

**THE AMERICAN DREAM LOST IN TRANSLATION: THE EDUCATIONAL
TRAJECTORY OF A MEXICAN IMMIGRANT STUDENT AND HIS JOURNEY
TOWARDS AMERICAN SUCCESS**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to challenge the general beliefs and labels often associated with Latina/o immigrant students, especially unauthorized students, to give a voice and meaning to the thousands of unauthorized students walking the halls of Texas public schools, to understand the experiences of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student, and to add to the discussion regarding current policies and practices in effect for Latina/o immigrant students. A life narrative inquiry method was used in this study. Data were collected through five interviews conducted with the primary subject, one interview conducted with both of his parents, and one interview conducted with the subject's high school principal. The purpose of each interview was to gain insight into the subject's academic experiences as traversed within the socialized structures of a public school district. The interviews were audiotaped, translated into English as needed, and then transcribed by two third party members. Data were also collected through the subject's academic records provided by the subject. This study began with one recurring question: What are the academic experiences of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student as traversed within the socialized structures of a public school system? The study was framed by one theoretical framework, racial opportunity cost (ROC). Data were analyzed using critically reflective analysis. The subject's life narrative is presented in eight vignettes that offer an in-depth view of his experiences coupled with my personal reflections and knowledge of the subject's story. The use of ROC as the theoretical framework impacted this study foremost by allowing

the cultural viewpoints the subject experienced as truth and draws attention to school culture as having a significant impact on the academic experiences of Latina/o immigrant children. Two conclusions were made from this study. First, Latina/o immigrant youth primarily require social-emotional support above academic support, and secondly, well-prepared teachers are warranted to ensure the academic success of Latina/o immigrant youth. Recommendations for future research lend themselves toward further research from both immigrant students and their parents' perspectives regarding their experiences in public school, policy regarding Latina/o immigrant youth, and educational leadership development.

DEDICATION

for Joe, my loving husband

for Esteban and Gabriella, our beautiful children

and for Miguel, may your story never be silenced again

In memory of Isabella Madalene

I am confident I will one day see you again soon my sweet girl.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

“Latinos are inextricably bound up with the future of the United States”
(Gándara, 2010, p. 27).

Public schools are faced with the ever-growing challenge and opportunity of educating students, especially those who are identified as immigrants. The term, “immigrants,” connotes *different* and is often fueled by a deep sense of emotion by educators, parents, and other interest groups. These differences come in obvious manners such as language and culture. However, the discussion of immigration is deeply rooted in differences more obscure. Immigration has been and continues to be a “contentious topic that weaves together the often divergent ways we view history, equity, patriotism, and human rights” (Irizarry & Kleyn, 2011, p. 6). Immigrants have a long-standing relationship with the United States. Although this relationship, as described by Irizarry and Kleyn (2011), is a “love-hate” one (p. 7), it nonetheless continues to exist and will only become more important as the percentage of immigrants in the United States continues to grow. Researchers have shown that nearly 25% of all school-aged children are immigrants or children of immigrants (Haskins & Tienda, 2011; Passel, 2011). Passel (2011) wrote, “By 2050 they [immigrant youth] are projected to make up one-third of more than 100 million U.S. children” (p. 19). Further, children of immigrant parents are the fastest-growing group of students in U.S. schools (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011). Specifically, “the number of children in the United

States who have immigrant parents is currently 1 in 5, or 16.3 million” (Irizarry & Kleyn, 2011, p. 9). This rapidly growing group of students present themselves with various levels of education, economic status, and experiences. There is no simple description that can sum up the elements of diversity these students bring to the schoolhouse. These challenges have caused much debate among critics in multiple respects. Olneck (2009) summarized these arguments.

Explicit in these scholars’ accounts is a contrast between, on the one hand, a dangerous present characterized by native-language persistence, rejection of a traditional assimilation norms, and the enlistment of the schools in linguistically and socially fragmenting American society; and on the other hand, a more harmonious past in which schools furthered the project of Americanizing immigrants, most significantly by teaching their children English. (p. 380)

Although these arguments appear distinct, the harsh reality is that both sides of these opinions opt for a solution that focuses its attention on the immigrant youth rather than considering the roles schools have in formulating environments which are at play for and/or against this group of students.

Politically, the United States finds itself in an on-going war of words as it struggles to find balance with issues of citizenship, protecting its borders against unlawful entry, and determining how immigrants are a part of its Western society. These arguments are heightened by national debates surrounding laws and jurisdictions of immigration reform. Academically, scholars and policy analysts continue to argue the points of how Latina/o immigrant children impact schools. Warren and Halpern-

Manners (2007) argued the discussion of high school completion for students has “major implications for educational policy and practice, patterns of economic and racial/ethnic inequality, and the quality of America’s labor force” (p. 335). The looming questions in these concerns remain with the future impact of how Latina/o immigrant students will influence the United States.

The political and academic concerns are important and require attention. However, the reality for public schools is that Latina/o immigrant children, both authorized and unauthorized, have a legal right to enroll in public schools for a K-12 education (Greenman & Hall, 2013) and demand it be meaningful. The ever-present challenge for educators is how to best approach these students by understanding their backgrounds, experiences, and academic and social needs on a day-to-day basis. In turn, Latina/o immigrant students are then confronted with the daily challenges of determining how they, both collectively and individually, fit the norms of American public schools academically, socially, linguistically, and culturally.

Problem Statement

The field of literature addresses Latina/o students in a variety of areas relating to academic achievement or lack thereof. Latina/o students are also highly written of when it comes to discussions of hardships these students encounter on a frequent basis. However, the field of literature has not significantly addressed the issue of unauthorized Latina/o students and the personal struggles they encounter from the point of entry into public schools through high school graduation as told by these students themselves. Latina/o immigrant youth are entering the United States and public schools at rates faster

than any other ethnic group (Gándara, 2010, p. 24). Limón (2006) explained the ideas of wealth and opportunity lure Latinas/os to risk their lives to enter the United States illegally (p. 75). Gándara (2010) explained the Latina/o population increase as seen in public schools.

The Latino public school population nearly doubled between 1987 and 2007, increasing from 11 to 21 percent of all U.S. students. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2021, one of four U.S. students will be Latino. In key states in the U.S. Southwest, such as Texas and California, the Latino school-age population is already approaching one-half of all students. In these states, the future is already here. (p. 27)

Texas' public school systems are inundated by Latina/o immigrant youth, both authorized and unauthorized.

The leaders and teachers of school systems must begin to consider their role in the processes of helping Latina/o immigrant students succeed or fail in the academic and social arenas of public schools. The diversity of Latina/o immigrant students includes various levels of educational attainment, language mastery of both their native language and English, socio-economic levels, and overall social and emotional development. The sheer size of the immigrant population in the United States may have the effect of masking the individual stories and experiences that compromise the larger narrative. Political debates and public opinion regarding immigrants also work to hide the realities of the struggles Latina/o immigrant youth face in the United States. To further add to the masking of these stories may be fear of freedom itself as Latina/o immigrant youth are

subjected to oppression by public school systems and beliefs that seek to normalize these children into an American way of life. Freire (2007) eloquently described the oppressed must acquire inner freedom.

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (p. 47)

To bring focus back to the meaning of each of the stories of Latina/o immigrant youth, I intend to offer insight and a deeper understanding into the life of one immigrant student and his family as he encountered barriers both inside and out of the schoolhouse and how he overcame his fears. More specifically, I unfold the relationship between one unauthorized immigrant student and the socialized structures he perceived to be at play during his public school experience and tell how this young man overcame his inner fear and adversity in pursuit of academic achievement.

How the public education system chooses to approach these students with choices and consequences of racial opportunity costs will have both immediate and long-term effects on each child. For educators to improve both the social and academic outcomes of Latina/o immigrant students, they must hear and understand such students' experiences within educational systems.

Historically, researchers in this field have attributed immigrant students' lack of academic achievement and failure to fully socialize in American society on issues such as poverty, language barriers, and ultimately immigrant parents who have failed to ensure the overall assimilation of their child (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010; Passel 2011). There is an abundance of data describing the hardships and barriers Latina/o immigrant youth face in the United States. The challenge here is to go beyond the research of natural deficit thinking, and to begin to "explore the role of school culture in supporting or thwarting the academic success of high achieving students of color" (Venzant Chambers & Huggins, 2014, p. 192).

Purpose of the Study

Given the overall focus on national immigration trends, the purpose of this study is to challenge the general beliefs and labels so often associated with Latina/o immigrant students, especially unauthorized students, to give a voice and meaning to the thousands of unauthorized students walking the halls of Texas public schools, to understand the experiences of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student, and to add to the discussion regarding current policies and practices in effect for Latina/o immigrant students.

Significance

I will contribute to the field of education in four respects through this study: field of literature, pedagogy and practice, policy regarding Latina/o immigrant students, and finally, education leadership development. In education research, a lack of discourse exists that gives meaning and voice to Latina/o immigrant students, especially unauthorized immigrant students. In the 2004-2005 school year, it was estimated over

135,000 students in Texas public schools were unauthorized. Educators cannot begin to understand the academic, social, and emotional needs of these students based on statistics alone. This discourse must begin within the realm of educators understanding their role at the school level that elevates or prevents Latina/o immigrant students from succeeding in school. Thus, the significance of my study will help contribute to the field of literature that addresses the academic achievement or lack thereof regarding unauthorized immigrant students.

The greatest significance of this study resides in its potential to influence the practitioner, teacher and school leaders, and help formulate pedagogy training by presenting the subject's narrative from his point of view of how he was treated and educated in a public school system. It is the anticipation that information regarding specific practices and programs established for unauthorized students and their families will be analyzed beyond the scope of this study by telling this one story. The effectiveness of policies is most often analyzed by statistical results. Data alone cannot speak for itself (Josselson, 1995, p. 29). Educators and policymakers alike must also consider the value of lived experiences and the stories of students and their families to know and understand how, and if, the school system has been successful.

Researcher Perspective

My findings in this study carry personal significance to me in the role of researcher. As a child and youth, I grew up with an inner voice constantly screaming inside. I was made to feel embarrassed in the schoolhouse of the fact my Father was a Mexican national. I was poor. I could speak two languages. My Mother was poorly

educated in an era where she was highly discriminated against. I was humiliated by some of my peers and teachers who could not see beyond my brown skin and dark hair. I could not share my experiences with my parents or with any teachers or school personnel. I felt humiliated to feel so ashamed at home, and I knew I could not play a victim to the people who constantly judged me at school. I had a story to tell, but I sensed no one would listen. I was angry at the ignorance that surrounded me in school, both from my peers and teachers. Time, education, and experiences have shown me these kinds of stories are worth telling and hearing. For this reason, I have opted to give a voice to a young man, one unauthorized immigrant, who has an incredible narrative to tell about his life and academic experiences within the socialized structures of a public school system. By giving a voice to this young man, I also found my story to tell.

Research Question

This study begins with one recurring question: What are the academic experiences of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student as traversed within the socialized structures of a public school system?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in one theory: racial opportunity cost (ROC) (Venzant Chambers & Huggins, 2014). This theory provided a structure by which to present this life narrative study. In the following section, an explanation of ROC is provided.

As Venzant Chambers, Huggins, Locke, and Fowler (2014) explained ROC and wrote, “The basic concept of racial opportunity cost may implicitly resonate with those familiar with basic macroeconomics. In the classic case, making one choice negates all

other possible choices” (p. 466). Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) further suggested ROC can be used “to examine the costs to individual students of color as a result of the press of larger contextual factors. That is racial opportunity cost highlights the relationship between the student and their school environment” (p. 466). Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) explained the four assertions in which this theory is based.

- 1) The institutional level has the most significant impact on the achievement of students of color, although this influence is purposefully difficult to see.
- 2) Race continues to play a primary role in students’ experiences, but other identities matter too.
- 3) Factors at the student, family, and cultural level influence students’ success, but also misdirect attention from the school’s role in their experiences.
- 4) Students of color are affected by and must navigate these institutional level factors, especially if they desire to achieve academic success. (p. 466)

ROC allows for the examination of the subject’s perceived thoughts that resulted in his actions in respect to the school structures and processes at play throughout his public school experience. ROC also allows for the subject to analyze and critically reflect on what his experiences meant to him at the point of occurrence and also now as he has moved beyond public school.

Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) further explained the cycle of ROC and provided a diagram as seen in Appendix B. Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) made clear this process begins with issues which exist at the institutional level. These issues are related to school culture that includes the hidden curriculum on a campus as it relates to the

norms that control the school's environment. Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) considered if students felt a sense of belonging and part of a greater community, which teachers had influence on this campus, how students were classified and viewed, and if school personnel were willing to engage in honest discussions about race. Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) identified "these issues as *school factors*, which consist of *climate factors*, *engagement factors*, *structural factors*, and *relational factors*" (p. 472). Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) explained how school factors influence *mediating variables*. These mediating variables include both *intersectional factors* and *capacity factors* described by Venzant Chambers et al. (2014).

First, intersectional factors is based on the literature outlined in assertion two and takes into account issues other than race that influence students' experiences in school, such as gender, ethnicity, immigration status, and/or socioeconomic states. Second, capacity factors, based on assertion three, take into account an individual student's resilience, as well as the positive and negative influence of external factors such as family and culture. Finally, the interplay of the school factors with the mediating variables ultimately influences the individual student and the racial opportunity cost he or she incurs; that is, how costly it is for African American and Latina/o students to pursue academic success in the racialized, White-normed context of their school environment. (p. 473)

ROC allows for a thorough examination of the experiences as perceived by the subject. The use of ROC allows the researcher to consider a myriad of factors that were at play as the subject recognizes them. This lens for examination allows both the subject and

researcher to consider factors beyond the obvious obstacles such as the subject's undocumented immigration status, his limited ability to speak English, and his low socio-economic status.

Operational Terms

The following terms are defined to provide the meaning of or usage of specific terms used in this study.

Coyote

Coyote is a Spanish slang term used to describe someone who specializes in human smuggling from Mexico and other Latin American countries into the United States.

English Language Learners (ELLs)

ELLs refers to persons learning the English language.

Familismo

Familismo is a Spanish term which means your family needs come before anyone's personal or individual needs (Leidy et al., 2010, p. 252).

Immigrants

Immigrants are persons who are not considered native born U.S. citizens who have entered and now reside in the United States.

Unauthorized Immigrants

Unauthorized immigrants are persons who are not native born U.S. citizens who have entered and now reside in the United States as undocumented.

Language1 (L1)

This the term is used to describe a student's native language.

Second Language (L2)

This term is used to describe a student's acquired second language; specifically, this is English for Latina/o immigrant students.

Spanglish

Spanglish is a combination of English and Spanish words, spoken with the non-English accent and often contains words that are of neither language, or words with elements of both languages. It may be spoken by someone who does not speak Spanish and/or English well, or by someone who speaks both very well. Spanglish is often used intelligently by switching languages for emphasis. It is also spoken by 'Latinos' in the United States who share parts of U.S. culture and culture from a Latin American country, and prefer speaking both languages instead of one or the other (Urban Dictionary, 2014).

Spic

This is a highly offensive term referring to a Spanish-speaking person from Mexico, Central or South America, Spain, or Portugal (Urban Dictionary, 2014).

Subtractive Bilingualism

Subtractive bilingualism occurs when "a second language is acquired at the expense of the first language" (Haynes, 2007, p. 150).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a literature review that addresses specific issues and concerns for Latina/o immigrant students including unauthorized students. In this chapter I aim to present research which currently addresses the socialized structures and processes at play in public schools that contribute to deficit thinking that plagues Latina/o students, their parents, and especially unauthorized students. These issues include how Latina/o children are viewed in public education, language, assimilation into the White culture and its challenges, high school dropouts and the issues of poverty, how Latina/o parents respect the public school system, socialization of Latina/o immigrant students, and *familismo* and its role in education.

The View of Latina/o Children in Public Education

School board members, superintendents, and all other educators can no longer deny the impact Latina/o immigrant children are having in the schoolhouse. Latina/o students account for the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Marx & Larson, 2010). Passel (2011) asserted the population of immigrant youth will increase from nearly 25 % to “about one-third of an even larger number of children in twenty-five years” (p. 20). These projections of growth will continue to challenge and influence schools. The greatest influxes of immigrants, legal and illegal, are primarily from Mexico (Passel, 2011; Leidy et al., 2010). The fastest-growing sector of Latina/o students are immigrants or children of immigrant parents (Haskins & Tienda, 2011;

Passel, 2011). This fact then influences the approach public schools take with Latina/o immigrant students in terms of special language programs, such as bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL), cultural awareness, race relations, and the overall academic setting created in public schools. Malagón (2010) wrote, “Deficit accounts have distorted and/or erased the experiences of Students of Color” (pp 59-60). How Latina/o students are viewed impacts their experiences in public schools. Portales (2005) wrote, “Race should not matter, but it does. Race still separates Americans long after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and it should not” (p. 180). We are decades from the era of The Civil Rights Movement, and yet children of color are still impacted by this very issue today in public schools. Speaking to this impact, Portales (2005) explained his view of race.

People need to recognize that race and skin color affects the nature of our experiences. Historically, race divided people. Race now needs to unite us. Instead of legally asserting race is illusory, we ought to embrace our human qualities and traits, excluding only what harms others. Not to acknowledge or to respect a person’s race is to ask citizens to try to see others as they are not.

(p. 181)

Although children of color may be unaware of how they are forced to contend with how they view themselves, the schoolhouse continues to make clear distinctions for Latina/o children by asking them and their families to identify their ethnicity by association of a Latin American country and by further asking Latina/o children to identify their race as

one of seven recognized race groups: White American, Native American, Alaska Native, Asian American, African American, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander.

This particular type of questioning regarding race asks Latina/o children to identify themselves in ways in which they do not see themselves.

Green (2008) offered another viewpoint of race and color. Green (2008) explained the current racial divide in America is not between African-Americans and Whites, but rather along the “spectrum of human complexion and human cultural experience” (p. 388). For Latina/o children in public education, their culture and language are tightly entwined with their daily experiences in school. Educators and policymakers of public school systems cannot realistically expect Latina/o immigrant children to deny who they are as they enter the doors in classrooms.

Language

English: Language of Power

Urciuoli (2001) asserted, “There is no single, clear-cut linguistic thing called *Standard English*” (p. 191). This statement then provokes one to consider why the argument of speaking English generates emotional responses. Urciuoli (2001) explained how debates about the English language really are in essence a discussion of what it means to be American.

Any U.S. resident with access to electronic or print media has heard years’ worth of arguments for or against an English Language Amendment, federal funding of bilingual education and, more recently, educational recognition of Ebonics.

These dichotomies continually reify language and at the same time reinforce the

moral position that gives these debates such teeth. People cannot leave them alone: they feel compelled to take and defend positions because these are not “debates” about language so much as they are about being “American.” Hence the moral edge. (p. 191)

Speaking English is equated with being American. One immediate and obvious obstacle millions of unauthorized Latina/o students encounter in public school is speaking and understanding the English language both socially and academically. The National Center for Education Statistics (2013) estimated there are over 5.2 million ELLs in the United States, and Texas accounts for over 726,000 of those ELLs. Latina/o immigrant students bring with them their native language labeled at L1, Spanish, and various levels of English language exposure and usage labeled at L2. Portales (2005) explained as Latina/os acquire English literacy skills that this should not be misunderstood to mean Spanish is not as worthy or valuable as English (p. 190). Portales (2005) described English as “the currency of the realm” (p. 191). That is to say English is viewed as power in American society. For this reason, Latina/o immigrants have long recognized the importance of learning English in American culture.

Latinas/os throughout decades have shared “a long history of seeking to have their educational needs met in a system that has often rejected them” (Marx & Larson, 2012, p. 261). English has been, is, and continues to be the dominant language of American society. Faltis and Hudelson (1998) explained the concept of hegemony and how the English language enjoys this status.

One language is believed to be superior, desirable, and necessary, while the other (s) is/are considered inferior, undesirable, and unnecessary. In the United States, English is the dominant language, the language of politics and government, the language of most societal economic opportunity. (p. 49)

Urciuoli (2001) reiterated this perception and wrote, “It [Standard English] exists as a powerful cultural idea in the same way whiteness exists: in contrast to a system of marked people, situations, and practices” (p. 191). This perception of English is transferred into the schoolhouse. Speaking English is equated to being White which both equate to some form of social power.

Latina/o immigrant children are made to feel less than their White non-peers because of their lack of ability to maneuver the English language proficiently.

Rodriguez, Ringler, O’Neal, and Bunn (2009) conducted a study in North Carolina regarding the perceptions of ELLs. Rodriguez et al. (2009) formulated their study based on a survey given to monolingual English speaking, White children, and ELLs. A question posed by Rodriguez et al. (2009) asked, “Do monolingual and ELLs students differ in self-esteem?” (p. 518). Students were then asked the following questions:

Are you able to learn in two languages? Are you able to read and write in both languages? Do you do well in all of your classes, especially in mathematics? Do you know science and social studies concepts and skills? Is your work displayed in school in both languages? (p. 519)

Rodriguez et al. (2009) explained question four was eliminated for Kindergartners as their curriculum was limited regarding science and social studies. The results across the

grade levels Kindergarten through fifth grade indicated monolingual English speaking students stated they experienced higher self-esteem compared with ELLs. The specific results are noted as monolingual, White students, compared with ELLs in Kindergarten are 3.2 to 1.9, in first grade 2.8 to 2.3, in second grade 2.7 to 2.7, in third grade 2.9 to 2.6, in fourth grade 2.7 to 2.2, and in fifth grade 3.4 to 2.1 (Rodriguez et al., 2009, p. 517). Speaking to the implications of this study, Rodriguez et al. (2009) noted, “since teachers have an enormous impact on student learning and students’ perceptions, instructing teachers on techniques for teaching ELLs may be the best method for improving support for ELLs” (p. 521). This perspective takes the focus away from Latina/o immigrant students as naturally deficit and requires the school level system to take action and responsibility for teaching these students. Davila and Aviles de Bradley (2010) took this discussion further by describing persons who cannot express knowledge in English are then viewed as “less than” (p. 49). In the schoolhouse educators view and evaluate children. Students who do not master the English language in public schools are seen as less competent and weak.

Faltis and Hudelson (1998) asserted researchers in countless studies have demonstrated that non-English speaking students, especially those in and early on in special language classrooms, prefer to use English rather than their native language. Faltis and Hudelson (1998) attributed this phenomenon to the realization that educators, particularly those in transitional bilingual classrooms, place little value on Spanish and assert English is the language of academic achievement.

On the one hand, the native language may be used for instruction, but on the other hand the message that children receive is that it is English achievement that counts. So rather than adding on English to what they already use, many ESL learners substitute English for their native language and subtract the native tongue from their linguistic repertoires. (Faltis & Hudelson, 1998, p. 48)

This practice is known as *subtractive bilingualism*. This practice, in turn, often leaves Latina/o immigrant students with gaps in both their L1 and L2. This socialized structure can have long-term academic consequences for Latina/o immigrant students as they begin to struggle with the rigor and complexity of academic language in later school years. Portales (2005) extended this argument.

English-as-a-second language students want and also deserve to be successful American citizens. Such students have long been ignored, and public school systems that continue to disable students whose first language is not English, in effect, are engaged in the business of creating untold problems for all Americans in the twenty-first century. (p. 193)

This practice also contributes to the increased and continued need for language support among immigrant students well beyond their initial years in the United States.

Need for Language Support

Most Latina/o immigrant students have a need for special language support upon enrolling in public schools. Pascopella (2011) noted, “Between 1979 and 2008, the number of school-age children (ages 5-17) in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 to 10.9 million” (pp. 29-30). Texas’

response to this need is to offer bilingual education for elementary students in Pre-Kindergarten to sixth grade or English as a Second Language (ESL) for students of grades Pre-Kindergarten through high school graduation that have been identified as ELLs. This response has been challenged at the U.S. Supreme Court system and all the way back through at the local school level. However, the need for language support in the schoolhouse poses a personal challenge for Latina/o immigrant youth. “Today, bilingualism often continues to be seen as un-American and considered a deficit and an obstacle to learning” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 112). The challenge for educators is to find successful strategies for Latina/o immigrant students to acquire the necessary English skills for academic achievement in the schoolhouse while at the same time maintaining a student’s dignity.

In a changing economy and world, it is only a natural result to see the faces in public schools change as well. The challenges of teaching ethnically diverse students are being felt across the nation (Lapkoff & Li, 2007). It is inevitable educators must be prepared to receive and teach Latina/o immigrant students as they enter classrooms with English and Spanish language gaps as well as special education needs. However, the lines become blurred when Latina/o immigrant children enter public schools with limited language experiences and the school system responds with a special education label.

Special Education

Minority students continue to be overrepresented in special education (Thomas & Collier, 1997). This is especially true for ELLs. Educators continue to struggle with distinguishing the differences between second language acquisition and learning

disabilities (Garcia & Ortiz, 2004; Ortiz & Garcia, 1995). This dilemma has led to a high number of Latina/o immigrant students referred for and placed into special education programs. Ortiz and Garcia (1995) believed this problem is formulated due to lack of direction and guidance for educators who work with this special population. From this perspective, legislation has little to do with how ELLs are being tested and placed in special education although Ortiz & Garcia (1995) addressed how poor education policy contributes to ELLs in special education. The high number of ELLs in special education can be attributed to the lack of “adequate policy and appropriate practices” (Ortiz & Garcia, 1995, p. 471) in the testing and classification of Latina/o immigrant students. Latina/o immigrant students are often misidentified for special education because they lack academic progress and have attention/behavior problems in the classroom (Ortiz & Garcia, 1995). A pre-referral process should be implemented before Latina/o immigrant students are tested and identified as having a learning disability (Garcia & Ortiz, 2004; Ortiz & Garcia, 1995). This approach to identifying bilingual students who require special education services becomes the responsibility of campuses, administrators, and teachers. It is not the responsibility of Latina/o immigrant students to prove their language and learning abilities. Roache, Shore, Gouleta, and Butkevich (2003) reiterated the over identification of ELLs in special education.

This over identification has been found to be correlated with educational professionals’ lack of knowledge on issues and stresses occurring in English-language instruction. A lack of knowledge on issues related to English language

acquisition has led some educators to mistakenly label certain language minority students as learning or emotionally disabled. (p. 118)

This perception and misidentification of Latina/o immigrant students extends beyond the classroom. Latina/o immigrant students and their families are left to contend with the implications a special education label and its limits for further education. Furthermore, Latina/o immigrant parents are then expected to understand the special education process layered into the public school system.

III-Prepared Teachers

There is no argument to be made in respect to the fact a teacher's professional relationship with his/her students impacts student learning. Jensen (2013) explained, "A critical step in creating an engaging classroom is to build relationships and respect. Students who have positive relationships with their teachers experience less stress, behave more appropriately, and feel more excited about learning" (p. 23). Teachers are responsible for the learning environment created in their classrooms.

Rodriguez et al. (2009) made valid points of how teacher expectations also influence the learning and academic success of ELLs.

Social and educational opportunities are typically hindered by frequent moves, poverty, gaps in previous schooling, and language and cultural barriers. These factors may reduce teacher expectations of ELLs. As teacher expectations of ELLs diminish, so do their prospects for knowledge gains, because there is a clear consensus among educators that teachers' expectations contribute to ELLs' academic success. (p. 513)

How teachers deal with their personal discomforts of ELLs and the language barrier between teachers and students greatly affects the learning outcomes of ELLs (Marshall, 2002). ELLs need teachers who are well equipped and trained to address both the academic and language needs of students (Abedi, 2004; Marshall, 2002; Roache et al., 2003).

The method by which teachers approach the classroom and work with ELLs influences the success or failure of these students (Haynes, 2007). Educators must be prepared to receive Latina/o immigrant students by understanding the stages of second language acquisition. Often teachers themselves realize they hold great content knowledge yet lack experience teaching second language learners (Haynes, 2007). It is important for educators to realize Latina/o immigrant students hold academic knowledge and need ways to express what they already know and understand. A misconception is ELLs who lack expressive skills also lack critical thinking skills (Dong, 2006). A significant finding in research connects the academic failure of ELLs to what happens instructionally.

Many English learners receive instructional programs that are too short-term in focus, or fail to provide consistent cognitive development in students' first language, or allow students to fall behind their English-speaking peers in other school subjects while they are learning English, or are not cognitively and academically challenging, or are poorly implemented. (Thomas & Collier, 1997, p. 15)

This discovery in research holds educators at the school system level responsible for the academic success of ELLs. However, Latina/o immigrant students are made to feel inferior because they cannot achieve English language mastery at the rate of other students around them.

No Two Students Alike

Another realm in the challenge in teaching Latina/o immigrant students is the fact no two students are identical in their second language acquisition. Students come from varying backgrounds with different language and educational experiences (Garcia & Jensen, 2007; Hill & Flynn, 2006). This challenge is one which repeatedly leaves teachers feeling stressed as they seek to meet the needs of all learners and often cannot do so alone. How districts and states choose to receive Latina/o immigrant students in their classrooms will have a significant impact on how these students achieve or fail in the public school system.

Researchers have been consistent in demonstrating teachers face multiple challenges in working with Latina/o immigrant students and ultimately helping these students reach high school graduation (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). They are a diverse group of students, and no two students can be categorized with the same level of language and social experiences. Culturally proficient pedagogy is one lacking in many schools across the United States. Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbell Jones (2005) explained this idea and wrote, “Culturally proficiency: honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully

among a variety of cultural groups” (p. xvii). Lindsey et al. (2005) further wrote specifically to educational leaders.

Educational leaders intent on transforming their schools and districts into pluralistic, inclusive organizations must first be willing and able to look deeply into their own tacit assumptions about the diverse students with whom they work and examine their expectations about those students’ achievement potential. (p. xvii)

It is merely not enough for schools to want to see Latina/o immigrant students achieve high academic standards. This accomplishment requires the necessary changes begin within the minds and perspectives of the school leadership. The literature is limited in revealing how Latina/o immigrant students’ experiences in public schoolhouses are affecting them emotionally.

Assimilation into the Culture of Power and Its Challenges

A major challenge for public schools is to first determine their role in ensuring the success of Latina/o immigrant students. The questions of assimilation and Americanization dominate this challenge (Enomoto & Bair, 2002). The idea of immigrant students in American schools is not new. However, dealing with the sheer number of Latina/o immigrant students coming with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and personal expectations is proving to go against traditional perceptions of the role of the schoolhouse: American acculturation. Enomoto and Bair (2002) explained, “In dealing with the racial and ethnic diversity among immigrants, there is tension between those educators who believe in schooling for assimilation and those who favor cultural

pluralism” (p. 181-182). This tension, in turn, affects the academic needs and environment created for Latina/o immigrant students. Marx and Larson (2012) addressed the issue of the academic needs of Latina/o students.

Although Latinas/os account for the largest ethnic minority group in the United States and they reside in every state, accounting for 1 in 5 schoolchildren, their academic needs as a group continue to be unmet. Latinas/os have the highest status drop-out rate of the largest American ethnic groups (White, Black, Asian or Pacific Islanders) at 22.4%. Latinas/os born outside the United States, and thus less likely to be fluent in English rather than their U.S.-born counterparts, had a drop-out rate at 38% in 2005. (p. 260)

Marx and Larson (2012) identified English fluency and high school graduation as two academic needs that are not being met in American public schools.

The schoolhouse’s response to Latina/o immigrant students traditionally has been assimilation. Assimilation denotes everyone coming together for a common culture which includes a common language and a common core of beliefs. This perception is most associated with the English only movement seen across states such as California and Arizona. Assimilation involves Latina/o immigrant students adapting into our school cultures successfully. This level of adaption includes mastery of the English language and often leaves Latina/o immigrant students in a language loss environment.

A language loss environment occurs when students enter public schools with only having their native language (L₁) and then finish school or leave school with limited ability to maintain their L₁ and their second language, English (L₂). Haynes

(2007) described subtractive bilingualism when “a second language is acquired at the expense of the first language” (p. 150).

High School Dropouts and Poverty

Educators recognize the overall success of a student is deeply interconnected to the path of high school graduation as well as to other completed levels of schooling (Haskins & Tienda, 2011). Latina/o students, when compared with their White peers, are more likely to drop out, to under perform in core subjects, and live in poverty according to Marx & Larson, 2012. Specifically addressing Latinas/os in higher education, Marx and Larson wrote, “They are less likely to attend and graduate from college” (p. 260). Reyes and Elias (2011) presented disturbing findings in their work specifically regarding Latina/o youth.

Much of the existing research indicates that Latino youth face significant challenges and engage in risky behaviors that can hinder positive development and well-being. For example, national statistics reveal that Latino youth have higher rates of attempted suicide, lifetime cocaine use, and unprotected sex than Black and White youth, with Latinas having the highest teen pregnancy rate among major ethnic groups in the United States. Latino youth also have the highest school dropout rate. Approximately 21.4% of Latino drop out of high school, which is four times the rate among White youth (5.3%) and nearly triple the rate among Black youth (8.4%). (p. 723)

The hindrances of high school graduation for Latina/o youth are clearly evident in the literature.

Gándara (2010) stated, “There is no better predictor of how well children will fare in school than parents’ education attainment” (p. 26). Gándara (2010) further explained that less than fifty percent of Latino mothers hold a high school diploma. “It is difficult for parents to impart to their children experiences and knowledge that they do not have” (Gándara, 2010, p. 26). This fact alone contributes to an already existing achievement gap between Latina/o youth and their White peers. Portales (2005) wrote, “Without high school graduation and useful college preparation, students whose first language is not English are not likely to provide well for themselves and their families” (p. 193). Leventhal-Weiner and Wallace (2011) offered the following statistics regarding the long-term benefits of high school graduation.

A high school graduate can expect a 39.6% advantage in steady employment, a 76.9% advantage in annual median income, and a 53.1% advantage of staying out of poverty over a person who fails to graduate high school. (p. 394)

Leventhal-Weiner and Wallace (2011) argued for a perspective that focused on the social context in which students are dropping out rather than an “individualistic, idiosyncratic, irrational, or even pathological” view (p. 395). Educators need to consider the socialized and academic contexts in which Latina/o immigrant students are leaving high schools without a diploma and thus entering or further deepening their arena of poverty.

Poverty poses a significant stressor on Latina/o immigrant students and their families. In their 2010 study, Leidy et al. explained how poverty affects Latina/o immigrants.

For example, recent immigrant Latino parents and their children are disproportionately represented in poverty statistics. Approximately 28% of Latinos under the age of 18 live in poverty, which is more than three times the rate of non-Latino White children. Not only do immigrant Latinos and their children experience economic difficulties, but they are often exposed to a battery of harsh and adverse conditions, including unsafe neighborhoods, limited community resources, over employment (working multiple jobs), language difficulties, discrimination, and crowded living conditions. (p. 252)

The stress of poverty is thus felt on many levels for Latina/o immigrant children and their families, particularly in the academic setting. Economically disadvantaged children who attend schools of the same condition are considered to be at a greater risk for negative peer pressure (Zvock, 2006, p. 98). Zvock (2006) explained his position.

Peer group influences are thought to stem from student interaction with the attitudes and dispositions of similarly situated classmates and are argued to be positive (in terms of fostering educational persistence) in schools that serve students from affluent economic backgrounds and negative under more economically challenged conditions. (p. 98)

Researchers have demonstrated how poverty and hyper-segregated schooling can negatively impact Latina/o immigrant students' success. However, it is not simply enough for public schools to ascertain Latina/o immigrant student failures to poverty alone. There must be further consideration to "processes at the school level that play an instrumental role in fostering or thwarting school successes for Latina/o students"

(Venzant Chambers, Locke, & Medina, in press, p. 6). At some point the leaders of our schools must begin to consider their roles in impacting Latina/o immigrant students' academic and socialization successes and failures. Venzant Chambers et al. (in press) described this approach as *racial opportunity cost*.

The connection between opportunity cost and our work is the idea that even under the presumption that we choose the option with the most benefit, our decisions can still come at a cost. In the field of education our notion of *racial opportunity cost* considers the fact that even when students of color achieve academic success, that achievement comes at a cost. (p. 4)

Latina/o immigrant students are engulfed into White American culture from the point of enrollment in public schools. These students, primary or secondary, and their families trust to the school system to advance their American dream.

Respecting the School System

There is an element of respect Latina/o parents have for teachers and the school system despite the fact educators often claim these parents are uninterested in their child's education. Portales (2005) wrote, "Most Latinos love children and are especially interested in being good parents, in providing not only so-called education for children but also the best quality educations that can be afforded" (p. 83). This is to say Latina/o parents want what parents of all origins and nationalities seek and that is the best possible education for their children. Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2011) provided an explanation of the disparity between Latina/o parents' responses to public school systems and educators' expectations of these parents.

Recent examinations of Latino parents' involvement (including several ethnographic studies) have suggested that while most Latino parents value education, hold high educational aspirations for their children, and believe that supporting their children's education is very important, the forms of involvement they choose may not be among those typically expected or observed by schools and teachers in many communities. (p. 411)

Walker et al. (2011) explained those less noticeable ways Latina/o parents support their children is by ensuring the children have time and space to complete homework, ask their children about their school day, and make conversations about school a part of their lives. Typical expected responses from parents in White culture include attending parent conferences to question and/or discuss their child's academic achievement, soliciting the help of an administrator when parents feel their concerns are not being thoroughly addressed by the teacher, and volunteering in school in some manner.

Walker et al. (2011) took their discussion further regarding Latina/o parents and framed their comments in role theory.

Parental role construction has received considerable attention in the literature on Latino parents' involvement. Many accounts, for example, have suggested that while Latino parents often hold high expectations for their children's educational attainment, they also believe that it is the school's job to teach their children. This belief leads parents to avoid involving themselves in a teaching role related to school content because it demonstrates disrespect for teachers' roles, knowledge, and expertise. (p. 412)

Latina/o parents do maintain a deep concern for their child's education. Latina/o parents' roles in their child's education may be tainted through a variety of lenses when viewed by White teachers and administrators who do not understand how often Latina/o parents deeply respect the public school system and trust educators are making the right decisions for their children.

Socialization

The schoolhouse serves as a crucial source for social norms for Latina/o immigrant students seeking to fit in to American living and adjust to American public schools. However, Gándara (2010) asserted Latina/o students, at nearly 40 percent, attend hypersegregated schools (p. 26). Gándara (2010) defined hypersegregated schools as those that have 90 to 100% nonwhite student population (p. 26). This poses significant challenges for Latina/o students in terms of understanding social norms in the schoolhouse. Furthermore, Gándara (2010) wrote, "This means that many Latino students lack access to peers from mainstream U.S. culture, which inhibits their understanding of the norms, standards, and expectations of the broader society" (p. 26). This obstacle greatly interferes with the need for normative socialization Latina/o immigrant students and their parents depend upon the schoolhouse in the area of language development as part of their socialization. Delpit (2013) discussed how educators should address helping students acquire another language.

First, they should recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with their loved one's community, and personal identity. To

suggest that this form is “wrong” or even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family. (p. 33)

Language development is part of the socialization aspect for Latina/o immigrant students. However, when this component is misunderstood by educators, then divisions between the school-to-home relationships are created.

Latina/o immigrant children are then forced to rely primarily on the schoolhouse to meet their academic and socialization needs. This is often misunderstood by American educators as an assumption that Latina/o immigrant parents do not value their children’s education and lack interest in the school system. This issue creates another factor in the collision at of American success through public education for immigrant students and *familismo*: the quest for a meaningful education from teachers and educators determined to cultivate these students in an American way of life.

Familismo and Its Role in Education

For Latina/o immigrant students, there is a deep interconnection of academic success entwined with his or her family. Latina/o culture holds deeply to *familismo* which means one’s family needs come before anyone’s personal or individual needs (Leidy et al., 2010). *Familismo*, as difficult as it is to accept for American culture, includes schooling and academic needs. It is at the crossroad of American success through education and a student’s deep sense of commitment to his/her family where racial opportunity costs begin to collide.

Delgado Bernal (2002) explained a study conducted with 50 Chicana/Chicano college students. Delgado Bernal (2002) emphasized the value of what students learn at home and how this knowledge is devalued in a White educational setting.

The application of household knowledge, specifically in the form of bilingualism, biculturalism, and commitment to communities, interrupts the transmission of official knowledge and even helps students navigate their way around educational obstacles. (p. 114)

Delgado Bernal (2002) further made clear the students in her study “voiced a strong commitment to their families or the Mexican communities from which they came, a commitment that translated into a desire to give back and help others” (p. 114). The students’ commitment to *familismo* served as “a source of inspiration and motivation to overcome educational obstacles” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 114). *Familismo* is not meant to divide Latina/o immigrant children between their families and the school system. If embraced properly, this deep sense of commitment to family and community can prove to be valuable when Latina/o children feel a sense of belongingness to their public school systems.

Conclusion

The success or failure of Latina/o immigrant students has significant impact in a community simply for the sheer number of students comprised in this unique population. School districts that cannot achieve meaningful success, high school graduation, with these students are penalized in multiple ways. Ultimately, Latina/o immigrant students are often left with more challenges leaving school than compared to the ones as when

they entered school. Latina/o immigrant students, especially those who remain as unauthorized citizens, are forced to contend with language loss of their native language, loss of *familismo*, and both the academic and social consequences of their decisions as related to the degree in which assimilation occurs. The certainty that teachers have influence on students remains a constant theme in educational research. The issues of ill-trained teachers for ELLs, bilingual teachers who lack sufficient Spanish language skills to meaningfully engage Latina/o students, and the notion that educators as a whole lack sufficient training in determining language needs verses identifying a learning disability impacts Latina/o students in multiple ways. Research is required to understand the personal experiences of Latina/o immigrant students to understand what socialized school structures are at play that continue to contribute to the obstacles these children face in public schools.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the qualitative research strategy selected for this study. This chapter includes the research design, approach to the study, theoretical framework, my positionality, a description of the participants and how Miguel (pseudonym), the primary subject, was selected, methods used to collect and analyze data, and the trustworthiness of this study.

Research Design

According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005), much of qualitative research is founded on an interpretivist epistemology. Qualitative research bases its epistemology on multiple truths. These truths are constructed by the experiences of the research subjects and not by measured scientific facts. The ontology, that is what is real, is founded on the interpretation of meaning by the subject. Qualitative research resides in the idea that “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). This world is in constant movement.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand how one interprets their interactions at a particular moment in time and in a specific context (Merriam, 2002). The approach to understanding how individuals experience their social world and the meaning it has for them is an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2002). Interpretive qualitative research has key characteristics as described by Merriam (2002). These include “(a) “understanding the meaning people have constructed, (b) the researcher is the primary

instrument for data collection, (c) the process is inductive, and (d) the product is richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 4-5). Creswell (2007) further explained these characteristics:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes.

(p. 37)

The focus of qualitative research becomes the process rather than outcomes and differs from quantitative methodologies (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1991).

The approach within this study is to capture the experiences of an unauthorized immigrant student as he pursued a high school diploma. A qualitative approach to inquiry allows for the participants to discuss their experiences, feelings, and personal observations.

The method used for this research is narrative inquiry in the form of a life narrative study. Bloom (2002) explained the three goals narrative research seeks to achieve.

Narrative research, as a strand of qualitative research, focuses on the “self” for data collection and data analysis. There are three central theoretical goals that structure the narrative research approach. First, narrative research is concerned

with using individual lives as the primary source of data. Second, it is concerned with using of the “self” as a location from which the researcher can generate social critique and advocacy. Third, narrative research is concerned with deconstructing the “self” as a humanist conception, allowing for nonunitary conceptions of the self. (p. 310)

This approach in this study allows for the primary subject’s story to serve as the principle source of data as it seeks to capture his lived experiences in public school against the socialized structures at play. Field notes from interviews with secondary sources, which include Miguel’s parents and high school principal, will also be analyzed to gather data.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) defined narrative inquiry as “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) further wrote, “that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 2). The essence of this research is to capture Miguel’s storied life from his perspective.

This narrative approach is meant to serve Miguel as “the representation of process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time” (Josselson, 1995, p. 33). The purpose here is to give Miguel an opportunity to make sense of his experiences and the socialized structures he perceived at play during his public school years. This study is not intended to serve as scientific fact records as Josselson (1995) explained, but rather to allow Miguel to unveil how the school level systemic processes

influenced who he has become at this point in his life from his point of view. For purposes of this study, data collected will be limited to Miguel's point of entry into the United States through his first year beyond high school graduation denoting thirteen years in public education.

Research Question

Creswell (2007) explained qualitative research is warranted when “we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices” (p. 40). The focus of this study aims to capture the story of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student as he experienced a public school education and the socialized structured processes. There is an abundance of data describing the hardships and barriers Latina/o immigrant youth face in the United States. The challenge here is to understand the story of a single student's lived experiences beyond statistics and to unfold Miguel's experiences entwined with the socialized structures at constant play while he attended public school. Therefore, this study begins with one recurring question: What are the academic experiences of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student as traversed within the socialized structures of a public school system?

Positionality

As I begin to consider the task before me I am overcome with great emotion to this undertaking. I am a public school educator, but before this I am a first generation Mexican American daughter. I grew up in southeast Texas in a predominantly White community where racism was blatant and ever present. I saw Latina/o students in and out of the classroom ridiculed for their limited ability to speak English and for their

perceived immigration status by other youth. I somehow managed to escape most but not all of that. Nonetheless, these experiences have never left my thoughts. My limited encounters of ridicule have lasted long with me both mentally and emotionally. When I became an educator I thought that we, as a community, had surpassed those days. I quickly found myself in the midst of conversations with other educators defending ELLs, their families, and debating immigration laws and issues. Each year in education I am drawn into conversations with parents about why or how their child or children of all grade levels are being unsuccessful in school. I have made phone calls on behalf of these particular families to teachers, counselors, and even school administrators trying to find answers for both students and parents regarding curriculum, alternative schooling, summer school, and many more issues. I consider the specific circumstances for these families related to immigration status, lack of English speaking ability, and the overall social and economic adversity facing Latina/o immigrant youth. I want to begin to understand where the school level systems have failed these students or can this argument simply be reduced to deficits within the students themselves that creates this trajectory for them. I am often embarrassed by Latina/o, immigrant or natural born U. S. citizens, youth who are failing to graduate high school. I am not satisfied that our public school systems cannot make significant gains within this special population to close the achievement gap between Latina/o immigrant students and their White peers. I am also dissatisfied with the mundane conversations in education that places all the blame on Latina/o immigrant students and their families for their failure to acculturate meaningfully in American schools. I seek to understand what school level systemic

processes made a difference for these students. I want to understand the stories behind statistics and figures regarding Latina/o immigrant graduation rates, test scores, and dropout rates rather than just analyzing numbers. I seek to understand the lived experiences of Latina/o immigrant students. For these reason, this study has been formed by my desire to understand the personal experiences of one Latino unauthorized immigrant student as he experienced the academic and social school level processes that influenced who he has become today.

My interest in Latina/o immigrant youth comes from my personal background and experiences. My father migrated to the United States in the mid 1950s. My father entered the U.S. legally. My mother was born in the United States, but she too was the daughter of Mexican immigrant parents. Year after year my new teachers would ask me politely, “Do you speak English?” I understood very young in my academic studies that the odds were against me in terms of high school graduation. I would pay close attention to the news and to my teachers’ conversations and understand they held out little hope for me and other Latina/o students like me. I even had a teacher once ask me what I wanted to do after high school. I ignorantly responded, “Go to college!” My teacher responded, “You will never make it!” I never realized how my Spanish surname and skin color made me different until teachers pointed that out to me in school. The few Latina/o friends I had entering high school were even fewer the night we graduated. I entered my undergraduate studies with a deep sense of isolation. I am fortunate in a myriad of ways to have been successful in both my undergraduate and graduate studies. I cannot, nor do I want to, escape my past, my heritage, and my life as a Latina. I am,

however, deeply compelled to begin to understand the experiences of other Latinas/os, especially immigrant youth and other children of immigrant parents. As an educator I want to understand how we enhance or hinder the experiences and academic success of immigrant youth. For this reason, I have selected a life narrative study of one young man's experiences from his point of entry in the United States through current day. I seek to understand how the educational system, in whole and in parts, responded to the social, emotional, and academic needs of this particular young man while using reflexive voice to offer my perspective simultaneously.

Participants

Although a brief description of each of the participants is provided below, a more detailed and comprehensive description of Miguel and the other informants is provided at the beginning of Chapter 4.

Miguel

I first met Miguel in the summer of 2008. I was his younger brother's teacher. Miguel accompanied his younger brother to "Meet the Teacher Night" as we all prepared to return for another school year. Miguel was entering his freshman year in high school at ABC High School in Suburban ISD. Soon after the school year began, Miguel's mother, Soñia, was contacting me by phone to discuss Miguel's academic status. Soñia would also bring me letters from ABC High School that were written in English about Miguel and have me explain them to her. I knew based on the information presented to me by Soñia that Miguel would soon be a high school drop out if some sort of interventions were not put into place.

I began to focus my dissertation study on a case study format towards the end of my graduate studies. I was interested in learning about secondary ELLs and their experiences from transitioning through special language programs and into an all English academic setting. I asked and Miguel agreed to be a part of that study. However, as I began talking to Miguel more I realized his story warranted further and deeper evaluation. I fell into this narrative life study as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007).

Soñia, His Mother

Soñia is Miguel's mother, and she also has three other boys, ages 9, 14, and 26. She currently resides in the U.S. as an unauthorized citizen.

Fernan, His Father

Fernan is 45 years old, Miguel's father, and remains a Mexican national citizen. He also resides in the U.S. as an authorized citizen.

Mrs. Calvert, His Principal

Mrs. Calvert was the principal of Freedom High School, the alternative education center, from which Miguel was able to graduate from in May 2012. She has since retired as a campus administrator, but remains active in public education as a consultant for school districts.

Data Collection

According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), the purpose of collecting data "in naturalistic inquiry is to gain the ability to construct reality in ways that are consistent and compatible with the constructions of a setting's inhabitants" (p. 81). Erlandson et al. (1993) described how the researcher must be able to consider what

the subject experiences and view those experiences likewise (p. 81). The purpose here is to allow Miguel to unfold his story for me in such a way that fully captures the essence of what he saw, heard, felt, and lived.

Consistent with the narrative style employed in this study and discussed in greater detail above (Bloom, 2002), Miguel himself will serve as the primary source for data collection in this study. Secondary, supporting data will be collected through participant interviews of Miguel's parents and his high school principal, and through data analysis of Miguel's public school records as available. These additional participant interviews are meant to enrich not supplant or corroborate Miguel's story as his perspective alone is enough. However, for some parts of his story, particularly the events that occurred early in his life, the addition of these perspectives is valuable. All the participants' names used in this study have been changed to protect their privacy. Additionally, the names of the schools and school district have also been changed for confidentiality purposes as well.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants and recorded. These interviews were formatted in both an unstructured and semi-structured approach. A complete listing of the structured questions posed to participants is listed in Appendix C. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) asserted, "Interviews in qualitative research vary in structure" (p. 246). This approach is also consistent with the writings of Erlandson et al. (1993).

For this reason the naturalistic researcher will gather data from a variety of sources and, preferably, in a variety of ways. Respondents are asked questions, but they are also encouraged to engage with the researcher in less structured conversations so that their hidden assumptions and constructions begin to surface. (p. 81)

The unstructured approach to the interviews was warranted to allow Miguel and the secondary participants the opportunity to express what may be “psychologically sensitive” data as described by Gall et al. (2007). The unstructured interview process is considered a “data collection tool” in narrative inquiry according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) further wrote, “Interviews are conducted between researcher and participant, transcripts are made, the meetings are made available for further discussion, and they become part of the ongoing narrative record” (p. 5). The interview process was essential to capture the essence of Miguel’s story.

Gall et al. (2007) explained semi-structured interviews by writing, “The semi-structured interview involves asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information” (p. 246). An additional purpose of this approach to the interviews is that I recognized the cultural differences in interviewing Miguel’s parents. Both Soñia and Fernan are very shy and timid. I had to probe them initially and throughout the interview to encourage them to speak openly.

The interviews were conducted primarily in English with Miguel. During parts of the interviews Miguel would use a word or phrase in Spanish to better express his thoughts or feelings. A total of five interviews were conducted with Miguel. The interviews ranged in duration from 45 minutes to over an hour each. Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed by an outside third party. Culturally, the conversations lent themselves to *Spanglish*, a combination of both English and Spanish dialogue. I offered Miguel the opportunity to meet at a location that was comfortable to him, including my home. Interviews with Miguel were conducted until he felt his story had been told.

The interview with Soñia and Fernan was conducted in Spanish and in the privacy of their own home. I am a fluent Spanish speaker and was able to conduct this interview without outside assistance. It was my anticipation, based on experience with Soñia and Fernan, they would opt to be interviewed together. I scheduled an interview with Soñia and Fernan for a 2 hour period although this interview lasted about an hour. The interview was also audio-taped, transcribed by an outside third party in Spanish, and then translated into English.

The interview with Mrs. Calvert was held at a location at her discretion and was held one time, but was divided into two parts as we took a break and then continued. The first interview lasted about 37 minutes and the second interview about 5 minutes. Mrs. Calvert and I continued our discussion about Miguel and overall hardships facing Latina/o youth after the formal interview was completed. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by an outside third party.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed through critically reflective analysis (CRA). Gall et al. (2007) explained CRA by writing, “is a process which the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomenon being studied” (p. 472). Gall et al. (2007) further wrote, “Its use involves a decision by the researcher to rely on her own intuition and personal judgment to analyze the data rather than on technical procedures involving an explicit category classification system” (p. 472). This method of analysis is “highly subjective”, but it also requires the researcher to examine and then reexamine all the data (Gall et al., 2007, p. 473). This approach emphasizes the idea the data collection process and analysis are equally important as the data itself. Campbell and Baikie (2013) discussed CRA in greater depth.

CRA is grounded in an epistemology that understands knowledge to be socially constructed and therefore open to deconstruction and reconstruction. Related to this is the belief that knowledge is positional, i.e. what is known, how a situation is interpreted, and the meaning made from an experience is influenced by one’s social location. Therefore CRA privileges the asking of contextualized questions and the search for provisional and partial knowledge over the provision of definitive answers. (p. 453)

Approaching data analysis through CRA allows the data to be evaluated as valid in the manner in which it is presented. “CRA makes linkages and interconnections between individualized values, beliefs and assumptions, and those that inform dominant and marginalized world views” (Campbell & Baikie, 2013, p. 454). This approach will allow

me, the researcher, to reflect upon the participant's story while simultaneously make connections to my own story and experiences.

Records Analysis

Gall et al. (2007) described records as “written communication that have an official purpose” (p. 291). Miguel has provided a copy of his academic records as held by Suburban ISD. These records were obtained directly from the Registrar at Freedom High School. These records serve as legal documents to the academic progress made by Miguel.

The records are not complete from year to year. The records in hand include Miguel's record of entry each academic year in Suburban ISD. The records include Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores for grades 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. I also have a copy of Miguel's Texas Reading Proficiency Tests in English for Grade 3, a report card from Grade 6, and a copy of one letter from Grade 6 entitled, “Parent Notification of Grade 6 Child's Progress in Reading.” The final record included is Miguel's “State of Texas Academic Achievement Record (Accredited)” which includes academic data from years 2010-2012.

The purpose of analyzing these documents was to gather information about Miguel's academic progress. It was my anticipation these records would help Miguel recall experiences as he saw familiar names of teachers. I also used the documents as I interviewed Soñia and Fernan as we discussed Miguel's experiences in school.

Trustworthiness

The credibility of the study is imperative. For this reason, validation strategies were implemented throughout the entire study. It was paramount for me to have first gained the trust of the participants so each person would speak honestly with me. Creswell (2007) described the first strategy and wrote, “Building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for information that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants” (p. 207). This strategy required the researcher to gain the trust of the participants. I did this through speaking honestly and extending sympathy to the participants’ experiences as he or she expressed them to me. Additionally, I sought to gain the participants trust by conducting the interviews in the language of the participants’ choice.

Secondly, I established credibility of the study through triangulation. Triangulation involves varying the data sources and collection methods (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). The purpose here is to determine corroboration of the data collected. I reiterate once again that Miguel’s story itself is sufficient to stand alone, but secondary interviews were conducted to help provide additional perspectives of Miguel’s experiences.

A third measure I will take to ensure credibility is member checking. Gall et al. (2007) explained member checking in detail.

Ensure representation of the emic perspective by member checking, which involves having research participants review statements in the report for accuracy

and completeness. Correct factual errors, and, if necessary, collect more data to reconcile discrepancies, rewrite the report, or include contrasting views. (p. 475)

Member checking allows each participant to review their transcript and add or remove any statements of their choosing. Member checking also serves to allow each participant time to reflect on their statements. It is my responsibility as the researcher to ensure the data is presented in its purest form and without blemish of my biases. For this reason, I will include a reflexive piece at the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter IV is presented into two sections. The first section provides a more detailed description of each participant, and the second present Miguel's life narrative in eight vignettes that offer an in-depth insight of Miguel's experiences coupled with personal reflections of both Miguel's and my experiences. The vignettes presented are entitled as followed: The Journey Begins; What's Your Name, What's Your Name; Separate and Not Equal; They Called me Dumbo; ¿Como se dice, mudo?: How do you say, mute?; Sit, Listen, Try, Fail, Repeat; Freedom High School Called His Name; and A Reflection of the Past and Hope for the Future.

Participants

Miguel

Miguel is a 22 year-old Latino male full of hope for a better future not only for himself, but also for his younger brothers and parents. I first met Miguel in the fall of 2008 when he brought one of his younger siblings to meet me for "Meet the Teacher Night." Then, I was a third grade bilingual teacher on the cusp of my graduate studies. Miguel appeared to me as a typical teenage boy, vivacious, and excited about a new school year as a freshman in high school. I vividly recall how he spoke to me in all English as he introduced his brother to me and spoke to me about going to high school. I had no idea at this point the trajectory Miguel's life had taken and all the challenges that remained ahead of him in the immediate years to follow.

As I had approached the research phase of my course work, I had considered research of a case study format. Preliminary research led me back to Miguel as a potential participant of that study. The more Miguel and I engaged in conversation, the more apparent it became to me that Miguel's story alone was worthy of sharing.

Miguel's story is one of millions among Latina/o immigrant youth currently living in the United States as unauthorized citizens. It is easy to dismiss his story as literally one in a million. However, Miguel's story gives us insight into the daily life and struggles of what it means to be an unauthorized immigrant in the U.S. public school system. It is my anticipation that by allowing Miguel to tell his story it will inspire educators to pay more close attention to what is spoken and unspoken by Latina/o immigrant youth and for educators to recognize their role in contributing to the success or failure of these students. Miguel's story tells of what he felt, saw, and learned in and out of school. Through this study I sought to fully understand Miguel's account, and therefore embrace the experiences of Miguel's parents as they tried to direct and guide their son towards their American dream for him as well as that of Miguel's high school principal to whom he attributes his high school graduation success.

Soñia, Miguel's Mother

Soñia is an unauthorized immigrant who has been living in the United States for over 15 years. She works as a house cleaner in an upper-class community. She is short in stature, but she has an infectious smile. She is the proud mother of four boys and most recently became a grandmother to a beautiful baby girl. Although Soñia is very shy, she is also very polite and courteous. Soñia repeatedly calls me *maestra*, Spanish for teacher,

although I have encouraged her repeatedly to call me by my first name. Soñia lives on the outskirts and to the east of a suburban community. She shares a small single-wide mobile home with her husband and three of her boys. Their living conditions are congested and poor. Over the last couple of years Soñia has faced her fears of becoming a working member of the community and has sought employment of cleaning houses independently.

Soñia entered the United States in March 1999 with the help of a *coyote*. She sadly recalled that physical and emotional journey through the desert and across the Río Grande in south Texas. She retold how her first experience in the United States was frightening as the first *coyotes* helped her and her husband, Fernan, reach the U.S.-Mexico border for a fee of \$1,250 per person. The second *coyote* robbed them of all their cash, totaling about \$3,500 as payment to take them further into Texas. Soñia spoke of the emotional struggle she felt as she left her two sons with her parents. She tearfully spoke of the nightmares she had of the boys calling out to her, and she could not help them.

Today Soñia is 45 years old and still hoping her boys reach their American dream. She remains very limited in her ability to speak English. She speaks of her experiences with the school system and honestly admits that after all these years living in the United States that she understands very little about school processes. Her encounters with the school system in academic matters have included two of the boys being tested and qualified for special education services, summer school participation, retention, alternative education, and the graduation process.

Fernan, Miguel's Father

Fernan's immigration status is also unauthorized in the United States. He currently works in construction alongside his oldest son and Miguel. Fernan's features are such that he has dark, brown skin and brown hair. He is quiet, yet friendly. In the past when I have visited their home Fernan has always joined Soñia and I at the kitchen table to listen to our conversations. Fernan offers his opinions and thoughts when I look at him as an attempt to engage him, but generally he does not speak openly. When Fernan participates in conversations, he does so calmly and with a gentle spirit. Fernan also admits he understands very little about the public school system here. Fernan attributes this to both very little time spent at the boys' schools and his uneasiness with the unfamiliarity of American schools.

Mrs. Calvert, His Principal

Mrs. Calvert is a White woman who worked in education for 38 years. She served as the principal of Freedom High School for 16 years before retiring her career in education. Today she enjoys serving as a substitute administrator and providing consultation services for school districts that are in need of direction and assistance with their alternative high school programs.

Vignettes of Miguel's Life Narrative

The Journey Begins

Fernan initially entered the United States illegally in July 1998 without his wife or children. He came first to see what life was like here and to determine if his family could survive here financially. Soñia was desperate for him to return back to Mexico. He

did, but soon after he returned to the United States with Soñia and entered illegally. Fernan knew it would be a daunting task to bring Miguel and his oldest brother to the United States. The journey to bring the boys into the United States was complicated by time, money, and finding someone who could smuggle the boys safely.

It was not until after 2 years later in 2000 that Soñia and Fernan were able to find *coyotes* to smuggle the boys across the Texas-Mexico border. Soñia was pregnant at the time with their third child. Soñia attended her doctor's appointments as scheduled each month at a local health clinic. It was at this clinic Soñia befriended a stranger with whom she began to share her story and experience with at each visit. The stranger told her of a couple, *coyotes*, who specialized in smuggling children. It took Soñia several months to convince Fernan that a plan to bring the boys to Texas was safe. I asked Soñia and Fernan why they decided to bring the Miguel and his brother to the U.S. despite the fear she had in trusting this task to strangers. Soñia responded.

Pues yo he decidido traer a mis hijos para acá para que ellos pudieran tener un futuro mejor. Que supieran hablar ingles.

(Well I had decided to bring my children over here so that they could have a better future. So they would be able to speak English.)

One evening in August 2000 Miguel, then 7 years old, and his older brother said goodbye to their grandparents as they tearfully passed him off to two complete strangers, *coyotes*, near the Texas-Mexico border. Miguel spoke of how difficult it was for him to leave his grandparents, whom he had loved deeply as they had provided emotional and physical security for him for the past several months. Miguel recalled how the *coyotes*

spoke to him in *Spanglish* as he could not understand all they were saying to him.

Miguel began to unfold his story.

Oh it all started when like my parents decided to bring us to the United States. Well I really didn't knew where I was going, but all my brother was telling me was, "We are gonna see our parents! We are gonna see our parents!" We were all happy. So once we got to talk to our parents, and hey is that really true? They were like, "Yeah!" I only recognized their voices. I didn't recognize their faces; that's the sad part about that. So it was a long way. My grandpa, which he took us and my grandma too, we rode the bus all the way to like I don't know what part of the border, and we were, we were waiting for the people and they said that they were wearing some type of color shirt. I don't know what color it was. But they were describing how they look so that's when my grandpa said, "Look that's them, ya' take care!" He put us a Virgin Mary on our backpack so we kept that. My brother, he was walking; we were walking. He told us that we were walking, and then the backpack fell and the Virgin Mary fell too and he, he saved that Virgin Mary. That made us think, like you know, that Virgin Mary made us, made us a miracle cause we saved her. We put it back to the backpack, it was kind of a little broken. So once we got in the car they were like alright, if they ask you this tell the name blah blah blah. Then once we got in there they were like this is the part they are gonna ask your names, but act like you are sleeping. So me and my brother were like... you know just lay down... he told me that in Spanish though. He's like, "Lay down and don't say nothing. Don't move, even if

they shake you don't move. Act like you are snoring or something." So we both did. We were like alright, and I was scared. You know I was real scared. I ain't gonna lie. I still feel the scariness you know. It was a long drive to a McDonald's, and they bought us pancakes and that juice, that little box juice they used to give. I don't think they give it no more. Well I don't know if they do, but it tasted weird. It tasted strong and nasty. They probably put something in it to make us fall asleep and so they made us. They put us to sleep basically cause I knocked out. I don't remember nothing from there.

Miguel leaned on his brother to help him comprehend that soon he would be with his mom and dad again. Miguel now understands this special juice had some kind of drug in it to cause him to sleep as they passed through immigration at the International Border. Afraid and uncertain about what was going to happen, Miguel complied. Miguel understands today that his fear and anxiety would have been easily manifested had he been awake while being questioned by U.S. Customs officers. Miguel relied on the courage of his brother to take him through the next phase of the journey as they traveled across south Texas. Miguel knew without question he was not in Mexico anymore.

Late that night Miguel met his parents at a gas station in a large metropolitan area. Miguel recalled how he did not even recognize his parents and that he was afraid to approach them. Soñia described Miguel.

Se quedo viendo nos un rato como en shock. Ay muy triste, muy triste.

(He stayed looking at us for a while like in shock. It was so sad, so sad.)

Miguel spoke of what his brother, Mateo, said to him, “*Ellos son tus papas.*” (That’s your mom and dad.) Miguel said he hesitated although his mom kept calling out to him. Miguel explained how he recognized his mother’s voice, but not her face. Soñia reiterated this point and tells how she tearfully embraced her son as he would not hug her back. Soñia then realized how their separation had been very difficult on Miguel.

Es que lo deje chiquito todavia

(It’s because I left him when he was still so small.)

After Miguel was finally over the initial shock with his parents he arrived to his new home. Miguel spoke of how strange this transition was for him not only in respect to his new living conditions, but also being with his parents who felt like strangers to him. Two weeks after entering the United States Miguel’s parents enrolled him in public school. I asked Soñia and Fernan if they thought Miguel was ready to begin school so soon after arriving in the U.S. Soñia sincerely answered.

No porque, bueno aquí, porque pues hablaban otra idioma y el no lo hablaba.

(No because, well here, well because they spoke another language [English] and he did not speak it.)

Although his parents believed Miguel was not ready to enter school, Fernan explained why they went through with the decision to have Miguel start school right away.

Pues como quiera, lo que nosotros queríamos es que ellos estudiaran.

(Well anyways, what we wanted is for them to begin studying.)

I could see the sadness expressed in Soñia’s demeanor as she shared this part of her story with me. Her eyes filled with tears, and her voice crackled over her words. As a mother

her desire was to protect her son. Now in hind sight she recognized Miguel was not emotionally ready to be in school.

I am first in awe of the bravery Miguel and his brother demonstrated the day they left Mexico with two complete strangers. The boys did not throw a fit nor screamed nor cried. Miguel trusted his grandfather and brother both as he entered the car of the *coyotes*. I can honestly say I do not believe I know very many, if any, children who demonstrate such courage at a young age.

As Soñia and Fernan shared their story and their decision to bring Miguel and his brother to the United States, I was over taken by great emotion. In my vain conceit I was quick to make judgments in my mind about their “foolish” decision as I saw it. I questioned myself silently over and over again, “What kind of crazy parents put their kids in the hands of complete strangers? Didn’t they know these people could have kidnapped their children, and they would have never seen them again?” I could not help myself but think all these insane thoughts. As time has passed and I have now had more opportunity to listen to and read and reread the manuscript from the interview that day, the fear and emotional pain Soñia and Fernan experienced was evident. I had specifically asked them if they had fears in bringing Miguel and his brother to the United States. Fernan responded.

Si, como no.

(Yes, how could we not.)

Soñia’s speech began to slow down as she had a somber look in her face as she began to elaborate further about Miguel and his brother coming to the United States.

Si, pues que uno tiene temor a darle, el como por decir, la confianza a otra persona que no conoce uno ni lo nunca a visto. No mas porque con el puro número de teléfono y la voz, pero no lo conoces y a confiar en esas personas.

(Yes, one fears trusting another person that you do not know and have never seen simply because you only have a phone number and a voice, but you not know them and to trust in them.)

Then this begs the question, why? Why would Soñia and Fernan risk their children's lives and their very own livelihood and put their children in strangers' hands? Fernan summed it all in one sentence.

Pues nosotros siempre, siempre quisimos que se recibiera, que saliera, y que agarra su carrera y ya.

(Well we always wanted, always wanted him to graduate, for him to finish [school], and have his career and that's all.)

Fernan's hopes for his son are the very same my parents had for my siblings and myself. My Mother's greatest pride is that we all graduated from high school. In my parent's home today are our pictures with our caps and gowns holding our diplomas. Underneath those photos are pictures of our spouses and our children. I honestly believe my parents had little thoughts for us to attend a university as it was rarely spoken of in our home. The goal was to reach high school graduation.

My parents were already living in the United States by the time I was born. I never experienced crossing the border illegally nor did my siblings older than me. My parents returned to live in Mexico for a short while after they were married. There was

not much for my parents in Mexico at that time economically, and so they returned to Texas. The sacrifices my parents made over all those years for us did not involve risking neither their lives nor ours. However, the sacrifices they made for us were indeed great. I am deeply compelled by Fernan's and Soñia's actions to bring their children to the United States against logic and reasoning. Their hope for a better future for their children was paramount against all their fears. They did what they truly believed was in the best interest of Miguel and his brother.

What's Your Name, What's Your Name

Miguel easily recalled of how excited he was to go to school. He had no idea what to expect, but was told by his uncle the children would speak English to him. At this point Miguel said he did not even understand what "speaking English" really meant. His uncle taught him his first English phrase, "What's your name, what's your name?" Literally, this is all the English Miguel could speak at the time. Miguel is able to laugh about this today as he shared this with me.

My cousins, primos hermanos, yeah I don't know how to say it, but they were there, and they told us about everything. That's where he [uncle], he told me something about a word saying, "Hey, when you go to school say, say to everybody in school say what's your name," but like he being funny and everything. I was like okay, okay what's your name to everybody! He's like yeah, and after they told you their name you should say okay bye. I didn't never know what it meant. I was just randomly in school, in elementary school telling

everybody, "Hey what's your name? What's your name?" That was the funny part.

Miguel further described being in the front office of his new elementary school and quickly realizing this school was not the same as the one he had left hundreds of miles behind. Miguel said, "Everything looked different." An entourage of extended family members already living in the United States accompanied Miguel and his mother to school. When I asked Miguel what he thought school would be like, he responded initially with enthusiasm and then faded into sadness.

Yeah I remember. She [Mom] was like, "Are you ready for school?" I was like, "Yeah, I wanna go to school!" I thought it was gonna be the same as Mexico like Spanish, and I thought they were gonna have a pool cause we had a pool in Mexico. I thought my mom was gonna bring me lunch like my grandpa did and my grandma did too. They would bring us lunch and everything. It was way different, way different! She took me there, and then she was like, "Hey, this is your class," which was Mrs. Sanchez. Mrs. Sanchez was like come in, come in. So I was like, I was noooo, I don't wanna go in no more. I want to go back home, and I was crying and crying. God, I realized right away when I got in there that it was different. It wasn't the same, like I saw all the walls different kinds of words that I didn't even know what they meant I thought I was reading Chinese.

As Miguel began to share this part of his story his demeanor changed. His voice was quieter as he looked up and around the room. It was clear Miguel was caught emotionally into his thoughts.

Miguel was placed in a second grade bilingual classroom in Suburban ISD. His journey to a better life was at hand, or so his parents believed. Miguel spoke of how he wanted to go to school, how he loved school in Mexico, and how he just wanted to do the same here. Miguel told of how he soon realized it was different and how he could not read any of the words on the walls. Miguel could not understand any of the signage around him and felt helpless. The teacher's ability and willingness to speak to Miguel in Spanish came to a fast end, and he was left to fend for himself.

Separate and Not Equal

Miguel described for me how he was treated in class. It was evident in Miguel's tone this memory resonated anger in him.

The teacher would put me on the other side of the room to draw. Nobody taught me English, not even the teacher. The teacher always put me on the side drawing.

I then asked Miguel what the teacher would be doing with the other students while he was placed apart and instructed to draw.

She'd be, ahhh, teaching the other kids.

Miguel could not understand the English instruction in class, and said he believes the teacher did this to him because it was easier for her to not teach him. Miguel tells of how he was included in instruction at some points for math only.

Yeah, she would be teaching that and then I would be the only person. She would do math you know, what's times this and times this, and I realize what it was cause that's there's no words. You know, there's like symbols so I knew what it was. I knew what it meant so that's, that's my first thing I learned, math.

After several days, Miguel was then given assessments in English which he could not understand or be successful at completing. I asked Miguel if the teacher, Mrs. Sanchez, ever worked with him in small groups or one-on-one.

No, she always put me separate drawing, just drawing. I don't know why she did that, but she did it. Sometimes she would be like alright here is your test, and I'm like...I don't even...don't even remember doing this so I didn't even know what it means. I mean like, uhhh it was in Spanish, but had big words. I was still in the process of learning reading. I wasn't good at reading. I was only like...you know I was...I was barely learning how to read. I mean, imagine me, barely not knowing how to read Spanish and now trying to learn English.

Miguel was also sent home with work to complete that was only in English. No one could help him. All Miguel's parents knew to do was to ask him if he had homework to complete and then provided a place at the dining table to do so. Soñia said when the work seemed too hard they would call one of Miguel's cousins, older than Miguel by a couple of years, to help explain his work to him. Miguel spoke of this and said his cousins would try to help him with work, but so often he could not understand how they were explaining the work to him. Fernan admitted they could not help Miguel with this process at all.

Es que es como cuando encargan la tarea y no hay amigos que le ayudaran a hacer esa tarea y uno pues menos. Eso es el que ¿como le van hacer ellos?

(When they were assigned homework, and they didn't have friends to help them with it and one can't either. And it was like, "How are they going to do this?")

It was obvious in Fernan's demeanor he felt dismayed as he described this experience as helpless. He looked at me and slowly looked away as he spoke.

Uno no se puede ayudar a su hijo y se siente mal.

(One cannot help his son and you feel bad about this.)

It did not take long for Miguel to realize homework and learning was too hard for him because of the language barrier. Miguel described how he was barely learning how to read in Spanish when he arrived in the United States and how he could no way in fact complete any assignments or pass a test in English. At this tender age, Miguel did not have the support he needed from his teachers to be successful. This began a perpetual cycle Miguel would then experience for several academic years to come. In a follow up interview, I asked Miguel why he thought his teacher, Mrs. Sanchez, put him to the side in the classroom.

Because she probably thought I couldn't do what her kids could do, speak English.

I asked Miguel to describe his relationship with his elementary teachers, and he did not hesitate to answer.

I had one good teacher, but I forgot her name. I only know the evil teachers. They were mean to me. They put me to the side, and one of them was Mrs. Sanchez. She would always put me to the side, and she wouldn't sit down with me and teach me how to do in class. I knew myself that I couldn't. When I read something I couldn't. I couldn't put it in my head. I would just forget. I was just reading and reading and not remember what I read, and that was my problem

about that. So that's why I was bad in reading, and I had another teacher, Mrs. Perez. She was really mean. You know sometimes I would be like, "Hey Mrs. Mrs. Mrs.", and I was like raising my hand first, and she would never pick me; she would pick the girl [another student] all the time, and one day she [the girl] complained about me doing something to her, bothering her in class or talking to her. Then that's when she [Mrs. Perez] called my mom saying, "Oh your son blah, blah, blah, and then when what she was doing was yelling at my face, and then my mom was like, "Whoa, why are you screaming at his face? You know you have to be patient. You know he's a little kid." And she would yell at me, and like she would basically get mad at me for no reason just because.

I asked Soñia about Mrs. Perez, and she was able to recall how Miguel would constantly cry in her class. Soñia quickly responded.

Pues, la maestro que lo regañaba mucho si.

(Yes, the teacher who would constantly punish him.)

Soñia spoke of how Miguel was punished constantly and forced to sit alone in a corner.

Si, pero pues, el se portaba así porque pues el no entendia el idioma de ellos o no se comunicaba mucho con los niños del salon. No se mijo, y si lo regañaba mucho. De nada tenia la culpa Miguel. Y como que me lo hacia a un lado, ósea no. Como decir, Miguel es malo, ponlo aya en la esquina. Yo así sentia.

(Yes, well he would behave in that manner because he did not understand their language, or he did not communicate with the other students from class. I don't know, and yes he was punished constantly. Miguel was not at fault for anything.

It was as if she would put him aside. It was like she was saying Miguel was the troublemaker, put him in the corner. That is how I felt.)

Soñia also emotionally spoke of how Mrs. Perez would call her and speak ugly about Miguel's behavior. Soñia said she could feel something in her heart and knew Mrs. Perez did not like Miguel.

Cuando me hablaba ella, que fuera y luego me decía, me daba las quejas que Miguel y decía pero si Miguel allá en Mexico no se portaba así y ¿porque todo Miguel? Osea como que no me lo quería. No se, no se. Y cuando me estaba diciendo ella a mi y luego decía ella, "Si Miguel, y mirame a los ojos Miguel," ósea con aquel coraje, y pues es un niño.

(When she would call me to go there [school], she would give me complaints about Miguel. I would say but in Mexico Miguel did not act this way so why is everything on Miguel? It was as if she did not like him. Then she would say, "Yes Miguel, look straight at me when I am speaking Miguel," as if she was scolding him, and well he was just a little boy.)

I asked Soñia if she ever felt like she could go to school and talk to someone about this situation.

Lo que pasa es que uno no está informado maestra. No está uno informado. Piensa que todo en esa tiempo yo pensé lo que decian ellas eso era. Pero ahora que ya, verdad, ya temenos mas tiempo verdad, ya sabemos que si ahí ayuda para ayudar a uno. Mas que nada la idioma.

(What happens is that no one is informed teacher. No one is informed. I thought at that time that whatever they said was how it was. But now that, truthfully, we have more time here honestly, we know there are resources to help us, more than anything with the language.)

However, Miguel was in a difficult situation with Mrs. Perez, and his parents did not know how to best help him during this time.

There was a stark difference though in how my parents handled the schoolhouse and situations that warranted their involvement. My father was very timid and shy. He would show up to events and never make a comment to anyone. These actions portrayed my father as weak in this American culture. This is how I believe Soñia was perceived. Surely Mrs. Perez recognized the way she handled Miguel and Soñia was not only unprofessional, but simply rude. My Mother, on the other hand, was very bold. She had little regard for how she was perceived when it came time to speak up for my brother and oldest sister who found themselves in trouble at school, both academically and behaviorally. So often we would hear my mother say things such as, "I am a U.S. citizen, and I know my rights. You think you can talk to me that way because I am Mexican!" I felt embarrassed to hear my Mother say these things to school personnel. I could not understand then what my Mother was experiencing or even fully understand the discrimination she had experienced growing up in the southwest. As Soñia had shared in her story, she accepted what the teachers said and did because she believed that was how things just were. The teacher said it, and the parents had to accept it. In Latina/o culture, educators are highly regarded and respected. Soñia was left disempowered against

Miguel's teachers and the school system as a whole when she did not realize in American culture she could have questioned the teachers and complained to administration about the anxiety and stress Miguel's teachers were inflicting upon him.

The part of Miguel's response that resonates most with me is the phrase, "her kids" as he spoke of Mrs. Sanchez's class. Miguel knew from a young age he was viewed as different from the other children in his class. Miguel did not feel as though he was a part of Mrs. Sanchez's class. He was often separated physically from other students and emotionally detached from his teacher. One might question how a teacher could actually make a child feel this way and still be respected professionally.

Mrs. Perez continues to teach in Suburban ISD. It behooves me to share that Miguel's youngest brother was placed in a bilingual class with Mrs. Perez two years ago. As soon as Soñia learned of this, she immediately requested her son be placed with another teacher. The campus administration told her they could not accommodate her request. Soñia then took the only recourse she believed she had and that was to remove her son from the bilingual program altogether and place him in the general education setting at another campus. Soñia said repeatedly that she would not allow Mrs. Perez to do what she did to Miguel to her youngest son.

Miguel used the word "evil" to describe both Mrs. Sanchez and Mrs. Perez. This is clearly not a term used lightly by Miguel as he described how these teachers made him feel at school. Miguel's facial expressions changed when we spoke of these two teachers. The frustration in Miguel's face was so easily noted. Mrs. Perez could not see the emotional pain she inflicted on Miguel as he was made to feel different from other

students in his class. The idea Miguel would raise his hand, as he knew to do, and he would still not be recognized by Mrs. Perez is wretched. The anxiety and stress Mrs. Perez caused Soñia to feel has had lasting impressions on her. Mrs. Perez had an opportunity to support Miguel and his family during this very hectic time in their lives. Instead, Mrs. Perez was not able to see beyond the faces of Miguel and his mother and care enough to make them feel valued in her classroom.

I recall being in fourth grade and the first day of school in a nearly all White campus. The teacher was walking around asking children for general information such as parents' names and phone numbers. When the teacher reached my desk, her first question to me was not, "What are your parents' names?" as I had heard her ask the other children. Instead my teacher's question to me was, "Do you live with your parents?" I responded, "Yes." My teacher then followed up with another question, "With both of your parents?" I simple responded, "Yes." I remember feeling embarrassed and thinking why my teacher would think I did not live with parents or even both of my parents. I could not let go of that thought for a long time. I constantly worried that someone was going to bring this up to me, and ask me something about my parents being together. Divorce was a taboo topic when I was in elementary school, and I did not want the other children to think I came from a divorced family. However, my teacher's line of questioning shoved me emotionally to the front of the class. In just a few moments and phrases, I was left vulnerable and on display in front of my peers.

This line of thinking from teachers and school personnel was always a part of my schooling. Nearly 10 years later I attended a university for undergraduate studies. My

very first professor in my field of study asked me in front of all the other students, “Augustina, are you Hispanic?” I remember the sense of shock I felt as I sat there with my mind racing and asking myself, “Why would she ask that? I have all the typical Hispanic features, dark hair, brown skin, brown eyes.” I politely opened my mouth and said, “Yes ma’am. I am.” She then said to me, “Well you don’t sound like you’re Hispanic, and that’s why I had to ask.” I could not decide if I was more offended by her line of questioning or the condescending tone in her voice. I knew immediately my racist professor was referring to my stereotypically non-Latino accent. All through junior high and high school I would constantly have other students tell me that I “sounded” White. As I sit here and think back on my public school experiences, I hated the social aspects. I hate that I was made to feel ashamed of my Mexican heritage, including my ability to speak Spanish. The most important aspect of school for me became my ability to speak clearly and to be understood by those around me.

To hear Miguel and his parents speak of his homework and tests distressed me as it immediately took me back to my public school experiences. I vividly recall that when I entered middle school, grades 6-8, that my parents found my homework increasingly more difficult. My Father had always been the one to help me with math, but I reached the point where I could no longer explain my homework to my Father in Spanish. In turn, my Father could not explain math concepts to me. I did not know what to do, but to try. My grades in middle school began to decline, and none of my teachers had even considered the struggle I was facing at home with both a language barrier and content

knowledge. I was never offered in-class support or after school tutorials. I just accepted my low grades and poor academic performance as common.

They Called Me Dumbo

As time went on Miguel began experiencing isolation from his peers. He told me of how frustrated he felt not being able to communicate with the other students around him in English. Miguel was being harassed by other students, and he did not know how to defend himself. I asked Miguel how he dealt with being bullied. Miguel said he could not defend himself with words, and teachers either did not recognize the bullying taking place, or they choose to ignore how students began calling him, “Dumbo.”

They [friends] told me to ignore them but it was a point you know, how can I ignore it. They were always bullying me. They would call me big hair boy, orejón, blah, blah, blah. You know that kind of stuff, Dumbo. They would say Dumbo, Dumbo, Dumbo. I didn't know what Dumbo is, and when White people started hearing that man, everyone would call me Dumbo in the school. You know? They would be like, "Hey, there goes the Dumbo dude!" I was just walking around with my head down. I was in the process of the big bully stuff.

It was clear by Miguel’s voice and manner this was a painful memory for him. At this point in the interview Miguel’s girlfriend, Lucy, was sitting next to him. Lucy asked if he wanted her to step out of the room. Miguel said, “No.” He then looked at me and explained he had never told her this story. In my futile attempts to be the researcher and professional, I gave Miguel a simple smile and continued. I tried to hold back my

emotions as I could see the agony in Miguel's face. Miguel's tone become softened as he allowed himself to become vulnerable in that moment as he trusted me with his story.

I asked Miguel if he felt like he could tell a teacher or another adult at school what was happening to him. Miguel simply said, "No." I asked Soñia and Fernan about Miguel's attitude towards school during his elementary years. Soñia gently responded.

A veces no quería ir, pero primero cuando llego traía ganas de ir a la escuela. Osea el tenia otra mentalidad de que era igual allá pero ya llegando aquí no. Yo creo que por lo que el veía allá dentro de la escuela.

(Sometimes he did not want to go, but when he first got here he was very excited about going to school. It's like he pictured it to be the same as in Mexico, but when he was finally in school he realized it was not. I think it's because of what he saw in school.)

Miguel went on to tell of how he finally stood up for himself, and it was evident he had something to say. Miguel looked straight at me and, with slight enthusiasm; he began to tell me what happened.

Yeah, well I was really bad. It was nasty too. Well, we were in the restroom, and they would keep going and keep going on me and I was like, I was peeing. And I was like, you know what, I'm gonna pee on his head. That's the kind of thing I brought from Mexico: the look that I can defend myself. Just cause you [the boy harassing him] speak English I can't defend myself? I was like no. So I just peed all over his face, and he started crying. I was like so, and I was telling him in Spanish, "See, leave me alone, dejame en paz. Why you doing that to me, you

know, leave me alone!” And that's when they had respect for me. That's when I earned my respect from all them.

Miguel explained this event was witnessed by other boys in the restroom who reacted by laughing. Miguel said he did not even think about what consequences would occur.

Miguel had reached an emotional breaking point. This action caused Miguel to be suspended from school for two days. Miguel pointed out that it did not bother him at all. However, from this point and forward, Miguel was then viewed as a behavior problem at school.

This part of Miguel's story leaves me with a sense of broken heartedness and anger as he recalled the bullying he experienced. I have great difficulty believing his teachers were so oblivious to what Miguel was experiencing and at the level in which it was occurring. My experience leads me to believe Miguel's teachers ignored this kind of behavior as they basked on the ignorance of Miguel's parents to not come to school and seek help for their son. As I sat and heard Miguel retell his experiences of harassment, his whole demeanor changed. His speech slowed down; he even began to stutter some. Miguel spoke of these occurrences with painful emotion as seen on his face. I question why no one helped protect Miguel against the actions of harassment. It was clear in Miguel's retell of this experience that this has been an emotional stressor for him for a long time.

Hearing Miguel tell his story also stirred painful emotion for me personally. In middle school I participated in the school band. I played the clarinet during sixth and seventh grade. Auditions were being held to advance our seating positions during the

spring semester of my seventh grade year. Naturally, I put my name on the list to audition. The next day when I went to check the list and my assigned time, someone had marked through my name and wrote "Spic." I immediately had tears in my eyes, but I knew I could not cry aloud. I looked around the room and felt I knew who had done that to me. I ended up erasing my name completely off the list. I did not feel like I could go to my band director to tell him what happened nor could I tell my parents. My perception was the "mean" girls who had done this were also the band director's favorite students. I felt if I told him what had happened he would have down played this situation, and I would be the one left with more shame. The only option I felt like I had was to drop band and apply to be a student office assistant. In order for a student to work in an office, one had to be selected personally by a staff member. I went to my counselor, an African-American woman, and asked her to accept me to work in her office. She agreed. I needed the written approval of my band director. I was filled with anxiety when I went to approach my teacher. His demeanor and response were both unprofessional and belittling to me. I remember the look on his face and sly remark he said to me, "Yeah, good luck with that." That was the end of music for me. I realized in that moment my band director thought very little of me as he did not attempt in the slightest to have me change my mind or even ask what happened that I would so easily give up a year and a half of band. He so easily dismissed me.

I later asked Miguel what he believed his elementary teachers thought of him. Miguel's response was filled with disappointment.

They would see me like a loser, basically. They would always make fun of me. I was always like on the side. Like those in every class that I was in they never talked to me. I always wanted to talk to people, but they never wanted to talk to me.

It was very hard for me to contain my emotions as I sat and heard Miguel speak those words, “a loser.” My immediate reaction was to right the wrong his teachers had inflicted upon him, but I could not undo the emotional hurt Miguel had experienced. Miguel’s teachers were so ill-prepared to accept a child like him into their classrooms. His teachers had one opportunity in life to make a positive difference in the life of a student, and they failed miserably.

In 1981, I attended a predominately White elementary school in a very racially charged community. Needless to say, I looked very different from most all the children in my class. I remember being in music class auditioning for the elementary school choir. My music teacher stopped the group and pointed me out specifically and said, “It’s you. You are not in tune. You need to go back to class.” I was so humiliated. I quickly exited the room and could not control my emotions. Granted, I do not have a singing voice. However, to approach me this way in front of all the other children was inappropriate and unprofessional of my teacher. Several years later my Mother showed me her obituary in the local newspaper. The only memory I had of her was when she shamed me in front of my peers. I refused to read the obituary. I cannot honestly say my teacher’s actions were racially charged because she never verbalized any words to that extent. Despite the lack of words uttered, I knew then that I did not look like all the other

girls standing on the risers, and my mother was not the *ideal* school volunteer. At that time I felt it was because I was not like most all the girls. I did not have blonde hair and fashionable clothing. My music teacher made me feel as though I was different. Unfortunately, I had to endure this for 5 years as she was the only music teacher at my elementary school.

¿Como se dice, mudo: How do you say, mute?

The word mute instantly brings to mind a person who is incapacitated to speak orally or hear. This is the word Miguel used to describe himself as he narrated the next phase of his story.

Miguel recounted of how even the students in his bilingual classes were always speaking English to one another and to him.

Even though they could speak Spanish to me, they wouldn't do it. All they wanted to do was speak in English.

I then asked Miguel if he thought it strange how and why the children in his bilingual classrooms would only talk to him in English.

Yeah maybe because they had family that outside the school only spoke in English and in school there was English and Spanish. I don't know if they did it on purpose to me, but they always talked to me in English, and they would laugh at me because I didn't understand. They were probably cussing at me, and I didn't know that they were saying, and they were like ha, ha, ha you don't know what they were saying probably.

I then asked Miguel to describe for me what school was like for him in the cafeteria, where he did not have a bilingual teacher helping him to understand or translate for him.

Well I started eating by myself at lunch, and they [students from his bilingual classroom] would sit together. Since I was the new kid there they never, they never talked to me. But I'm a really talkative person like. I like to talk to people, and I was like, "Hey, what's up?" You know in Spanish. Hey my name is this, this, this you know so let's go play, let's go play something. They were like okay, alright, and they sometimes were like, "Hey, we are gonna play this in English." They would tell me games that they would play, and I'm like huh? I started doing and seeing what they did, and I started learning how and what they were talking about. Well I would try to ask [the teachers] the first time. I would try to ask, but they didn't understand me. So the second time I just went, you know, and I would just get in trouble sometimes. They would be, "Where you going, where you going?" I was like, I would just point. They be like, "Okay you can go!" You know, but sometimes I wouldn't understand. Like alright, it's time for recess and all that. I would just see kids running outside, and okay I'm gonna run outside too. Then when I wanted a fork or something I would just point like, I want this like, Como se dice, ¿mudo? [How do you say mute?] Like that's what I was, you know.

Whenever Miguel could not communicate his needs clearly or teachers did not recognize his hand held up signaling he needed assistance, Miguel would then take action without

permission. These actions would then in turn cause Miguel to be reprimanded by teachers and other staff members.

I am once again emotionally beleaguered by Miguel's words as he shares his story with me. As a bilingual educator, I am left feeling frustrated as to how Miguel's bilingual teachers did not encourage their students to speak in Spanish as they knew the students could do so. This part of Miguel's story lends itself to subtractive bilingualism. It is obvious Miguel's teachers placed high value on speaking English at school. Why would Miguel's teacher not encourage the students to speak Spanish to him? Why did she or the school not have measures in place to help students like Miguel throughout his day? Do educators truly believe students who are limited English proficient (LEP) are just LEP in the classroom, and as a profession we do not acknowledge how students like Miguel struggle with language throughout their entire day? I am left baffled in realizing that I have only blamed monolingual speaking teachers for fostering this type of atmosphere, but now I have to contend with how bilingual teachers have done so as well. Now I question how I fostered such behavior when I was in the classroom. Portales (2005) explained, "Teaching bilingual education, it should by now be very clear, is a demanding proposition. It requires skill, very good training, commitment, and competence in speaking two languages easily and comfortably or without hesitancy" (p. 193). It is difficult to determine why Miguel's teachers encouraged the English dominant environment. I am compelled to believe Miguel's teachers embraced the idea that English proficiency equated with success and power as seen in the research. However,

I am now working in my fourth school district. I have served in school districts from west Texas through central Texas and into southeast Texas. I can honestly say that not one of those school districts made any effort to acknowledge how ELLs are left to maneuver and struggle with the English language outside a special language program classroom such as ESL or bilingual education. I am forced to accept the state in which our bilingual programs find themselves with parent denials of language services that may be a result of the lack of professional pedagogy on behalf of my bilingual colleagues. I am left wondering if Miguel's teachers fostered an atmosphere of English because they was not competent in their Spanish and found it easier to teach in English. Despite the teachers' reasoning, the affect on Miguel was clearly beyond the academic setting and reached well into Miguel's social-behavior development as Miguel used the word *mudo* to describe himself. Miguel was given a sense of feeling speechless and dumb as he could not communicate his most basic needs of going to a restroom or asking for a fork to eat with at school.

Sit, Listen, Try, Fail, Repeat

Miguel fell into a pattern with teachers and students as he transitioned from elementary to intermediate to junior high school. Miguel was constantly in a state of survival as he was trying to understand both the language and content his teachers presented.

Well when I got off the fourth grade, I learned a little bit more. But once I got to intermediate I speak English more. I started defending myself. I could defend myself, but I was still a quiet person. But when I went to that school

[intermediate] *I was just focus on school. I was like man I'm a try to learn English better. I would tell my parents, "Look man, watch, I'm gonna learn English this year."*

Miguel had to repeat second grade in elementary school. He later went on to fail fifth grade because he was unable to pass the fifth grade Reading Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test. Miguel was then required to attend summer school where he recalled his progress in English began to improve.

I did learn English but cause I was going to summer school and not cause I was in school learning English. My mom told me that when you get there [intermediate] you are gonna learn English; they are gonna tell you all the words. It wasn't like that. They would just put me to the side and it was just assignments, assignments, tests, tests, tests, and you know you say "silla" in English, chair, no they wouldn't do that, not in my class they wouldn't. I guess they just wanted to finish work, and then one time I went to that school. All the summer schools that I went to like they would sit down with me, teach me. I read as long as I wanted to, as slow as I wanted to cause over there I had pressure, and you have to finish your reading and read faster. Okay I'm a read faster, but I don't know what I'm saying. I don't know what they are saying. If there was a time in summer school that a word that I didn't understand I would look it up in the dictionary, and then I would go to the computer and search it up what it meant in Spanish or what it meant in English. And that's how I started learning, oh for reals like that's the word that it means, that's how to say it and they started

telling me, and that's how I started telling myself okay this is how you say it and then that's how they did it you know.

I went further with Miguel to inquire about any academic support he was able to receive at home from his parents during this time.

No, they were never able to help me. They would always be like, "I don't know!" and they would always call one of my cousins. She would come to my house, and she would be like this is how we do it blah, blah, blah in Spanish. She would tell me in Spanish. She speaks well in Spanish. Now she does good in English too. She would tell me, this is how you do it, this is how you do it. And then that was my little teacher. She was close to my age.

Miguel relied on the language support of his cousin, a little girl at the time who was near Miguel's age. When I asked Soñia and Fernan about this, Fernan explained how they had no one else to help Miguel. Both Soñia and Fernan discussed how they did not know they could call the school and ask the teacher to assist Miguel by modifying his homework in Spanish or to ask the teacher to send home instructions in Spanish so at a minimum one of them could explain to Miguel what he needed to do.

As I sat and listened to Miguel, other questions came to mind. I wanted to more deeply understand his perceptions of school and how he believed his secondary teachers viewed him.

I was disappointed in teachers, like how I had Hispanic teachers, and I was disappointed in them and how they didn't understand who you are and where you came from and how hard it was going to be for you coming in if you were new,

especially. I was disappointed in a lot of that stuff, schools, and public schools and how they don't care who you are. They didn't even try to get to know me and who I was, and I guess they don't care who you are. They just judge who you are by what they see, and I guess they really don't care.

Miguel went on to share with me how he had seriously contemplated dropping out of high school. Miguel was called into a counselor's office and was told that based on his age, 17, and his poor academic performance that he could be released from school. I then pursued his thoughts about what teachers or staff at his high school thought of him at this point.

If I would have dropped out, it was like a little piece of paper throwing it away in the trash, that's it, he's done with this, get over it, and they would go, "Next!" You know when you're dumb, you're just dumb. Then I thought about that, man I if just drop out they're just not going to care you know, and I really thought about that a lot. But I decided to stay in and make them think, "Hey you have somebody here that needs help and you should start caring for those kinds of people that are having trouble in school like me."

It took all I had inside of me to hold back tears as I listened to Miguel describe himself as a piece of paper being thrown to the trash. Dropping out of high school was never a thought for me although I had faced many obstacles in high school. My senior year I opted to take Chemistry II as an elective. I was a science geek in high school, and I had done well by making it to the state science fair competition. There were only twelve students in this class. I remember one day my science teacher began asking the students

about our plans after high school. When she asked me I responded, “I am applying to Baylor and a few other colleges.” Her response to me was, “You will never make it.” My teacher said it boldly and without hesitation in front of the class. My reaction towards her was unbecoming as I responded with obscenities and stormed out of her room. She was an old woman, and she followed me through the science building, into the main building, and finally to my counselor’s office. Miguel felt like “trash” based upon the way he was treated, and it was clear on this day in December 1989 that I too, was seen as trash by my Advanced Chemistry II teacher. I felt like I had no other option but to drop this class. Ten years later I saw this teacher again at my high school reunion. I could not get myself to acknowledge her presence. Over the years I have not given much thought to this day, but yet I cannot seem to forget it either. My experience and Miguel’s experience are set nearly twenty years apart from one another and occurred in different school districts. What we share in common is the disheartened sense of rejection inflicted upon us both from educators.

Freedom High School Called His Name

Freedom High School, the alternative high school, became a viable option for Miguel and the situation he was facing of being released from school for his age and lack of academic performance. Miguel spoke of when he learned of Freedom High.

Well first of all they called me into my counselor’s office, and which I was rarely there. Like they were never like, like before that let’s say, that they were never like, “Oh you need help on this, this, and this.” I never had that kind of stuff, but there was one day I guess I was doing bad in class because they called me up

there. They were like, “Hey you know you are doing bad in your classes and you might get held back again and your age, they can just take you out of school.” And I was like man no, I don't want that cause I already thought about dropping out, but I decided not to. I just decided to stay in school, but now this came up. So I was like well. So then she told me, “Have you ever heard about Freedom High School?” And I was like, “Is that a school or a boot camp or something?” And they were like, “No, it’s a really good school, and I think they would help you out.” And I was like alright I guess I’ll give it a chance since I don't want to drop out of school, and now ABC High School is kicking me out. If I fail again they're going to kick me out again eventually because of my age.

Miguel also told of how his mom did not understand what was happening when she received a letter in the mail telling her Miguel was being transferred to FHS. This transition stirred feelings of mixed emotions for Miguel.

I was really nervous cause it’s a new. It’s another new beginning. I was afraid of that. I was like man what if they don't like me. What if they start bullying me again cause I already had everything under control at my old school. I had good friends and everything cause I had my, my English was better. I had White friends and everything. Once I went there I was nervous. I was like what if it’s all a lie, and I end up dropping out.

As Miguel began to speak of FHS his whole demeanor changed with zeal. He smiled and gave a quirky laugh as the thought of FHS came to mind. He sat straight up in his seat and spoke with eagerness in his voice.

Freedom High School was like family. The teachers, they were like your cousins. They were like your uncles. They would, they were really caring. They cared about the students so much that they put them first then them you know. So if there's something wrong with them or something wrong with your family, they would actually sit down and talk to you. "Are they ok? How was it?" With other teachers they don't care. They just judge by what they see. And these teachers they don't judge by what they see. They ask before they judge and that's how they were like friends to us. They were really good friends.

Miguel went further to explain in detail how FHS was vastly different from ABC HS. Miguel explained how all of his classes were smaller, up to eight students in a room, how teachers worked with students to ensure everyone was understanding the material presented, he was given time at school to complete his homework and other important projects, and most importantly Miguel said someone was always there to give him help when he needed it. Miguel discovered he was both a visual and kinesthetic learner, and FHS gave him multiple opportunities to see, ask questions, do, and touch the materials. I asked Miguel what was the "game changer" for him at FHS. In reviewing his transcripts with Miguel, I pointed out to him he had earned his first "A" in his entire academic career at FHS. He made an "A" in Government. Miguel's face lit up, and he began to talk about his principal, Mrs. Calvert.

I give her a lot of credit. She was, she was, I don't know. She changed my whole life I guess, and yeah.

I quickly interjected and said, “That’s a pretty big statement!” I restated to Miguel how he said Mrs. Calvert changed his whole life to which Miguel went on to explain further.

Well yeah she did. If I was at ABC High School I mean I know they would probably kick me out, and I wouldn't even know who my principal, what principal kicked me out or who was my principal. Yeah, over here at least I would know who was my principal. And I would know they did care for me, but it was my fault if I failed, you know. It was my fault, not their fault. Over here they cared for me so I'm gonna care about what they're doing for me, you know. I'm not just gonna be like, “Ahh.” She showed that she cared so the students saw that and were like, “Alright she’s caring for me, I’m gonna do my best.”

Miguel acknowledged he needed lots of chances to do better early on at FHS. Miguel struggled to balance working late nights to earn money to help his family and waking up early to be at school on time. Miguel said he often would fall asleep in class and instead of being punished, judged, or kicked out of school, Mrs. Calvert came to him to ask him what the situation was and how they could work this out for Miguel’s sake. Miguel’s parents understood what was at stake for him, and after meeting with the principal, Fernan decided Miguel needed to quit working and focus solely on school.

Mrs. Calvert was able to recall Miguel and his academic situation. Mrs. Calvert knew Miguel was a student who could be helped as long as expectations were placed over him. I asked Mrs. Calvert to describe FHS in her own words.

I guess that our philosophy was that if students are to work hard and believe that they can, they can be very successful. I was there sixteen years, and when I first

got there I wasn't sure that we had a real clear-cut focus, a real clear-cut philosophy. So over the years it evolved into something pretty simple, and it was believe you can work hard and you get smart. The belief system is just powerful. My school served approximately 175 critically at risk kids, and I had grades 8th through 12th. My largest numbers were in my 12th grade because those were the kids that were hanging on to the hope that they were gonna graduate, my lowest numbers were probably eighth grade, ninth grade, tenth grade. Very small school, we were like a little, tiny high school. You could get 22 credits; that's the minimum diploma plan in Texas. We also offered two foreign languages so you could get a Recommended Plan if you choose to, but a lot of my kids were so ready to be out of school that they graduated on a 22 credit plan, but some of them did have more than that. Personalization was probably our strength; that's what we wanted it to be. Kids that came to us unsuccessful, disenfranchised with school, they had had failure after failure after failure, and we needed to change that. And many of these kids were the first ones in their families to graduate from high school. So it was a great display for us to say and you know my kids don't get cut any slack on passing state tests, the number of credits that they need they still had to have 22, even though that's a minimum. Many of the kids had 24 or 26. Everybody knew that they had to do what the requirements were in order to graduate.

Mrs. Calvert also described for me the type of environment FHS provided students. It was one of high expectations and not one most students were accustomed to.

I can tell you more than once I had kids who would say, "You know I have never passed a portion of TAKS". And I would say well get ready you're going to. And they would look at me like are you sure? Well they would pass one, and they would pass two, and then three and four. So it was just you didn't really have a choice. You were gonna be swept along in the success and people caring about you and making sure that you were taken care of. We had a lot of visitors at my campus and sometimes some of my toughest kids would be visiting in the classrooms. I'd say does anyone want to say anything to our visitors. Sometimes my toughest ones would say, "We are like a family." The teachers here will not let you fail; they will come and find you, you will do, you know you'll do your work. They saw us, I think, as a huge support for them, but also as a family in many ways, and some of my kids didn't really have a family.

Mrs. Calvert further spoke of Miguel and her relationship with him.

I felt like I was probably a little hard on him, but I cared about him. It's kind of like your own kid you know. I don't care for anyone in the world like I care for my own kids, but I was tough on my kids so maybe that means that I was able to balance the support and the warmth because I really liked him. So maybe that showed, but sometimes I would think, "Oh you know, I'm really being tough on him", but I had really high expectations for him. I didn't see any reason why he couldn't be what I believed he could be.

As I have gone back and reviewed Mrs. Calvert's interview, I am grateful for the example she has set for educators who work with students similar to Miguel. I am also

deeply content to know Miguel finally received that small group instruction he longed for all those years past. In a way I felt like what Mrs. Calvert did for Miguel she also did to every one of us-children of color. Mrs. Calvert was able to look beyond Miguel's economic status and language barrier and simply see a young man who needed an opportunity to learn. Miguel said Mrs. Calvert changed his life forever. That is a testament to the person Mrs. Calvert is and the educator she was for students.

A Reflection of the Past and Hope for the Future

I asked Miguel to reflect on his past experiences for me. Specifically, I inquired about his final thoughts regarding his teachers before FHS.

They need to understand that when there is someone like me, my situation, like what I had. They need to understand, like man, whoa you know it's a different world for them. You need to, you need to pay, not pay more attention to them, but at least make them feel like they are important. You know, cause they made me feel not important. Maybe just draw on paper, draw happy faces, but if now you know I would tell them you know to pay attention to those kinds of people. Help them cause it's not easy for them; it's really hard for them. You might see that it's not going to be easy for them, but that's because you know how it is, you know English, you know everything. They come blank. It's like starting a new story for them; it's like a new life. But, you know just focus on them, and stay with them after-school. I mean once in a while you know. That wouldn't hurt them. Stay with them after-school, give them special classes or something you know cause they didn't give me no special classes for me until I got to Freedom. Then they

realized that I had a little problem about reading, and how I read, and that I never know what I read. You know, examine how they are, you know so they can know them. Okay, this is a new person we have to study him, how they are, how they understand this, what they don't understand, what are they good at and what they are good not, and sit with them on what they are bad at. You know? That's what I was saying.

My next inquiry focused on Miguel's parents and what Miguel believed were the reasons his parents risked his personal safety and their legal status to bring him to the United States.

They wanted the best for me, and they knew that or what they saw how other kids were growing up to be in a better person. There's a lot of opportunities over here, a lot of jobs, a lot of important positions that you can be in. You could be getting good money. You wouldn't be suffering for a little plate every night. Over there it's a lil' plate. They serve you food like twice a day. Over here you can eat whatever you want. There's a lot of stuff that you can do now. What they suffered they don't wanted me to suffer so that's why they brought me over here. Like my Dad he was going to each house, aunts, uncles, whatever just to get food every day cause there was nothing. He got raised with no mother or dad. You know, and as they were over here they don't want me to be going house to house to house and maybe something will happen to me cause I was always in the streets and you know as Mexico is really dangerous. They knew that I was gonna be a

better person and I was gonna graduate from high school, have a good education, and be respectful. Basically like be respectful to everybody.

I furthered asked Miguel about life after high school and his plans now. He responded fervently.

Once I graduated from high school, once I got my diploma, everything, I was like I'm going to college. I'm a try to do, become somebody, or I'm a work for the best and have a good position knowing that now I know my English. I would become a better person like now; I know that I'm a better person because I went through all that. I've gone through a lot and I passed. I passed through those brick walls saying, "Hey, I can do this!" I'm still hoping. I wanna go! I wanna go!

Miguel went on to further speak about doors being opened to him now because he knows English. I pursued Miguel's thoughts about his American dream and what that meant to him.

My American dream is like for me it's not suffering for nothing. Have everything in place, having everything in order; not be like man I gotta pay this, man I gotta do that. My American dream is just to be home, work, and not over think about stuff like, like I want my sons, my future kids to be like not suffer for what I suffer. Like they gotta go to work cause I don't have money to buy them what they need. I want them to be like, they're gonna have a limit like what they want, but like I said I'm not gonna spoil them. But yeah like have money, money. That's what it is. Have money to give them, and give them a good education.

I then asked Miguel what he felt like he needed to do to accomplish his American dream. He quickly responded.

Go to college. I have to go to college so I can reach it and become who I want to be. I still have my age, I still, I still have a long way to go.

I asked Miguel to tell me the one thing or things he wanted to make sure I understood about him today.

The person that who I am now, like, like I want everybody to know like I'm a better person. I'm not the same anymore. I'm not the same one. I'm not the same one who came to this country, this United States. How do you say? I'm way different. I have different thoughts. I think different now, like, like I think of doing things a different way. I have a lot of things like I can solve things now. I'm more of a responsible person. Like Freedom High School made me a responsible person cause I can defend myself now. If somebody would tell me something I can defend myself. I would never let myself be held back like that.

I quickly asked, "So that scared little boy that came isn't scared anymore?" to which Miguel immediately answered.

Nah. He's way gone.

Miguel endured 13 years of public school before finally reaching his goal of obtaining a high school diploma. Miguel left the public school system without being able to maintain his native language, Spanish, without money or financial aid assistance to pursue higher education, and without a valid driver's license or photo identification card that is required to enlist in the United States' military. Today Miguel is left holding onto

a minimal high school diploma with the anticipation that he can achieve more than anyone has thought possible for him.

I know the struggles that continue to lie ahead for Miguel. Earning a high school diploma was a step in the right direction, but I know that alone cannot eliminate the hardships he will continue to encounter. I left high school with high hopes for a university experience that would spell inner-freedom for me against racism and categorization. It did not at all eliminate any ill thoughts I had about teachers and education. Although I could speak Spanish fluently, I did not have an “accent” that would group me with other Hispanics. Although I have very typical Hispanic features such as brown skin, dark brown hair, and brown eyes, I did not “sound” like other Hispanics. By the latter years of my undergraduate experience I realized I am the person I believe myself to be and not the person others normalized me to be. Miguel will also have to learn to make his way through this White America. I asked Miguel how he viewed himself and his nationality. I specifically asked him if he saw himself as Mexican or American. Miguel answered back and said, “*I’m a Texan!*” I couldn’t help but laugh at his response because that is the world in which I sit in. I cannot claim to be Mexican because I was not born or raised in Mexico. If I claim to be Mexican-American, that phrase is meaningless to people that sit on both sides of the border. If I answer and say Latino, then people assume I am from a Latin American country which is not true. If I answer Hispanic, then this shadows my heritage and culture by placing me into a sea of lost identity. To say that I am Texan, a *Tejana*, means I hold English and Spanish in the same hand; I embrace my Mexican heritage and American customs in the same breath.

When I look at Miguel there is nothing that stands out to me to say this young man is Mexican. He dresses like a typical American young person as seen in movies and on television. His smile is infectious, and his demeanor is kind. The ideas and promises of an American dream are very appealing from a far away land. It is when one looks more closely do they realize the American dream is often lost in its translation.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Latina/o immigrant youth are entering the United States at rates faster than any other group. Thus, their impact on public school education is not only mounting, but also posing significant challenges to both communities and local education agencies to find meaningful way to connect with these students to ensure their academic success. The author's intent of this study was to present a life narrative piece that told the story of one unauthorized immigrant youth's experiences from his point of entry to the United States to finally reaching high school graduation. More specifically, I sought to unfold the relationship between one unauthorized immigrant student and the socialized structures he perceived to be at play during his public school experience. This deeper purpose was to understand Miguel's story by allowing him to share his lived experiences with me and to realize the school's role in shaping or thwarting his academic success. In the end Miguel's story stirred an emotional response within me as I critically reflected on his words and reconnected with my past. This study was guided by the following research question: What are the academic experiences of one unauthorized Latino immigrant student as traversed within the socialized structures of a public school system?

This chapter is divided into four sections: a summary of the study, summary of findings, implications of this study noted in two conclusions, recommendations for future research, and a final reflection piece from the researcher.

Summary of the Study

A qualitative approach to this study through the format of a life narrative was the most appropriate conduit to understanding Miguel's perceptions of his experiences in public school. Racial Opportunity Cost (ROC) provided a unified structure by which to present Miguel's life story. By framing this study in ROC, it allowed the researcher in this study to go beyond the scope of the ideas of blatant racism and further examine the racialized structures in public school settings that Latina/o immigrant children are forced to contend with on an on-going basis. The use of ROC in this study provided the means to examine the school's role in contributing towards or thwarting Miguel's academic success.

Data for this study were collected primarily through one-on-one interviews with Miguel. Secondary interviews were conducted with Miguel's parents, Soñia and Fernan, and with Miguel's high school principal, Mrs. Calvert. The interviews with Miguel were conducted predominantly in English, the language he chose to speak to me, and were conducted in my home as Miguel opted for this. The interview with Soñia and Fernan was conducted in Spanish and held in a location of their choice, their home. Mrs. Calvert invited me to meet her at her work, an intermediate campus in Suburban ISD. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow the participants to share their stories with me while at the same time allowing for the researcher to probe for further information and/or clarity. The participants all signed a statement agreeing to participate in the study on their own accord and without compensation. All the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and translated as needed by two outside third

parties. The participants were given an opportunity to review their transcriptions for member checking although Miguel and his parents declined to do so. Mrs. Calvert did not respond to a request for her to review her interview transcript.

In addition to the interviews, Miguel provided the researcher with school records that spanned from third grade to graduation. The researcher used this data to help Miguel and his parents to recall classes, specific events, or information each of them deemed important. The data were reviewed, read, and continuously re-read by the researcher and analyzed through critically reflective analysis (CRA). This approach required the researcher to rely primarily on intuition and judgment to portray Miguel's story rather than technical methods of categorization. The approach of CRA also allowed for the idea that data collection and analysis are equally important as the data itself. The method of using CRA allowed the researcher to reflect upon Miguel's lived experiences while simultaneously making connections to her own experiences.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were presented in vignettes, short, impressionistic stories as told by Miguel and constructed through the researcher's analysis and knowledge of his story. This study was guided by the researcher's purpose which was to understand Miguel's academic experiences as negotiated within the socialized structures of a public schoolhouse and framed in the theory of Racial Opportunity Cost. Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) explained the four assertions in which this theory is based.

1. The institutional level has the most significant impact on the achievement of students of color, although this influence is purposefully difficult to see.

2. Race continues to play a primary role in students' experiences, but other identities matter too.
3. Factors at the student, family, and cultural level influence students' success, but also misdirect attention from the school's role in their experiences.
4. Students of color are affected by and must navigate these institutional level factors, especially if they desire to achieve academic success. (p. 466)

In their discussion of the ROC cycle, Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) explained Assertion 1 and how “students of color learn they must follow a White-normed script that outlines expectations for speech, dress, and behavior in order to be seen” (p. 468). The emphasis for students of color becomes their presentation, and not their academic ability, as assessed by their peers and the adults in the schoolhouse to be accepted as “*smart and capable*” (Venzant Chambers et al., 2014, p. 468).

Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) emphasized the role of race in Assertion 2. In discussing the role race continues to play in students' experiences, Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) wrote there exists an “important interplay of race with class, gender, ethnicity, and other facets of identity” (p. 469). The intersectionality of these elements colliding for students of color has significant impact on the experiences of Latina/o students according to Venzant Chambers et al. (2014).

Assertion 3 speaks to the influences family, community, and culture has on students of color. Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) added these influences have significant impact on student achievement, yet these factors do not negate the role the

schoolhouse and its personnel have in thwarting or contributing to students' academic success.

Assertion 4 as described by Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) speaks to how students of color learn to navigate "White-normed spaces" in order to achieve academic success (p. 471). The issues of acculturation and socialization and the notion of "acting White" are put forth as part of this discussion. For Latina/o students, paramount in this assertion is their ability to maneuver the English language.

School Factors

Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) explained the ROC cycle and began with school factors at the institutional level. School factors "consist of *climate factors, structural factors, engagement factors, and relational factors*" (p. 472). Examining school factors at the institutional level helped the researcher to understand what the school's message to the subject was and to critically reflect on Miguel's experiences in public school.

Climate Factors

Climate factors are directly linked to school culture (Venzant Chambers et al., 2014). There was a clear message given to Miguel as he entered and experienced public school and that was English was paramount. Miguel's inability to master the English language proficiently in elementary school not only worked against him academically, but it also served to make him feel inferior socially. Pascopella (2011) explained how the number of children who spoke another language other than English was greatly increasing in the United States. Clearly Miguel had a need for special language support. The school's response to Miguel was to place him in a bilingual classroom. Although

Miguel's class placement should have provided him with the language support he needed, Miguel's story tells of how he was not only separated from other students, but also made to feel rejected by adults who had a professional obligation, at a minimum, to teach him English. Marx and Larson (2012) described how Latinas/os throughout decades have shared "a long history of seeking to have their educational needs met in a system that has often rejected them" (p. 261). Miguel explained why he believed he was rejected by his elementary teacher.

Because she probably thought I couldn't do what her kids could do, speak English.

Soñia also spoke of how Miguel was set aside and not taught properly. Soñia further discussed how Miguel was blamed for things he did not do or know in class. Soñia painfully shared how Ms. Perez has long left emotional scarring on her as a mother and how she refused for Ms. Perez to cause harm to her younger son.

The language barrier proved to be an obstacle early on for Miguel both physically and emotionally. Miguel would later go on to describe himself as *mudo*, a mute, as he could not communicate his basic needs such as asking permission to go to the restroom or ask for a fork in the cafeteria to school personnel. The notion Miguel would render himself as physically challenged, mute, speaks volumes to the school climate Miguel encountered in public school: English was supreme. Everyday Miguel was not able to speak English fluently was another day he was made to feel less than and be rejected by both his teachers and classmates.

Structural Factors

Structural factors address both the hidden curriculum constructs of the schoolhouse and the bilingual program in which Miguel was a part of in Suburban ISD. A second message experienced by Miguel from the institutional level is that Spanish was not important. Miguel described how even when his bilingual teachers could and should have spoken Spanish to him as a newcomer they did not. Not only did his teachers withhold Spanish from Miguel, the children in his bilingual classes would often only speak English even though they were all classified as limited English proficient students. Simply stated, the structure of the program was subtractive bilingualism. The structure of the bilingual program Miguel was a part of was not designed to help Miguel achieve English fluency. Rather, the program set Miguel further behind academically as he was set aside during language instruction, was only included in whole group instruction for math, and his teachers failed to advance the limited academic Spanish Miguel arrived with from Mexico.

Miguel later developed the notion of how valuable English was, as this became his weapon of self-defense. Although Portales (2005) explained as Latina/os acquire English literacy skills this should not be misunderstood to mean Spanish is not as worthy or valuable as English (p. 190). However, Miguel understood English was his was to acceptance, both by his peers and adults, in the schoolhouse.

Miguel's acquisition of English slowly created an unintentional divide in his home. Soñia and Fernan were left with a great sense of loss as they could no longer understand what Miguel and his brothers were discussing at home as the boys were

acquiring the English language. Soñia had explained English fluency is what they had hoped for Miguel, but she was made to feel excluded from Miguel when she could no longer understand what he was saying.

To reiterate the literature, Faltis and Hudelson (1998) asserted researchers in countless studies have demonstrated that non-English speaking students, especially those in and early on in special language classrooms, prefer to use English rather than their native language. Faltis and Hudelson (1998) attributed this phenomenon to the realization that educators, particularly those in transitional bilingual classrooms, place little value on Spanish and assert English is the language of academic achievement.

Miguel's schools were structured to support and encourage the English language although he was afforded the opportunity to be in bilingual classrooms. Miguel's challenges in the public school system centered upon his ability to not speak English fluently upon arrival in Texas and his parents' lack of knowledge of the public school system. It would be years before Miguel could describe himself as a fluent English speaker. Miguel walked the halls of Texas public schools lifeless in a sense as he could not communicate orally what his needs or wants were. Miguel relied on gestures, both on his part and on the adults around him, to seek answers to his questions and for directions. Miguel spoke of how he would see other children take actions, such as lining up for recess or other transition points, and he would blindly follow. Miguel described himself as being *mudo*, a mute, having the inability to speak, when in fact he was not at all mute. Initially Miguel could only speak in Spanish and received little support from his bilingual teachers and peers to communicate with him. Portales (2005) plainly stated

how the disabling treatment of ESL students will have negative effects on American society through the twenty-first century. Today Miguel experiences lack of fluency in his ability to communicate effectively in both English and Spanish.

Structurally the schools in which Miguel was enrolled in did not support Spanish-speaking parents. From the moment Soñia entered Miguel's first school in Suburban ISD, she could not communicate directly with school personnel. Soñia relied on family members to translate for her during the enrollment process. Soñia spoke of how she would attend school functions and sit at the back hoping to not draw attention to herself. Soñia explained how school functions were all in English, and she could not understand what was being said. Soñia and Fernan relied on a niece, a child like Miguel, to help him with his homework, as they could not understand all the material being sent home in English from his Spanish-speaking teachers. Soñia would later come to rely on Miguel and his older brother, Mateo, as well as trusted adults such as myself to help her communicate with school personnel and translate documents as the school years passed. Although it was never explicitly stated or put in writing, one's ability to speak English proficiently was part of the hidden curriculum and structural factors at the schools in which Miguel attended.

Engagement Factors

The *engagement factor*, or rather the lack of engagement Miguel experienced in school signaled to him that he was not important to his teachers. Miguel's teachers failed to meaningfully engage him in a sense of belonging and community. Miguel's early elementary teachers opted to separate Miguel from the other students while they taught

and presented lessons to the other children in both English and Spanish. Miguel spoke of how so often he was initially placed by himself to draw, and this separation continued when he was viewed as a behavior problem. Miguel openly discussed how he has always struggled with reading and comprehension. No one had ever mentioned to Soñia and Fernan that Miguel could have possibly had a learning disability in reading. This the researcher finds interesting as the literature shows ELLs as continuously being overrepresented in special education (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Instead, Miguel was forced to contend with being set apart from other students and face the consequences of failing two grade levels in elementary school. Additionally, Miguel spoke of how his teachers placed him apart maybe because they did not believe he could do the work as the other students could. Rodriguez et al. (2009) addressed in their research how teacher expectations influence the learning and academic success of ELLs. Miguel had little academic expectations placed over him when he was repeatedly allow to draw in class. Nonetheless, Miguel was left to fend for himself in completing daily and homework assignments in English and failed miserably along the way. This also left Soñia and Fernan with a great sense of helplessness, as they knew they lacked both the language and academic skills to help Miguel.

Miguel spoke of how he felt isolated from other students and was lonely. Miguel also shared with me what he believed his teachers thought of him.

They would see me like a loser, basically. They would always make fun of me. I was always like on the side. Like those in every class that I was in they never

talked to me. I always wanted to talk to people, but they never wanted to talk to me.

The most telling piece of Miguel's story that speaks to his sense of not belonging in school was the bullying he withstood from White students calling him "Dumbo!" Miguel painfully spoke of the name-calling and harassment he experienced.

They would call me big hair boy, orejón, blah, blah, blah. You know that kind of stuff. Dumbo, they would say Dumbo, Dumbo, Dumbo. I didn't know what Dumbo is and when White people started hearing that man, everyone would call me Dumbo in the school. You know? They would be like, "Hey there goes the Dumbo dude." and I was just walking around with my head down.

The actions of the students described by Miguel and the lack of action taken by Miguel's teachers to protect him against this kind of behavior further deepened his sense of not belonging in school. Miguel's trajectory for academic success was on a path for failure as his teachers failed to engage him academically, socially, and emotionally throughout his years in public school up to ninth grade.

Relational Factors

The *relational factor* is truly the most compelling piece in Miguel's story as he emotionally recalled the harassment and bullying he suffered at the hands of White students and his teachers failed to develop professional and meaningful relationships with him. Miguel was taunted and made fun of by students calling him Dumbo, a Disney character that Miguel did not even know at the time. Miguel could not be categorized with other Hispanic students in his school. As a newcomer Miguel lacked American

social skills and English proficiency. Miguel also was struggling with the social-emotional change from leaving Mexico and coming to the United States to live with his parents once again. His parents, who trusted the public school system to teach him, sent Miguel to school, and yet the betrayal he felt from teachers not defending him has long lasted with Miguel.

Venzant Chambers and Huggins (2014) discussed organizational culture and how individual exchanges manifest the overall organization's structure.

The essence of an organization's culture exists not only at macrocosmic level through organizational structures but also microcosmically in the way those organizational structures are manifested in individual exchanges and the interpretations of those individual exchanges. (p. 192)

The individual actions of Miguel's teacher revealed the organizational structure of his schools. Miguel was viewed as less than as denoted in the way he was treated by school personnel and made to feel so unimportant. Miguel's teachers failed to establish a professional relationship with him and his parents.

Miguel spoke of how Ms. Sanchez isolated him by putting him to the side to draw while she taught the other students in his class. Miguel used the word "evil" to describe the actions of Ms. Sanchez and "mean" to describe Ms. Perez as she constantly blamed him, scolded him, and made him to feel ashamed in front of the other students in his class.

I only know the evil teachers. They were mean to me. They put me to the side, and one of them was Mrs. Sanchez. She would always put me to the side, and she

wouldn't sit down with me and teach me how to do in class. I knew myself that I couldn't. When I read something I couldn't, I couldn't put it in my head. I would just forget. I was just reading and reading and not remember what I read and that was my problem about that. So that's why I was bad in reading, and I had another teacher, Mrs. Perez. She was really mean. You know sometimes I would be like, "Hey Mrs. Mrs. Mrs." I was like raising my hand first, and she would never pick me.

Miguel's teachers throughout his elementary and intermediate school years failed to build a professional teacher-student relationship with Miguel. Miguel's story was unique and his social experiences were different from the other children around him though none of Miguel's teachers had considered this. Evidently Miguel's teachers lacked culturally proficient pedagogy as described by Lindsey et al. (2005) as no adult in the schoolhouse made an attempt to reach out to Miguel. Miguel went on to say he was basically a "piece of trash" being thrown in the trashcan by his high school teachers and counselor. Miguel described how no one even knew his name in the office, and he also did not know any of the campus administrators or school counselors.

The *school factors* as told by Miguel's story were all working against him. Miguel lacked English proficiency and could not fully be acclimated into the school culture. His parents were also disconnected from school because of their lack of the English language. The schools in which Miguel attended did not help foster an environment of inclusion for Soñia and Fernan, and their lack of knowledge of American school culture worked against them to engage meaningfully in Miguel's learning.

Miguel's teachers failed to engage him in the learning process and develop appropriate student-teacher relationships with him. These *school factors* were on a collision course with mediating variables at play in Miguel's life.

Mediating Variables

The ROC Cycle as presented by Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) transitions from the institutional level to the individual level where *intersectional factors* and *capacity factors* affect school factors (p. 472-473). Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) labeled this transition as *mediating variables*.

Intersectional Factors

Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) described *intersectional factors* to include “issues other than race that influence students’ experiences in school, such as gender, ethnicity, immigration status and/or socioeconomic states” (p. 472-473). Two *intersectional factors* at play, Miguel's unauthorized immigrant status as well as the low socio-economic state of his parents compounded by Soñia's and Fernan's lack of education, would propel Miguel into a pattern of academic failure. Miguel never discussed the impact of his undocumented immigration status in detail in the interviews, but it was an *intersectional factor* at play both outside and inside the schoolhouse. However, it was overtly implied by Soñia that she felt as though she had no rights to complain to any school personnel about the ill treatment Miguel was receiving in school when she spoke these words.

Lo que pasa es que uno no está informado maestra. No está uno informado.

Piensa que todo en esa tiempo yo pensé lo que decian ellas eso era.

(What happens is that no one is informed teacher. No one is informed. I thought at that time that whatever they said was how it was.)

Walker et al. (2011) addressed this issue as they discussed role theory. Soñia did not feel it was her place to question what Miguel's teachers were saying to her about his behavior and academic achievement. Soñia neither realized she had a right to do so. Soñia discussed how she would attend a few school functions and sit at the back hoping to not draw any attention to herself. This is a very common act by undocumented immigrants. Soñia and Fernan never understood they had a right to question not only the actions of Miguel's teachers, but also the school leaders' decisions to retain him in both second and fifth grade. When school district personnel made the decision to send Miguel to the alternative high school, Freedom, Soñia neither understood the structure of this school and why Miguel was being sent there. Again, Soñia did not ask questions and just accepted what was told to her. Soñia's responses appear to be a culmination of fear, ignorance, and respect.

Another *intersectional factor* at play outside the schoolhouse was the fact Soñia and Fernan were poor and were also poorly educated in Mexico. Their lack of English proficiency was a factor at play used against them in the school system. This is aligned to the research previously presented in which Gándara (2010) stated, "There is no better predictor of how well children will fare in school than parents' education attainment" (p. 26). Gándara (2010) explained the impact not having a high school diploma for their children. "It is difficult for parents to impart to their children experiences and knowledge

that they do not have” (Gándara, 2010, p. 26). Soñia and Fernan’s lack of experience with the Texas public school system was an obstacle that would not be easily overcome.

Capacity Factors

Capacity factors take into account the individual’s resiliency as well as factors that thwart or lend themselves towards student success (Venzant Chambers et al., 2014). Unmistakably factors were at play to hinder Miguel’s success in school. First, the poor relationships Miguel’s teacher exerted over him were building capacity for failure. Secondly, the “Sit, Listen, Try, Fail, Repeat” academic pattern Miguel fell into as his school years passed him by also built great aptitude for academic failure. Miguel had to repeat second grade. Then, Miguel was forced to repeat fifth grade because of failing reading scores on his TAKS test. Again, not one educational professional had considered that Miguel might have had a reading problem. Soñia, out of personal fear of drawing attention to Miguel, accepted what the school system told her. All the while Miguel maintained his drive to acquire English proficiency and defy the odds so greatly stacked against him. Miguel gained new words in English with each passing year. In Miguel’s opinion, this was a much needed skill to be able to defend himself and gain the respect of other’s around him. The transition from elementary to junior high school brought about a different kind of change in Miguel. By the time Miguel reached the end of eighth grade, he was a fluent English speaker. Language alone could not carry Miguel through the next hurdle he was about to encounter, being removed from high school.

Miguel found himself at the crossroad of dropping out of school when he landed in ninth grade as a 17 year-old freshman. Miguel was called into the counselor’s office

and told that based on his age and lack of academic achievement the only option he had was being removed from public school. At this point Miguel's only option was dropping out of high school. Miguel was at the verge of becoming a statistic as described by Marx and Larson (2012) when they explained Latina/o students are not only more likely to drop out of school, but also test lower in core subjects when compared to their White peers. At this point resiliency, Miguel's greatest *capacity factor*, came into play for him.

Despite great odds against Miguel related to language and other issues, his tenacity and unwillingness to quit helped see him through the next phase of his journey. Miguel was called a second time into the counselor's office where he was told of an alternative high school that he could attend. Miguel admitted that even after discussing this school with the counselor, he did not fully understand what FHS was about. Miguel was determined to succeed when many students would have failed and given up. Miguel was soon transferred to FHS where someone, an adult, actually knew his name, spoke to him on daily basis, and begin to pave the way for him to reach high school graduation. Miguel attributes his academic success to one person, Mrs. Calvert, the principal. Mrs. Calvert was the voice Miguel needed that could explain to him how the high school system worked and how the goal was for Miguel to earn credits to obtain a high school diploma. Mrs. Calvert held high expectations for Miguel, reached out to Miguel's parents to make sure Miguel was attending school every day and on time, and she was able to help Miguel believe he had it in him to reach high school graduation. Miguel was quick to point out the first "A" on his transcript, and it occurred at FHS. Miguel found his niche in education when the teachers taught Miguel in small group, worked with him

to ensure his understanding and learning of the material, and created an atmosphere of *familismo* for him. Miguel felt a deep sense of wanting to work hard to make Mrs. Calvert and all of his teachers proud when he became emotionally entwined with them. Miguel was filled with personal drive to complete high school and earn a diploma.

Today Miguel and his parents are very proud of his accomplishment to graduate high school and his ability to speak English more fluently than ever before. However, in examining Miguel's academic success, the data revealed Miguel's achievement came at a price to him. This price is what Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) describe as *racial opportunity costs*.

Racial Opportunity Costs

Venzant Chambers et al. (2014) clearly defined these costs and wrote the following description.

Finally, the interplay of the school factors with the mediating variables ultimately influences the individual student and the racial opportunity cost he or she incurs; that is, how costly it is for African American and Latina/o students to pursue academic success in the racialized, White-normed context of their school environment. (p. 473)

The *racial opportunity costs* to Miguel were significant in terms of community and psychosocial. Miguel underwent a sense of loss of community throughout his public school experience. Miguel was left to fend for himself in almost every aspect of schooling with each passing year and as he matured.

Language

The most notable loss of community is language. Although learning English was a goal Fernan spoke of for Miguel, both Soñia and Fernan confessed how it was uncomfortable for them to hear their children only speak English and not be able to understand what the boys were speaking about. It was obvious in the way in which Soñia spoke of this based on her facial expressions she was less than enthusiastic about this change in their family. Nonetheless, Miguel spoke zealously about his growing ability to speak English with each passing year. Learning English meant Miguel was able to defend himself, he was able to make friends outside the bilingual classroom, and it also meant for him his teachers treated him better in intermediate and junior high school. Miguel also easily recognized he lost his ability to speak Spanish in public school. Miguel and his older brother began speaking only English to one another and would use Spanish when it was necessary. Miguel's younger brothers have also embraced an English only relationship amongst themselves at home.

Another way language divided Miguel from his parents was related to schooling and disseminated information. Miguel spoke of how his parents could not understand letters that were coming home or even his report card. As Miguel and I looked over his school records he was quick to point out his parents could not understand what "GEO" meant. This acronym referenced World Geography on Miguel's report card. When Miguel spoke of the letter he received about attending Freedom HS, he jokingly said his Mom probably thought it was a letter about a field trip. A greater divide in Miguel's home was created each year as Miguel continued to acquire English literacy each school

year. Miguel was easily able to hide letters sent home, as his parents did not know to expect them. Miguel was also trapped in a system where he could not sufficiently explain in Spanish to his parents information he needed them to understand as Miguel continuously lost his Spanish speaking fluency.

Homework proved to be the greatest challenge for Miguel in terms of language loss. As Miguel said, he was barely learning how to read in Spanish when he left Mexico and then his teachers put English and big words in Spanish in front of him when he arrived in Texas. Soñia and Fernan could not help Miguel with any of the English homework. Miguel lacked the necessary skills in Spanish to translate or explain to his parents what the homework expectations were.

Clothing

Another notable loss of community came in a less obvious way, clothing. Miguel reached a point where he could buy the types and name brands of clothes he wanted to wear. Miguel was proud of his accomplishment to buy his own clothing because this meant he became more fashionable and less noticeable to other students around him. Even today there is nothing noticeable about Miguel's dress or style that would indicate he is any different from any other young American adult.

Identity

There are two significant aspects in which Miguel spoke of race inadvertently. The first time and the one I found to be most gripping was when Miguel spoke of his fear in going to FHS and leaving ABC HS.

I was really nervous cause it's a new, it's another new beginning. I was afraid of that. I was like man what if they don't like me. What if they start bullying me again cause I already had everything under control at my old school. I had good friends and everything cause I had my, my English was better. I had White friends and everything.

Miguel used the phrase, "I had White friends and everything." Miguel had reached a point in high school where he believed having White friends was not only significant, but also like the "currency of the realm" as Portales (2005) described the English language. Miguel had felt he had finally arrived in high school as he had two elements under control, his English speaking ability and having White friends.

The second aspect of race that Miguel addressed was when he identified himself as being a *Texan*, not Mexican and not American. Miguel no longer sees himself as a Mexican national as he truly is legally. Miguel has been far removed from a Mexican society and spoke of how he would not only know where to go, but he would not even know how to get around the place he once called home. Miguel neither identified himself as American as this would denote being White American.

Miguel developed the ability to adjust to his social environment, a *psychosocial cost*, in terms of language, clothing, and overall mannerisms throughout his public school experiences. Miguel's assimilation into English and American culture was made complete in his mind when he earned his high school diploma.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Miguel's story together with the current literature helped shape the conclusions of this study that follow in this next section. This study led the researcher to two conclusions: First, Latina/o immigrant youth require social-emotional support as they transition from their home country to a public school setting. Secondly, well-prepared and trained teachers are warranted to ensure the academic success of Latina/o immigrant youth.

Implication One

Latina/o immigrant youth require social-emotional support as they transition from their home country to a public school setting. Miguel entered the United States at a vulnerable and tender age. As a young boy Miguel did not have the maturity or communication skills to speak up and be heard. It was incumbent upon the professional staff at his school to notice him and to see him for who he was and not just as another economically-disadvantaged child who could not speak English. Again, the purpose of this study was formulated on one question: What are the academic experiences of one undocumented immigrant student as traversed within the socialized structures of a public schoolhouse? As Miguel unfolded his story it was evident through the experiences he shared he needed emotional-social support as he transitioned from Mexico into a public school setting. First, Miguel was often left on his own to maneuver the English language and ask for things he needed outside the classroom. Miguel relied on non-verbal gestures to have his needs met, and yet when these gestures were not

understood or were ignored, Miguel took matters in his own hands by getting up and going to the restroom without permission.

Secondly, Miguel suffered harassment and bullying at the hands of children who could not speak Spanish to Miguel and to whom Miguel could not defend himself against in English. This harassment has long lasted with Miguel as evident in his emotional retelling of his experiences. Miguel vividly recalled the boys who harassed him and the words and phrases they called out to him in the hallways, on the playground, at lunchtime, and even in the restroom. Miguel's recount of this traumatizing time in his childhood places the blame not only on the children who made fun of him, but also on his teachers and other adults at school who failed to protect him socially and emotionally.

Thirdly, the people who were suppose to care for and nurture Miguel in a public school setting became his adversaries. Miguel's bilingual teachers in elementary school choose to ignore him by placing him apart and in corners away from the other children. Miguel was given coloring sheets and drawing paper instead of the attention and care he so deserved. Miguel's bilingual teachers would use English against him as they fostered English only environments in the classroom and failed to work with Miguel with language development in meaningful ways. These actions against Miguel led him to describe himself as *mudo*, a mute. Miguel was then expected to complete daily tasks, homework assignments, and tests in English. Miguel's grades suffered. Other bilingual children, who would only speak English to him although they had the ability to speak Spanish, ostracized him in more ways. Miguel was given an English Reading TAKS test

that he failed in his fifth year in public school in Texas. Miguel went on to summer school and failed the test again. Miguel was then required to repeat fifth grade and thus was a 12 year-old student in a classroom full of 10 and 11 year-olds.

Implication Two

Well-prepared and trained teachers are warranted to ensure the academic success of Latina/o immigrant youth. Miguel's story highlighted critical issues occurring in the public school system and that is ill-prepared teachers working with ELLs and immigrant youth. Miguel's experiences in a bilingual classroom are not isolated events only occurring in Suburban ISD. Portales (2005) highlighted the spiritless performances of bilingual programs.

Here and there, where well-prepared teachers believe in teaching two languages, good bilingual programs exist, mainly because dedicated instructors and some good school systems have had the true learning interests and welfare of their students at heart. But most bilingual programs throughout the United States now have records of five, ten, twenty, or more years of lack luster performances. In the case of bilingual education, universities and colleges too, have not sufficiently known how to train and how to educate teachers well enough so that they can competently instruct students bilingually, that is successfully in two languages. (p. 192)

Miguel suffered 10 years in public school before an educator recognized his academic needs and made a concerted effort to reach out to him. By the time Miguel reached Freedom High School, his records indicated he had failing grades and test scores all

throughout his public school experience. Remarkably, Miguel was able to overcome his academic deficits and achieve high school graduation.

Miguel's story also sheds emphasis to the idea that he was a LEP student all day everyday while attending school. It is first expected Miguel's elementary teachers would have had both the necessary and professional training to work with a new comer at Miguel's young age. Secondly, it is anticipated that intermediate and secondary teachers would also have the crucial pedagogy training and be able to demonstrate competency in working with ELLs. The next element in culturally proficient pedagogy training should also be extended to paraprofessional support staff who work in schools were immigrant students and ELLs are enrolled. Miguel's parents were hesitant to approach school personnel not only because of their ignorance, but also because they were not made to not feel welcome in Miguel's schools on one very simple term, language. Miguel's parents could not speak English, and the school staff was very limited in speaking Spanish to them. Soñia described how she would attend school events and sit in the corner hoping to not be seen because she could not speak English and none of the information was offered to her in Spanish.

To recap the findings presented by Marx and Larson (2012), Latinas/os throughout decades have shared "a long history of seeking to have their educational needs met in a system that has often rejected them" (p. 261). Miguel's parents entrusted the staff at his schools to care for and teach him appropriately. Although Miguel was made to feel unimportant at school, his parents pushed him to fulfill their dreams for him to become educated and learn English. As a child Miguel explicitly understood he was

rejected by his teachers. This dismissal was perpetrated all throughout Miguel's experiences in public school until he finally met Mrs. Calvert, his principal at Freedom High School.

Jensen (2013) emphasized the influence teachers have on students. Specifically addressing ELLs in the classroom, Marshall (2002) explained how teachers deal with their discomforts of ELLs and the language barrier between themselves and students greatly affects the learning outcomes of ELLs. It is expected bilingual teachers have both the pedagogical and professional training needed to work with students acquiring a second language, particularly Latina/o immigrant youth. However, Miguel's account of his experiences in a bilingual classroom lead to the conclusion his teachers were ill-prepared to not only receive him, but also to teach him. Thomas and Collier (1997) connected the academic failure of ELLs to what occurred instructionally in the classroom by stating many ELLs are not provided with "consistent cognitive development in students' first language" (p. 15). Miguel spoke to this very point when he said he was barely learning how to read in Spanish when he left Mexico and that his first teacher was expecting him to now read in English when she in fact had not offered meaningful language support in Spanish first and then English. This approach to teaching and learning would soon propel Miguel into a pattern of failure and have lifelong affects not only on his language development, but his social-emotional growth as well.

Miguel was made to feel inferior in his classrooms first by his teachers and then secondly by other students who would only address him in English. It seems as though

Miguel's teachers were truly the inferior ones in the classroom as their only recourse with Miguel was to make him feel ashamed he could not speak English fluently. Portales (2005) said it best when he wrote, "Teaching bilingual education, it should by now be very clear, is a demanding proposition. It requires skill, very good training, commitment, and competence in speaking two languages easily and comfortably or without hesitancy" (p. 193). It is also apparent that Miguel's bilingual teachers were not only poorly trained, but incompetent as well. This trajectory of failure followed Miguel throughout his public school experience until he met Mrs. Calvert.

Mrs. Calvert took a different approach to Miguel and all the students sent to her alternative high school campus. Mrs. Calvert understood her campus was the final stop for Miguel, and he was either going to be successful and graduate from high school or become another Latino dropout statistic. Mrs. Calvert took this challenge seriously by not only recognizing the impact she and her staff could have on Miguel, but also by giving Miguel ownership of his learning. Mrs. Calvert made her expectations known to both Miguel and his parents. She remained consistent in her approach to Miguel and demanded he work for what he wanted to achieve. Mrs. Calvert provided the social-emotional support Miguel needed by creating an environment of *familismo* among her students and staff while upholding high academic standards for Miguel to achieve. Mrs. Calvert became the factor that led Miguel to high school graduation, an accomplishment he had only once dreamed about before and a goal set for him by his father when he risked his life and that of Miguel's to come to the United States.

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations for future research include research, policy regarding Latina/o immigrant students, and finally, education leadership development.

Future Research

Gándara (2010) summed up Latina/os in America best and wrote, “Latinos are inextricably bound up with the future of the United States” (p. 27). Public schools cannot deny the impact these students are having both in terms of academic achievement data and the overall school environment. Quantitative studies have been conducted regarding Latina/o students to determine the high number of students walking amongst the hallways of public schools. These studies fail to acknowledge the stories of these children as told by the children and their families. Qualitative studies have also been conducted regarding Latina/o immigrant students, and yet these studies have not fully considered all the ways in which unauthorized students are struggling in school beyond a LEP status and economically disadvantaged label. These studies have failed to consider the school’s role in thwarting or contributing to the academic success of Latina/o immigrant students. Further studies are necessary to document the needs of unauthorized immigrant students in public schools to better determine how public school educators can address these students in meaningful ways. This study showed Miguel unknowingly was confronted with loss of his native language in order to succeed in school. First, to defend himself against other students and then secondly, to achieve academically. Miguel unconsciously lost his racial identity along his journey in Texas public schools as he no longer saw himself as a Mexican national citizen, which is his legal status.

Additionally, further studies are needed to consider these and other *racial opportunity costs* Latina/o immigrant students are forced to contend with if they are to be successful in American public schools.

Researchers have provided literature that addresses the concept of *familismo*, the idea of putting one another's needs ahead of yours, in Latino culture. Through this study, another aspect of *familismo* requires further research and that is how an atmosphere of *familismo* created in the classroom between the teacher and student and at the campus level between school and home impacts unauthorized Latina/o students. It was a natural transition for me in a bilingual classroom to build relationships with my students and their families. It was ingrained in me to build and have a sense of *familismo* with my students. Once this bond was established, I quickly realized how eager my students were to work and please me by working longer and harder. Their parents were supportive and complied with my requests for enforcing homework time and allowing their children to participate in after-school tutorials after a long day of school. As I sat and listened to Miguel's story and the definitive factor of his success, it was evident Mrs. Calvert created this type of environment for Miguel while still maintaining high expectations of student achievement. As the theory of ROC is applied to examining the success of high academic achievement Latina/o students, the element of *familismo* in the schoolhouse could be added as an additional variable.

A third area that warrants further research in studying unauthorized Latina/o immigrant students is understanding the experiences and perspectives of their parents as they relate to the public school system. Gándara (2010) discussed how a parent's

educational attainment is the best predictor of how students will perform academically. Unauthorized immigrant youth have parents who were not educated in the United States, and most often were not well educated in their native countries. The ignorance and fear of the public school system incapacitated Miguel's parents early on in his transition to the United States. Miguel found himself being separated from other children both in physical sense in the classroom and an emotional sense as he experienced harassment from other children. Miguel was left to fend for himself as his teachers failed to intervene, and his parents did not know how to approach the public school system regarding these issues. The findings in this study showed how Soñia and Fernan were rendered helpless in Miguel's school because they lacked English proficiency, lacked knowledge of the school system, and were overcome by fear of their unauthorized legal status. Further studies are needed to focus on the parents of unauthorized immigrant youth to determine how the public school system can assist, reduce anxiety, and best support families as they support their children through school as told by the parents themselves.

Policy Regarding Latina/o Immigrant Students

The recent flood of unauthorized children crossing the United States borders has forced the American public to address policy issues regarding the care and education of hundreds of thousands of children. The debate of deportation versus allowing the children and youth to stay in the United States is not isolated to politics, but is now impacting local education agencies in multiple ways. In most recent months, local school districts have held town meetings to vote against accepting any of these children into

their school systems. People in California protested planes that were set to move these children to other states. What these overzealous community leaders and protesters fail to realize is that our schools are already filled with these children who walk amongst their children disguised by their often quiet demeanors and passive personalities. Miguel was clear to point out that he has not returned to Mexico since his departure at seven years old. Miguel explained if he were taken back to Mexico he would not know enough of the Spanish language to fend for himself nor would he know where to go to find any family members or get help.

Current education policy allows unauthorized immigrant children to be accepted into and educated in Texas public schools without ever having to show proof of a legal resident status. This privilege benefited Miguel as he was allowed to be in school until he reached his American dream of obtaining a high school diploma. In the more recent years Miguel has been able to apply for a conditional permanent residency status through the DREAM Act under President Obama's administration. The DREAM Act which stands for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors provides a temporary status where young people like Miguel, who are in good, moral standing as determined by a criminal background check, who have graduated from high school with a diploma, and who are able to prove they were brought to the United States as minor children and not of their own accord as proven through early school records, is a temporary solution for a long standing issue. Millions of young people, just like Miguel, have already applied for this status. Miguel was granted temporary status and for additional fees, he was also able to apply for a legal work status, but not a Social Security card. When

Miguel's renewal date for deferred deportation spirals back to him, Miguel will have to show proof of enrollment in a four year college, or have earned an associate's degree, or have served a minimum of two years in the United States armed forces with honorable discharge. Currently Miguel does not have the financial means to enroll in a community college and is not eligible for financial aid of any sort because he does not have a Social Security card. Miguel also admitted going back to school may be somewhat hard for him as he fears without the support of another educator and supporter like Mrs. Calvert he may not find success in college. Miguel doubts his ability to successfully pass the armed forces required aptitude exam, commonly known as the ASVAB. Miguel sits in limbo as he considers his option. Until then, Miguel said he would continue to do what he has done all this time, work and stay out of trouble.

Erdman (2014) reported President Obama had opted not to take any executive actions on immigration reform until after November elections. This delay added further backlash from the American public who oppose allowing unauthorized immigrants a legal work status, and also offends supporters of immigration reform for the benefit of the millions of unauthorized immigrants living and working honorably in the United States. Heck (2004) cited the work of Coleman (1972) to describe the nature of policy research and the complications associated with this practice.

Coleman (1972) commented on the political nature of policy research that is, it tended to produce findings that added to the power of certain groups while diminishing the power of others-a feature not found in basic research. Because of the high stakes surrounding policy actions, policy disputes often involve

misrepresentation, selective presentation of information, coercion and the discredit of opponents in the name of gaining advantage. (p. 18-19)

Miguel's transition from public school to young adulthood now places him in another arena of debate. Miguel's American dream continues to be lost in translation as policymakers and politicians determine the future of unauthorized immigrants in our public schools and communities.

Education Leadership Development

The findings of this study help educators to understand the importance of leadership development and training. As politicians and policymakers make arguments and drum up support for or against immigration reform, school leaders are left on a daily basis to face the real issues surrounding Latina/o immigrant youth. School leaders are responsible for setting an atmosphere of mutual respect, acceptance, and care for unauthorized immigrant children who fill the classrooms on their assigned campuses. Education leadership programs must work to include culturally proficient pedagogy in their repertoire of instruction. Latina/o immigrant youth can no longer be wished away and off public school campuses. Latina/o immigrant youth, authorized and unauthorized, are here and are continuously coming to schools to find the support, education, and leadership they so desperately need to be academically and socially successful in their journeys towards their great American dream.

As aspiring school leaders are trained and educated to take on new leadership roles, there must be consideration given to working with special populations such as unauthorized immigrant students. District and school leaders must consider the value of

a meaningful newcomer program that addresses the social, academic, and emotional needs of students like Miguel. This also requires educational leaders to prioritize the needs of each of these students ranging from second language support, considering their level of schooling in their native country, their social-emotional need for support, and understand the goals these students and their parents have for them.

Conclusion and Final Reflection

As Miguel reflected on his past experiences in public school, his early years were tainted by the experiences provided to him by his bilingual teachers. The language barrier was a great obstacle, and yet Miguel recalls how his teachers so easily dismissed him in their presence on an on-going basis. By the time Miguel had acquired English to defend himself and understand what teachers were instructing and saying to him, Miguel found himself at the crossroad of becoming a high school dropout. As the situation seemed dire, one moment changed his life: Freedom High School and its leader, Mrs. Calvert. Miguel spoke of how his entire life has changed because of the generosity and high expectations Mrs. Calvert placed over him. Miguel achieved the goals his father set out for him when the decision was made to come and live in the United States: graduate from high school and learn English. Miguel believes his greatest accomplishment was learning English. Today Miguel continues to hope that he will one day be able to attend college and live out his American dream.

Public school teachers and leaders must make concerted efforts to meet the academic and social needs of Latina/o immigrant youth in their schools. Authorized and unauthorized Latina/o immigrant youth are desperate for the professional leadership

these educators have to offer. Educators across all levels require better training and understanding of how to work with Latina/o immigrant youth. This training should include, but is not limited to understanding second language acquisition, understanding the similarities and differences between a LEP student and a special education student who has a learning disability, establishing smart goals with the end in mind of what determines academic success for these children, and finally, recognizing these children are often deeply entwined with their families and because of this, the parents of Latina/o immigrant children should be included in the academic and social decision making processes that affect their children. All of this training should include the most valuable component of working with Latina/o youth, and that is the voices of these children and their families to understand their needs. There are millions of Latina/o immigrant youth walking through the doorways of public schools to have their needs met, and yet are often rejected by the very professionals who have an ethical obligation to reach them and teach them.

Public school educators and leaders must begin to consider their role in contributing to or thwarting the academic success of Latina/o immigrant children in public schools. Parents, whether legally or illegally, have risked their lives and the lives of their children in crossing the United States border. These parents did not bring their children to American classrooms to have them rejected by a public school system that cannot see past their poor and obscure faces. Rather, they have all come here placing their trust into the hands of educators with the hope their children will be able to lead productive and full lives in this great country, the United States of America.

I approached this study with much excitement and in a state of ignorance due to my novice research status. I entered the study with the hope of hearing an incredible story of a young man's life and learning how he overcame all the obstacles in his path. Miguel delivered this hope to me and offered me a rich story full of emotions and details. What I could not predict was the emotional state I would find myself as I connected my story to that of Miguel's. This experience took me back down through my childhood and forced me to contend with raw emotion that I did not know ran so deeply in my spirit. I was emotionally coerced to remember faces, feelings, and situations that I was certain I had dealt with years ago. I was emotionally unprepared to contend with the deep sense of anger I still felt after all this time had passed. As I wrote Miguel's story and mine, I often found myself staring off into the wall sometimes crying to the point I would have to stop writing for days. I was also unprepared to hear how Miguel's teachers, especially his bilingual teachers, miserably failed him and his family. I fear the racism and hardships my children will face because of the color of their skin and Spanish names. My son is entering his teenage years and his "bubble" world is coming to a fast halt as he is already telling his own stories of how kids around him talk about race, culture, and ethnicity. I know I cannot stop what the world will say and do to my son, but I can help him to understand how all people, all of us, have value and worth. I am indeed grateful to Miguel for trusting me with his story, and I promise to share his story and never forget what he lived so that maybe another scared little boy who is set to cross the international border this very evening will cling to his American dream and see it to fruition

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF RELEASE FROM IRB COMMITTEE

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Research Compliance and Biosafety

May 08, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Beverly Irby, Ed.D,

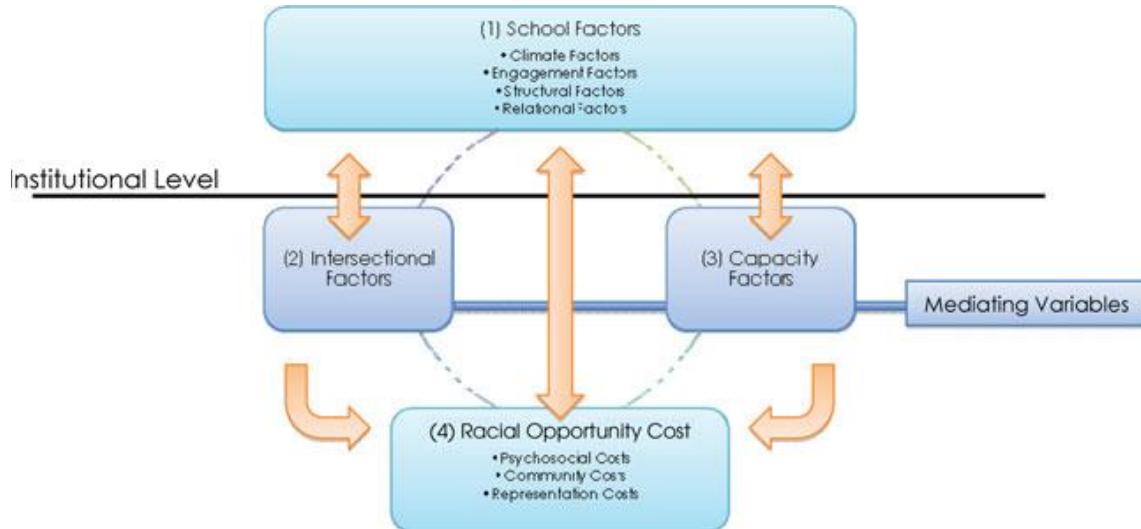
FROM: Laura E Ruebush, Ph.D.
Human Subjects Protection Program

SUBJECT: The American Dream Lost in Translation: The Educational Trajectory of a Mexican Immigrant Student and His Journey Towards American Success

The information you have provided has been reviewed and does not require IRB review or approval because the study does not qualify as human subjects research. Federal Regulations define both terms research and human subjects (45CFR46.102). Research is "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge." Further, human subject means "a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains: data through (1) intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information". Given that this study is not human subjects research, the IRB application has been withdrawn.

APPENDIX B

RACIAL OPPORTUNITY COST DIAGRAM*



* Venzant Chambers, T., Huggins, K. S., Locke, L. A., & Fowler, R. M. (2014). Between a “ROC” and a school place: The role of racial opportunity cost in the educational experience of academically successful students of color. *A Journal of the American Educational Studies* 50(5), 464-497.

APPENDIX C

KEY QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Miguel (subject of study)

Interview 1 Focus: Coming to the United States, early experiences, elementary school

Can you begin by telling me your earliest experiences of coming to the United States? What was that like for you? Can you recall how you felt?

Do you remember when your mom took you to school for the first time? Can you tell me about that experience? For example, what did you think and how did you feel about being in this new place?

How would you describe your early experiences in the classroom and around school?

How would describe your relationship with your teachers?

Could you speak any English at this time? Did you have someone in school who could translate for you? How did that make you feel?

Did you like school? Why?

If you could change anything about your elementary school experience, what would it be and why?

Interview 2 Focus: Intermediate school through ninth grade year

How did you feel in this new campus?

Can you describe for me your experiences on this campus (in the classroom, friends, and teachers)?

After sixth grade you then transitioned to junior high for seventh and eighth grades. Do you remember much about going to school then?

Do you remember if your parents were very involved in your schooling, for example helping you with homework, attending school functions, or volunteering at school? How did that make you feel?

At home, do you remember having conversations with your parents about school, teachers, or your grades? When you think about this, can you tell me how that makes you feel?

In ninth grade I know you attended ABC High School. Can you tell me what this was like for you?

How much do you think your parents understood about this time in your life? How does that make you feel when you think about this?

How did you feel at the end of your freshman year? Why?

Interview 3 Focus: Alternative high school experiences through graduation, people who influenced Miguel

After your ninth grade year you attended Freedom High School. How did you feel about making another move to this new school?

Can you explain why to you were moved to this new campus?

How would you explain your grades and overall academic performance during this time?

Can you describe this new school for me? For example, can you tell me about your teachers, schedule, rules, and friends?

Did you believe that you would graduate from this campus?

Were your parents involved in your schooling at this campus? How do you feel when you think about that?

Can you tell me about your principal? What was he/she like?

What made this principal different from all your other principals?

Interview 4 Focus: Overall perspective of his experiences as they relate to Racial Opportunity Costs and Critical Race Theory

What is your biggest achievement or disappointment from attending public schools?

Did you feel like your teachers and principals had expectations of you to do well in school? Can you explain your answer?

When you left high school would you say you were a fluent English speaker? How did that play out in your home with your siblings and your parents? What language was primarily spoken in your home when you were in high school?

Did you ever feel there were any major differences in what you were learning at school compared to what you taught at home? If so, can you describe these differences?

How do you view and define your nationality and culture? How does this view of yourself compare to your parents' view or even your brother's view?

Do you feel like you lost or gained something about yourself (thoughts, beliefs) by coming to the United States?

Why do you think your parents brought you to live in the United States? Do you feel like you have accomplished what your parents had envisioned for you?

When you thought about life after high school, what did you hope for?

When you think about the great American dream, what does that mean to you? Have you reached your American dream? If so, tell me more about it. If not, what do you think you will have to do to reach this dream?

Fernan and Soñia (Parents)

Interview 1 Focus: Coming to the United States, early experiences for Miguel, schooling from elementary to eighth grade

When did you decide to come to the United States and when did you decide to bring your children here?

What did you hope to gain for yourselves personally by coming to the United States? What did you hope for your children?

Did you have any fears about the boys coming to the United States? If so, can you describe those fears?

How long was Miguel in the United States before you took him to enroll in school?

Did you feel like you could express your concerns or worries about Miguel to anyone at school? Why or why not?

Do you remember anything in particular about Miguel's behavior and attitude towards going to school?

Did you feel good about Miguel's experiences in school? Why or why not? Did you feel like there was anything you could do to make things better for him or help him more?

Can you tell me about Miguel's intermediate school? Is there anything you can remember about him being in 5th and 6th grade?

When Miguel went to junior high, 7th and 8th grade, did you notice any changes in his behavior or social skills? If so, what kind of changes?

Interview 2 Focus: Miguel's high school experiences through graduation, their personal hopes and thoughts about his overall experiences

Do you think Miguel was happy at school during this time? If so, what did you see in Miguel that would make you say yes? If not, why do you think Miguel was not happy during this time?

At the end of Miguel's freshman year, he was transferred to Freedom High School. Can you explain to me why this happened? Who, at school, explained to you why this change was happening?

Did Miguel ever talk to you about this school, the teachers, his friends, or the principal? If so, what would he say about these people?

Did you understand that Miguel was struggling in school regarding his grades and studies? If so, how did this make you feel?

What did you hope for Miguel once he graduated high school? Did you have any specific thoughts for him about finding a job or going to college?

Do you have any regrets about bringing Miguel to the United States? If so, what do you regret and why? If not, tell me more about your dreams for Miguel?

How would you describe the American dream for yourselves and for Miguel?

Mrs. Calvert (Principal)

Interview 1 Focus: Miguel's experience on the alternative campus through graduation, any additional information that is useful for understanding Miguel's story

I would like to talk today about the time Miguel was a student on your campus. Can you tell me how well do you remember him?

Can you describe for me in detail Freedom High School? I am interested in learning about its purpose, the type of students who attend there, the atmosphere, and how it differs from a traditional high school campus.

How does the staff at Freedom address the social/emotional development needs of students?

Was there anything in particular that stood out to you about Miguel? If so, what would that be?

Was there anything about Miguel that made you think you had seen time and time before in other students? If so, can you describe that for me in detail?

Miguel attributes his success of completing high school to you. Why do you think that is?

How do you define success for a high school student?

Do you remember anything in particular about Miguel's academic performance while he was in school at Freedom? If so, can you describe that for me?

Were there any particular measures you took with Miguel to motivate him to finish high school?

Do you believe Miguel's parents were actively involved in his schooling? If so, how were they involved? If not, why do you think that was?

Did you or a staff member ever talk to Miguel about what career or further educational options he had beyond high school? If so, can you describe that conversation (s) for me? If not, why?

In your professional opinion, what did you believe were viable options for Miguel upon completing high school?