having to look very far. This common quick and easy hiring practice did not require Catholic school administrators to actively recruit for teacher openings and it also limited the diversity of the school's faculty and staff since most hires came from within the parish.

A Shift in Demographics

In a report evaluating the future of Catholic schools in the United States, the University of Notre Dame (2008) noted the following:

> The Church in the United States has undergone a profound demographic transformation due to the dramatic growth of the Latino population. Latinos will soon comprise the majority of Catholics in the U.S., yet only 3% of Latino families send their children to Catholic schools. The Church and its schools must find ways to attract, serve, and be engaged by the growing Latino population. (p. 11)

Nonetheless, in 2019-2020, 85.9% of all Catholic school teachers in the United States were White (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). Catholic schools, nationally, do not reflect the students they are counting on to save their schools despite an obvious "pressing responsibility to embrace the growing Latino population that has such an important role to play in the future of the Church in the United States" (University of Notre Dame, 2008, p. 2).

Locally, however, there was a slightly different window of opportunity. As of the 2020-2021 school year, there were a total of 263 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA). Slightly over 55% of the total Catholic schools in the ADLA were classified as either urban or inner-city schools—30.41% and 25.47% respectively. The diversity of the students enrolled in the ADLA Catholic elementary schools was representative of the five geographic regions covered by the ADLA. Over sixty-four thousand (64,685) students were enrolled in the ADLA Catholic schools and 46.14% (29,852) of the students identified as Hispanic or Latino/a. The total student enrollment in the ADLA by race is summarized in Table 1 and Table 2 below (Department of Catholic Schools, 2020):

Table 1

ADLA Elementary School Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity 2020-2021

Race	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Unknown	Total
American Indian/Native Alaskan	94	16	0	110
Asian	2628	78	0	2706
Black	829	895	0	1724
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1350	626	0	1976
White	8258	1834	0	10092
Two or More Races	3817	634	0	4451
Ethnicity				
Hispanic or Latino/a	20415	659	10	21085
Total	37,391	4,742	10	42,143

Note. Adapted from Archdiocese of Los Angeles data, Department of Catholic Schools, 2020.

Table 2

ADLA High School Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity 2020-2021

Race	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Unknown	Total
American Indian/Native Alaskan	138	30	0	168
Asian	724	1149	0	1873
Black	570	1222	0	1792
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	952	53	0	1005
White	3865	2783	0	6648
Two or More Races	1577	712	0	2289
Ethnicity				
Hispanic or Latino/a	7850	917	0	8767
Total	15,676	6,866	0	22,542

Note. Adapted from Archdiocese of Los Angeles data, Department of Catholic Schools, 2020.

Statement of the Problem

Within the context of a growing diverse student population nationally and locally, a teacher shortage throughout all educational sectors, and high teacher attrition rates in urban schools (Berrios, 2016), it is imperative that the teaching workforce reflect the racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of students in urban Catholic schools. However, largely due to their limited historical experience of having to recruit, select, and retain a teaching workforce, Catholic schools as a system do not appear to have developed a coherent strategy to recruit and retain diverse teachers (Sanchez, 2018).

Despite the increasing percentage of Students of Color attending U.S. Catholic schools, the teacher workforce in Catholic schools nationally has been predominantly White (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). As noted by O'Keefe (2003): "The staffing problem in inner-city [urban] Catholic schools is multifaceted" (p. 11). This problem is driven by the cultural mismatch between students and teachers that are often found in urban Catholic schools. According to the National Catholic Education Association's (NCEA) annual report on school staffing, 85.9% of Catholic school teachers were White, and slightly less than 10 percent (9.6%) identified as Hispanic or Latino/a (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). While research on the retention of quality Catholic school teachers has shown to be directly related to the success of the school (Przygocki, 2004), scholarship on why Teachers of Color choose to teach in Catholic schools and the motivating factors that sustain their work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools is practically non-existent.

The racial disparity between Students of Color and the teachers teaching them is a social justice issue (Berrios, 2016). Catholic schools, specifically those in under-served urban

communities, function as a catalyst for social transformation through their commitment to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and the endorsement of social justice principles (Dobzanski, 2001). As noted by Horning (2013): "The Catholic parochial school has historically served the educational needs of urban communities, the poor and the marginalized" (p. 381). Catholic schools, through their mission, shared vision, core values, and educational goals, were able to give witness of their call to implement Gospel values into their culture and curriculum (Dobzanski, 2001).

Catholic educators who reflected the intersectionality of their students and who were committed to enacting social justice practices were integral to the mission of Catholic education. The implementation of Catholic social doctrine into Catholic schools was accentuated by the role of the Catholic school educator (Dobzanski, 2001). The lay Catholic teacher, like their religious predecessors (Caruso, 2012), hold the responsibility "to call one another and their students to live with integrity, respect for human dignity, compassion, courage, and social responsibility" (Dobzanski, 2001, p. 320).

Teachers were essential components in the development of quality Catholic schools (Przygocki, 2004). As Catholic schools primarily rely on the laity to carry on the work of the sisters and as student demographics continue to shift in U.S. Catholic schools, an intentional and exerted effort needs to be placed on the recruitment, selection, and retention of a diverse teaching workforce.

Research Questions

This study aimed at highlighting how the racialized experiences of Latino/a teachers played a role in their motivations to enter and stay in under-resourced urban Catholic schools

that serve primarily low-income Students of Color. This study focused on Latino/a Catholic school teachers in order to contribute to the noted gap in scholarship on the unique experiences that Teachers of Color encounter in Catholic schools due to their racialized identities. The following research questions served as guideposts for this study:

- What factors do Latino/a teachers describe as encouraging them to choose and sustain their urban Catholic school teaching profession?
- How do Latino/a teachers describe their racialized experiences in urban Catholic schools?
- How can urban Catholic schools enhance recruitment and retention policies and practices to diversify their teaching workforce?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to advance the field's knowledge of the factors that enhanced the recruitment and retention of Latino/a Catholic school teachers to more adeptly increase the presence of Latino/a educators in grades transitional kindergarten (TK) through 12 urban Catholic school classrooms. Furthermore, this study explored the racialized experiences and factors which motivated, sustained, and contributed to the choices of Latino/a Catholic school teachers to work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. This study also aimed at highlighting the authority of Latino/a teacher epistemology and ontology to understand that if the demographics of Catholic schools continue to shift, the recruitment, selection, induction, and retention practices of Latino/a teachers must also transmute to meet the needs of all students in urban Catholic schools; and reveal the regularities and variations within and across the practices of Latino/a teachers in urban Catholic schools.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for several important reasons. First, empirically, very little was known about why Latino/a teachers chose to teach in under-resourced urban Catholic schools and the factors that contributed to their retention. Although there is growing literature on teacher and student racial disparity in urban public schools (Berrios, 2016; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), there was limited research that described the factors that sustained the work of Latino/a Catholic school teachers who served in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. This study represented one of the first empirical investigations to understand the recruitment and retention of Latino/a Catholic school teachers in the greater Los Angeles area primarily from the perspectives and experiences of the teachers themselves.

The promotion and benefits of diversifying the teaching workforce was another significant contribution of this study. Research has shown that Teachers of Color positively impact and significantly contribute to the educational experiences of all students, and in particular, Students of Color (Berrios, 2016; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Villegas & Irvine, 2010, Will, 2019). Specifically, Teachers of Color serve as advocates and role models for all students; Teachers of Color improved the academic outcomes and brought with them a deep understanding of the cultural experiences of Students of Color; and lastly, Teachers of Color further enhanced the education of Students of Color by reducing the teacher shortage in hard-to-staff, high-minority urban schools (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

This study described the extent to which social justice has impacted Latino/a teachers' decisions to begin and continue their teaching career at urban Catholic schools that have typically struggled to retain teachers. The findings obtained through this study assist principals

and (arch)dioceses in promoting a culture that fosters teacher diversity through the implementation of intentional recruitment and retention practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in two overarching theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). Solorzano (1997) defined CRT as a "set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color" (p. 6). LatCrit is an extension from CRT "which examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture" (Perez Huber, 2010, p. 77). As noted by Perez Huber (2010): "LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters" (p. 79).

Additionally, CRT in education has become a centered framework that has provided researchers with a critical lens that has allowed them to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to the law and by examining how varied forms of oppression can intersect within the lives of People of Color and how those intersections were manifested in their daily experiences (Khalifa et al., 2013; Perez Huber, 2010; Solorzano, 1997). CRT is formed by five tenets that have emerged from the work of CRT scholars (Khalifa et al., 2013; Solorzano, 1997):

- Acknowledging that racism is an invisible norm and White culture and (privilege) is the standard by which other races are measured.
- Committing to understanding that racism is socially constructed and expanded and an inclusive worldview is required for true social justice.

- Acknowledging the unique perspective and voice of people of color as victims of oppression in racial matters and valuing their storytelling as a legitimate way to convey knowledge.
- Engaging interdisciplinary dialogue and discourse to analyze race relationships.
- An understanding that racism is systemic, and that many current policies and laws are: (1) neither ahistorical nor apolitical; and (2) are situated to privilege Whites and marginalized minoritized groups. (Khalifa et al., 2013, p. 491)

Research Design and Methodology

This study was conducted using a Critical Race Methodology (CRM). More specifically, in alignment with the critical race grounded theory approach, Critical Race *Testimonio* was used to document the experiences of the participants (Perez Huber, 2010). A purposive convenience sample of six Latino/a Catholic urban elementary school teachers was used to select the participants for this study (Leavy, 2017; Mills & Gay, 2019). Data were collected using an in-depth, three-interview series design in which the first interview focused on the participant's personal and professional background, the second interview focused on the participant's lived experiences as an urban Catholic school teacher, and the third and final interview explored areas of growth and strategies that have worked in sustaining their work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools (Seidman, 2019; Theoharis, 2007).

Participants were also invited to participate in a group interview in which preliminary findings were shared and explored. A content analysis of relevant institutional and school documents related to the schools' mission, vision, and philosophy was also conducted. Interview

questions were developed using a CRT lens and from my own lived experiences as a Latino urban Catholic school educator (Theoharis, 2007).

A deductive coding approach (Creswell, 2014; Thomas, 2006) was used to closely analyze the data to develop themes and codes. The use of deductive coding assisted in the reduction of data and to find patterns and relationships across the three interviews. Since multiple semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of this study, an analytic memo was maintained and preliminary jottings were recorded as data were being collected. In order to identify emergent themes, all interview transcripts were read multiple times and a list of codes obtained during the analysis was created.

Positionality

In an effort to articulate my positionality, specifically as it related to my interest in the recruitment and retention of Latino/a Catholic school teachers who serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools, I acknowledged that my positionality was shaped through my own experiences as a Latino Catholic school teacher and principal at one of the poorest urban Catholic schools in the ADLA and by my position as a program director of two Catholic teacher preparation programs at a Jesuit university in Los Angeles, California. It was also imperative that I took into account and critically reflected upon my intersectional identity as a Catholic, first-generation, bilingual, Mexican American, male, raised in poverty.

To provide a true grasp of the multiple identifiers of my intersectionality and the impact it had on my positionality, I took into account how these identities were shaped through my family's early experiences as immigrants from Mexico and my experiences as a social justice leader in Catholic education institutions.

Limitations

Given the qualitative nature of this research, there were some limitations to the study. Limitations for this study included the reliance and selection on the participants' memory since recollection of their experiences included critical feedback on their school's leadership, for example, and researcher bias due to my positionality as an urban Catholic school advocate and former urban Catholic school principal. Also, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant influence on the expression of the participants' experiences given the impact the pandemic had on students, teachers, administrators, and education as a whole.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this study included the specific criteria that were set for selecting participants and sites, and the study's sample size. Also, other stakeholders such as principals, parents, and students were not interviewed for this particular study. Another delimitation was that only under-resourced Catholic schools were chosen as part of the study. The ADLA had schools in urban communities that were not considered under-resourced and yet experienced many of the same challenges described throughout this chapter.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following definitions were applicable to this study:

Archdiocese: The chief diocese of an ecclesiastical province governed by an archbishop (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], n.d.).

Catholic Social Teaching: CST is based on the Church's understanding that every human being is created in the likeness of God. CST is built on a commitment to the poor and

marginalized, emphasizing that the faithful are called to reach out and to build relationships of love and justice (USCCB, n.d.).

Laity/lay: In Catholic canon law, a layperson is anyone not ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop. However, documents of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) referred to the laity as those who are neither ordained nor members of a religious order. The Vatican II description of the laity was the one commonly intended in most discussions of laypeople and their role in the church (Flannery, 2007; USCCB, n.d.).

Parochial: Of or relating to a church parish. Parochial schools are under the jurisdiction of the local Bishop (Jakuback, 2017).

Religious: Members of a religious order by virtue of religious vows who have committed themselves to a life of service to the Church. This includes ordained priests, sisters (nuns), and brothers (Jakuback, 2017).

Second Vatican Council: Often referred to as *Vatican II is* the twenty-first Roman Catholic ecumenical council (1962–65) convened by Pope John XXIII. The council produced 16 documents that redefined the nature of the church, gave bishops greater influence in church affairs, and increased lay participation in the liturgy (Jakuback, 2017).

Students of Color: American Indian/Native Alaskan, Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino/a students.

Teachers of Color: American Indian/Native Alaskan, Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino/a teachers.

Urban Schools: Schools that are located in or near densely populated areas that serve primarily poor and ethnically diverse students. Urban schools are typically described as performing lower academically than suburban schools (Zinger, 2016).

Organization of Dissertation

In Chapter 1 I presented an introduction to my research study which focused on the importance of diversifying the teacher workforce in urban Catholic schools to reflect the growing population of Students of Color. A brief historical background was given on the staffing of Catholic schools and how this transition of staffing is vital to the future of Catholic schools in urban communities. The purpose and the significance of the study were described, supported, and informed through two intersecting theoretical frameworks that placed the voices of Teachers of Color, told through a counter-storytelling or *testimonio* approach, at the forefront. Additionally, the research methodology and design were briefly outlined and I included the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature through the synthesis and critical analysis of the scholarship relevant to my research topic. Chapter 3 describes the research questions and provides a detailed description of the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the research data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews using Critical Race *Testimonio* and a discussion on the significance of the findings. I conclude with Chapter 5 which provides implications for practice, policy, and research along with recommendations that support the need for school-based changes and (arch)diocesan-wide reform if we are to increase and sustain the presence of Latino/a Catholic school teachers in under-resourced urban Catholic schools.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focused on exploring the lived experiences of Latino/a Catholic school teachers in under-resourced urban schools, the motivating factors in their selection to teach at under-resourced urban schools and their commitment to remain, while research shows that so many are leaving the profession. This literature review begins with a historical overview of Catholic education in the United States and includes a discussion on data trends in Catholic education nationally. This overview further elaborates on the transition of staffing in Catholic schools from a religious to lay faculty and a review of foundational Church documents that have been instrumental in the operationalization of Catholic schools and the role of lay teachers. The importance and effectiveness of Catholic schools are also discussed. Literature on Latino/a students in Catholic schools is also reviewed along with scholarship on Catholic school teacher retention, the diversification of the teaching profession through recruitment and retention strategies, and the benefits of having Teachers of Color in schools that predominantly serve Students of Color.

Context of Catholic Schools in the United States

Historical Overview

The origins of Catholic schools in the United States can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. Catholic schools were established to serve impoverished families and the growing immigrant parish communities. Early colonial Catholics embraced Catholic schools and key components of early Catholic school success were credited to the growing immigrant population's desire of educating their young in the way of the faith (Walch, 2003). According to

Walch (2003), several themes continually emerged in the history of Catholic schools in the colonial era:

- Catholics had to overcome significant obstacles—before they could even consider building their own schools, the Catholic faith had to survive the largely Protestant colonial America.
- The central importance of women religious—the sister-teachers provided a steady supply of the teaching force in Catholic schools for nearly 125 years.
- Sacrifice—colonial Catholics understood that the future of the Church in the United States was coupled with educating the next generation of Catholics; therefore, they were willing to dedicate their lives for the sake of education. (Walch, 2003)

Catholic schools reached their enrollment peak during the early 1960s (Hamilton, 2008). Over 5.2 million students attended close to 13,000 schools throughout the United States. The following two decades, however, saw a decline in the number of students that attended Catholic schools and an increase in school closures. By 1990, Catholic schools in the United States were comprised of 2.5 million students in nearly 9,000 schools. Despite a brief steady enrollment increase from the mid-1990s through 2000, there had been an 18% decline in the number of students and a 12.8% decrease in the number of schools in the ten years since the 2010 school year. The most impacted schools have been felt by elementary schools; primarily those located in urban communities (McDonald & Schultz, 2020).

In the 2019-2020 school year, 1,737,297 students attended 6,183 Catholic schools. Although the last four decades showed a significant decrease in the total number of Catholic schools in the United States, their commitment to educating children, particularly those living in

poverty and within urban communities did not waver—39.4% of Catholic schools were still in urban/inner-city areas (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). According to McDonald and Schultz (2020), the past 40 years also saw a significant increase in student diversity—21.8% were racial minorities (18.5% identified as Hispanic or Latino/a). Thirty-two percent (32.9%) of the students who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a attended Catholic schools that were located in the West/Far West region of the United States (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). Despite the increase in student diversity that Catholic schools had seen in the last 40 years, the Catholic school teaching workforce was still predominately White.

Transition in Catholic School Staffing

It must be restated that the story of Catholic schools in the United States cannot be told without highlighting the work of the sister-teachers. In his book, *When the Sisters Said Farewell: The Transition of Leadership in Catholic Elementary Schools,* Caruso (2012) asserted it was unthinkable to imagine Catholic education in America without the sisters. However, as he later noted: "History has proven the implausible possible" (p. 1) as the number of sisters working in Catholic schools declined significantly in recent years. At mid-century, the staffing of Catholic schools consisted almost entirely of religious sisters, brothers, priests, and deacons (90.1%). As of 2020, religious comprised less than three percent of the professional staff in Catholic schools nationally (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). With the dramatic changes that started to take place during the last quarter of the twentieth century, many wondered how it would be conceivable to replace the sisters' selflessness and countless hours of service (Caruso, 2012; McDonald & Schultz, 2020).

Nonetheless, with the decline of religious sisters and the universal call to holiness after the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s (Flannery, 2007), it was the laity, both men and women, who answered the appeal to serve and teach in Catholic schools (Caruso, 2012; Hamilton, 2008). Committed groups of mission-driven laity took on the work started by the sisters. The laity answered the Church's call to service and took the helm in helping steer the next generation of Catholic school students (Caruso, 2012; Hamilton, 2008). As of the 2019-2020 school year, 97.4% of the professional staff that made-up Catholic school personnel were lay men and women, while 2.6% were religious sisters, brothers, and/or clergy (McDonald & Schultz, 2020).

As stated by Sister Rosemarie Nassif, Executive Director of the Center for Catholic Education at Loyola Marymount University (LMU): "Those who founded Catholic schools, essentially, the sisters, will not be their saviors" (2019). Although this impact statement, which was shared with a group of Catholic education advocates and partners, was meant to jolt those in the room, it was not intended to diminish the work of the religious sisters. Instead, it was to bring to light the transition in staffing in Catholic schools and to highlight the importance of preparing and retaining qualified lay Catholic school teachers.

Although most Catholics accepted the transition of staffing in Catholic schools from the onset, some more traditional Catholics doubted whether Catholic schools could maintain their Catholicity if they were staffed primarily by non-religious teachers (Hallinan, 2002). In an indirect response, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) recognized the changing conditions in Catholic school staffing (Przygocki, 2004) and issued an encyclical letter in which it reaffirmed the mission and purpose of Catholic education. The apostolic letter asserted that

"Proclaiming the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and developing the mental, spiritual, and physical attributes of students would continue to be the essential mandate of Catholic schools" (Przygocki, 2004, p. 532).

Additionally, because of the obvious challenge of having to develop new finance structures to accommodate the retention of the more expensive lay faculty and staff, urban Catholic schools, particularly those that served students who came from historically disadvantaged backgrounds and communities, were most at-risk. For the first time in its history, Catholic schools had to begin to worry about how to retain their workforce. This transition in leadership meant that, more than ever, retaining lay educators was vital to sustaining Catholic schools, especially those in urban communities.

Foundational Catholic Education Documents

In order to understand the significance of Catholic education in the United States, one must take into consideration the foundational Catholic education documents that denote the importance of Catholic schools (Litton et al., 2010) and their responsibility in faith formation and their role in serving the primary mission of the Church which is to evangelize. In establishing her own schools, the Church was able to incorporate teachings of the Catholic Church that were being ignored in early common schools. According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977): "She [the Church] establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed" (section 8). Similarly, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) referred to Catholic schools as the heart of the Church and wrote: "The Catholic school participates in the

evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out" (section 11).

The aim of Catholic schools was to have a positive contribution towards the total formation of an individual. Thus, civilization would be of great loss without Catholic Schools (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). In describing the mission of the Catholic school, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) also asked that it be kept in mind that the basic principle of instruction at a school was education. Therefore, instruction at school was to promote the development of the whole person. In other words, Christian values were what guided Catholic schools towards the total formation of the individual (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977).

The notion of Catholic schools educating the whole person, and stressing the importance of moral development rather than just an academic maturity, continued to surface throughout many church documents on Catholic education. As annotated by Jacobs (2001), although studies have found that Catholic schools have a number of noteworthy academic achievements, the following should be noted: "The primary purpose for establishing a Catholic school is not intellectual, but moral" (p. 11). The idea that morality was prioritized over academics was based on the idea that educating an individual with good morals would obtain the supreme good for society (Pius XI, 1929).

In the papal encyclical, *On Christian Education,* Pope Pius XI (1929) highlighted the belief that a Catholic education was not only beneficial for the individual receiving the Catholic education but for the good of society. To further explore this concept of educating the individual for the good of society, Pope Pius XI (1929) asked questions regarding who had the

responsibility to provide this moral education for the Catholic youth. He concluded the following: “Education which is concerned with man as a whole, individually and socially” (Pius XI, 1929, section 14) was the responsibility of the Church due to her absolute superiority over the other factors which include family and civil society. It was the Church’s responsibility to announce the way of salvation to all men. Catholic schools were one way in which the Church decided to make the effort (Paul VI, 1965).

The Importance and Future of Catholic Schools

As noted by Jakuback (2017): “Catholic schools have historically played an important role in education in the United States” (p. 2). Therefore, it was vital to further articulate the need, importance, and effectiveness of Catholic schools in urban communities. Due to the many challenges that Catholic schools faced, many questioned the future of Catholic schools in the United States. According to the University of Notre Dame’s (2008) task force on the future of primary and secondary Catholic schools in the United States:

> Will it be said of our generation that we presided over the demise of the most effective and important resource for evangelization in the history of the Church in the United States? Will it be said of our generation that we lacked the resolve to preserve national treasures built upon the sacrifice of untold millions? Will it be said of our generation that we abandoned these powerful instruments of justice that provide educational opportunity and hope for families otherwise trapped in poverty? Surely not. Instead, when the story of Catholic schools is written, historians will look back on our age and marvel that against great odds, we changed the ending. (University of Notre Dame, 2008, p. 19)

It was the call answered by the laity to teach and serve in urban Catholic schools that provided hope in helping change the ending. The retention of highly effective teachers and the diversification of the Catholic school workforce will be instrumental in sustaining and saving Catholic schools in urban communities.

Regardless of the incessant transformations of society, Catholic schools have been able to adjust to these unremitting changes throughout history. Due to the fact that Catholic schools have stayed true to their ultimate goals of sustaining the religious faith and preparing the youth as productive members of humanity, Catholic schools have been able to adapt to the constant change of society. Contributing factors to the development of Catholic education in the United States are survival, immigration, adaptability, community, and identity (Walch, 2003). Interestingly enough, many of the factors that Walch (2003) discussed as crucial to the establishment of Catholic education were still evident in contemporary Catholic schools as critical elements of their survival.

The Effectiveness of Catholic Schools

Catholic school scholars often pointed to their effectiveness and outcomes as a way of describing the Catholic school difference (Aldana, 2014; Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Hallinan, 2002; Setari & Setari, 2016). For example, studies showed that Students of Color benefited greatly by attending Catholic schools (Aldana, 2014; Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Setari & Setari, 2016). Also, studies further found that the closing of Catholic schools impacted the educational outcomes of Students of Color and the social quality of the communities in which the schools were located (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). According to Setari and Setari (2016):

> The impact that attending Catholic schools has had on minority attainment of higher education and success in higher education institutions is of particular importance. Minority students with Catholic school backgrounds are considered to be better prepared for the rigorous work of college than their traditional public school counterparts. (p. 5)

Jacobs (2001) pointed to the quality of teachers and a sense of vocation as additional driving forces behind the success of Catholic schools. Further, Hallinan (2002) examined the outcomes of Catholic education as a way of making connections between Catholic schools and

other societal institutions. In her article, Hallinan (2002) stated that there were differences in achievement across grade levels and over time when comparing Catholic and public schools. Catholic school students consistently attained higher scores in standardized tests than their public school counterparts.

In accounting for this disparity, Hallinan (2002) pointed to the differences in the strength of academic programs offered in Catholic schools compared to public schools. The sense of community fostered in Catholic schools was also attributed to explaining the higher test scores (Hallinan, 2002). The role of the teacher was identified as a contributing factor to the sense of community and effectiveness referred to by Hallinan (2002). The Catholic school teacher extended his/her reach beyond the classroom, thus leading to students' increased commitment to their school and community. Teachers' high levels of collegiality and loyalty to their school were also recognized as promoting a strong sense of community (Hallinan, 2002).

Catholic schools have contributed greatly to improving conditions in urban communities (Litton et al., 2010). In order to appreciate the contribution of Catholic schools, Hallinan (2002) offered that it was essential to look at the outcomes of Catholic education. Studies found that sophomores and seniors in Catholic schools had higher levels of verbal and mathematics achievement scores than those same groups in public schools (Jacobs, 2001). Many people questioned how Catholic schools were able to produce these results given that there was a disparity when it came to the resources available to Catholic school teachers (Jacobs, 2001). The quality of teachers that staff Catholic schools has been the answer to this disbelief. Jacobs (2001) noted that professional credibility, clear purpose, and a sense of vocation were what drove Catholic school educators in providing a quality Catholic education. The Congregation for

Catholic Education (1988) also accentuated that even limited resources were invaluable if educators created a climate that was "humanly and spiritually rich" (1988, p. 28).

It was essential to point out that the outstanding performances and achievements of Catholic school students were not reserved for Catholic schools located in communities of privilege. But rather, throughout its history, Catholic schools have shown their effectiveness and impact with students of low socioeconomic status (Litton et al., 2010). While there was some research on the effectiveness of Catholic education for students of a low socioeconomic status, much of it was done in the last two decades of the last millennium (Litton et al. 2010). Litton et al. (2010) conducted a study that closely examined the effectiveness of Catholic schools located in urban communities.

The study focused on students that received financial assistance through the Catholic Education Foundation (CEF)—an independent charitable trust dedicated to providing tuition assistance to students attending Catholic schools within the ADLA with financial need (Wittenburg, 2010). Litton et al. (2010) found that CEF tuition awardees were succeeding academically despite many personal and financial difficulties; parents of CEF tuition awardees perceived Catholic schools as partners in raising their children; CEF alumni believed that Catholic schools had a profound impact on their lives and society; Catholic school principals confirmed that CEF tuition awards were key to keeping many urban schools open; and CEF alumni were committed to social justice. The study also found that students that received tuition assistance from the CEF had a very high graduation rate from high school. Over 97% of the students that participated in the study graduated from high school with a diploma (Litton, et al., 2010).

Similarly, as cited by Theriault (2016), a statement by the California Conference of Catholic Bishops highlighted how Catholic schools, focused on the formation of the whole person inspired by a faith environment and community, have benefited Catholic school students in California. In particular, the statement shared that Latino/a students in the ADLA achieved a 97.5% high school graduation compared to 66% of Latino/a students in Los Angeles public schools; were 2.5 times more likely to graduate from college if they attended Catholic school; earned higher incomes; and were more likely to be engaged civically (Theriault, 2016).

It is important to further highlight that teachers were at the core of the effectiveness of Catholic schools (Przygocki, 2004). However, there was a disparity among Teachers of Color in Catholic schools, a high turnover rate among Catholic school teachers (Brock & Chatlain, 2008), and attrition rates were highest in urban city schools. The following sections further explore these topics.

Latinos/as in Catholic Schools

Data showed that the student demographics in Catholic schools were changing (Hadro, 2016; McDonald & Schultz, 2020; Sanchez, 2018; Torres, 2018). In spite of this demographic shift, Sanchez (2018) noted that there were "Several structural barriers to a more diverse teaching staff at Catholic schools" (para. 2) and among them was a weak pipeline due to the limited pool of potential Latino/a teachers. As a result, many were asking "When will school faculties begin to reflect those changes" (Sanchez, 2018, para. 1) to serve the growing number of Latino/a children, many of which were Catholic (Hadro, 2016). Ospino and Wyttenbach (2022) asserted the following four reasons as to why the number of Latino/a teachers and leaders in Catholic schools had been historically small:

- "Human Capital Compositional Shift in Catholic Schools" (p. 10)—the transition from a religious staff made-up of primarily White men and women to a lay racially and ethnically diverse teaching workforce has not followed.
- "Focus has been on Enrollment vs. Engagement and Empowerment" (p. 10)—despite the increase of Latino/a school-aged children in the United States, Catholic schools are not doing enough to *engage* Latino families.
- "Location, Location, Location" (p. 11)—About 61% of all Catholic schools in the United States are located in "geographical regions where the Catholic population is predominantly white, Euro-American, and English speaking" (p. 11).
- "History of prejudice and discrimination" (p. 11)—Latino families have been historically marginalized and as noted by Ospino and Wyttenbach (2022): "Confronted with negative perceptions about their bilingualism, biculturalism, migratory status (for those who are immigrant), and even the various ways in which they live out their Catholic identity" (p. 11).

The geographic factors mentioned above along with inaccurate perspectives of Catholic schools have played a significant role in the low number of Latino/a children attending them. Although most of the Latino/a children were in the South and the West, the majority of Catholic schools in the United States were located in the Northeast and Midwest. Also, newer immigrant Latino families had a different understanding or false assumptions regarding Catholic education in the United States because of the elitist stature that is often attached to private schools in their home Latin American countries (Torres, 2018).

Other recent reports have found that although there had been an increase of Latino families in U.S. urban communities, less than three percent of all school-aged Latino/a children were actually enrolled in Catholic schools (University of Notre Dame, 2008; Theriault, 2016; Torres, 2018). Lack of cultural training among school staff, bilingual teachers, and administrators; Latino/a board members; and training in Latino/a ministry and theology were among the issues identified as contributing factors to the Church's inability to attract more Latino families to their schools (Theriault, 2016).

However, Catholic schools in California have had a different approach, experience, and success in serving the Latino community. According to Theriault (2016), schools in the ADLA implemented a vision that helped them in enrolling Latino/a children at rates much higher than those in recent reports. Dr. Kevin Baxter, former senior director and superintendent of Catholic schools in the ADLA, was cited as pointing to their "'History of being mission driven, being in urban environments, in low-income communities and serving those communities effectively'" (Theriault, 2016, para. 19) as having its greatest impact in drawing Latino families.

Even with the growing number of Latino/a students nationwide, efforts to increase the number of Latino/a students in Catholic schools were still rather new (Corpora & Fraga, 2016). The University of Notre Dame, for example, made an exerted effort to address the issue of Latino families' access to Catholic schools through their work with the Notre Dame Catholic School Advantage Program—an initiative dedicated to promoting research, innovation, and information dissemination regarding best practices to increase the number of Latino/a students enrolled in Catholic schools (Corpora & Fraga, 2016; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009). This campaign was a result of a report from the Notre Dame Task Force on the Participation of Latino

Children and Families in Catholic Schools titled, *To Nurture the Soul of the Nation: Latino Families, Catholic Schools, and Educational Opportunity* (2009). The task force examined and analyzed demographics, parent focus groups, principal surveys, case studies, and provided four key findings/recommendations:

- Developing demand—informing and attracting Latino families through personalized efforts and making Catholic schools affordable;
- Developing access—filling empty seats and reopening closed schools;
- Developing leaders—build human capacity in Catholic schools, transform school culture to better address the needs of Latino/a students, and recruit Latino teachers;
- Transforming Catholic schools and systems—develop new governance models and foster relationships between institutions of higher education and Catholic schools. (Corpora & Fraga, 2016; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009)

Given the reality of the shifting demographics described above, the future of Catholic education in the United States may well be at risk if the needs of a growing Catholic Latino population are not met by adjusting their teaching staff to reflect the students they are counting on to save their schools. Catholic schools have not been able to adapt to meet this need (Hadro, 2016). In fact, as noted by Sanchez (2018): "Catholic school systems do not appear to have developed a coherent strategy aimed at addressing diversity concerns" (para. 11). There have been limited efforts of any particular outreach by Catholic schools for the recruitment of Teachers of Color despite the abundance of literature that highlighted the benefits of more diverse teaching staffs (Sanchez, 2018; Villegas et al., 2012).

Diversifying the Teaching Workforce

For over four decades, demographic data collected by the U.S. Department of Education clearly demonstrated the need to diversify the teaching workforce (Villegas et al., 2012). In the early seventies, there was a 10% gap between the total enrollment of Students of Color and Teachers of Color in public schools. As this margin grew wider within the next decade, advocates of teacher diversity policies cautioned that this gap would only continue to widen without the implementation of any intentional interventions (Villegas et al., 2012).

In order to understand the cultural gap separating Students and Teachers of Color in schools, it is important to take a step back and explore the historical context that has impacted teacher diversity in the United States. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling said that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. This groundbreaking Supreme Court case helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement and brought many other unjust social structures to the forefront. However, as noted by Will (2019), "*Brown* also had an unintended consequence, the effects of which are still felt today: It caused the dismissal, demotion, or forced resignation of many experienced, highly credentialed black educators who staffed black-only schools" (para. 4). After the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, over 38,000 Black highly-qualified teachers and principals lost their jobs. This devastating decline continued to have lasting effects on the teaching workforce. As a result, a very small percentage (about 14%) of the teaching workforce in public schools were Teachers of Color (Lutz, 2017).

Even 68 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), a diversity gap in schools continued to exist in public schools—half of all Black teachers worked in urban public schools, over two-thirds of Black teachers taught in high-poverty schools, and only one percent of Black

teachers worked in predominately White schools. A similar trend existed in U.S. Catholic schools where 85.9% of teachers were White (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). Scholars agreed that the greatest impact on the lack of teacher diversity in the teaching workforce was the detriment that it has had on the learning experiences of all the Students of Color that were enrolled in public schools that could have benefited from having teachers that understood their lived experiences (Will, 2019).

According to Villegas et al. (2012), the literature for increasing the representation of People of Color in the teaching profession could be departmentalized into two arguments: (a) Teachers of Color serve as role models for all students, especially Students of Color and (b) Teachers of Color were able to make connections with their students through the understanding of their backgrounds and experiences.

The first argument for the diversification of the teaching workforce reinforced the notion that Teachers of Color were role models for all students. In particular, when Students of Color saw teachers who looked like them, they were able to visualize themselves as someone who could one day hold a professional position. This level of hope increased students' motivation to succeed academically and socially. In contrast, when Students of Color were exposed to a predominately White teaching workforce, they subliminally began to believe that People of Color were not suited to hold professional positions of authority (Villegas et al., 2012).

The second argument for the diversification of the teaching workforce suggested that Teachers of Color could bring to their practice an understanding of their Students' of Color cultural backgrounds and experiences (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Villegas et al., 2012). It would be naïve to believe that all Teachers of Color would automatically understand and relate to all of

their Students' of Color intersectional identifiers. Nonetheless, research showed that Teachers of Color were more likely to relate to their Students of Color than their White counterparts.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color

As more school districts and (arch)dioceses look for diversity in their teacher workforce, an exerted effort must be placed on the development of teacher recruitment, retention policies, and initiatives (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Sanchez, 2018). While there were still many challenges and barriers in strengthening the diversity of teachers, there were some promising practices that could translate across educational sectors:

- Build high-retention, supportive pathways into teaching—teachers were more likely to stay in the profession when they received high-quality teacher preparation. However, Teachers of Color were more likely to enter the profession through an alternative pathway and often learned while on the job. Candidates of Color could be supported by the underwriting of their teaching preparation program (loan forgiveness), funding for teacher residencies, developing Grow Your Own programs, ongoing mentorship, and the design of data systems to track racial diversity in teacher preparation programs. In the Catholic school context, programs like Loyola Marymount University's Partners in Los Angeles Catholic Education Corps (PLACE Corps) (Loyola Marymount University, 2022b) and Catholic Archdiocesan School Teachers (CAST) (Loyola Marymount University, 2022a) programs offered generous tuition scholarships to teachers who served in under-resourced Catholic schools.
- Create proactive hiring and induction strategies—teachers were more likely to stay in the profession when they were introduced properly to the profession. The shifting of

hiring timelines, partnering with local teacher preparation programs for teaching placements, including Teachers of Color in the hiring process, and offering a comprehensive induction program could significantly influence their decision to enter and stay in the profession.

- Improve school teaching conditions through improved leadership—administrative support and mentorship were key elements to the retention of Teachers of Color. Improving principal recruitment, preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development with diverse students and staff will help school leaders develop the necessary skills to support and retain Teachers of Color. (Carver-Thomas, 2018)

The recognition of the need for a diverse staff was only the first step. Once Catholic schools figure out how to diversify their teaching workforce, they then have to solve the challenges of retaining them.

Teacher Retention in Catholic Schools

Research has found that the recruitment and retention of quality teachers were essential to maintaining strong academic programs and that there was a direct correlation to the success and sustainment of a Catholic school (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Przygocki, 2004). Przygocki (2004) noted that: "Without effective teachers, there are no effective schools" (p. 524). In his review of Catholic school teacher attrition and retention literature, Przygocki (2004) found that the length of a professional career had a cost and benefits relationship. Therefore, he postulated that higher rates of attrition could be dependent upon the teacher's ease of entry into the field. Przygocki (2004) offered the following strategies that have supported and/or led to higher retention of Catholic school teachers:

- Catholic schools must be able to address the issue of the relatively lower compensation of Catholic school teachers.
- Effective teacher induction programs.
- Commitment and ministry are strong motivators for teachers who choose to stay in Catholic education.
- Merit-pay, career ladders, and advancement opportunities were identified as important factors that could influence teacher retention.
- Revised hiring practices: being able to match mission- and identity-driven prospective teachers.
- The expansion of Catholic teacher service corps.

While Przygocki's (2004) review of literature focused primarily on Catholic school teacher retention and attrition, other researchers explored teacher attrition across educational sectors. In their report, Holmes et al. (2019), suggested five reasons as to why teachers left hard-to-staff schools: (a) lack of principal effectiveness, (b) weak structures, (c) student behavior, (d) district practices, and (e) poor compensation.

However, the high attrition rate of teachers at urban schools had a detrimental effect on the school's educational program (Przygocki, 2004). Urban Catholic schools that served primarily diverse and historically disadvantaged populations (Martin, 2013) and schools that served low-income students were more likely to hire inexperienced teachers without the proper induction and/or preparation (Tamir, 2013; Winters & Cowen, 2013).

Catholic schools, particularly those in urban communities, had a significantly higher teacher turnover rate than public schools (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Ingersoll, 2003; Przygocki,

2004). About 40% of teachers left the profession within the first five years across all sectors with an average yearly attrition rate of 15% (Ingersoll, 2003). Private schools (which included Catholic school data), however, had a yearly attrition rate of 20-25% depending on the demographics of the school (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Ingersoll, 2003).

Additionally, finding teachers who were willing to work in an urban school was just as difficult as retaining them (Przygocki, 2004; Winters & Cowen, 2013). According to Winters and Cowen (2013), schools serving students who come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds had higher rates of teacher attrition and were more likely to get lower quality teacher applicants than schools that had student populations that came from backgrounds of privilege. In order to maintain their high standards of excellence that Catholic schools were known for, the ability to retain quality teachers was a key element of sustaining Catholic schools in urban neighborhoods (Brock & Chatlain, 2008).

Unfortunately, the schools that had the highest attrition rates were those found in under-served urban communities (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Przygocki, 2004). Although limited, the research on teacher retention and attrition in Catholic schools has focused primarily on why Catholic school teachers left the profession (Jakuback, 2017). There was even less literature that focused on why Catholic school teachers decided to stay in urban schools.

Tamir (2013) acknowledged that studying teacher retention involved a variety of variables and therefore traditionally had been challenging. Tamir (2013) conducted a comparative, longitudinal case-based study from three educational settings: urban public, urban Catholic, and Jewish day schools. Although recent research has been able to make some gains in providing a relative significance of the various variables that were common when looking at

teacher retention (i.e. personal and life cycle factors, school organization factors, societal factors, etc.), Tamir's (2013) study focused on two areas that have not been addressed in previous teacher retention research: (a) the gradual shift that teachers move away from their teacher preparation programs and (b) the contributing factors of school conditions. Tamir's (2013) study used a sample of beginning teachers from three teacher preparation programs: Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) at the University of Notre Dame, Day School Leadership Through Teaching (DeLeT) at Brandeis University, and Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) at the University of Chicago.

According to Tamir (2013), school context and environment had an impact on a teacher's career. Tamir (2013) found that school leadership, specifically principals, played a major role in shaping teachers' careers. The professional culture fostered by school leaders highly influenced a beginning teacher's perception of their school environment and determined the likelihood of them staying in teaching. Tamir (2013) concluded that teachers in the sample who did not receive adequate support from administrators and peers, regardless of the type of school setting (public, Catholic, or Jewish), were more likely to leave their beginning school placements. The results of the study found that many of the teachers who moved or left, experienced isolation, lack of collaboration, and did not receive meaningful mentorship.

There were many common themes in the review of teacher retention literature, including teacher support, the importance of effective teacher induction, and mentorship (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Chatlain & Noonan, 2005; Ingersoll, 2002; Przygocki, 2004; Shields, 2008; Tamir, 2013; Vierstraete, 2005). These themes will be further explored in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Beginning Teacher Support and Commitment

Collegial support was helpful to beginning teachers as they learned to cope with the first years of teaching. Support from colleagues also motivated beginning teachers to stay in the profession (Thomas et al., 2019). Thomas et al. (2019) pointed out that collegial support was often assessed using single survey items or composite Likert scales to measure how teachers perceived support from colleagues. However, Thomas et al. (2019) argued that a more comprehensive approach to understanding collegial support was needed. One such way was by taking a social network perspective (Thomas et al., 2019). In their study, Thomas et al. (2019) sought to investigate, through an explorative analysis, the relationship between collegial support networks and key factors impacting teacher retention using a social network perspective. The social network approach looked at collegial support as a resource that was an interconnection of relationships between beginning teachers and their colleagues. This perspective took into account the extent to which characteristics of support such as frequency and usefulness were related to teacher retention, motivation, and self-efficacy (Thomas et al., 2019).

Thomas et al. (2019) argued that relationships with colleagues were vital for all teachers. However, they noted beginning teachers needed three types of support: professional, emotional, and social. Professional supports for beginning teachers promoted growth in their teaching competencies—both theoretical and practical. Thomas et al. (2019) also found that beginning teachers encountered "the praxis shock" (p. 163) and reduced self-confidence. Thus, the emotional support of colleagues was essential in supporting them as they encountered other difficulties common to novice teachers. Finally, this study indicated social support of beginning teachers helped in their integration of the school culture.

The findings of the study revealed that network size was related to job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation to teach. The research suggested that novice teachers who received professional, emotional, and social support from colleagues experienced increased job satisfaction and motivation to teach. The findings of Thomas et al. (2019) were consistent with a previous study that supported the notion that all three types of support were important and needed to encourage positive teacher attitudes, therefore leading beginning teachers to continue in the profession.

Principals played a significant role in ensuring whether a teacher was successful in the classroom (Baxter, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002). Baxter (2011) noted that teacher success was more likely to occur when principals viewed the teacher through a supportive lens rather than through an evaluative one. Principals' actions were a way to show their support of their beginning teachers. For example, providing teachers with needed materials, giving teachers autonomy in their curriculum and pedagogy, and limiting service obligations (e.g., coaching sports, moderating extracurricular activities, committee work, etc.) were ways to decrease overwhelming workloads for beginning teachers (Williby, 2004). Principals had to serve as advocates of their teachers. As beginning teacher advocates, principals were able to provide support through mentoring opportunities and by training teachers in student-behavior management. Williby (2004) emphasized the importance of mentoring, noting: "It is this interaction, above others, that draws the talented to the teaching profession" (Williby, 2004, p. 191).

Research showed that principal support had a strong correlation to strengthening a teacher's commitment and job satisfaction (Squillini, 2001). Squillini (2001) conducted a study

to identify characteristics of job satisfaction that may be associated with commitment and longevity in teaching in Catholic schools. Squillini's (2001) study focused on elementary lay teachers in the Archdiocese of New York and examined job satisfaction and motivating factors for lay teachers to continue teaching in Catholic schools, looking particularly at differences in gender and teaching tenure. The study found that Catholic school teachers placed a high priority on administrative leadership, student behavior, teacher autonomy, and collegial relationships (Squillini, 2001). The fact that the majority of the participants were between 42 and 55 years of age with 10 to 19 years of teaching experience, indicated that the results would give a strong indication of what principals can do to sustain their novice teachers.

A study by Cimino (2001) showed similar findings as to what motivated the Catholic school teacher—love for teaching, love for working with students, and a strong commitment to Catholic education's mission of teaching as a ministry and being a witness to faith. Convey's (2014) study on motivation and job satisfaction of Catholic school teachers also found that the primary professional motivator for all teachers was their love for teaching and confirmed that faith was an important motivator for teachers choosing to teach in Catholic schools.

Teacher Induction

Retaining highly qualified teachers by providing teacher induction during the early years was essential to the continuing success of Catholic schools (Brock & Chatlain, 2008). Effective teacher induction programs were among the many strategies that proved to support and/or lead to higher retention of Catholic school teachers (Przygocki, 2004). There was a direct correlation to the support beginning teachers received in their induction period as they worked towards becoming competent and effective teachers (Chatlain & Noonan, 2005). This was an opportunity

for schools and school leaders to help retain them as they progressed in the profession. As indicated by Chatlain and Noonan (2005), 30% to 40% of beginning teachers left within the first five years.

In an effort to support the idea that a systematic, well-planned induction program helped in the development and retention of new teachers, Chatlain and Noonan (2005) examined the induction process for beginning Catholic school teachers in a mid-sized, urban Western Canadian Catholic school deanery known for employing a high number of novice teachers. They used a cross-sectional design using questionnaires and surveys to measure the effectiveness of teacher induction over the first five years of a teacher's teaching experience.

Teachers' perceptions in three dimensions of induction were considered for this study: pedagogical, religious, and managerial. The results of the research analysis found that the level of confidence of teachers on the three dimensions of induction varied. However, as noted by Chatlain and Noonan (2005), data presented a pattern that could assist in making conclusions on beginning teachers' needs. They also noted a good understanding of the confidence levels of beginning teachers and what schools could do to help alleviate some of their concerns within the three dimensions. School leaders either at the school and/or diocesan levels could look at the proposed areas of focus in the study as a way to develop professional development for their new teachers. The areas of support that were identified within the open-ended questions could also be further explored.

As noted by Ingersoll (2012): "While teacher induction has received much attention in the policy realm, until recently, empirical research on these reforms has been limited" (p. 47). Research has indicated that beginning teachers who experience induction, mentoring, and

collegial support in their first year of teaching are more likely to stay in the profession (Brock & Chatlain, 2008). Recognizing the scarcity of research on Catholic school teacher induction programs, Brock and Chatlain (2008) selected a qualitative paradigm methodology using survey narrative data to explore current induction programs. The researchers reached out to one diocese in each of the 50 United States and 48 Canadian districts in five provinces. Twenty-eight superintendents returned the survey—16 in the United States and 12 in Canada.

The authors found that most of the dioceses had similar goals for their induction program. The program goals included: the orientation of new teachers to the mission and values of Catholic education, improving the quality of new teacher performance, and improving retention of new teachers. They also found that the induction programs varied in comprehensiveness, delivery of the program, and lacked structured training in classroom management. Another major finding was that superintendents aiming to improve their induction program were constrained by time, money, and geographical location between schools (Brock & Chatlain, 2008).

Brock and Chatlain (2008) also mentioned that the majority of their participants identified mentorship as one of the most beneficial elements of their induction programs. Vierstraete (2005) defined teacher mentorship (as cited in Podsen & Denmark, 2000, p. 31): "As 'helping novices speed up the learning of a new job or skill and reduce the stress of transition, improving instructional performance of novices through modeling by a top performer, and socializing novices into the profession of teaching'" (p. 382). According to Vierstraete (2005), the large number of newly hired teachers that left teaching was not because of a lack of ability, but rather due to their perception of a lack of efficacy. Proper mentorship as part of teacher induction programs helped alleviate the overwhelming feelings felt by first-year teachers

decreasing the likelihood that the novice teacher would consider leaving the profession (Vierstraete, 2005).

Shields (2008) proposed a model for new teacher induction for Catholic educators that built on pastoral theology and adult learning theory. In Ontario, Canada, as part of a government policy, a transition year was implemented to support and train new teachers as they moved from education students to full-time teachers. The New Teacher Induction Program or NTIP, a combination of professional support and mentoring, was designed to help new teachers transition into the teaching profession. Since Catholic schools in the Canadian province of Ontario were government-funded, the NTIP was also mandatory for Catholic schools within that system (Shields, 2008). As a result, the Ontario Ministry of Education committed itself to incorporating a Catholic approach to NTIP. However, according to Shields (2008): "For Catholic teachers, developing professional competence is not something that is separate from spirituality, faith knowledge, vocation, and being a religious educator/catechist" (p. 166). Therefore, these elements should not be treated as "add-ons" (Shields, 2008, p. 166) by the Ontario Ministry of Education, but rather as integral to the process of the induction program.

Social Justice Implications

Research suggested that there was a need for educators who were committed to endorsing and enacting social justice practices (Hernandez et al., 2014; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017; Ryan & Katz, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership as making "Issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p. 223). In his study, Theoharis (2007) provided specific examples of social justice-

oriented leaders who transformed their school communities through their commitment to enacting justice and equity, explored the resistance faced by social justice leaders when working for social justice, and described strategies used by leaders to maintain themselves to continue working towards social justice.

While the majority of social justice leadership scholarship looked at the principal as the unit of analysis (DeMatthews, 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Theoharis, 2007), this review and study looked at the teacher as the unit of analysis and proposed that the traditional use of social justice leadership should not be reserved to school administrators and that leadership at schools should not be synonymous and/or exclusive to school principals. Catholic schools have been known for giving teachers the autonomy to lead from any chair and therefore have positioned themselves well to the operationalization of social justice teacher-leadership in this context.

As accentuated by Reed and Swaminathan (2016), social justice leadership "Encompasses a leader's disposition as well as the intentional actions required to enact SJL [social justice leadership]" (p. 1102). This premise was explored through the voices of Latino/a teachers who used social justice as a motivator to serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Teachers, like school administrators, have the capacity and responsibility to focus their attention on addressing the unjust social structures that disempower their students (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Theoharis, 2007).

Unfortunately, as noted by Lia (2019):

> Catholic school principals have a Herculean job to do it all: be an instructional leader, care for the operations of the campus, engage in the governance of the school, work closely with the Pastor and Board, have positive relationships with parents and families and so much more. (p. 3)

This adverse reality of overwhelming responsibility has made it critical for Catholic school principals to foster a culture of shared leadership with their teachers. However, as previously noted, the majority of research dedicated to social justice was centered on the school principal and not on other stakeholders (DeMatthews, 2014). While research on social justice leadership tended to offer implications geared toward the improvement of principal preparation programs, this study focused on providing examples of how teachers were indeed social justice agents in their own capacity and context and were willing to go the distance even when met with resistance.

Although resistance had been an emerging theme in social justice leadership literature (Hernandez et al. 2014; Jean-Marie, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018; Theoharis, 2007), very little had been written about what social justice educators could do to sustain themselves. This study contributed to the growing literature of social justice leadership that was beginning to address the resistance that tends to accompany social justice implementation. As noted by Johnson (2006): “Leading urban schools in the United States has never been easy” (p. 19) and can lead to great personal toll and a persistent sense of discouragement (Theoharis, 2007). The former and latter were contributing factors to high teacher turnover.

In essence, high teacher turnover in urban Catholic schools was a social justice issue. According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leadership was centered on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. Theoharis (2007) also expressed that social justice leadership was a call to action and appealed for educators to take “purposeful steps” (p. 250) to change schools on the behalf of those in the margins while keeping equity and justice in mind

and heart. At the core of this dissertation study, was the exerted effort to focus on the factors that contributed to Latino/a Catholic school teachers' choices to work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools and whose efforts often went unnoticed.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Viewing Catholic school teachers through a social justice teacher-leadership lens helped provide insight into their resilience in taking on the challenges that existed in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) accentuated the faith-based elements that were integral to the mission of Catholic education. CST principles as they related to Catholic schools emphasized the affirmation of human dignity, serving the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized (Scanlan, 2009). As noted by Scanlan (2009): "CST applies broadly to messages on social matters spoken from a wide array of Catholic voices, ranging from Church officials to theologians to lay leaders" (p. 7). Catholic schools must strive to live by the three core values of CST if they are to call themselves truly Catholic (Scanlan, 2009). These core principles, if present in Catholic schools, should assist in retaining Catholic educators who were driven to utilize Catholic schools as their instrument for enacting social justice.

Conclusion

As demographics continue to shift, Catholic schools will have to adapt to meet the growing needs of the nation's diversity. Catholic schools have been in positions of change throughout their history and will once again have to demonstrate the Church's continued commitment to meeting its people where they are at. The diversification of the teaching workforce will be instrumental in helping change the ending of the Catholic school story in

America. In order to do so, however, it is imperative that Catholic schools are in a position to retain their greatest resource—the lay Catholic school teacher. As evident in the literature, Catholic schools continued to be important institutions of academic excellence and evangelization. Catholic schools hold the responsibility to find effective ways to decrease the high teacher turnover that was common in Catholic schools and to reimagine their recruitment and selection practices to coincide with the growing number of students who can benefit from a Catholic education. As supported in the review of the literature, beginning teacher support and quality new teacher induction programs will help with increasing beginning teacher motivation and job satisfaction which will then lead to higher retention of Catholic school teachers. Most importantly, research showed that Students of Color benefit greatly from a diverse teaching faculty and staff.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As illustrated in the review of the literature presented in Chapter 2, the retention of urban school teachers across educational sectors was an ongoing problem. Scholarship showed that this dilemma was exacerbated in urban schools that served primarily students who historically were disempowered by unjust social structures and who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The research discussed in the previous chapter further accentuated that Catholic schools in particular had a much more difficult time retaining teachers citing lack of leadership, limited mentoring, and ineffective induction to teaching as the primary reasons teachers left the profession in high numbers within the first five years.

Also, as demographics continued to shift in urban communities across the nation, and as urban schools got much more difficult to staff, data showed that teachers in urban classrooms were not reflective of the diverse student populations they were being asked to teach. Despite this reality and regardless of the fact that research demonstrated that there were many benefits to diversifying the teaching workforce (Berrios, 2016; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), there was a gap in the literature that focused on the experiences of Teachers of Color who chose to teach in under-resourced urban Catholic schools and the factors that contributed to their retention.

This chapter is focused on the research design and methodology to answer the guiding research questions that aimed at filling the gap in the literature and focused on Latino/a Catholic urban school teachers. Furthermore, this chapter provides a rationale for the selection of a Critical Race Methodology along with the methods used to gather data. The participant criteria

including the setting of the study are described as well. Lastly, this chapter includes an outline of the data collection, data analysis procedure, limitations, delimitations, and a brief discussion on the validity/trustworthiness of the study.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of advancing the field's knowledge of the factors that enhanced the recruitment and retention of Latino/a urban Catholic school teachers, and in an effort to learn more about the racialized experiences which motivated, sustained, and contributed to the choices of Latino/a Catholic school teachers to work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools, the following research questions served as the guideposts for this study:

- What factors do Latino/a teachers describe as encouraging them to choose and sustain their urban Catholic school teaching profession?
- How do Latino/a teachers describe their racialized experiences in urban Catholic schools?
- How can urban Catholic schools enhance recruitment and retention policies and practices to diversify their teaching workforce?

Rationale for Critical Race Methodology and Critical Race *Testimonio*

This study was conducted using a Critical Race Methodology (CRM). CRM was defined as a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) revealed experiences with and responses to racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in education; (b) challenged the Eurocentricity of traditional research paradigms and offered a liberatory and transformational meaning to academic research; (c) involved exploration and creation of space for Latino/a voices and experiential knowledge through the construction of storytelling and counter-narrative; (d)

exposed deficit-informed research and methods that silenced and distorted the experiences of People of Color and instead focused on their racialized, gendered, and class experiences as sources of strength; and (e) used *testimonio* within a CRM to uplift the voices of Latino/a teachers (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Perez Huber, 2008; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

As noted by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), research showed that U.S. educational institutions marginalized People of Color and that "educational marginalization is justified through research that decenters and even dismisses Communities of Color—through majoritarian storytelling" (p. 36). CRM offered a way to understand the experiences of People of Color and this methodological approach generated knowledge by offering a way to document their voices "by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). CRM was focused on research that explored how Communities of Color experienced and responded to the U.S. educational system and contextualized their experiences through the use of multiple methods, that Solorzano and Yosso (2002) referred to as: "Often unconventional and creative, to draw on the knowledge of people of color who are traditionally excluded as an official part of the academy" (p. 37). Among these methods were included counter-storytelling, historiographies, *corridos,* poetry, *testimonio*, and films. In essence, CRM in educational research is centered on People of Color from the development of research questions to the collection, analysis, and presentation of data (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

The use of CRM confirmed the need for the gathering of data directly from the voices of the participants and further validated *testimonio* as the counter-story method—"A method of

telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). According to Perez Huber (2008), there were four central tenets of Critical Race *Testimonio*:

- Validate and honor the knowledge and lived experiences of oppressed groups by becoming a part of the research process;
- Challenge dominant research paradigms that guide traditional forms of academic research, including epistemological and methodological perspectives;
- Function within a collective memory that transcends a single experience to that of multiple communities; and
- Be motivated by social and racial justice by offering a space within the academy for the urgent stories of People of Color to be heard. (p. 172)

As highlighted by Reyes and Curry Rodriguez (2012) in their review about the roots of *testimonio* and its integration in qualitative research approaches:

> 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)

The *testimonio* approach went beyond one-on-one interviews—they were a collaborative process between the participants and researcher where they were able to co-create a theory and knowledge through a conversation of collective lived experiences. In essence, this research method placed the voices of Latino/a teachers at the forefront and had been, as noted by Perez Huber (2010): "Used as a strategy to denounce injustices experienced by marginalized groups" (p. 83). This methodological approach worked well with this study because the research questions aimed at exploring the lived experiences of Latino/a urban Catholic school teachers

and their decision-making in staying in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. According to Khalifa et al. (2013), a counter-storytelling method approach "Allows marginalized people to articulate their own realities in dignified, wholesome, and culturally nuanced ways" (p. 494).

There was no single definition of *testimonio* (Perez Huber, 2008). However, as noted by Perez Huber (2008), *testimonio* as it had been described among scholars, articulated "Clear areas of overlap between the tenants of LatCrit and the elements that compose *testimonio* as a research method" (p. 169). In this sense, *testimonio* did not simply tell a story but explained lived experiences from the perspectives of Latino/a teachers to bring to light systems of power, construct past events, claim identities, expose contradictions, and build community. Thus, *testimonio* functioned as a methodological process that allowed new ways of theorizing and knowledge production to emerge.

Methods

To answer the research questions, I utilized a CRM, specifically Critical Race *Testimonio,* and content analysis to explore the racialized experiences of Latino/a urban Catholic school teachers and the factors that motivated them to choose and sustain their work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. In the sections that follow, further details about the participants, setting, data collection, and analysis are provided.

Participants

Participants were selected using a purposive convenience sample (Leavy, 2017). This sampling method relied on the researcher's experience and knowledge to select participants as co-collaborators. Mills and Gay (2019) noted that this sample selection approach allowed the researcher to engage participants that "Will contribute to the researcher's understanding of a

given phenomenon" (p. 159). A criterion sampling approach was also utilized. Contact was made with my network of principals in the ADLA and with teachers in the field that I had contact with as the director of two Catholic teacher preparation programs at an institution of higher education. I contacted participants directly through email communication. In regards to Latino/a teachers I had contact with, familiarity with the interview participants was of limited concern as there was an atmosphere that allowed for them to speak freely. In an effort to prevent potential participants from feeling obligated or coerced to participate because of their relationship with me and/or my positionality, I emphasized to all participants that participation was entirely voluntary. I also provided participants with an opportunity to decline to participate. For example, I communicated to the participants that there was an understanding that they were busy, may not have time to participate, and that they could withdraw their participation in the study at any time if they so decided.

Participants were screened using the following criteria: (a) Latino/a Catholic school teacher; (b) teacher at an urban Catholic school in the ADLA with at least 90% Students of Color; (c) teacher at an urban Catholic school in the ADLA with 60% or more students who qualify for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program; (d) taught at their school site for five or more years; and (e) the teacher evidenced a track record of advocating for Students of Color. Participants met all of the aforementioned criteria. Gender did not serve as part of the participant selection criteria for the study.

After the potential participants were identified, I sent all of the participants a recruitment email that reintroduced myself, explained the research project, questions, and methods, and provided my contact information. If individuals chose to be interviewed, they were then sent an

Informed Consent Form that included the purpose of the study, any risks associated with the study, confidentiality statement, and their right to withdraw at any time. Upon receipt of their voluntary consent, I arranged convenient times to meet via Zoom (2021, http://zoom.com), a videoconferencing platform. Subsequent interviews were scheduled at the conclusion of each interview. A pseudonym was given to all the participants to ensure the protection of their identity in the study. The participants' actual teaching positions and teaching sites were not specified as an additional layer of maintaining confidentiality.

Six Latino/a Catholic school teachers who taught in under-resourced Catholic schools in the ADLA were selected for the study. The participants and their backgrounds are further described in the subsequent section.

Elementary School Teachers (Grades TK to Five)

Graciela. Graciela had 22 years as a Catholic elementary school teacher—all of which had been at the site in which the study was conducted. Her urban Catholic elementary school was located east of downtown Los Angeles and had a total of 175 students in grades TK through eight. Although Graciela had taught at her school for all of her teaching career, she had experience teaching summer school at other Catholic high schools. Graciela was a proud product of Catholic education from elementary school through high school. Ninety-five percent (95.42%) of the students at the school were Students of Color and of those students, 93% identified as Latino/a. Less than five percent of the students at the school were considered ELL and 64% of the students at the school were receiving Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch. Her school had a long-standing tradition for the families in the community in which it served and

many of the students were considered legacy students—grandparents and/or parents were alumni of the school. Graciela brightly described her school as a family, community, and loving.

Martha. Martha had completed 5 years as a Catholic elementary school teacher and was starting her sixth year at her school. Prior to her work as a Catholic school teacher, Martha had experience in the public school sector as a teacher's assistant and resource specialist. Her urban Catholic elementary school was located south of downtown Los Angeles and had a total of 309 students in grades TK through eight. Nearly all (98.7%) of the students at the school were Students of Color. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the students identified as Latino/a. Approximately 54% of the students at the school were ELL and 100% qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program. Martha expressively described her school as welcoming, family-oriented, and accepting.

Elementary School Teachers (Grades Six to Eight)

Angela. Angela had been a Catholic elementary school teacher for five years and was starting her sixth year at the time of the study. All of her Catholic school teaching experience had been at her school. Angela attended urban Catholic schools similar to her teaching site from elementary school through high school. Her urban Catholic elementary school was located south of downtown Los Angeles. The school had experienced an enrollment increase and had a total of 262 students in grades TK through eight. Ninety-seven percent (97.32%) of the students at the school were Students of Color and 97% identified as Latino/a. Nearly 95% (94.53%) of the students at the school were ELL and 70% of the students qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program. Angela proudly described her school as family-oriented, innovative, and competitive.

Pascual. Pascual had been a teacher for 15 years, with seven years at his school. He and his siblings attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through high school. The urban Catholic elementary school where he taught was located east of downtown Los Angeles. With a total of 225 students at the school, 100% were Students of Color and 98% identified as Latino/a. Twenty percent (20.21%) of the students were ELL and 84% qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program. Pascual humbly described his school as dedicated, empowering, and community-oriented.

High School Teachers (Grades Nine to Twelve)

Concha. Concha had been a teacher for 19 years all of which had been at her current school. Concha attended a Catholic elementary school and dreamed of attending a Catholic high school in her neighborhood. Concha's teaching site was located east of downtown Los Angeles. The all-girls urban Catholic high school boasted a total of 280 students. Nearly all students (99%) were Students of Color and 97% identified as Latina. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the students qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program. Concha affectionately described her school using the following three words: home, family, and heart.

Juan. Juan had worked in Catholic education for 21 years. Throughout his two decades in Catholic education, Juan had taught at multiple schools—all of which were urban Catholic schools. Juan taught at an urban Catholic high school located east of downtown Los Angeles where he had taught for a total of seven years. A total of 381 students made-up the all-boys student body and 98% of the students were Students of Color. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the students identified as Latino. Slightly more than 10% of the students were identified as English Learners and 75% of the students qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded

Breakfast/Lunch Program. Juan enthusiastically used his school's charism to describe the school: home, school, Church, and playground.

Setting

The study was conducted in the ADLA. Approval from the Department of Catholic Schools (DCS) was granted for the research of this study to be conducted. Participants were selected from schools that met all the following criteria: (a) identified as an Urban/Inner-City Catholic school by the ADLA; (b) urban Catholic school in the ADLA with at least 90% Students of Color; (c) urban Catholic school in the ADLA with 60% or more students who qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program.

Data Collection

Data were collected from three semi-structured interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2019). The interview protocol and questions (see Appendix) were adapted from Theoharis' (2007) seminal study to answer this study's research questions. Participants were also given the option to participate in a group interview at the conclusion of the three interviews as a way to further explore and articulate preliminary findings. Each interview took approximately 30 to 90 minutes and was conducted and recorded using Zoom at a time of their choosing. A content analysis of the participants' schools' mission, vision, and philosophy statements was also conducted. In order to assess the alignment of the interview protocol with the study's research questions, a pilot interview was conducted with an urban Catholic school teacher that met all the criteria established for the participants (Creswell, 2014). Feedback received from the pilot interview assisted in the revision of the final interview protocol.

I used Zoom and Otter.ai (https://otter.ai/) to document the three interviews and the group interview. I also used handwritten field notes during interviews and group interview sessions to record information. Before the start of all interviews and group interview, I asked participants' permission to audio record and take handwritten notes. I transcribed all recordings and transcripts using Otter.ai. Participants' names were removed from transcripts and all participants were given pseudonyms. Transcripts were kept digitally in a password-protected file.

Participants were not identifiable by name or institutional affiliation. Participants were only identified using their pseudonyms. All recordings were erased once they were transcribed and the transcripts were purged of any actual names. Transcripts and field notes were stored in a secure and locked location.

Study Procedure/Instrument

Interview 1. The first interview focused on building rapport with the participant and to gather personal and professional background information. The first interview also explored why the participants chose to teach in under-resourced urban Catholic schools and on their decisions to remain in hard-to-staff schools.

Sample interview questions included: (a) from where did their commitment to urban education come from; (b) what events or people influenced their commitment to urban Catholic school education; (c) what were the primary reasons that motivated them to become a Catholic school teacher; (d) what were the guiding or driving forces behind their teaching practice; and (e) what was their motivation and/or focus as a teacher at an under-resourced urban Catholic school.

Interview 2. The second interview was centered around the participants' racialized experiences and further explored their commitment to urban Catholic school education. Sample

interview questions included: (a) what steps they had taken to advocate for students that came from historically disadvantaged backgrounds at their school; (b) what did they feel they had accomplished at least partially on their advocacy for marginalized students in their school community; (c) what barriers or pressures had they experienced in their work; (d) what resistance had they run into while advocating for their students; (e) they were asked to recall a specific time that they felt resistance against their work as a Latino/a teacher; (f) in what ways had resistance impacted their experiences as a Latino/a teacher and/or personally; and (g) how had they experienced their racial identity as an urban Catholic school teacher.

Interview 3. The third and final interview focused on what they felt were areas of growth in regards to supporting the experiences of Latino/a teachers in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Also, in this interview, participants were given the opportunity to further articulate strategies that worked for them in sustaining their work in an under-resourced urban Catholic school.

Sample interview questions included: (a) what strategies did they use to manage or deal with the competing resistance to their work; (b) how did they manage any challenges that they encountered to continue their work at an under-resourced urban Catholic school; (c) how did they maintain their passion for teaching in an under-resourced urban Catholic school; and (d) when they first started as a teacher, what would have been helpful as a part of their induction to assist with their success.

Group Interview. Participants were given the opportunity to participate in a group interview. Although all six of the participants agreed to be part of the group interview when asked, a total of three actually participated in the interview via Zoom. The group interview

protocol began with a review of the study design and a presentation of the emerging themes found through the analysis of the three individual interviews. I went through the findings for every section and made sure to stop and give participants the opportunity to clarify and/or ask questions about the preliminary findings.

Sample group interview questions included: (a) what struck them about the findings; (b) did the findings represent their racialized experiences accurately; (c) did the findings resonate with their work; (d) what was missing; (e) what was the most powerful part of the findings; (f) what did they disagree with; and (g) what other insights/thoughts did they have.

Content/Document Analysis. To further triangulate the data gathered through the individual and group interviews, a content analysis was also conducted. Content, or document analysis, has been used by qualitative researchers to understand the meanings that circulate in written materials (Leavy, 2017). I collected and reviewed relevant institutional and school documents from the participants' teaching sites that included their schools' philosophy, mission, and vision statements. These materials were obtained from their schools' websites.

Analysis Plan

A deductive coding approach (Creswell, 2014; Thomas, 2006) was used to closely analyze the data to develop themes and codes. The use of deductive coding assisted in the reduction of data and to find patterns and relationships across the three interviews for each participant as well as key institutional documents. More specifically, the following procedures were used to examine and analyze the qualitative data from interviews and institutional documents: (a) organization and preparation of data, including typed transcriptions from each interview; (b) the arrangement of documents into initial categories; (c) organization of data into

broad categories; (d) the coding of data on the initial transcripts; (e) the identification of emerging themes, organized and arranged for member checking in a follow-up group interview recorded, transcribed, and used to add a description to the findings; (f) and interpretation and research findings with reflections and analysis on the research process. The data collection and analysis conformed to the highest standards of qualitative research, using the common qualitative practices of triangulation, member checks, thick descriptions, and audit trails (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).

Validity/Trustworthiness

According to Mills and Gay (2019): "In qualitative research, validity is the degree to which qualitative data gauge accurately what we are trying to measure" (p. 558). For this study, trustworthiness was established by addressing the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the findings (Mills & Gay, 2019).

The credibility of this research was explored through the point of view of the lived experiences of the teachers in the study. Their voices, told through a counter-story approach, provided answers to an area that had not been studied empirically. Credibility was further established by practicing triangulation of interview responses and existing literature of similar themes. Transferability of data also enhanced the study's trustworthiness. By collecting detailed descriptive data of the context, readers of this study were able to make comparisons to other possible contexts that they identified with. Lastly, the confirmability of the data provided an additional layer of trustworthiness for this study. It was important that underlying assumptions and biases were intentionally exposed by the researcher. There was an intentional effort by the researcher to reveal any assumptions of biases by incorporating his own composite *testimonios* in

his analysis of the data and by acknowledging his positionality at the onset of the study. This type of transparency helped in providing a neutrality or objectivity of the collected data (Mills & Gay, 2019).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included reliance on participant memory, the accuracy of participant reconstruction of lived experiences, interview time, and my positionality as a Catholic school leader and advocate of urban Catholic schools. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. All six participants were interviewed during a time that they were navigating the return to their school campuses after having taught virtually for an entire school year. This experience created an extra layer of vulnerability as they were being asked to reflect upon their teaching experiences in already high-need communities during an unprecedented and unexpected time.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this study included the specific criteria that were set for selecting participants and the school sites. For this study, only teachers were interviewed and it did not include the experiences of other stakeholders such as principals, parents, and/or students. Another delimitation of this study was that only six Latino/a teachers from six under-resourced urban Catholic schools were selected for this study. Lastly, as a former teacher in an under-resourced urban Catholic school, the researcher identified with the intersectional identity and lived experiences of the participants, and came to the study with a shared perspective on immigrant families living in poverty who send their students to urban Catholic schools.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative research study focused on advancing the recruitment and retention practices of Latino/a Catholic school teachers by exploring how their racialized experiences motivated, sustained, and contributed to their decisions to work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Because the demographics of Catholic schools were shifting swiftly and significantly, it was vital that an exerted effort was placed on highlighting the authority of Latino/a teacher epistemology and ontology so that the needs of the growing number of Latino/a students attending Catholic urban schools were met. This study further examined ways in which schools and (arch)dioceses could promote a culture that fostered teacher diversity through the implementation of intentional recruitment and retention practices.

The study utilized Critical Race *Testimonio* to illuminate the understandings and experiences of six Catholic School Latino/a teachers who served in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. The participants of this study jointly committed 18 individual interviews and one group interview where they shared personal and professional background information that accentuated their commitment to social justice through their service as Latino/a Catholic school educators in hard-to-staff urban schools.

The *testimonios* served as counter-narratives and involved a continuous process of reflection. We shared our experiences and engaged in discussions about how to better understand them. The group interview played a critical role in this reflection. During this meeting, the participants were asked to reflect upon excerpts from their *testimonios*. From these reflections, we engaged in discussions about representation, contradictions, similarities, and differences in

our experiences. These discussions were used to build our analysis and theorize from our lived experiences.

Testimonio also served as a methodological process by drawing from our Latino/a epistemological positions, specifically, the knowledge we have gained from our personal and professional experiences—what Delgado Bernal (1998) termed "cultural intuition" (p. 556). Cultural intuition informed the analysis process of this study by allowing for an open and reiterative process of bridging and building theory from lived experiences of our participants and myself. Engaging our own cultural intuition, we were able to draw from our racialized experiences as Latino/a teachers in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. We reflected on the ways that our minds, bodies, and spirits have been and continue to be affected by oppression and psychological and physiological consequences. However, through *testimonios* of connection and collectivity, we found spaces of resistance and healing to recover and move forward in our work and in our lives.

The process of *testimoniando* countered the traditional Eurocentric role of the researcher. It was not my intention to speak for the Latino/a teachers in this study, but to co-construct knowledge about their experiences. More than a "data collection tool," *testimoniando* is a process that allowed researcher and participant to theorize lived experiences in the context of doing research, further unpacking and negotiating the dichotomous lines in qualitative research or researcher/subject. Through *testimonio*, guided by a LatCrit framework, I learned to trust myself in the ways I know, understand, and interpret the world and recognize this knowledge as valid and valuable to the research process. Following the *testimonios* of the participants, I present

my own ways of knowing, to highlight the congruencies that emerged as a result of my *platicas* with the Latino/a educators.

Ultimately, this study repositions Latino/a teachers as central to scholarly inquiry in regards to the teacher diversity pipeline. In this chapter, *testimonios* voice injustice and raise awareness as they allow Teachers of Color to inscribe a social witness account of collective and individual experiences that are invisible in the field of education, and in this case, Catholic TK through 12 urban education.

Restatement of the Research Questions, Methodology, and Participant Profiles

The following three research questions guided the data collection:

- What factors do Latino/a teachers describe as encouraging them to choose and sustain their urban Catholic school teaching profession?
- How do Latino/a teachers describe their racialized experiences in urban Catholic schools?
- How can urban Catholic schools enhance recruitment and retention policies and practices to diversify their teaching workforce?

The theoretical frameworks and methodology for this study were woven together seamlessly to guide the analysis of the *testimonios* (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Perez Huber, 2009):

- Reveal the injustices caused by the structural conditions that lead to those injustices;
- Challenge dominant Eurocentric ideologies that undergird the research process;
- Validate the experiential knowledge of People of Color;
- Acknowledge the power of human collectivity through emancipatory strategies of healing and revealing;

- Remain committed to racial and social justice to dismantle; and
- Acknowledge a sense of urgency needed to address the injustice.

It is essential to reaffirm that these six teachers were selected to participate in the study because they met the following criteria: (a) Latino/a Catholic school teachers; (b) teacher at an urban Catholic school in the ADLA with at least 90% Students of Color; (c) teacher at an urban Catholic school in the ADLA with 60% or more students who qualified for the Free/Reduced Federally Funded Breakfast/Lunch Program; (d) taught at their school site for five or more years; and (e) the teacher evidenced a track record of advocating for Students of Color. Table 3 provides an overlook of the participant profiles.

Table 3

Participant Profiles

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Experience Teaching (years)	Grade Level Taught	Percentage of Latino/a Students at School Site
Angela	Female	6	6-8	97
Concha	Female	19	9-12	97
Graciela	Female	22	3-5	93
Juan	Male	21	9-12	95
Martha	Female	6	3-5	96
Pascual	Male	15	6-8	98

Note. Teachers' grade level is provided using a range for confidentiality.

Findings

The findings in this chapter are grouped by the first two research questions through an individual and composite analysis. The third research question will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Research Question 1: The Motivation to Teach and the Motivation to Stay

For Latino/a teachers working in under-resourced Catholic schools, the motivation to teach and the motivation to stay is rooted in their lived experiences at the intersection of race, class, immigrant status, and language. The participants shared experiences about their family's story, the neighborhoods where they grew up, and their own experiences as students in communities that mirrored the one in which they taught. Often, these stories were accompanied by strong emotions and long reflective pauses that demonstrated a sense of pride, gratitude, and realization that they were indeed a tangible expression of their parents' sacrifices. The teachers also referenced faith as a factor that influenced their motivations to teach in under-resourced Catholic schools.

Familia [Family]

Family was commonly shared as an integral motivating factor that helped sustain the participants' work at under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Specifically, witnessing their parents' struggles and sacrifices was a common thread and a direct correlation to their students' experiences. The participants referenced racialized experiences as children of immigrant parents, first-generation students, children of single-parent households, and growing up in poverty as examples of lived experiences that fueled their resilience and commitment to urban Catholic school education. Angela expressed her family's humble beginnings:

> I grew up in a two-bedroom apartment, with my uncle and his wife in one bedroom, while my parents, my two siblings, and I lived in the other bedroom. My parents immigrated here [to the United States] from El Salvador. They worked their butts off to pay for my Catholic school tuition. Not one, but three because my brother, my sister, and I all went to Catholic school. Somehow, they made it work. I remember seeing their taxes when I would have to translate stuff for them. My dad had two jobs. He would go in at two in the morning for one job, come out, shower, pick us up, take us to school, then he would go straight to his next job. During his lunch break, he would go pick us up from

> school. That means he didn't eat because he was picking us up and he didn't want us taking the bus. He did all this so that he knew we were safe.

Similarly, Concha recalled her family's humble living situation:

> We lived in a one-bedroom apartment. Since my dad is very close to his brothers and sisters, there were many times when we had an uncle and an aunt living with us sharing that space. . . . Our family has always been very close-knit.

Angela witnessed firsthand the many sacrifices that her parents had to make to afford a Catholic education for her and her siblings. In addition, she talked about overcoming language barriers. She shared that she often referenced her experiences when speaking to her students and reminds them that their challenges should not be obstacles, but rather, fuel for encouragement and reasons to be proud about who they are and whey they come from. For example, Angela shared that the majority of her students came from Spanish-only households. And although many saw this as a disadvantage, she offered a counter-narrative explaining how Spanish did not hold her back:

> My mom to this day doesn't speak English and she has three college graduates. My dad learned English when I was in third grade. We would practice together. My mom used to be a sewing machine operator. So, she practically worked in a sweat shop and she made nothing. And all three of their kids have college degrees! We went to college, a four-year university right out of high school! We saw how hard they worked so we worked hard for them.

Angela consistently circled back to how proud her parents were of their children's success. Like Angelica and her family, Pascual's family also made sacrifices because of the value they placed on education as a metric for measuring his family's success. Pascual shared the following:

> Both of my parents stressed education and that was why they sacrificed so much for me and my siblings to go to a private Catholic school for elementary and high school. I think that's why, you know, this idea of education is so important now with my own kids and the students I teach. . . . My mom always stressed that education is something that no one

> can ever take away from you. And I think that's the message I'm always trying to give to my students, you know. Education and what you learn is one thing that no one can ever take from you.

Pascual's commitment and love for education were implanted early on as he watched his own mother get her degree despite being told that she could never do it by his chauvinistic father:

> I look back at things that happened to me growing up. Like I said earlier, you know, my dad was a very traditional *machista* [male chauvinist]. But my mom, you know, she was the rock. She was the one that was always like, "You know what? I'm going to make this. I'm going to do this no matter what it takes." And I think she has been the biggest influence in me becoming a teacher. When I told her that I was going to become a teacher was the year she got sick. For her, it was like the greatest thing that I became a teacher. So, I always think of her when I'm teaching. I saw how she struggled through it herself. You know, raising a family of six while going through school is not easy. You know, having a family, going to school, and on top of that, having a husband that's just very insecure because of his ideals was hard for her. For my father, having a wife that was earning a lot more than him wasn't easy either. You know, it does something to a very traditional Mexican dad. For me, the person I am today is from that lived experience.

Similar to Angela's and Pascual's experiences, the other participants expressed how they were driven by their immigrant family's journey. For some, that meant enduring great tragedy. The participants' experiences were a reminder that families who came from Latin American countries were willing to risk everything for a chance to give their children a better life. And for the participants, a better life meant getting a good education.

For immigrant families, tribulations can present themselves in multiple ways. For the participants of this study, it meant deportation, being raised in a single-parent household, and the loss of family members. For example, Concha talked about how hearing her father's stories about the many times he was deported still brought her tears of pride:

> My parents immigrated from Mexico. And so, when my dad first came to this country, you know, he had been deported many times. He always tells us stories of all those treacherous journeys of being deported by immigration. And so, that's always very

> touching to me because, you know, sometimes we just take it for granted. You know growing up, *perdón, pero me causa sentimiento* [sorry, but it causes me to get emotional], he tells us the stories and I think, "Oh wow, you went through that to allow me to do what I'm doing now?" You know, my dad could have easily given up so obviously I'm super appreciative of that. I'm thankful and I think I'm going to say this many times during the interview . . . because we were the only ones, my dad and my mom were the only ones within our extended family who chose a Catholic education for the kids. We were the only ones! And I remember back then a lot of my uncles and aunts were like, "Why waste your money?" My parents didn't listen.

Adversity, for Graciela, meant that she had to do whatever it took to make it to college—her single mother's dream for her. Graciela recalled always thinking back to her mother's journey from Guatemala as a source of inspiration and motivation. Graciela always felt that her mother was living her dream of going to college through her. Although Graciela's journey to college and eventually teaching was not easy, she always knew that her mother was her biggest supporter:

> My mom went to school, but she didn't go to college. She went to school in Guatemala and then when she came to the United States her intention was to go to school. She came to the U.S. because during that time Guatemala was going through a civil war. My mom came to the U.S. on a student visa and her plans were to come and study and to go to college here. But obviously, she had some challenges so she ended up not going to school. My mom ended up staying here as a nanny and was a live-in nanny for a long time. My mom also had me when she was a little older—she was in her 40s. My parents divorced. To be honest, they didn't last together too long so they divorced right before I was born. I grew up with just my mom and I'm an only child. Her resilience of everything that she had to overcome to make sure that I didn't live a life that was difficult has inspired me. You know, I'm a first-gen student and I never realized there were other options other than college because my mom always made me feel like there was no other way. I knew I was going to college and that was just my path.

Likewise, for Juan, not only did he grow up being raised by only his mother, she was his greatest supporter and he credits his love for family, teaching, and serving young adults to her:

> My father was born in Mexico and had probably a fourth-grade education. My mother was born in Los Angeles. My mother went to Catholic schools. You know, growing up I was the youngest of five, all four of my older brothers and sisters were all very educated and successful. Growing up playing sports was all I really wanted to do. So, my mom

> supported me. She never pushed me towards other things. My father passed away when I was eight years old. So, my mom was my mother and my father figure. Growing up and not having a father, I can relate to my students. My father died young. I was eight years old. But two things my mom always said, "Divorce and death are not an excuse for you to be a failure as an adult!" I tell my students the same.

To Martha, the words family and parents had a deeper meaning and merited an in-depth testimony to how she came to appreciate and value the life she was given. Like the other participants, Martha's parents immigrated to the United States. Both of her parents came from Mexico in their early twenties, held multiple jobs, and took on extra shifts to support a family of six children. Martha always talked about her parents as people who valued education and made it a priority in their household. But to Martha, this was not the sole reason that made her parents extraordinarily influential:

> My parents, well, they're actually my aunt and uncle. When I was just a six-month-old baby, my birthmother passed away and I was given under the care of my dad's sister, which is my *tía,* but she's my mom because she took me in when I was six months old. My parents always share things about my birth mom. My actual birthmother was a teacher for illiterate older people in Mexico. So, I feel that kind of inspired me to follow in her footsteps and to become an educator, make her proud, and to accomplish something that unfortunately she couldn't. I feel that she was my role model and she's what shaped me into wanting to give back to people because that's what she did with the elderly. I wanted to do that with our future generations. Well, our future which is our children. I feel that my whole personal life, as far as being a baby and not having my birthmother, being taken in by this wonderful family that I have, and having them just always push, motivate, and encourage me to accomplish my education and become someone for myself is a great gift. I think that's kind of what shaped me into wanting to share that knowledge and shape the lives of the future.

Raíces **[Roots]**

All of the six participants grew up in urban communities and attended urban schools. The majority of the participants attended urban Catholic schools. They all considered this a motivating factor that influenced their decision to teach at urban Catholic schools. As stated by Concha: "*Mis padres siempre nos inculcaron las raíces de la familia y comunidad* [My parents

always instilled in us our family and community roots]. You always need to remember where you're from and where you've come."

Martha said that her upbringing in an urban community and attending under-resourced public schools motivated her to teach at a school with similar demographics. Martha went to schools that fell under the same economic level as the school where she taught:

> I grew up attending schools with the same economic level as the school where I teach. Since I grew up in an under-resourced community, a high-poverty community, I know what kind of education the students deserve. Most of the time, you have those teachers that don't want to go teach at these schools because of the neighborhoods or because of the parents' or students' ethnicities. To me, it's not about that. It's about making sure that students receive the same quality education that they would somewhere else. So, I feel that aside from being comfortable and just being around like *la gente* [the people] or *mi gente* [my people], it's just being able to give back and giving the students the opportunity to receive that great quality education that we can provide regardless of socioeconomic status.

There was no doubt in analyzing Angela's responses that her attendance at an under-resourced urban Catholic school had an impact on her decision to teach at an under-resourced Catholic school. Angela wanted to make sure that she and her students' experiences in an urban Catholic elementary were not seen as inferior by some, or misconceived by others:

> People think that just because you go to a private school that your parents have money. No, they don't! They do not! So that highly motivated me to want to teach at an urban Catholic school! My school is a Catholic private school, predominantly Latino, definitely predominantly Latino. Most of the parents, I want to say, are immigrant parents. A lot of my students are first-generation, although that tide is slowly changing. I'm getting a lot of second-generation students now. The area in which the school is located is not the safest area. I know it has gangs . . . mostly Florence and Bloods area. The fact that my kids know this and that they tell me is sad. That's the scariest part that this is normal to them. Very normal to them. And so, our kids are exposed to all of this. They have tougher skin than most kids their age. But, at our school, they don't have to be afraid because we do shelter them. If you want your kids safe, you want your kids to have attention, our school is the place!

While Martha, Angela, and Juan taught in schools similar to the communities in which they grew up, many of the participants taught in the actual neighborhood where they grew up. For example, Pascual started his teaching career at the Catholic school that he attended and thought: "It's not coincidental that I started my teaching career where I started." Although he briefly left his former Catholic grammar school in the urban city to teach at a suburban Catholic school, Pascual eventually made his way back to what he referred to as his "old neighborhood":

> When I had the opportunity to return to my old neighborhood and an opening at my current school came up, I jumped at it! I needed to get back to the city. Especially because I grew up so close to my current school. I remember saying, "That's what I need to go back to." I don't think I would feel like I'm making an impact if I were at a private school that's in a well-off community. I think my work has to be here, you know, I would have to be in the urban city. For me, personally, this is a school where I would hope to teach for the rest of my teaching career. I pretty much have decided that. The mission of the school and the way they want to help out the community is similar to the school that I attended. It is here where I want to make the most difference and where I can have the most influence and change.

Concha also found herself driving through familiar streets on her way to work every day. She was called back to her childhood community to be a resource and because she found herself often thinking: "*Aquí perteneces* [This is where you belong]." Concha felt that her presence in the school would create "*un ciclo* [a cycle]", one that would hopefully encourage students at her school to come back and do the same:

> It's hard to say this but there's always going to be under-resourced communities, unfortunately. *Pero* [But], when we put good people in place, it doesn't feel like it's under-resourced, you know? It's because the richness *no viene de lo económico* [does not come from the economic]; the richness *viene de la gente, del amor, del cariño y de la sabiduría que está aquí* [comes from the people, from the love, from the affection, from the wisdom that is here].

Graciela also taught at the Catholic school that she attended as a child. Graciela brightened up when she talked about her ties to the community and the school where she taught.

Her school was more than a job; it was part of her identity. According to Graciela: "I really feel like being here is . . . it's me! It's part of who I am. I really feel like I owe the school a lot because they shaped me into who I am today." And even though she had discerned on multiple occasions on whether or not she should move on, her commitment to the community kept her grounded there:

> I got an opportunity to go elsewhere that was a little bit further out and I thought, "You know what? I'm gonna do it." But something inside me was like, "No, you need to be here." You know, we just went through school renovations, our school just got redone and just so much renewal. I want to be part of that. Our school's changing for the better. We are starting to serve more students and serving our community. I finally feel like people are realizing what a great little community we have at our school and I just feel like I need to be there, and I need to be part of the school. I need to give back to my community because I owe it to them.

Vivencias [Experiences]

The participants often referred to their own school experiences as motivating factors to enter the teaching profession, and specifically, to teach at under-resourced urban Catholic schools. As the participants recalled these episodes of their lives, they often cited individuals as key players in their decisions. For Martha, Angela, Concha, and Graciela it was a teacher that made a lasting impact in their lives. Juan and Pascual on the other hand, reflected on those who motivated them early on in the profession.

In reflecting on what kept her motivated to continue to do this work in hard-to-staff schools, Martha expressed having a few teachers who did the same for her. Martha shared:

> I, myself, had a few teachers that did this for me. They could have been somewhere else but they committed to staying at the school that I attended for years because they were just amazing teachers. They wanted to make sure that every child was really not left behind and that they received the same quality education that we all deserved.

Angela specifically recalled her seventh-grade social studies teacher as someone who greatly impacted her life. She described her teacher vividly: "He was Latino, had seven siblings, and his parents were immigrants." Angela also recollected that he was her first teacher that taught beyond the book: "He had us learn history from the history book because that's what White America wants you to learn but then he would say, 'But this is really what happened.'" Her social studies teacher would share his life story with the students, one that was nearly identical to theirs, and one that the students could relate to:

> He told us a story from when he was a student. His White teacher told him why even bother to learn the lesson that he was a little Mexican boy that's just going to be a gardener anyway. He told us that anger fueled him to go to college and he did, on an academic scholarship. He had us read *The House on Mango Street* and we learned about the massacre of all the Aztecs and the Mayans. That wasn't in our textbook that we read at school! We learned about the Mendez versus Westminster case! I got to high school and we still didn't learn that! That to me was like, "This is why a Latino needs to get an education . . . to open their eyes." You have grown adults that have no idea what Mendez versus Westminster is. It was a Mexican and Asian family that started this [Civil Rights] movement!

Angela's teacher talked about issues that were relevant to the predominantly Latino/a students' lives and this allowed her to reconcile with her Latina identity that seemed to be forgotten in White supremacist society:

> I think our culture gets very forgotten. It's always Black and White. And I get the emphasis on black culture, I truly do. But we're here too, you know? But we don't get celebrated. We don't get recognized. We don't get that attention. There are issues that are unique to us. You don't have the fear of your family being deported like our people do. You don't have the fear of losing your DACA status like our family members do. There's a difference we have. We are silenced because of immigration status. And [teacher's name] spoke so much about this and it made me realize, [teacher's name] lived all of this. It made me want to be that example. He was the first brown teacher that we had that you could say acted brown. Someone that was proud of his heritage.

Angela was not the only participant who called out not having Latino/a teachers until well into her middle school grades. Concha identified this as being injurious to Latino/a students'

learning: “I guess that brings me to a question: Where are our Latino teachers? *¿Dónde están?* [Where are they?] Where are you? Come out, we need you!”

Concha credits her sister-teachers (nuns) as integral to her decision to enter the teaching profession at a Catholic urban school. She had fond memories of the selfless work of the sisters and how they were always willing to support her family. Concha still remembered the day she took her entrance exam at her urban Catholic elementary school and it was a religious sister that “took a chance” on her:

> I remember the principal [a religious sister] telling my mom, “I’m going to give your daughter an opportunity. She’s very low-skilled and wasn’t able to answer all of the questions. But if you really want her in a Catholic school, I’m going to give her the opportunity.” And so, I remember struggling. I remember struggling in first grade and having a hard time with reading. My parents couldn’t help me because they didn’t speak the language. And I was obviously an English Learner. The principal, believe it or not, who accepted me was the principal in eighth grade when I graduated as valedictorian. I remember walking up to her with my mom to thank her at graduation. She changed my life!

Graciela’s motivation to become a Catholic school teacher was a bridge between Angela’s and Concha’s experiences. According to Graciela: “I learned so much from the sisters. Again, the effort they put into teaching me really has shaped me into who I am today without saying so.” Additionally, like Angela, she was also indebted to one teacher in particular:

> I feel that a lot of my instructors at [named Catholic high school] really helped shape me because I think I was pretty lost when I started high school. I just really needed that tough love from them. And one particular instructor, his name is [named teacher]. He was really great with us. He would give us books that he thought would be really great for us to read. I really feel like he took the time to care enough to push me to finish school, not rebel so much, and apply to colleges. Having good teachers that really put, you know, put in that time, effort, and energy into really keeping me on track. Every day I hope to instill that into my students as well.

Juan and Pascual attributed their motivation to teach in urban Catholic schools to mentors that they had early in their careers. Juan recalled his mentor as someone who introduced him to

the true meaning of service: “In my three years of working with [named mentor], I learned a lot from him. And I think that’s the first time I was introduced to the charism of urban Catholic education.” Similarly, Pascual treasured his passion for urban Catholic education to the first lay principal that he worked for in his teaching career:

> I think she [named principal] was a really great role model not only for me but for the kids because, one she’s Latina, and two she’s really well educated and a great principal that took that role seriously. Even though she was younger than me, I learned a lot from her. She was passionate about her work and the community.”

***Fe* [Faith]**

Faith-based elements grounded in Catholic Social Teachings (CST) were integral to the retention of the participants and were central to the mission of the Catholic school educator. Principles such as the affirmation of human dignity, serving the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized (Scanlan, 2009) were core values referenced during the interviews with the participants. All six participants mentioned the fostering of faith, whether in their own lives or that of their students, as fundamental to their decision to stay in an urban Catholic school. As stated by Pascual: “As a Catholic, my faith tells me I have a duty and responsibility for the students that I’m teaching.” Similarly, Martha saw it as a divine calling to remain in Catholic education:

> I believe it was like a calling to be here . . . it was God talking to me, “I need you to do this.” Being able to learn more about God and then teach that to my students is what keeps me here. I could be a teacher anywhere else but I’m called to be here for me to grow within my own faith.

The participants were unable to separate faith from their teaching identity. The participants felt that they were responsible for being role models of faith for their students and took this obligation very seriously. “First and foremost, you know, *somos una escuela católica*

[we are a Catholic school]," stated Concha. "We're going to guide them [the students] through their faith and teach them to embrace it," she said. This commitment to their mission as Catholic educators elevated them to serve as faith-guides and faith-influencers which lead to the empowerment of their students as striving "to be model citizens of the world."

Juan shared that he was a faith-guide and influencer by putting his faith at the forefront and by "lead[ing] by example with [his] faith." He also held that "it's [his] faith that's kept [him] alive and that's keep [him] going" in Catholic education. In the same way, Pascual felt blessed to be able to impact his students through faith. Although he does not consider himself "a strict, Bible reading Catholic," Pascual described himself as a "practicing Catholic" because of his engagement in his parish community and his focus on "doing." A "practicing Catholic," according to Pascual, is one who becomes a role model in faith.

The participants even placed faith as a primary reason for their decision to stay in urban Catholic schools even if it meant making less money. For example, Graciela's family and friends questioned her resiliency in putting up with the many demands that came with working at an under-resourced school. Graciela turned down the opportunity to teach at other schools regularly over her 20 plus year teaching career:

> My husband would always say, "Just quit. You don't need to be there. Why do you put up with it?" I just couldn't just say I'm just quitting because, you know, my ego's hurt. And not only that . . . but also, I think he sees that I have a higher degree than he does and he doesn't see our financial compensation to match it. It was hard at one point because you know, we felt like I worked so hard to be where I'm at and why am I settling. I think he didn't realize how important things were until like I finally laid it down and said, "Listen, I need to be here because I feel like I wouldn't be the same at a public school. I really feel like I need Christ to be in the classroom. And I want to be able to say amen or say a prayer or for whatever needs we have, without feeling like I'm going to get in trouble for that."

Composite Testimonio

The Latino/a teachers identified personal meaningful lived experiences that centered around *familia, raíces, vivencias,* and *fe* as motivating factors to teach in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. As a former teacher at an under-resourced urban Catholic school, my *testimonio* illuminated our communal experiences of hardships and sacrifice, immigration, language, and a deep commitment to faith.

As a Latino researcher, I brought with me my *whole* self into the study and acknowledged that I was unable to detach myself from it and found it difficult to ignore my intersectional identity that resembled the participants'. As a Catholic, first-generation, bilingual, Mexican American, male, raised in poverty, my stories of *familia, raíces, vivencias,* and *fe* were in harmony with the participants' *testimonios*. The commonality among the seven of us was that we all had stories of sacrifice and hardships.

Like the participants in the study, the story of *mi familia* is one that began south of the United States border in a small town in Mexico. The origin of my multiple intersectional identifiers was formed when my father came to the United States in the late 1950s as a member of the *bracero* program—a labor agreement between Mexico and the United States that started during World War II and allowed for the contracting of Mexican workers to work in the farms and fields for minimum wage (Mize, 2016). Under this program, workers were given 45-day contracts and were allowed to renew for up to six months at a time. My father worked as a *bracero* from 1959 until the program was terminated in the mid-60s. Nonetheless, he continued to cross the Mexican/U.S. border back and forth multiple times until he found stable work in an

industrial laundry company in downtown Los Angeles, where he eventually worked at for over 40 years.

It was only when my father found steady work that he decided to send for my mother and my three older siblings to join him in California. Unfortunately, my mother's first attempt to reunite with my father in America was a tragic one. A half-day into the journey, my second oldest sister got sick. Unable to make it to the border, my mother returned to her hometown in Mexico but with only two of the three children still living. Devastated and determined to reunite with my father, my mother waited a whole year before she attempted to cross the Mexican/U.S. border once again. Although this journey which is taken by so many is never easy, the second attempt was a successful one, in that my mother, sister, and brother, were able to set foot on American soil and be with my father.

My parents eventually established their *raices* in Los Angeles, California, where they began to grow their family. However, the struggles continued. My parents were forced to vacate their tiny one-bedroom apartment because the structure was deemed inhabitable and it needed to be demolished. My father considered returning to Mexico with the family since it was impossible to find an apartment that would welcome a young couple with six children. Through hard work and much sacrifice, my parents eventually purchased a home in South Central Los Angeles where they raised their nine children.

And although my parents had a limited formal education—my father had completed the sixth grade while my mother had only gone to school up to the second grade—education in the Felix household was always a priority. My parents believed that an education would provide their children with pathways that would lead to a better life than they had experienced in their

homeland. For my older siblings, this meant a Catholic education. The rest of us were sent to underperforming public urban schools. Through my parents' support and encouragement, college became the norm in the family. Eight of the nine Felix children went to college and one served in the United States Marines. As the second youngest in the family, going to college only became a reality for me because of my older siblings' *vivencias*. Their lived experiences paved the way for me. This motivated me as a teacher, and eventually as a principal, to do the same for my students and their families.

My commitment to urban Catholic education has been framed through my strong Catholic faith and the social justice principles that I acquired from my family, community, and through my Jesuit higher education. These principles have been instrumental in my own growth as an Educator of Color in urban communities. I was raised in a home where Catholic Social Teaching was the foundation of my moral and ethical development. It is no surprise that five of the ten Felix children have dedicated their lives to serving others as educators specifically in under-resourced urban schools—in the public and Catholic school sectors. It is through my love for Christ that I was able to sustain my work, commitment, and involvement in urban Catholic schools as a Latino teacher and leader. My service and commitments to my work and *mi comunidad* [my community] were driven by my devotion to *mi fe católica* [my Catholic faith] which is a universal relationship that I share with the students and families that I have served.

Like the participants of this study, my experiences of *familia, raíces, vivencias,* and *fe* had a strong influence on my motivation to teach and remain in under-resourced urban Catholic schools as a teacher and principal. These experiences have served as the catalyst to dedicate my professional life to service and the promotion of social justice through education.

Research Question 2: Racialized Experiences

As Teachers of Color, the Latino/a teachers were able to play a critical role in the education of Students of Color through *apoyo, cultura,* and *identidad*. It was because of their race that the teachers were able to engage in these roles of advocacy and cultural identification with their students. For these teachers, this reality brought so much more to the table than just a commitment to academic formation. The Latino/a teachers became much more than just teachers to their students. The teachers redefined what it meant to be a teacher—they were guides, counselors, and friends. In essence, they were *veladoras*—lighters of the way. Like candles, however, they often consumed themselves to light the way for their students and this had many personal implications.

Apoyo [Advocacy]

In Spanish, the word advocacy can be translated in multiple ways. For the sake of this theme, the word *apoyar,* which also means to support, is most appropriate as it closely aligns with the type of advocacy described by the six participants. As noted by Collay (2010): "Teachers who are fully committed to student learning take action on students' behalf within flawed organizational structures whether they consider themselves formal leaders" (p. 230). Urban teachers are motivated to advocate for their students and their families because they can relate to their students' educational experiences and/or come from related cultural backgrounds (Bradley-Levine, 2021; Collay, 2010).

Speaking up for their students was a common form of advocacy among the participants. In some instances, this meant standing up to fellow teachers or administrators. On one particular

occasion, Angela had to put another teacher "in his place" even though she was only a second-year teacher:

> As we were picking teams for our academic decathlon team, I had one of the teachers not wanting to pick a particular female student. This teacher wanted to pick a male student over her instead. I was wondering why he didn't want to choose her because she was outperforming the male student in every area. I knew she would be good for math and logic. His response to me was, "Oh, well, boys usually do better in these areas." I was like, "Are you really telling me that? Of all people, do you really want to go there?" And so, you know, the first step was that I had to check this teacher and put him in his place. And when he didn't like it, I had to pull the "well, I'm the head coach and you're not" card. He calmed down really quick.

Angela was very insistent that she did not enable this student but rather, show her that she was worth fighting for, that her teacher had her back, and that she could indeed speak up for herself as well:

> First, you have to see why you even have to advocate for them [the students]. These are students that are not used to being advocated for, period! Next, who's the one that's not allowing them to progress? Who's the one that's not giving them that support to begin with? And when it's another teacher, it's a little like, "Really? You're here too! How are you not seeing this?" And so, after putting that teacher in his place, I have to then work on how to get her to advocate for herself.

Angela was not the only participant that talked about speaking in favor of one of her students against a teacher-colleague. Concha experienced a similar event where she had to go up against a whole department at her school in order to admit a student who had recently immigrated to the United States:

> As educators [in urban communities], we should expect to have many students of mixed backgrounds and mixed abilities. Unfortunately, sometimes teachers . . . let's just be real . . . some teachers were resistant. They said things like, "But you know, she doesn't speak the language. How are we going to help her? That's more work for me?" I emailed the teachers and asked, "How can we *not* help her? We need to go above and beyond for this child!"

Concha saw herself in that student and wanted to give her the opportunity of a Catholic education like the one she was given decades earlier:

> This student had just been in this country for no more than two years, came from an underprivileged family, and had maybe like six or seven siblings. She was going to a public school and she heard about our school. When she came in with her mom and her siblings into the office, her English was very limited, very limited English. But one of the very first things she asked us was, "Can your school help me get to college?" My heart was like, "How are we not going to give you an opportunity? Why would we not give you an opportunity?" She said, "*Yo quiero ir a la universidad* [I want to go to college]." And I was like, "You know what? Yes! You came to the right place!" I always gravitate towards the underdog. The one who doesn't have the resources. The one who doesn't have the parents who can be their advocate. Then, you know, as a teacher, I have to be their advocate!

Welcoming Spanish-only students was not a unique experience to Concha. The other participants all shared advocating for students who were new to the United States and did not speak any English. Martha, for example, saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate her love for her Latino culture and language by following her students' progress well after they left her class. For Martha, advocacy meant being connected beyond one academic year:

> I've had a few students that have been completely new to the country. They come from Mexico and Central America. I had one particular student from Honduras and she came to my class speaking only Spanish. She is a top student now in our middle school. To me, that means a lot. It shows that my work is reflected in her because during her elementary grades I challenged her. She took the challenge. I continue monitoring her progress throughout the years here at our school and her teachers have nothing but great things to say about her and she's like an honor roll student.

For the students that these teachers served, advocacy sometimes meant simply being present. Martha made an exerted effort to be present for her students beyond the school day hours and often found herself attending their extra-curricular events including those that were not school related:

> Sometimes all the students need is for you to show them that you are part of their community. This includes making myself present for community events so that students

> and parents see that I'm also here for their events, even if the students are not in my classroom. To hear my students say, "My teacher's here! She does care! She does worry about me! She took the time to come look at me play at my game!" makes it all worth it.

Apoyar sometimes meant being a financial supporter or advocate for their students. Even with his own family to look out for, and keeping in mind the many financial sacrifices that these teachers had made to stay in under-resourced urban Catholic schools, Juan thought it was imperative that he and his family contributed to his school's scholarship fund:

> I had a student who we pretty much helped pay for his tuition while he was here at [named school]. He's a first-generation Latino who immigrated from Mexico. His parents didn't speak any English. But much more than his tuition scholarship, was that I helped him and his family navigate applying for college. He was a gifted athlete and his parents didn't know the lay of the land when it came to collegial sports, travel teams, talking to scouts, and things like that. I took him in like my own son and made sure that he had the opportunity to go to college and play at the next level.

Cultura **[Culture]**

In an effort to enact social justice in their classrooms, teacher advocates made intentional commitments by engaging in common pedagogical practices regardless of their years in the teaching profession (Bradley-Levine, 2021; Collay, 2010; Picower, 2012). These practices grounded in social justice constructs ranged from culturally relevant pedagogy and linguistically responsive education (Picower, 2012). Research further supported the notion that teachers who advocated for their students made "a commitment to prepare their students to develop understandings of how injustice operates so they, too, could learn how to take action for social change" (Picower, 2012, p. 566). The participants in this study demonstrated their commitment to their students through the expression of a cultural commitment and responsibility to their Latino/a students and families. Martha talked about how she was driven to work with her students because they shared the same cultural identity and she did not want to let them down:

> I feel that because I am Latina, I have a strong tie to the community and the students. Like you said [speaking to the researcher], the statistics show it's mostly White women teaching in Catholic schools. And where do you see them in our communities? You don't! So, I feel that because of my background I am serving the students that I am meant to be serving. That's another reason why I stay within the urban communities because of my background and being Latina.

One of the ways that Angela demonstrated her commitment to working at an under-resourced Catholic school was through a culturally relevant pedagogical lens by creating liberatory learning spaces for her students and making sure that all of the Latino cultures at the school were being represented:

> I remember my first year at my school and September 15th [El Salvador and Guatemala Independence Day] rolled around and we didn't do anything. September 16th [Mexican Independence Day] rolled around and same. We didn't do anything! *Cinco de Mayo* [not Mexican Independence Day] rolled around and we had a festival. I went to my fellow Salvadorian principal, who was born in El Salvador, by the way, and I'm like, "What the hell? What do you mean? Why the hell are we only celebrating *Cinco de Mayo*? It's not even a holiday that Mexicans celebrate! It's a White excuse to have tacos and get drunk. Why the hell are we only celebrating *Cinco de Mayo*?" . . . So, the following year we started celebrating all students! September 15th landed on a Friday and I had every class do some type of song, dance, or presentation on one of the countries that celebrated their Independence Day on the 15th or 16th. I gladly did El Salvador and I gladly went first because no one ever wants to go first. I had my students read the history of El Salvador, and they performed to *La Sonora Dinamita, Que Nadie Sepa Mi Sufrir*. We [the school] sold food from the different countries. I wanted the people to know this is a brown school. Let's educate their brownness, you know? Since then, kids at our school started realizing that *Cinco de Mayo* isn't Mexican Independence Day.

Angela wanted to empower her students to get to know their culture. And although the majority of the students at her school were of Mexican descent, they really did not know much about their culture:

> During the first week of school, I always ask my students where their parents are from. I sometimes get, "Oh, I don't know. I think they're from Mexico." I tell them, "Well, go find out. You're gonna find out where, you're gonna draw me a map, you're gonna color it, you're gonna tell me their major exports. . . ." They always tell me, "But this isn't a social studies class." "I don't care! I'm your homeroom teacher," I tell them. "This is a homeroom assignment. I need to know you. You're going to need to find out about

> yourself too!" During the month of September, I play *cumbias, merengue,* and then I ask my husband, who's Mexican, to recommend some *rancheras*. They listen to Spanish music and some of the kids don't like it. I'm like, "I don't care. This is where your roots are. This is what you can listen to learn about yourself."

Being culturally connected to students simply because the teacher carried a Spanish surname or spoke their students' primary language was not enough. A teacher's ability to build cultural connections with students' cultural backgrounds was apparent when a teacher built their students' self-image through the expression of their own cultural identity. Similar to Angela, Pascual strived to prepare his students to value their cultural identity by building caring relationships with them through his own Latino heritage experiences:

> As a teacher, the biggest thing for me is always building that connection . . . building that relationship with the students. I always tell them, "Hey, I was once where you are at. It might have been different decades but I know we have the same experiences. We go to the same places, the same festivals, the same parties. . . ." It's always been through my teaching of the students that I've never hid something [his Latino identity] that I've always been proud of. Again, if we're trying to teach our students to be accepted, this is who we are, you know? Accept who we are and use that as a motivation to bring up *la raza.* We all have an identity and this is ours. When I first started teaching here I assumed everybody was Mexican. I had to change that perception. I have a lot more kids from Guatemala, from Honduras, from El Salvador. I encourage them to share their nationality . . . share their identity . . . share whatever it is that makes them who they are. I tell them to never hide that. I grew up like my students, you know? In a similar neighborhood, my dad only spoke Spanish. This is what I was meant to do. And this is who I was meant to teach.

Concha constantly strived to build cultural competence among her colleagues and recognized that cultural responsibility should not be reserved for Latino/a teachers:

> Our students want to see more familiar faces. If not familiar faces, *porque* [because], you know, we have some great teachers who are obviously not Latino. They are wonderful but they make that effort to understand the culture, they make that effort to understand the families, they make that extra effort to really understand the students.

Concha also recalled a time that a non-Latino/a teacher asked her if she could draft a list of "*cosas que son muy Latinas*" [items that are very Latina] so that this teacher could learn them. Concha refused to create the list and told her colleague the following:

> *"Con todo respeto," le dije. "Una lista de mí no te va servir. Tú tienes que conocer a tus alumnas y a las familias. Si yo te doy una lista de 10 cosas que son muy Latinas, no te va servir. No sirve por qué realmente tú te estas basando en una lista en vez de conocer a tus estudiantes." Yo sé que la intención de ella era buena. Pero tenía que tomar el paso de conocer a sus estudiantes.*
>
> ["With all due respect," I told her. "A list from me is not going to help you. You have to know your students and their families. If I give you a list of 10 things that are very Latina, it is not going to help you. It doesn't work because you are basing your understanding of your students from a list instead of getting to know them. I know that she had good intentions. But she had to take the step to get to know her students.]

***Identidad* [Identity]**

In exploring if the participants viewed their Latino/a identity and professional experiences in Catholic education as having a relationship, the participants overwhelmingly agreed that it was difficult to separate them from one another since both elements were integral to their collective identities as Latino/a teachers. Eccles (2009) defined collective identities as those personally valued parts of the self that serve to strengthen one's ties to highly valued social groups and relationships—such as one's gender, race, religion, social class, culture, and family. As further supported by Bergey et al. (2019): "The life experiences Latinos have in their families, schools, communities, and society at large shape how they see themselves as members of social groups—their collective identity" (p. 4). The strong connection between their Latino/a identity and their professional experiences was another driving and guiding force that called them to teach and sustain their work in urban Catholic schools. As noted by Pascual:

> They [Latino identity and being a teacher] have always gone hand in hand. I've never been able to separate them from each other since the first year I started teaching to even

> now where I think it serves me as an advantage. For me, being Latino means being able to communicate in Spanish with families and parents especially. I feel I've been blessed with this ability just because I've been able to build relationships with the parents. I don't hide my Latino background just like I don't hide being a teacher. I'll talk to students in Spanish in class and make them feel at home.

Angela and Martha described the way they managed students' behaviors and/or related to them as an extension of their intersectional identities as Latina urban Catholic school teachers. The descriptions of Angela's and Martha's *amor maternal* [motherly love] approach embodied comparable elements of what Delgado Bernal (2001) referred to as "pedagogies of the home" (p. 624)—"the communication, practices and learning that occur in the home and community" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 624). The pedagogies of the home "Often serve as a cultural knowledge base that helps students survive and succeed within an educational system that often excludes and silences them" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 623). According to Delgado Bernal (2001), these constructs "Extend the existing discourse on critical pedagogies by putting cultural knowledge and language at the forefront to better understand lessons from the home space and local communities" (p. 624). For example, Angela's "strictness" with her students was appreciated by their parents:

> My classroom management stems from my Latina identity. There's no way a little kid is gonna smack his lips at me. There's no way that I'm going to have a kid that I've asked to go move this or go sit over there and have him ask me why. My Latina identity definitely has to play into it because the way I manage my kids is the way that I was brought up at home. Tough love and respect. The way I was brought up by my Latino parents and their parents. Being Latina just shapes me as an educator, period. Like, I know how to get my kids' attention. You know, I remember the first time I was hard on one of my students and I thought to myself, "Damn. I'm going to get in trouble. I should have never said that. It just slipped." But when you have kids calling you mom left and right it's hard not to treat them like your kids. At a Latino school, we're a community. We're not individuals. We are a community of brown people. And that alone helps to shape educators.

Martha had a similar outlook to Angela's. She explained that she had been criticized before by her non-Latino colleagues on the way she treated her "kids." In Martha's case, the "tough love" that Angela spoke of was often reciprocated with *cariño maternal* or motherly affection:

> I feel like there is a connection. First of all, because of the [school] community I'm in. Because of my Latina identity, they [the students] can relate to me and I can relate to them. As a Latina woman, I also feel like it's easier for me to navigate the profession in situations that are unique to my students. I've had other colleagues who were not Latinos and they struggled to get our school. They didn't understand why I interacted with my students a certain way. They always felt like we [the Latino/a teachers] coddled our students. It's not that we're coddling them. It's that we can relate to a lot of their situations or we can relate to how they're growing up, or how they're being raised. Let's not forget the parents. . . . Being able to have these relationships with the parents are unique to me as a Latina.

Of all the participants, Graciela had been at her school the longest. For Graciela, she initially was not sure if there was a direct relationship between these two identifiers. However, as the interview continued, Graciela's reflection on this question echoed the other participants':

> I just always felt like they [the students and families] resonated with who I was because you know we were maybe in that same situation where some of our parents who are also first-gen were in. They also, you know, have gone through the same struggles that maybe I did. I think they're happy to see somebody who is like them teaching their children. And then there are other families who maybe are not as educated who look up to me and might think, "If she can do it, you can do it too." I've heard it from parents where they tell their kids, "Look, she went to college. You can do it too." That makes me feel good. I'm glad that I'm there to represent for our students who are Latinos. I'm there to be a role model for them to show them they can be whatever they want to be.

Although all of the participants acknowledged and recognized a deep connection between their Latino/a identity and their professional experiences, it was not as easily articulable as when they were sharing classroom experiences or describing motivating factors that allowed them to engage in their work as urban Catholic school teachers. Bridging their Latino/a identity with their professional experiences was something that happened naturally and was often overlooked

because of its organic nature. These two elements of their lives have become one and are thus difficult to detach from one another. Juan alluded to this notion:

> As I get older, I realize, you know, my ethnicity and my work are one in the same and I am proud of it. I just feel that you know, us as Latinos, we've looked out for each other. After all these years, I just love it when I see my students who struggled and who are now excelling, graduating, or they're moving on to their careers. . . . I'm just proud of my ethnicity and I'm proud of being Mexican. I guess it's part of my evolution as a person.

Presiones **[Pressures]**

The racialized experiences of *apoyo*, *cultura*, and *identidad*, created distinct pressures for the participants working in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. The *testimonios* showed that the boundaries between their personal and professional lives were blurred. The Latino/a teachers expressed not being able to turn their backs on their students and were confronted with the added pressures of carrying the guilt of abandoning their students if they did not endure these challenges.

They also voiced fears of feeling responsible if their students did not succeed, and as a result, were willing to make personal sacrifices to avoid any sense of exhibiting abandonment. I refer to this notion as the *Si no yo, ¿Entonces quién?* [If not me, then who?] belief. This expectation was an added pressure in the day-to-day teaching of Latino/a urban Catholic school teachers. Concha shared that this pressure also brought on some feelings of inadequacy:

> I know that some of my students also face this or will face this . . . imposter syndrome. I sometimes think, "Am I fit to be here?" I feel bad for feeling this way since I know that some of my students will face more. I have nothing against males or anything, but you know, it's still a male-dominated world. It's still within our culture, within our society, and I see that. Maybe somebody else will do a better job than me to help these students. I love what I'm doing. I feel that I'm doing what I need to be doing. I have to trust God wholeheartedly. And like I said last time, I follow the Holy Spirit and I am where I'm meant to be. But sometimes I wonder to myself, "Am I good enough?"

Pascual also felt similar pressures and found it difficult to just be a teacher when he was also required to fill the role of a parent:

> I find that the hardest is dealing with living situations that the students come from and dealing with those issues and balancing their educational needs while still trying to have their parents have a big part of it too. Especially parents who are not involved. Parents who are not there for the kids or parents that sometimes just leave everything up to us and they want us to do the parenting. A lot of the challenges that I've dealt with were, you know, communicating with parents or making parents understand their value in their kids' education. . . . Making them see that they have the biggest part in their kids' future. Even more than the teacher does.

Pascual also struggled with the recognition that his students' future was a shared responsibility and it was one that he did not take lightly:

> It's one of the hardest things, I think, in our job, knowing students. When you get to really know them you might find the unfortunate stuff that happens in their life. I think that's probably the hardest part, you know, hearing what the kids go through. Sometimes you can do so much for them and they still can't escape from where they're coming from. After 15 years of doing this work and having the unfortunate times where there are those kids that just [long pause] you feel like you couldn't help. And not taking it personal is very hard. But again, I learned early on, if you're going to survive in this profession, you got to start accepting that you can't change everyone. And when you find out about that first student that you just couldn't reach . . . it's just . . . that one hurts, you know. I still think about students from when I first started teaching that I feel I could have done more for or if I would have done more, maybe . . . I think that those are things that keep me questioning, "When it happens again to another student, will I be able to accept it?"

Graciela, in like manner, shared how she has lived with the harsh realities and pressures of witnessing students who had challenging paths in their lives. Given her many years in the profession, Graciela has had to experience former students' trials in life:

> Everybody's family dynamic is so different. So, things that we might find important might not be as important to their parents. And when I say that, I don't mean their parents are against our teaching, or what we're doing, but maybe going to college isn't the final goal for them. Maybe it's just finishing high school. And so, sometimes we've pushed that barrier. And some parents don't want to hear it. One of my students from my first class ever . . . I recently found out that one of my former students is a drug addict. And it really broke my heart. I mean, I was blown away. I just couldn't believe it. He went down the wrong path, and unfortunately, he wasn't able to get out of it. And it just broke my

> heart because my husband also coached him for football. And so, we had that connection with him, and when we saw him at a gas station panhandling, and it just like, I was taken aback, it really broke my heart to be completely honest. I don't want to feel like that again.

These pressures were exacerbated by the pressures of the administration. While the participants showed great appreciation for their school's leadership, the administration was often cited as a barrier and/or pressure in their work. Despite the fact that the participants' school mission statements emphasized providing a holistic education and promoting a "spiritually, academically, and socioemotionally" learning environment for the students, this was not seen as a priority for teachers given the scarcity of resources for professional development opportunities.

All of the schools alluded to fostering twenty-first century learning, academic excellence, and providing a challenging and engaging education as important values and drivers of their schools' mission and vision. And although the participants recognized the need for their principals' high expectations and acknowledged the emphasis of a culture of high academic achievement that Catholic schools have been known for, they were unable to understand the feasibility of meeting these demands with the limited resources they were given. Martha talked about how lack of resources was a barrier that made it difficult to meet all students' needs justly:

> We don't have the resources needed to be able to work with those students that need extra support or are marginalized because of their academics or behavior. I feel that there's a lack of resources in the Archdiocese or at least here in my school community as well. Sometimes it does feel like we're doing the kids a disservice because we can't offer them that one-on-one support that they need. There is a lack of resources when it comes to advocating for those students with special needs or those who are in need of extra attention.

Martha expressed a sense of desperation because she felt that she could do more but was unable to due to being pulled in many directions and sometimes not having her administrator's support:

> Aside from the lack of resources, I would say administration can be a challenge. I always come to work positive and I have an open mindset that it's gonna be a good day but I feel like a lot of the stressors that happen throughout the day are things that could have been addressed or could have been taken care of by administration. I feel that there's a disconnect with the communication. . . . Sometimes you don't feel that you have that help or that support, because you have all kinds of hats to wear. Aside from being a teacher, you're a nurse, you're a psychologist, you're the janitor, you're everything. I understand right now because of the pandemic our expectations are a little bit higher, but then it's like, "What about us? We're humans too! Many times we are just given things. It's kind of like, "Here, this is what you need to do now." We're good to adapt to things like that because we're teachers but they [administration] forget that we're human or we have families outside of the school as well.

Angela struggled with the pressure of being "micromanaged" and not always being allowed to freely put into practice the pedagogical training she received in her teacher preparation program:

> My administration likes to micromanage. . . . I think it comes with the fact that it's such a small school. I think if it was a public school, maybe it'd be different, I don't know. But you know, the constant, "I want to see your lesson plans. I want to see what you're doing. I want to see your objectives; I want to see this. . . ." You're giving me all this extra work! It's like, let me do my job. When you see that I'm not producing good work, then bother me, then ask for every little thing, then micromanage me. But if you see I've been doing my job consistently, leave me the hell alone. Like, all the time they're taking away from me, I can be investing in creating stuff for my kids. Sometimes I get resistance when I ask to do something and I'm told no. I ask for something and I'm told, "You don't really need that. You could just do this." And I'm like, "No! You want me to do that?" I get that they've been doing this longer than I have. I get that. But just because it didn't work for them doesn't mean it's not gonna work for me. And if it doesn't work for me, I will tell them, "You were right." And it's happened. Just let me try.

Pascual had similar pressures and also did not find it difficult to share his concerns with his administration:

> You have the pressure of administration. . . . They want the numbers up [test scores], they want to see the data that students are doing better all the time. I try not to focus on that. If you [administration] want to know what I'm doing, come into my classroom and I'll show you what's happening. Don't assume anything. If you really want to know what's going on, come in. I don't have any problem with someone coming in to see what I'm doing. I've always been upfront with administration. If there's ever a time they feel like I'm not meeting their expectations or something, that's fine. We can discuss it you know?

These pressures underscored the socio-emotional toll that this work had on their personal lives and overall wellness. The teachers, like their parents, endured great sacrifices for the well-being of their students and sometimes at the expense of their health and/or own families. In many instances, the participants of this study neglected their own families in order to be able to meet the demands associated with serving in under-resourced Catholic schools. Juan referred to his work as a teacher and coach as an "addiction":

> I think my biggest pressure has been at home. The time that I've taken away from my family and my wife is time that's never going to come back. I've given so much to my work. I would say 95% of it has been to my teams because I've coached so long. It's just my craft, you know, working. In my career, I've been a dean, an athletic director. . . . I've been a facilities manager, campus minister. You know, all that takes time. We don't want to fail at our job. But at times, I'll be honest, I've failed as a husband and as a parent, you know, because I haven't been there as much. That's been my biggest struggle . . . my addiction to team sports, man. I get home and that's what I want to do. After I've been at a game all day, I just want to come home and relax and crack open a cold beer and watch a game, you know. I'm trying to balance. I'm definitely trying to find balance.

Graciela and Pascual also talked about how their work has impacted their family life and kept them from being fully present with their own family. Specifically, Graciela shared:

> You know, one thing that kills me all the time is that we do so much for all our students and at the end of the day, we neglect our own. I hate that. I saw it so clearly during the pandemic because here I was, trying to make sure everybody [students] logged on and that everybody was doing their work. And what about my own kids? I had two at home as well and you know, their dad was still at work. So, it was just me and the kids and my kid hardly logged on because she hated it. She was a TK student so doing schoolwork online was horrible for her. And then I had a son who never came out of the room because he was always in class doing classwork and we sacrificed a lot during that time. The gap in salary too. . . . You [speaking of herself] could be making so much more at a public school but you stay because of your faith and because you know that this is where you need to be. And sometimes the environment at school can be toxic and you're not staying because of the people. Before you know it you start putting yourself last and when is enough? You know, when do you say, "This isn't for me anymore? Or, this isn't my issue. I need to think of myself?"

Pascual echoed Juan's and Graciela's sentiments as he recalled the sacrifices he has made as a teacher:

> It's had an impact, especially in the beginning when my kids were young and I spent so much time doing stuff for school. Being a private school teacher is so demanding. You're just not a teacher. . . . I'm in charge of sports stuff here and so many different programs. It does take a lot of time after school and it does take away from my family stuff. I've run into that issue, you know, where you're [speaking of himself] always doing stuff with the school. When are you gonna have family time and stuff like that? I just had a conversation earlier today with one of my co-teachers she was asking me, "Why are you doing so much? Why are you doing all this sports stuff?" I said, "Because if I don't do it, kids won't have a football team to play in, or the girls' volleyball team won't do anything." If I don't attend these meetings . . . if I don't figure out the schedules, then it's not gonna happen. And these kids are not gonna have a chance to play after school or do something outside of being here in class all day.

Some of the participants experienced health challenges due to the high-stress levels. As noted by Schmidt and Jones-Fosu (2019): "Teachers at high-poverty, urban schools encounter additional stressors that are not commonplace at suburban or rural schools" (p. 18). They further noted that some of these stressors were caused by lack of funding, resources, and heavy workload (Schmidt & Jones-Fosu, 2019)—challenges identified by the participants in their *testimonios*. Abel and Sewell (1999) suggested that: "Teacher stress is specifically defined as conditions of negative effects, such as frustration and anxiety, that result from aspects of the job and that are perceived by teachers as a threat to their psychological or physical well-being (p. 287).

Martha's, Pascual's, and Concha's health were impacted due to the high-stress levels that they encountered in their work. Both Martha and Pascual broke out in a rash/hives. Martha shared that:

> Last year, during the pandemic, I had to go to the doctor a lot of times because I would break out in a rash. I had to take mental health days because I was just taking in so much of everything that was going on at work that I started developing these rashes. They were

> all associated with stress. So that's when my doctor told me, "You need to keep calm and take it easy. Make sure that you take care of yourself if you don't want to see your body like that." I had never seen my body like that. My arms and legs were red all over. I was taking it home with me. It wasn't fair for my daughter. My mom would tell me, "*Ella no tiene la culpa*" [It's not her fault]. My daughter even tells me sometimes because she hears me talking to other teachers and she gets mad. She's like, "Why are you doing that? Why are you dealing with that?" Or, "Stop replying to parents," when she sees that I'm trying to email parents or respond on our communication app. I have to remember that I need to take care of myself as well because I have someone to look after at home.

Pascual also shared about a time that his health was compromised:

> It just takes a really strong person to continue in this kind of work. It's not easy because you get to learn about the lives of students and families and what they're going through. And it does take a toll. A couple of years ago I was really stressed out and I got hives, you know. I'm tired. A lot of times just I get home and I don't have the energy to do anything. You know, it's demanding. It's a very demanding profession.

Lastly, there was a time early in Concha's teaching career when she contemplated leaving the profession because she was emotionally drained. Like Martha, she unapologetically described her experience:

> I'm okay to admit it. I mean, I'm not embarrassed or anything like that. I remember a year that I just felt so burnt out because I was dealing with so much. I was teaching and I also took on an extra responsibility here at my school, I had just gotten married, and we had a new principal that year. I remember that there was a point where I would drive to work and I would just cry. I would cry. I just wanted to go back home. And all through the drive to work all I did was cry—*lloraba* and I when I arrived to work, I would rush to the bathroom to fix myself *para que la gente no notara* [so that people would not notice]. But I was having a miserable time. You know, I even contemplated, "should I just throw in the towel?" I prayed about it and I said, "God, *ayúdame* [help me]. What's the path I should take? *¿Qué hago?* [What should I do?]" You know, it was just so much for me. And I finally said, "Enough is enough. I have to seek help." So, I did. I had to go seek professional help.

The participants of this study explained that not only did they have to manage barriers, pressures, and resistance at their school sites, but also had to navigate criticism from family and friends when explaining their decisions to teach in urban Catholic schools. The participants on multiple occasions had to justify themselves to loved ones about why it is that they are called to

this work despite low-pay, high levels of stress, and constant pressures due to marginalized communities in which they served. Concha, for example, talked about how she turned down job opportunities at more affluent schools and how that was not well received by a co-worker:

> I had a colleague who was pushing me to go that route [to accept a position at a more affluent school]. He said, "You will have job stability and you're not going to deal with certain issues at that school. You're just going to teach and you don't have to worry about all these extra responsibilities, it's going to be so much easier. Remember, you're a newlywed. You won't be stuck at school for 10 to 12 hours and be doing extra work when you don't have to." I eventually told him I declined it. He was like, "What?" I'm like, "Yeah, I declined it. I think that this school still needs me." He reminded me that our school was struggling with enrollment, that the resources weren't there, and to imagine what I could have done with the resources at that other school. "You could have done so much more," he said. I remember I got major pushback from that. And you know, that individual was also in the Catholic school system. According to him, I made a grave mistake because I decided to stay at a school that was struggling.

Pascual felt blessed that his wife was very supportive of his profession, but even his friends of over 25 years questioned his decision to teach:

> People have always asked me, "Dude why are you teaching? How can you do this?" Before I was teaching, I worked for the government and that's where I met my wife. I look back and I think how I can be making three times what I'm making now. If I stayed with my old job, I know I wouldn't have a fulfilled life. I am very fortunate that I have my wife who is really supportive and tells me, "If this is what you want to do, do it." She's like, "God knows I couldn't do it. I don't know how you do it every day." But she knows that this is my passion. She knows that this is what I wanted to do. There're other people that just don't understand why I do it and say, "Why are you doing this? Just go work somewhere else and make a lot more money." I think the only way I can describe it to them is like, "I'm happy doing what I have to do. I might not make the money you make but, you know, I'm okay with that. Because at the end, you know, I lived a life where I was able to do something that I was passionate about and was able to make a difference. . . . I might have gotten pushback from family and friends but not ever once did they get close to convince me that I can just let it go.

Martha's family and friends did not question her decision to teach, but rather, were judgmental about her reasons to teach at an under-resourced Catholic school. When Martha

received her master of arts degree in education, she found herself having to answer this question more frequently:

> They're [family and friends] always saying, "Why are you still there? You could be at a public school or you could be working doing this anywhere else. Why are you there? They don't even pay you a lot even though you do so much. You're always stressed . . . working your whole weekend . . . working after work hours! You're making yourself sick at times because of the stress and everything you take on! The money's not good." I know, it's not about the money. It's about the calling. I don't know if there's another way to put it but I am comfortable and I do like serving this community. Yes, it's stressful and everything but what job isn't?

Composite Testimonio

The Latino/a teachers' racialized experiences resonated with my own accounts. The seven of us embraced a racial and social justice commitment to our work through *apoyo, cultura,* and *identidad*. The Latino/a teachers provided support and advocacy to their students and their families through a cultural approach that sought to form the whole student. This notion of educating the whole child was present in my own practice as a teacher where I too incorporated an additional layer of advocacy that went beyond the traditional understanding of a holistic education that was often centered on meeting the academic and spiritual development of students. Like the Latino/a teachers, my interpretation of providing a well-rounded education was not exclusive to the academic and spiritual, but rather, it encompassed elements of race and class that assisted my students in managing discrimination and poverty.

Apoyo was a primary driver of my work as a Catholic school teacher at an under-resourced Catholic school. Drawing from my own experiences, I was aware of the empowerment that was felt when someone advocated on my behalf. My earliest memory of educational advocacy takes me all the way back to a parent-teacher conference from when I was in the second grade. My mother, my biggest educational advocate, felt I was ready to formally start

learning English at school and on that day asked my teacher if it would be possible for me to start transitioning into the English "side" of the classroom. As the translator of this convening, I vividly remember having to tell my mother, what I now understand as deficit thinking, the reasons why my White teacher did not think I should be reading in English. My mother did not take "no" for an answer and somehow convinced my teacher to allow me to learn in English.

I have since learned that there was much more that took place on that day than what I understood then. Many years later I learned that my school principal had given the teachers a directive to not re-designate English Learners. The principal did not want to lose the funding attached to the number of English Learners at the school and wanted to maintain the number of English Learners as high as possible. I learned of this when I was pulled out of my 10th grade honors English class in high school to take a basic English language development test.

This experience shifted my own practice as a teacher at a school that served predominately Latino/a students. In my first year as a teacher, I noticed that our school's entrance exam at the middle school level largely favored students who were fluent in English and had the tendency to exclude those who had limited English proficiency from entering our school in the middle school grades. It bothered me greatly that we often overlooked students who for example, did really well in the math portion of the entrance exam and demonstrated a lot of promise. But, because these students were still learning how to speak English, we would not give them an admission invitation.

I never forgot about the day that my mother stood up to my second-grade teacher and insisted that I join the English reading group. If my mother, a soft-spoken humble *señora* who could only communicate in her native tongue, had the courage to stand up for me so that I could

learn how to read in English, I was convinced that there was nothing that could hold me back from advocating for my students. Eventually, because of my advocacy and leadership, the entrance exam became a placement exam. The assessment that once measured if applicants were "good enough" to join our school became a test that measured an applicant's potential.

Like the Latino/a teachers, I explicitly valued my Latino *cultura* as a teacher. Our ability to see our students' struggles and witness their successes through a cultural lens provided us with insight to see our students' wisdom and potential that might be more readily ignored by a non-Latino/a teacher. This cultural and community knowledge of my students positioned me as a bridge-builder—someone who was able to assist their students in navigating social structures that would otherwise be difficult to traverse on their own. My own realities as a Latino teacher allowed me to understand and appreciate what my students were bringing to the table.

I was also well aware of the types of challenges my first-generation immigrant students were facing, and most importantly, I was cognizant of where their potential would lead them. I saw this as my responsibility to connect both of those worlds for my students. For example, I would conduct mock interviews for my students in preparation for their Catholic high school admission interviews, drove students and their parents to Catholic high school open-houses, and held office hours to assist parents in completing Catholic high school applications and financial aid forms.

The fact that I always felt I was more than just a teacher to my students coincided with the *testimonios* of the Latino/a teachers. This sense of responsibility of not being able to walk away, or the construct of *Si no yo, ¿Entonces quién?* cannot live independently from the pressures and emotional/spiritual labor that accompany the sacrifices Latino/a teachers make. For

instance, as a Latino teacher, I always felt I had something more to prove than my White colleagues. Many times this meant staying much longer after school to prepare my lessons and also, volunteering to take on extra-curricular activities. In retrospect, while I perceived the many extra obligations that I took on over the years as professional growth opportunities, I was really trying to compensate for what I did not get as a student and wanted to be more than "just a teacher" for my students.

Our *testimonios* showed that we were more than just *maestros* [teachers]—for Latino/a teachers the binary of personal and professional was collapsed. My wife and children have witnessed this alongside me. Their front-row view of my dedication to my vocation, students, and their families has come at great cost and sacrifice to them as well. They too have had to ask themselves, *Si no yo, ¿Entonces quién?* when supporting me in my work. They have answered this question by extending me their *apoyo*, grace, and compassion in moments when they have had to be second and third to my professional commitments and obligations.

Discussion of Findings

The *testimonios* provided new understandings about motivation, the racialized experiences, and distinct Latino/a teachers' identities in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. The participants' relationships and practices with their Latino/a students and families often delineated along racialized lines, acknowledging the importance of the need for urban Catholic schools to diversify their teaching workforce to reflect student diversity in their classrooms.

Raced Understanding of Teacher Motivation

The *testimonios* of the Latino/a urban Catholic school teachers racialize research on teacher recruitment and retention. First, the research on the motivation to teach and the

motivation to remain in the teaching profession generally revolves around intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic factors. Altruistic motivation, in particular, includes a desire to help children and adolescents; a desire to improve or contribute to society; providing meaningful and worthwhile service to others; answering a calling to teach; wanting to make a worthwhile contribution to the lives of children; and wanting to make a difference (Queensland College of Teachers, 2016). While intrinsic motivation points to factors such as interest in the subject matter or the "participation in something that is interesting or intellectually stimulating" (Queensland College of Teachers, 2016, p. 12).

In addition, teacher attrition research in urban schools primarily points to ineffective teacher induction programs, teacher compensation, lack of effective school leadership, weak organizational structures, and student behavior as reasons why teachers leave hard-to-staff urban schools (Holmes et al., 2019; Przygocki, 2004).

The *testimonios* of Latino/a teachers and their motivation to teach and stay in urban Catholic schools racialize the literature on motivational factors by highlighting the centrality of race in discussions around teacher retention. Intrinsic and altruistic motivations to teach do not take into account the interplay among race, racism, and motivation. For example, White middle-class teachers teaching in neighborhoods that are considered underserved, at-risk, or in need, for altruistic reasons fall prey to the deficit-model of teaching and learning. Simply having good intentions when teaching youth in low-income and racialized communities is not enough.

In fact, teacher education has been critiqued for being built on the implicit assumption that a marginalized community and its youth could benefit from the engagement of White middle-class teachers trained in teacher preparation programs that are largely informed by

Eurocentric ideologies. The *testimonios* of the Latino/a teachers counter this deficit perspective and add a new distinct layer to research on teacher motivation and retention. For Latino/a teachers, the motivation to teach and the motivation to remain in the profession is anchored in their lived experiences at the intersection of race, class, language, and immigrant status. Thus, their motivations to teach in under-resourced urban Catholic schools are not simply intrinsic or altruistic, but embodied through lived experiences as well.

Elements of Latino/a teacher's upbringing and lived experiences play a role in their decisions to serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. As cited by Mendoza Aviña (2016), "Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) identify the body as a source of knowledge production, coining the term 'theory in the flesh' (p. 23) to recognize the ways in which our bodies hold histories and produce knowledge" (p. 470). The Latino/a teachers entered the classroom with life experiences and "theory in the flesh" that reflected their raced and material realities. *Cuentos* of fear, hunger, and pain become part of the lived experience that informs and redirects our thinking about teacher motivation and retention. For instance, the participants often had first-hand experiences of overcoming similar barriers that their students faced. Their lived experiences, grounded in family, roots, school, and faith, carried deeply personal motivations for teaching. If the teachers grew up or lived in communities with high poverty, they were more likely to opt for teaching in similar environments.

Also, contrary to research that posits that urban school teachers who feel emotionally exhausted and/or experience high levels of stress demonstrate lower teaching quality and weakened relationships with students are more likely to leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2002; Schmidt & Jones-Fosu, 2019), the participants of the study defy the odds

intellectually, spiritually, and corporally. The Latino/a teachers' lived experiences challenge this deficit narrative about what motivates urban school teachers by demonstrating resilience on multiple levels.

Raced Understanding of "Teacher"

While there has been a significant increase in the number of ethnically diverse learners attending Catholic schools in the United States, the teaching workforce remains predominately middle-class, female, and White (McDonald & Schultz, 2020). Research shows that students from working-class Communities of Color often have negative experiences in schools. For example, schools position children and families from non-dominant, non-White Latino communities as linguistic and racial others whose cultural practices constitute a liability rather than an asset to learning. Consequently, notions of what constitutes a *teacher* often do not include Latino/a voices and experiences. Foregrounding Latino/a Catholic teacher *testimonios* provides insight into what they believe we should know about their experiences, and then, we are able to gain a fuller understanding of the impactful work of Teachers of Color.

The *testimonios* evidence that Latino/a teachers play a critical role in the education of Students of Color through *apoyo, cultura,* and *identidad.* A recent national study that examined pathways to increase the presence of Latino/a educators in Catholic schools found that the participants "expressed a belief that their cultural background and ethnicity create a strong connection with the underrepresented students and families they serve and that they offer perspectives that are different from those of non-Hispanic teachers and leaders" (Ospino & Wyttenbach, 2022). As noted by Ospino and Wyttenbach (2022):

> Professional identities are multifaceted, with different components interwoven; family, ethnic origin, academic background, and occupational experience are all part of the mix.

> Research on how Hispanics define identity has found that this population is inevitably influenced by two major paradigms: (a) identity as influenced by political and racial discrimination; and, (b) identity as influenced by family, community/class and religion. (p. 19)

The Latino/a teachers in this study were highly committed to the students, families, and communities they served. They provide dynamic, contextualized, rigorous instruction, hold high and clear expectations, and develop supporting caring relationships with all students. In essence, Latino/a teachers embody unique understandings of the location of knowledge and power within themselves and their students. They push back on the common belief that institutionalized knowledge in the field of education carries more validity and power than the experiential knowledge of students, families, and communities. As a result, they avoid making assumptions about the students' knowledge and experiences. Instead, they can see the wisdom in the students that are often undetected by those who may not share lived experiences of deportation, poverty, or learning a second language.

Latino/a teachers are able to access unique material and intellectual resources that exist within families and communities. For example, Students of Color find that images and stories that represent them are not in their school texts. Latino/a teachers are able to access storytelling, music, and Catholic traditions that align with their students' cultures and beliefs.

Latino/a teachers exhibit a racialized ethics of care. As noted by Mangual Figueroa and Barrales (2021), "There is a long history of schooling institutions intervening in racially minoritized and economically disenfranchised families' lives in order to change their caregiving practices through assimilation to majoritarian white middle class and English-speaking norms" (p. 17). However, the *testimonios* raise an awareness about the Latino/a teachers' value of care and are heard as counter-stories that communicate their resilience and commitment to help their

students better themselves, see a better future, and reach their goals through education. As noted by Esposito (2014), “To truly teach the whole student, teachers must engage in an ethic of care, a way of loving and caring for the whole student” (p. 277).

This ethics of care comes with a heavy burden. The similarity of lived experiences, cultural identity, and background was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the teachers cracked open a deep level of understanding and insight into their students and families. The teachers were able to understand the worries of deportation, discrimination, economic hardship, and sacrifice. On the other hand, these cultural ways of knowing fueled pressures and consequences that were directly related to their advocacy of students and families. This created a construct among the teachers that I call: *Si no yo, ¿Entonces quién?*. This notion refers to the teachers’ inability to walk away from their students and show their disposition to be there for their students beyond all measures. In other words, they unequivocally believe that if they do not do this work, who will?

The participants felt an immense responsibility to create school experiences and environments for their students to succeed. Supporting the academic, emotional, and linguistic needs of the students took a psychological toll on the participants. It was evident in their narratives that teaching in an under-resourced urban Catholic school was tiring work. Nonetheless, the participants found mechanisms of resilience to confront the barriers and challenges they encountered. Their faith, for example, was one element that cut across the *testimonios*. Another important component of their resilience was their ability to articulate their driving factors as to why they chose to teach at an urban Catholic school and their ability to defend their decisions to stay.

The work in urban Catholic schools is heavy because these teachers were going up against systems of educational oppression and culture deficit mindsets that have been in place for Students and Teachers of Color. The theoretical pedagogies of this study, CRT and LatCrit, provide a framework that allows for the teachers to challenge the deficit mindsets that they often encounter in their work in marginalized communities. In their study on the racialization of Teachers of Color in urban schools, Pizzaro and Kohli (2020) presented counter-stories of self-identified justice-oriented teachers and explored barriers they experienced as Teachers of Color. The researchers found that the Teachers of Color in the study used racial literacy, "language and conceptual frameworks to analyze their racialization" (Pizzaro & Kohli, 2020, p. 985). The authors suggested that the teachers' ability to use their lived experiences allowed them

> To disrupt narratives that framed their racialized struggles as being 'weak,' 'overly emotional,' or 'not cut out for the job.' With a strengthened critical racial analysis, they were able to challenge notions that their feelings, experiences, and ways of being were irrational and unprofessional. (Pizzaro & Kohli, 2020, p. 985)

The Latino/a teachers' conscious decision to willingly confront and endure difficult schooling conditions represents a legacy of justice work that Catholic schools have been known for throughout their existence and resembles the culture of service that was initiated by the sister-teachers. As noted by Martin and Litton (2004): "Attention to cultural diversity issues in Catholic education is a mandatory aspect of what it means to be a professional educator. The mission and legacy of Catholic education call this forth" (p. 1). Because of their lived experiences, advocacy, cultural competence, and commitment to faith, Latino/a teachers are uniquely positioned as social justice educators.

Chapter Summary

In seeking to answer the research questions of the study, this chapter discussed the findings that emerged from the *testimonios* of Latino/a Catholic school teachers who serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. The participants of the study shared their personal and professional experiences as they related to their teaching of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds and communities in hard-to-staff urban Catholic schools.

In alignment with the study's Critical Race Methodology, the chapter highlighted counter-narratives told through *testimonios* that validated that the lived experiences of the participants, researcher, and their Latino/a students were both collective and connected. By reflecting on the ways in which our work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools affected our emotional and physical well-being, we were able to articulate spaces of communal healing and ways to continue to move our work forward.

Lastly, the findings showed that the intersectionality of race and class were inseparable. The primary drivers of why the participants decided to become urban Catholic school teachers happened at the intersection of race, class, language, and immigration status. These complicated identities developed and evolved through the lived experiences of the participants and demonstrated that teachers from similar race and social class backgrounds to their students are committed and enduring to the teaching of their students despite pressures and barriers.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to increase the presence of Latino/a teachers in urban Catholic schools by examining the motivating factors that contribute to their decisions to teach and remain in an urban Catholic school setting. Although the literature on the diversification of the teacher workforce in urban public schools continues to grow, scholarship on the factors that influence and sustain the work of Latino/a Catholic school teachers who serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools is practically non-existent. This study served as a vehicle for a group of dedicated Latino/a Catholic school educators to help *reimagine* the recruitment and retention of Latino/a teachers by elevating the participants' voices and sharing their stories so that others may learn from their experiences and/or be encouraged to also give witness to their dedication to their profession despite the many challenges and barriers encountered in their work in urban Catholic schools.

Chapter 4 of this study answered the first two research questions by offering a raced understanding of teacher motivation and "teacher". This final chapter addresses the third research question which sought to answer how urban Catholic schools can diversify their teaching workforce by improving their recruitment and retention policies and practices. This chapter further discusses major findings from the participants' *testimonios* related to the literature on teacher recruitment and retention. Furthermore, through the use of the participants' experiences, this section bridges the theoretical and practical implications and recommendations that are offered at the conclusion of this chapter to inform policy on teacher recruitment and retention using a micro and macro analysis approach.

Implications

The implications of this study centrally place the evaluation of recruitment and retention practices of schools and (arch)dioceses as a critical need and are offered through a practical, policy, and theoretical perspective. The participants' *testimonios* found within this study have drastically shifted the way we should look at Latino/a teachers who serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Their narratives provide portraits of strength, commitment, dedication, and passion for their work. The participants of the study embodied the foundational values and principles of which Catholic schools in the United States were built-upon—a commitment to fulfilling the mission of serving the most vulnerable and those in the margins is well and alive. As noted by Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill (2017): "This is a unique opportunity for U.S. Catholics in the twenty-first century to reimagine the commitment to Catholic education in an increasingly Hispanic Church while building upon the best of our experiences and resources" (p. 5)—the Latino/a Catholic school teacher.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have implications for school-level practices. The *testimonios* highlight factors such as *apoyo*, *cultura*, and *identidad.* These were principal elements in Latino/a teachers' decisions to remain in urban Catholic schools. As a result, schools should be very intentional about providing these experiences for their teachers and most importantly, supporting teachers' efforts of advocacy for their students and families. The teachers want to feel the support of their school administrators and that they are valued for the experiential knowledge that they bring with them. As indicated in the findings, the teachers' motivation to teach at under-resourced urban Catholic schools was more than just intrinsic and extrinsic. These

teachers were driven by family, their commitment to serving in the margins, and their strong ties to the community. To meet the needs of their teachers and to promote the retention of Latino/a teachers, schools need to do the very same things that the teachers do for their students.

For example, as alluded to by Concha, mentorship early in her career was something that she was seeking. Teachers who lacked mentorship were more likely to leave the teaching profession. As noted by Ospino and Wyttenbach (2022):

> Placing value on relationships as Jesus did, Catholic educators likely benefit from intentional mentoring programs that support new educators. The power of mentoring has the potential to benefit not only the individual, but also the school community and, arguably, the larger system of Catholic schools.

Ospino and Wyttenbach (2022) emphasized that mentoring could happen at any point in a teacher's career and offered many approaches and designs to providing professional guidance to teachers:

- Traditional One-to-One Mentoring.
- Mentoring Groups of Teachers Within and Across Schools.
- Critical Mentoring—also known as same-race or affinity-based mentorship.

According to Ospino and Wyttenbach (2022): "Culturally responsive or critical mentoring design allows underrepresented teachers to recognize the racial, cultural, and social identities along with ways to leverage experiential knowledge" (p. 32). This approach has proven to work well with underrepresented teachers and to support the mission of Catholic education (Ospino & Wyttenbach, 2022).

The participants of this study expressed a strong desire to have had a formal mentor in their early years as teachers. Graciela shared the following:

> I wish that I would have had someone to tell me the basic procedures. I was very young and the teachers there were very seasoned. I didn't know a lot of the procedures and no one would say anything. It felt like they were just waiting for me to fail. So it just pushed me to work harder so that I wouldn't fail. But, I always felt like they were just waiting for me to fail because nobody told me basic procedures like that I was supposed to walk my students out to recess or to the cafeteria for lunch. Little things like that. I just wish I had somebody who would have said to me, "On Mondays, we do this. This is what we do in the morning." Luckily, I eventually had one person who kind of took me under her wing and helped me as much as she could.

Martha, Pascual, and Concha all associated mentorship as a multi-dimensional support structure. Specifically, they envisioned having a mentor that would provide curricular support and also someone who would assist them in navigating their school's culture. When asked what she was most in need of as a novice teacher, Concha responded:

> Some kind of mentor teacher. You need to have a mentor teacher! We're in Catholic schools . . . everybody wears multi-million hats. But, if you really want to provide professional support for your teachers you need to have a formal mentorship program. It's more than just assigning someone. It has to be a program where the mentor is really going to give their time. It has to be intentional and not just for show. There's no point in having a mentor teacher that doesn't provide you feedback. You do need that person to be in your classroom and tell you what you need to hear. A mentor should also be someone who knows the ins and outs of the school, including the mission and the charism.

Mentoring augments the growth and enriches the teaching experiences of educators by providing pedagogical, emotional, and psychological support (Ospino and Wyttenbach, 2022). Formal mentorship initiatives will help with the retention of Latino/a Catholic school teachers and serve as a single element of a multi-dimensional approach to lowering teacher attrition. As noted in the review of the literature of this study, mentorship was regarded as a key element of teacher induction programs (Brock & Chatlain, 2008).

Implications for Policy

This study will also help inform policy at the (arch)diocesan level by informing practices that will impact schools' decision-making to support the diversification of the teaching

workforce. It is important that a system-wide lead is taken in regards to setting the recruitment of a diverse teaching workforce as a goal and priority. A critical policy analysis of all elements of the onboarding of a new teacher from recruitment to selection will enhance hiring practices. For example, there is no formal teacher induction policy found within the ADLA Administrative Handbook (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2022) which serves as the comprehensive resource of information on archdiocesan administrative policies and procedures for operations and particular situations. As a result of this absence of policy, and the implications found in the research on teacher retention and attrition (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Chatlain & Noonan, 2005; Ingersoll, 2012), teacher retention is compromised because of a lack of policy that supports teacher induction and effective mentorship in ADLA Catholic schools.

Retaining highly qualified teachers, by providing proper teacher induction during the early years, is essential to the continuing success of Catholic schools (Brock & Chatlain, 2008). Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of teachers and the type of support they received as beginning teachers in their induction into the profession and that these teachers are more likely to stay in the profession (Brock & Chatlain, 2008; Chatlain & Noonan. 2005). Effective teacher induction programs are among the many strategies that have proven to support and/or lead to higher retention of Catholic school teachers (Przygocki, 2004). This is an opportunity for schools and school leaders to help retain quality teachers as they progress in the profession. Their *testimonios* assist in reimagining what their introduction to the profession could have been like if they would have had certain support structures in place.

For example, all the participants shared a similar experience in their introduction to the teaching profession. Juan used the expression: "*Vaya con Dios* [Go with God]", when he was

handed his first set of classroom keys. Juan was not sent to an induction program when he started teaching and received his formal teacher training when he entered a teacher preparation program designed for full-time Catholic school teachers. There, he collaborated with other Catholic school educators who shared similar values and interests. Graciela and Pascual shared how it all moved very quickly for them as well. Graciela noted:

> I was just given the keys. I literally went in for an interview, I got hired, and then that Friday, I went to pick up my things and my keys. The principal was like, "We're going out of town so these are the keys. This is the code if you need to come in and fix your class." I didn't even know what books we were using.

Pascual was hired with limited teaching experience. After having substitute taught at his former elementary school a couple of times, Pascual received a call from his former grammar school principal:

> She called and said they were looking for a teacher and asked if I would want to take the position. I had only subbed for her twice. I mean, I had no experience. I didn't know what to do. She said, "I think you'll be good. I think you'll do fine." I was like, "Well, if you believe I can, let's do it." No meetings. . . . I think she just threw me in. "Here you go!" At that point, it's either going to be sink or swim. I guess I swam, but it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy.

Angela hoped she had a different induction experience but it was not the case: "I had no proper induction," she said. "It was kind of like, 'Here. Here's your room. Go.'" Although Angela was encouraged by her principal to ask other teachers about the curriculum being used, she did not feel the collegial support that she needed was there:

> I'm the type of person that I'll figure it out on my own. I know that if I had asked for help my principal would have found a way to give it to me. But I didn't. To me, it's like I'm the adult. I'm the teacher. I'll figure it out. And that's what I did. Curriculum-wise, [named principal] gave me free rein on whatever curriculum I saw fit. She saw I was always very organized in terms of presenting my stuff. So she saw that I had a plan. She's like, "Okay, go for it and we'll see how it goes."

During her first year, Concha wanted to quit because of the lack of curriculum available and was relying on what she remembered from just a few years earlier as a student. Like the others, Concha did not participate in an induction program:

> I had *nada, nada* [nothing, nothing]. That first year was another year where I just, you know, there were times when I wanted to just drive back home. I was given an AP class to teach my first year. I had no idea. I was trying to teach my students or attempting to teach my students what I remembered in high school because I took that AP class. I didn't even have a book. I had zero. I had nothing. And that class was my biggest challenge. I wasn't that much older than my students. I think when I started teaching I was like 21 years old. Just fresh out of undergrad. And my students were seniors. . . . Eighteen [years old], maybe. So I wasn't that much older than them. And so obviously they knew that. They sensed that and they smelled the fear that I probably portrayed. And, you know, I didn't feel like I had any type of guidance.

The work of these teachers was powerful. Teachers who serve in under-resourced urban Catholic schools need support from the onset. The policy recommendations of this study will help correct the structures that are in place so that these teachers can do their work and thrive.

Implications for Research

This study only focused on Latino/a teachers' motivating factors to teach and remain in under-resourced urban Catholic schools and how they described their racialized experiences. Thus, opportunities exist for scholars to expand the study across non-Latino/a Teachers of Color, by looking at the intersectionality of other multiple identifiers, and by exploring narratives of other Catholic school stakeholders. Other research opportunities could extend this study's qualitative methodology through the implementation of a mixed-methods approach. The most important implication, however, is that further research on the recruitment, selection, induction, and retention of a diverse teaching workforce in Catholic schools needs to be treated with a sense of urgency.

The teachers in this study demonstrated resilience, perseverance, and a continued desire to serve and grow in the Catholic education system. It would not be fair to generalize, however, that all Latino/a urban Catholic school teachers will withstand the resistance, challenges, and/or barriers often encountered when serving in under-resourced Catholic schools. Still, the experiential knowledge of these Latino/a teachers and their unique racialized experiences as urban Catholic school teachers position them as powerful agents of change in regard to leading the charge to reimagine the recruitment and retention practices of schools and (arch)dioceses through further research.

The participants were invited to think back to their first year of teaching and were challenged to think of the strategies, resources, and/or *consejos* [advice] they would have liked to have had. They were then asked to offer their top three things that every new teacher should have and areas that would enhance their work as urban Catholic school teachers. Their responses included: opportunities to engage with other teachers, being paired with mentors who understand the school's culture, proper induction, curriculum development support, socioemotional training, teaching autonomy, and a voice in the hiring of faculty and staff.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this study are guided by the major findings of all three research questions. The findings of this research study support the need for school-based changes and (arch)diocesan-wide reform if we are to increase and sustain the presence of Latino/a Catholic school teachers in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. Also, other areas of research that could be derived from this study are described below. The following are recommendations that will support this effort:

School-Level Recommendations

Create a Hiring Committee of Stakeholders

Teacher-hiring in most Catholic schools is done solely by the principal. Principals must engage other key stakeholders by forming a hiring committee composed of individuals that are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and who are reflective of the school's student demographics. The hiring committee should be provided with resources such as implicit bias training.

Demonstrate a School-wide Commitment to Diversity

Schools need to engage in the continual review of their mission, vision, and philosophy statements to reflect an organizational commitment to the cultural diversity of the students and teachers. This practice should include the triangulation and reflection of foundational Church documents (papal, conciliar, and episcopal), Catholic Social Teaching principles, and reflection exercises centered on collectively identifying the school's charism.

Implement Socioemotional Support Structures

While the teachers in this study persevered and continued in their work, it could not be assumed that all Latino/a teachers can professionally survive the conditions endured in under-resourced urban Catholic schools without the proper support structures. Schools must invest in the implementation of teacher in-services that support their teachers holistically with tools and resources to navigate the many challenges that are often faced while working in high-poverty schools. The application of different strategies and activities that support the development of healthy identities and establishing and maintaining supportive relationships, will increase overall teacher wellness.

Form Affinity Spaces for Teachers

Partner with other schools that share similar interests in the diversification of the teaching workforce and who recognize the value of Latino/a teachers. Affinity spaces will allow teachers to come together and build community with one another based on shared characteristics and values. Creating such spaces decrease teachers' sense of isolation and serve as a powerful tool to help Latino/a teachers navigate the racialized landscape of U.S. Catholic schools.

Build and Promote a Culture of Autonomy

Principals who provide their teachers with classroom autonomy, recognize teachers' contributions, and provide spaces of input, are more likely to retain their teachers. Principals need to be intentional about providing teachers with the agency to make decisions and keeping clear lines of communication. The promotion of a collaborative decision-making culture will allow teachers to have input on pedagogical approaches and/or curricular purchases that are within the schools' means.

(Arch)Diocesan-Level Recommendations

Form an Advisory Committee

Recruitment, selection, and retention of Latino/a teachers is a systemic responsibility. (Arch)dioceses must plan the formation of an advisory committee composed of diocesan leaders, Catholic school teachers, principals, and higher education partners to research, reflect, and report on the issues of recruitment and retention of Latino/a teachers in U.S. Catholic schools.

Foster a Pipeline of Latino/a Teachers

(Arch)dioceses must foster pipelines of Latino/a teachers by developing "Grow Your Own" type programs by partnering with Catholic high schools and/or Catholic youth leadership

organizations. The outreach would focus on recruiting teacher candidates who are more likely to reflect the diversity in their communities and are more likely to continue to teach in their communities. Developing a tutoring program partnership with local colleges and universities to introduce undergraduate students to the teaching profession will also create a teacher pipeline.

Design a Multi-Year Induction Program

Design a multi-year teacher induction program that focuses on culturally responsive practices and is grounded in a theoretical framework that supports the social justice mission of the Church. In order to encourage the participation of under-resourced schools, the induction program should include a funding plan that subsidizes teachers from urban Catholic schools, who serve primarily students living in poverty, to attend the induction program at a low or no cost.

Develop a Teacher Mentorship Program

Launch a teacher mentorship program of Latino/a teachers who have served in urban Catholic schools. A formalized teacher mentorship program would allow for Latino/a teachers to learn from the experiential knowledge of their Latino/a mentors and to navigate spaces where their intersectional identities are seldom acknowledged and affirmed. The mentorship program could be a component of the induction program. A culturally responsive mentoring program would complement the school-level recommendation of forming affinity spaces for teachers.

Advocate for Philanthropic Support

Leverage philanthropic partnerships to support the continued formation of Latino/a Catholic school teachers who serve in under-resourced communities. Scholarship support for Latino/a teachers for teacher preparation programs and/or professional development opportunities will enhance the professional capacity of teachers. This should include the

prioritizing of culturally responsive teaching development for all teachers. Lastly, highlight the importance of the diversification of the teaching workforce by promoting a shared and collective responsibility that is supported with (arch)diocesan resources.

Research Recommendations

Expand to All Teachers of Color

The diversification of the teaching workforce of Catholic schools should not be limited to Latino/a Catholic school teachers. With the continued gradual growth of the number of Students of Color attending urban Catholic schools, it is essential that this study be replicated to explore the racialized experiences of *all* Teachers of Color. Since the goal of most qualitative studies is not to make generalizations, it is important that a similar study be conducted on non-Latino/a Teachers of Color to possibly obtain a unique contextualized understanding of their experiences.

Explore Other Intersectional Identities

As evident in the review of the data, racialization happened at the intersection of multiple identities. These identifiers were often co-dependent and could not be separated from one another. A study that further explores the intersection of race and gender (with an explicit focus on the latter) in Catholic school staffing would contribute significantly to a body of scholarship that is emerging in the public school sector, yet, there has been a dearth of research as it relates to Latino's (or other male Teachers of Color) in Catholic schools.

Testimonios of Students, Parents, and Administrators

One of the limitations of this study was the absence of students', parents', and administrators' voices. Including their perspectives and examining their motivating factors and decisions to attend/work in under-resourced urban Catholic schools would supplement the major

findings of this study by adding another layer of lived experiences through the narratives of other stakeholders.

Mixed-Methods Approach

Although the qualitative approach for the current study was able to produce rich authentic data that clearly articulated the racialized experiences of the Latino/a Catholic school teachers who served in under-resourced urban Catholic schools, a mixed-methods approach would allow for the implementation of other research instruments such as surveys and the ability to get quantifiable data from a larger sample size. The survey could be developed using the key themes and sub-themes from this study. The survey could also include a scale to measure different motivating factors for choosing to teach at an under-resourced urban Catholic school, the extent to which they have experienced barriers and challenges, and the retention strategies used to continue their work.

Feasibility Study on a Community School Model for Urban Catholic Schools

As found in the content analysis of the participants' school mission and vision statements, Catholic schools have strong traditions of recognizing parents as the primary educators and educating the whole child. However, this practice varies based on a number of factors and looks different from school to school. A feasibility study on the application of a Community School Model for a cluster of Urban Catholic schools will formalize the schools' ability to achieve the four pillars of Community Schools: integrated student supports, family and community engagement, collaborative leadership and educator practices, and extended learning time and opportunities (Maier & Niebuhr, 2021). This study would explore the possibilities for the cluster of schools to partner with community-based organizations and government agencies to align

resources that would meet the holistic needs of students, families, and teachers in under-resourced urban Catholic schools.

Conclusion

The participants of this study enthusiastically expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to share their experiences as Latino/a Catholic school teachers who willingly chose to teach in under-resourced urban Catholic schools. They gratefully described their participation in the study as a professional awakening that allowed them for the first time to see the correlation between their Latino/a identity and their professional experiences as Catholic school educators.

Listening to the Latino/a teachers' *testimonios* of hope, sacrifice, and hardships, not only reminded me of the hundreds of Latino/a teachers in the ADLA who give daily witness of their faith through their remarkable dedication to their vocation as Catholic school educators, but of the pressures that come with the thousands of families who rely on these teachers to be at their best day in and day out. These six remarkable Latino/a educators are a tangible manifestation of the Catholic school difference that is centered on faith, dedication, and service. Despite the challenges they have faced from teaching in communities that are often avoided and ignored, the Latino/a teachers have gracefully embraced this responsibility to serve the under-served and to uphold the philosophy and values of Catholic education at all costs.

Their *testimonios* are a reminder of the racialization that occurs within the context of urban Catholic schools and our professional experiences. They taught us that motivation is inseparable from the intersection of our racial identity and social class. They reminded us that our students are paying close attention to our every move and that one day, if we may be so

lucky, we will be a part of their *testimonio.* The participants' *cuentos* of many sleepless nights are a testament that our students are worth fighting for and that we will not walk away.

Lastly, their selfless dedication brings us full-circle. Although the story of Catholic school staffing could never be told without putting at the center the work of the religious women and men who were fundamental in establishing Catholic schools in America, the participants' *testimonios* give further credibility to the lay women and men who have answered the call to do the Lord's work in hard-to-staff urban Catholic schools. As best articulated by Concha:

> That's one of the things that you'll hear people say to us, "*Somos una escuela católica pero, ¿Dónde están las hermanas? ¿Dónde están las monjas? Yo simplemente les digo, "Nosotros somos las herederas de las monjas. Nosotros somos los que aprendimos de ellas para poder seguir su legado."*
>
> ["We are a Catholic school but where are the sisters? Where are the nuns?" I simply say to them, "We are the heiresses of the nuns. We are the ones who learned from them in order to continue their legacy."]

APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

(Sample Questions)

Interview #1

Personal Background Information

1. Can you tell me about your educational experiences (as a child to where you are at now)?
2. What was that experience like as a K-12 student and post-high school? Please feel free to share whatever you are comfortable telling me.
3. Where did you grow up?
4. Please describe your family?
5. Where did you go to undergrad/grad school?
6. What helped to shape you as an individual?
7. What are your personal interests?

Professional Background Information

1. How long have you been in Catholic education?
2. How long have you been a teacher at your current school?
3. Have you taught at other Catholic schools? If so, were they considered under-resourced urban Catholic schools?
4. Other relevant professional experience?

Urban Education Background

1. From where does your commitment to urban education come?

2. What events or people have influenced your commitment to Catholic school urban education (if they talk about where they grew up, connect the dots if urban)?
3. Do you feel that because you grew up in an urban community, this influenced your decision to teach in an urban Catholic school?

School information

1. Can you briefly describe the school where you are working (include school name, type of Catholic school, demographics - race, poverty, disability, and ELs, etc.)?
2. What three words would you use to describe your school?
3. If you could choose three primary reasons, what are the reasons that motivated you to become a Catholic school teacher? (If necessary ask: was advocating for underrepresented students a driving force behind what brought you to this current position?)

Setting the Stage

1. What are the guiding or driving forces behind your teaching practice?
2. What is your motivation and/or focus as a teacher at an under-resourced urban Catholic school?
3. Do you agree that you teach, advocate, and keep at the center of your practice issues of race, class, gender, and/or other historically marginalizing factors?
4. Do you face any resistance from family or friends because you serve in an urban Catholic school?
5. How do you still stay in it even though it takes a toll?

6. Do you see your Latino/a identity and professional experiences in Catholic education having a relationship?
7. Do you see any type of connection between your race and professional Catholic education background?

Interview #2

Advocacy Work

1. What steps have you taken to advocate for students that come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds at your school?
2. What do you feel you have accomplished at least partially on your advocacy for marginalized students in your school community?
3. What evidence/data do you have to support that these efforts have helped or improved your school or the education/lives of the students?

Pressures and Challenges

1. What pressures or challenges have you experienced in this work?
2. What resistance have you run into while advocating for your students?

Resistance

1. Tell me about a specific time that you felt resistance against your work as a Latino/a teacher?
2. How did you manage that resistance and continue your work at an under-resourced urban Catholic school?
3. How have you experienced your racial identity as an urban Catholic school teacher?

Interview #3

Strategies

1. What strategies do you use to manage or deal with the resistance to your work as a Latino/a teacher?
2. In what ways have the pressures you have encountered impacted your experiences as a Latino/a teacher? Personally?
3. Have your ideals, vision, and/or passion changed because of these experiences?

    If so, how are they different and how do you explain this?

    If not, how have you maintained your ideals, vision, and passion?

Induction / Archdiocesan Support

1. What did you learn or gain from your induction/preparation program?
2. What do you wish you would have learned/received?
3. When you first started as a teacher, what would have been helpful as part of your preparation/induction program to assist with your success?

Group Interview Protocol

At the beginning of the interview, review the study design and remind the participants of the research questions.

Findings

Go through the findings section by section. Do not forget to stop and pose questions to the group. Ask participants to think about the questions below as you go through the findings:

1. What struck you about what we accomplished?
2. Do the findings feel like they represent your racialized experiences accurately?

3. Do they resonate with your work as a Latino/a Catholic school teacher?
4. Did I miss something?
5. What was the most powerful part of the findings?
6. Is there anything that do you disagree with?
7. Are there any insights/thoughts you would like to offer?

Group Interview Conclusion

1. What was the most powerful part as you heard the *testimonios* of your experiences?
2. Did this study and discussion represent your experience accurately?
3. What resonated or struck you the most about what we discussed?
4. Other comments/insights you want to share with the group?

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