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"We Run a Different School Within a School": Educator Perceptions of Guatemala-Maya Students in a North Georgia Public School System

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**““WE RUN A DIFFERENT SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL”: EDUCATOR
PERCEPTIONS OF GUATEMALAN-MAYA STUDENTS IN A NORTH GEORGIA
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM”**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Academic Faculty

By

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the social and political persecution of the Maya population throughout Central America has led to an influx of Maya women and children migrating to the United States. The increased population of immigrant children presents new challenges for the United States, especially in public education. Maya people are rarely distinguished from the Latinx population, subsequently causing their linguistic and cultural needs to go unmet and unacknowledged. This project focuses on the education of Guatemalan-Maya students in a North Georgia public school system, framed through interviews with educators. The educators selected for this study worked almost exclusively with elementary, middle, and high-school age Guatemalan-Maya students. The perspectives of the teachers are presented in combination with the historical, social, and economic positionality of immigration in the New South. The purpose of this project is to understand how the public school system shapes the attitudes and perceptions of public educators towards the education of their students, and how this system ultimately effects identity, acculturation, and academic achievement.

Section I

Literature Review

Introduction

Recently, the United States experienced a drastic change in the composition of the Latino population. While the majority of Latino immigrants into the U.S. are Westernized and Spanish speaking, the increasing number of Guatemala-Maya immigrants altered the cultural composition of this population. Although immigrants from Guatemala began arriving in the United States in the 1980s, the most recent group was recognized for their high concentration of women and children. This trend in immigration can be attributed to social and political persecution of the Mayan population within Guatemala, as well as economic opportunities in the U.S. This large population of Mayan children has presented a new set of challenges for the U.S. One of the most complicated spaces to negotiate for these newly arrived immigrants has been the public school system. Because of linguistic and cultural differences, Mayan children require different resources than traditional Latino immigrants in order to succeed throughout the acculturation process in a western, Anglo society.

In order to understand the spectrum of influences on the Mayan population within the United States, specifically those that affect a student's ability to succeed in educational spaces, research must be drawn from a wide array of fields. These include the field of education and the field of history, evaluated through the social, cultural, and political positioning of Mayan students within United States society. In this way, these combined disciplines will provide a comprehensive exploration of social and cultural influences, unique to the Mayan population.

This literature review will explore scholarship on racial and ethnic differences, specifically concentrated in the Southern United States, often understood through the binary of black and white. The experience of Mayan children within the public school system will be

analyzed through scholarship on linguistic and cultural barriers, and how upward mobility and acculturation are affected. Additionally, this review will explore several different analysis of legislation which controls the movement and employment of Mayan immigrants, as a basis for understanding migratory patterns. Finally, this review examines literature on community networks which have been created to reinforce social support, acculturation, upward mobility and education to Mayan students outside of the school system. The success and failure of these community networks will be analyzed through the impact of legislation and movement.

This categorization provides an illustration of societal factors impacting Mayan movement (residency and permanence), income, and social networks. Educationally, these societal factors directly influence the linguistic and cultural difficulties Mayan students experience within the classroom, and the development of their ethnic identity within the United States. Although multiple disciplines will be analyzed in conjunction, this combination provides a complete understanding of societal positioning within the public school system.

It must be acknowledged that there is not a wealth of research on this subject because of the relative newness of the growing Mayan population in the United States. In combination with the colonized generalization of 'Latino', Mayan populations are often undistinguished in studies that assume homogenous ethnicity of all Spanish speakers. As a result, much of the research used for this literature review has been drawn from differing fields and used in combination to create a broader understanding of the social and cultural positioning of Mayan students in education, but many unanswered questions still remain.

Laws and Movement

Regardless of nationality, immigrant movement is dictated by state and federal laws. To better understand the social, economic, and political positionality of immigrants within the United States, it is vital to this project to discuss the history of Latino-focused immigration laws

since the early 2000s. Scholars discuss the development of immigration laws within the United States, and particularly the Southeast, through major contributing factors. These include the higher cost of living, job availability, and xenophobia. These laws are also analyzed based on their intention to incorporate new immigrants into a community or control their movement and use of space.

Following the events of September 11th, 2001, the United States experienced a surge of xenophobia. This sentiment was fueled by deteriorating economic conditions and an increase in Latino immigration to the U.S. “Popular Attitudes and Public Policies: Southern Responses to Latino Immigration” by Elaine Lacy and Mary E. Odem describes the increase of immigrants within the Southeast during this time period. Lacy and Odem give an history of changes in the laws affecting immigrants in Georgia, showing that while attitudes were relatively welcoming throughout the 80’s and 90’s, there was a strong xenophobic shift with the turn of the century that became heightened following the 9/11 attacks.¹

As a result of this xenophobia, they find that most of the legislative action addressing immigration throughout the Southeast focused on exclusionary tactics. Within the state of Georgia, Senate Bill 528, also known as the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act of 2006²: 1) required all contractors doing business within the state to ensure their workers have legal authorization to work, 2) denied tax-supported benefits to adults who cannot prove legal residency, 3) required police to check the legal status of anyone arrested for a felony or DUI, 4) authorized the state to work with the federal government to train law enforcement officers to

¹ Lacy and Odem, “Popular Attitudes and Public Policies”, 144

² “Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act”, Georgia Department of Labor

enforce immigration laws, and 5) prohibited employers from claiming a state tax deduction on wages paid to undocumented workers.³

It should also be noted that this legislation was originally proposed by Chip Rogers, a Republican politician from Cherokee County, Georgia.⁴ Understanding that this bill was proposed by a legislator within Cherokee County contributes to the larger comprehension of the social and political climate for immigrants within this specific area. Following the passage of SB 529, South Carolina and North Carolina passed similar laws, fearing an influx of immigrants.

Although it was considered one of the harshest immigration laws of its time, SB 529 was followed by HB 87, known as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011. HB 87 expanded on SB 529, most notably by implementing the E-Verify system for employers. The government-regulated E-Verify system required employers to prove the legal residence of all hires, with fines or incarceration threatened as punishment for those who did not obey within a certain time frame.⁵ Jeremy Redmon has explained how business owners in the construction, agriculture, and restaurant industries (who rely on migrant labor) opposed this legislation.⁶

At a local level, a housing ordinance proposed in Cherokee County during the mid-2000's sought to "prohibit renting or leasing to unauthorized immigrants".⁷ Local residents and businesses challenged this ordinance as a violation of state and federal laws. A state court issued a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction against its enforcement, but the ordinance ultimately never developed.⁸ Although it never gained traction, the proposal of this

³ Lacy and Odem, "Popular Attitudes and Public Policies", 151

⁴ Odem and Brown, "Living Across Borders", online

⁵ "Georgia Security and Immigrant Compliance Act", Georgia Department of Labor

⁶ Redmon, "Georgia Lawmakers Pass Illegal Immigration Crackdown", Atlanta Journal Constitution

⁷ Lacy and Odem, "Popular Attitudes and Public Policies", 154

⁸ *ibid*, 155

ordinance represents as community-level desire to restrict the movement and placement of Latino immigrants within a predominantly white county.

Turn of the century xenophobia also permeated the institution of public education. The Public Law PL 107-110, known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 predated the restrictive immigration laws of 2006 and 2011. This act concentrated exclusively in the sphere of public education and replaced the Bilingual Education Act. Rather than emphasizing multilingualism for Nonnative-English speaking students, educational institutions were forced into an exclusive focus on English.⁹ As it relates to restriction, this law discouraged students from developing their native language and emphasized the importance of speaking only in English.

On a national level, the legislation contributing to the movement of Latino immigrants throughout the Southeast can be understood through “The Dalton Story: Mexican Immigration and Social Transformation in the Carpet Capital of the World”. Victor Zúñiga and Rubèn Hernández-León discuss the forces that brought Latinos to Dalton, a rural town in northeast Georgia. They describe the main ‘pull’ factor to Dalton as the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), which led to a saturation of permanent laborers in the agriculture markets. Unlike turn of the century immigration laws, IRCA offered a legal path to citizenship for roughly 2 million undocumented immigrants who had resided in the United States since 1982.¹⁰

Locations that were historically heavily populated by U.S.-Mexico migrants, like the Southwest, experienced a spike in the cost of living and a reduction in the availability of employment. Immigrants, no longer afraid of deportation, began to branch out to less conventional spaces. Small towns with steady industry saw an increase in their Latino population

⁹ Lee and Wright, “The Rediscovery of Heritage and Community Language Education”, 143

¹⁰ Mees, “1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act”, US Immigration Legislation Online

as people migrated in search of year-round positions, less demanding work environments, and a lower cost of living.¹¹

Unlike IRCA, present immigration laws do not serve to incorporate immigrants into the community. As discussed above, this is largely due to a xenophobic attitude that spread post-9/11. Outside of a political understanding, this legislation has a wide-reaching social impact. Mary E. Odem delves deeper into this concept in her article, “Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Space in Atlanta” She describes a focus specifically in the Atlanta-metro area and the establishment of laws that serve to prevent incorporating Latino and undocumented immigrants into civic life. The examples cited throughout the article include spaces for day laborers and access to vehicles/drivers licenses. Odem argues that these events illustrate a larger conflict over social space between Latino immigrants and local authorities.¹²

Odem’s work explains how restriction of space limits the ability to form unity within an immigrant community. The creation of a secure space to express culture, emotions, and education allows people born outside of the dominant culture to develop a network of support. This leads to organization, improved quality of living, and better emotional coping skills throughout the population.

The laws enacted to restrict immigration also serve to restrict the establishment of immigrant community and spaces throughout the United States. The restriction of these spaces leads to a lack of social networks and support within people of similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Within the public school system, the laws enacted prevented students from cultivating their native language alongside their English education, thus impacting the development of their culture. The literature on this subject across disciplines emphasizes the

¹¹ Zúñiga and Hernández-León, “The Dalton Story”, 36-37

¹² Odem, “Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Space in Atlanta”, 115-116

importance of understanding anti-immigrant laws and their broad-reaching impact on immigrants and immigrant students within the United States.

The research presented above provides a generalized understanding of immigration and the subsequent laws. These scholars produced research that, while not directly forming a consensus, presented several repeating themes. The xenophobia that motivated immigration laws on federal, state, and local levels also manifests itself within the sphere of public education. As a result of this xenophobia, the laws function to control immigrant use of space and prevent the establishment of community.

Separating Maya from Latino

Many scholars understand ethnic classifications, which may otherwise be difficult to define, through the motivating factors for immigration. These are typically separated into voluntary reasons such as job opportunity, or involuntary reasons such as persecution. In this section, authors explore ecology theory and the theory of voluntary vs. involuntary minorities. Multiple scholars use ecology theory as a basis to define voluntary vs. involuntary minorities and their differing classifications. The divergent understandings of these categorizations ultimately reflect onto students, as they are used to project socioeconomic outcomes.

The Maya Heritage Project, through Kennesaw State University, and the National Pastoral Maya Network produced a manual entitled “Children of the Guatemalan Maya: A Handbook for Teachers”. This handbook provides an introductory understanding of cultural differences between Latino and Maya students and ways in which educators may not understand cultural differences. Methods of learning and regard for elders are particularly emphasized, as those may be easily discernible in a classroom setting.¹³

¹³ Maya Heritage Community Project, “Children of the Guatemala Maya: A Handbook for Teachers”

The need for this handbook arose as the Mayan population in Cherokee County grew. Educators were unable to distinguish Mayan students from western Latino students and the unique needs of the Mayan students were going unaddressed. The main differences between Mayan culture and Latino culture have been discussed throughout this piece, but not through the understanding of U.S. social relations and ethnic hierarchy structures. Within the United States, minorities experience an intensely complicated network of oppression. The historical understanding behind each ethnic minority is extremely important as it relates to an individual understanding of identity and perception of upward mobility.

In “Cultural Explanations for Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Academic Achievement: A Call for a New and Improved Theory”, Natasha Warikoo and Prudence Cartera outline cultural-ecology theory through the understanding of ‘voluntary’ vs. ‘involuntary’ minority students. This same theory is expressed in “Structuring Failure and Success: Understanding the Variability in Latino School Engagement” by Gilberto Conchas. Conchas explains cultural-ecology theory and voluntary vs. involuntary minorities through the lens of Mexican-American students.

Both pieces define voluntary and involuntary minorities in similar ways, based on Ogbu’s model of cultural-ecology theory. Warikoo and Cartera understand voluntary minorities as those who arrived in the United States in search of economic opportunities, where involuntary minorities are those who descended from groups incorporated through colonization or conquest. Emotionally, the major distinction in attitude between voluntary and involuntary minority students “boil(s) down to their sociocultural responses to discrimination and cultural invisibility.... voluntary minority students see school success as a major means of upward mobility...whereas involuntary minorities view the opportunity structure as primarily

closed...”¹⁴ Conchas echoes this definition, and adds that “academic achievement differences by race result from minority groups’ perceptions of the opportunity structure...”¹⁵, thus establishing an understanding for academic performance disparities.

The major difference is between these two articles is the authors’ understanding of where Mexican-American, Latino-American, and Latino students fall between these two definitions. Carter and Warikoo understand most Latino students as voluntary minorities¹⁶, and Conchas identifies Mexican-American students as involuntary minorities¹⁷. As this manifests itself within the public education system, difficulties arise when ascertaining definitive distinctions between these two groups. Although these groups maintain separate nationalities, their cultures may exhibit themselves in similar ways, the most easily discernible being linguistically. This prevents the two groups from acquiring effective resources and aid that could improve their academic performance.

So this raises the question, where would a student from indigenous Maya heritage fit into this theory? What aspects of this theory impede or enable a Mayan student to attain a public education, and how does it influence their outlook on integration into U.S. culture? Although immigration from Central America to the United States is often understood as a desire for economic gain, many Mayan immigrants are escaping ethnic persecution in their homeland. The difficult analysis of these situations complicates the binary of voluntary/involuntary migration. Nonetheless, this scale can still be utilized by educators to understand different factors impacting a students’ understanding of upward mobility and the separation between Maya and Latino.

¹⁴ Carter and Warikoo, “Cultural Explanations for Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Academic Achievement”, 370

¹⁵ Conchas, “Structuring Failure and Success”, 477

¹⁶ Carter and Warikoo, “Cultural Explanations for Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Academic Achievement”, 370

¹⁷ Conchas, “Structuring Failure and Success”, 477

Southern Binary

Especially in the U.S. South, scholars have also explored how the historical relationship between black and white populations has affected Latino immigrants. In “Race, Migration, and Labor Control: Neoliberal Challenges to Organizing Mississippi’s Poultry workers” Angela C. Stuesse outlines:

...how different groups’ discourses about race and national origin create obstacles to collective movements for change within the Mississippi poultry industry. The discourses depend largely on stereotypes promoted by state, corporate, and other social actors and nourished by the lack of communication and mutual understanding that plagues Mississippi’s poultry workers... This case illustrates the complex ways in which the exploitation of discourses that perpetuate racial stereotypes is a conscious and deliberate practice of corporations used to control, fragment, and divide working people along lines of difference for the benefit of corporate profit.¹⁸

In this case, the operators of the poultry plants were able to manipulate prejudices and subsequently exacerbate tense race relations. Stuesse describes an interview with a black poultry plant worker in which the employee laments their understanding of Latino laborers as “...too willing to work for nothing” and “they’re taking our jobs and forcing us to work even harder.”¹⁹ This contrasts with excerpts from Latino poultry plant workers who are quoted as saying “Most Blacks like how things are”, “Blacks have no problem with discrimination” and “We are living in different worlds”.²⁰ Although these two ethnic groups are working similar positions for comparable wages in the same location, they expressed discord.

While Stuesse reveals the racial tension that exists within a poultry plant in Mississippi, this type of relationship is prevalent throughout the South. Understanding ethnic relations as a binary between black and white populations illustrates the scale in which ethnicity is measured. As a result of European colonialism and slavery, the agricultural economy developed in the

¹⁸ Stuesse, “Race, Migration, and Labor Control”, 93

¹⁹ Ibid, 100

²⁰ Stuesse, “Race, Migration, and Labor Control” 103

Southern U.S. has continued to influence racial hierarchy. Latino immigrants often exist within a 'grey area' because they are not classified as either white or black.²¹ However, many Latino immigrants inhabit geographical space historically linked to black populations.

Stuesse's piece offers an understanding of how complicated ethnic relations manifest themselves within an economic and social space. The ethnic hierarchy of the South permeates every institution, and can also be found within the public education system. "Cultural Explanations for Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Academic Achievement" by Carter and Warikoo incorporates the theory of segmented assimilation. This theory "claim(s) that proximity to native minority students threatens the educational achievement of immigrant youth."²² Essentially, this theory argues that the academic achievement of immigrant students is negatively influenced by social relationships with black students. This argument is rooted in the belief that the history and social positioning of each group in the United States contributes to their overall beliefs and attitudes within institutions controlled by the hegemonic group.

The authors go on to present three trajectories for cultural adaptation, based on Portes and Zhou's model (1993): 1) new immigrants will identify with the dominant group, 2) they will identify with the native minority, or 3) they will identify with their own ethnic immigrant communities. Research suggests that new immigrants who follow paths 1 or 3 find upward social and academic mobility, where immigrants who follow path 2 leads to "problems associated with ghetto poverty and disadvantage".²³

If this theory is applied to the poultry plant, it might explain why Latino people and black people express such division. Under the threat of oppression, they experience more social

²¹ The exception to this would be Afro-Latino

²² Carter and Warikoo, "Cultural Explanations for Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Academic Achievement", 371

²³ Carter and Warikoo, "Cultural Explanations for Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Academic Achievement", 371

mobility by identifying within their native ethnic groups rather than black ethnicity. Conversely, if the fragmentation described in the poultry plant were to display itself in the public system, how would that influence/affect the ethnic identity of Mayan students? Understanding the theory of segmented assimilation from the perspective of Maya in the South broadens the question of where this indigenous group fits within the binary of black and white.

While both of these pieces offer a thoughtful understanding of how existing in an ethnic minority ‘grey area’ can assimilation into the United States, both authors neglect to analyze the multifaceted layers of Latino identity. It is impossible to answer the question of ‘where Mayan students fit’ within a system of colonized ethnicity without analyzing racial stratification in a Latin or South American context in countries of origin. Specifically, Cartera and Warikoo focus on students and do not delve into outside factors that may influence a student’s desire to identify with a particular group. Their main discussion is the delineation of options and the subsequent outcomes of those options. It is also potentially problematic that the authors do not analyze the cultural representations of ethnicities within social hierarchies. For example, methods of speech, style, and social relationships. Rather, the article insinuates that an attitude is adopted by the immigrants, based on the social group in which they place themselves. This analysis could be used to support the theory that oppressed ethnic groups collectively focus on past historical abuses, which prevents their upward mobility. No potential solutions are presented in any of the pieces.

Segmented assimilation theory, in combination with racial hierarchy, is integral in analyzing the social positioning of Mayan students within a public education classroom. As demonstrated within the poultry plant, there was separation between the Latino and black populations. Segmented assimilation theory argues that Latino students who predominantly

identify with black groups are less likely to succeed academically, in contrast to Latino students who identify with Latino or white groups. However, within the Latino ethnic hierarchies, indigenous groups are often ranked lower. If Mayan students chose to identify as Latino, how would their academic success be affected by the discrimination they experience within this ethnic group as indigenous people?

The concept of the racial binary is further analyzed by Tomás Almaguer in his piece “Race, Racialization, and Latino Population in the United States”. While he recognizes the colonial structures that have ranked ‘lightness’ over ‘darkness’ in regards to skin color, he argues that national identity heavily influences the way in which Latinos racialize each other in the United States.²⁴ He references how Mexicans view Puerto Ricans through the lens of ‘blackness’ while Puerto Ricans view Mexicans through the lens of ‘Indianness’, based on how these ethnic classifications are understood in each country.²⁵ Ultimately, his analysis of racialization is still rooted in the colonial system.

In this section, scholars present somewhat differing understandings of ethnicity as a scale or binary. Ethnic hierarchy in the United States maintains itself as a binary as a result of historical events, but present events (increase in Latino immigration) are causing a shift. It is difficult to find consensus throughout the research on how these changes manifest themselves because colonial interpretations of ethnicity have global influence. Almaguer argues that the increase in Latino population in the United States threatens the traditional binary model because each Latino country has their own understanding of ethnicity. However, it that is also based on colonial prejudice. As the Latino population increases, the immigrants into the United States are

²⁴ Almaguer, “Race, Racialization, and Latino Population in the United States”, 143-144

²⁵ Almaguer, “Race, Racialization, and Latino Population in the United States”, 153-154

bringing understandings based on the history of their native country, while still maintaining a binary of light and dark.

When understanding ethnicity throughout the United States, geographic area also plays an important role. The authors presented here did not thoroughly differentiate between geographic area within the United States. Although Stuesse focuses on the U.S. South, each geographic region of the United States maintains a unique history, which inevitably impacts interpretations and reactions to ethnicity.

Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Education

Scholars from social sciences, as well as the field of education, analyze the lasting impacts of cultural identity within education. For many Mayan immigrants, the ability to maintain their language establishes identity maintenance throughout acculturation. In their article, “The Rediscovery of Heritage and Community Language Education in the United States”, Jin Sook Lee and Wayne E. Wright argue for comprehensive community based language education programs. The authors define languages through ‘heritage language’ or ‘community language’ (hereby referred to as HL/CL) which is understood as language in which someone has a personal connection.²⁶

The authors offer a critique of the No Child Left Behind Act as it replaced the Bilingual Education Act and forced educational spaces into an exclusive focus on English, rather than multilingualism (as previously discussed).²⁷ However, they note that HL/CL schools exist outside of government-regulated education spaces, as they allow immigrants and people outside of the dominant culture to cultivate community without systematic policies. Lee and Wright state:

²⁶ Lee and Wright, “The Rediscovery of Heritage and Community Language Education”, 138

²⁷ Ibid, 143

Community-based language schools provide opportunities for students to socially network with coethnic peers and to nurture cultural identities and ethnic pride that may otherwise weaken due to pressures to assimilate. Thus, they have been an integral part of ethnic social structures by serving as the locus of social support, network building, and social capital formation.²⁸

The explanation of benefits offered by HL/CL schools demonstrate the close connection between language and cultural maintenance. The authors continue to describe the overarching benefits of these spaces for an immigrant community through the understanding of ‘social capital formation’. Along with establishing a support network, HL/CL schools promote connections that foster social success outside their own community.

Later in this literature review, tangible examples of Mayan community spaces are discussed. These spaces reinforce culture, linguistic acquisition, and provide social capital. As demonstrated by Lee and Wright, these community-based programs have wide-reaching benefits. However, as will be discussed below, the legislation and movement imposed on Mayan people have prevented many community spaces from taking root.

Culturally, maintaining language is a barrier for Mayans that separates them from other Latinos within the United States. In their article, “Static Structures, Changing Demographics: Educating Teachers for Shifting Populations in Stable Schools”, Pedro R. Portes and Peter Smagorinsky “look at the degree to which stable schools and authoritarian instruction accommodates the needs of learners exhibiting difference, with special attention to ELLs in a Southern setting.”²⁹ They argue that the format of public education institutions lends them to be uncondusive for accommodating a ‘collision’ of differing cultures.

Systematically, the detrimental effects of English-only (or Anglo-only) language education is recognized through subtractive bilingualism. Portes and Smargorinsky define

²⁸ Ibid, 139-140

²⁹ Portes and Smargorinsky, “Static Structures, Changing Demographics”, 236

subtractive bilingualism as the occurrence of students losing their native language and only reaching proficiency in the dominant language. In contrast, additive bilingualism occurs when students utilize their first language as a tool and a means of acquiring a second.³⁰ By approaching ELL education as an English-only approach (as previously mentioned with the passage of No Child Left Behind), public education institutions risk creating subtractive bilingualism, which inevitably impedes the academic success of a student. In contrast, additive bilingualism utilizes previous language acquisition to build secondary and multilingual skills.

For many Mayan students, the ethnic hierarchy in the South significantly impedes their ability to develop a positive ethnic identity within the classroom. Because their cultural identity is deeply connected to traditional Mayan language, and indigenous peoples already experience discrimination within a Latino community, this contributes to the difficulty in finding an established community space.

In her book, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, Lisa Delpitt discusses the importance of linguistic diversity in a classroom setting and its relationship with community identity outside of school. Specifically, she cites Anglo perceptions of linguistic differences and how they are used to measure academic success. In this example, Delpitt discusses a black student who tells an episodic narrative, versus a white student who tells a topic-centered narrative. The white educators who listened to the episodic narrative largely identified it with negative comments and questioned whether the student had “family problems”, “emotional problems”, and “language problems that affect school achievement”.³¹

Although this example does not specifically focus on the usage of Mayan language versus English language, it is a perfect understanding of cultural differences manifesting

³⁰ Ibid, 242

³¹ Delpitt, *Other People's Children*, 55

themselves linguistically. The episodic narrative told by the black student did not fit the traditional format, and in turn the white educators critiqued and questioned the students' academic ability. This reaction can be understood through the lens of a Mayan student acculturating into a western, Anglo society. The linguistic norms of Mayan people, which are discernible through culture, can often be misinterpreted because they are different from western expectations. As demonstrated by Delpitt, this misunderstanding jeopardizes the overall academic potential of the student.

These three sources demonstrate the difficulty Mayan students confront when navigating ethnic and cultural spaces within the public school system. Although it is an integral aspect of their acculturation and social development to maintain their native language and identity, many programs in the United States implement English-only language acquisition programs. Even though these programs may appear valuable for their efficiency in language education, they ultimately strip a student of the identity necessary to maintain affirmative mental, emotional and social support.

Based on the research presented, conclusions can be drawn on the perspective of educators with Mayan students. Unfamiliarity with linguistic and cultural norms of the Mayan people can lead to a misinterpretation of academic ability. This is exacerbated by English-only programs because they discourage thoughtful comprehension of a students' native culture. This misinterpretation leads to resounding negative consequences for a student's educational attainment, particularly if they are labeled 'underperforming' as a result of cultural miscommunication.

Obstacles in Education

Outside of cultural differences, this section will focus on how scholars have described the other obstacles Mayan students must overcome within the classroom. Many of these obstacles

are faced by Latino students, as a result of generalized grouping, as well as immigrant/non-English speaking students as a whole.

“Educational Barriers for New Latinos in Georgia”, by Stephanie Bohon, Heather Macpherson, and Jorge Atilas, presents a qualitative understanding of barriers Latino students face throughout the public education system and higher education in the Southeast. They conclude that the main barriers included “(a) lack of understanding of the U.S. school system, (b) low parental involvement in the schools, (c) lack of residential stability among the Latino population, (d) little school support for the needs of Latino students, (e) few incentives for the continuation of Latino education, and (f) barred immigrant access to higher education.”³² Many of the conclusions drawn from their study can be understood through previous sections of this literature review. The “lack of residential stability among the Latino population” and “barred immigrant access to higher education” are directly related to legislation throughout Georgia that controls movement and permanence. These laws, as previously discussed, have prevented the creation of Latino communities. The “lack of understanding of the U.S. school system” and “little school support for the needs of Latino students” can be understood as cultural miscommunications, as well as political actions directly taken to reinforce Anglo-centered, English-only education. The “low parental involvement in schools” can also be attributed to misconceptions about the U.S. school system, linguistic barriers, or employment that leaves little time for parent engagement in the school.

Reinforcing the conclusions drawn from the study above, Cristina Igoa comments on the movement of immigrant children as it relates to their educational attainment in her work, *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child*. She cites her own experience with immigrant children and

³² Bohon, Macpherson, Atilas, “Educational Barriers for New Latinos in Georgia”, 43

notes that many “have experienced gaps in their education because of travel, time needed for preparation of exit and entry documents, and moving around in search of a better home. Many children have skipped one grade or more.”³³ The movement described by Igoa directly affects the time students spend attaining an education and the variability in their curriculum. Unlike non-immigrant students, students who are influenced by legislation seeking to prevent permanent residence have difficulty following the systemic K-12 curriculum employed in the U.S. The negative impacts include adding years of education to the traditional timeline, struggling to adjust to new curriculum, and difficulty with retention (among many others).

Several of the barriers described in these two pieces are caused by outside societal factors and may give the impression that education as an institution has little influence over the success of Latino students. Gilberto Conchas challenges this conception with the results of his study on Latino students in “Structuring Failure and Success: Understanding the Variability in Latino School Engagement”. Conchas examined how school programs “construct school failure and success among low-income immigrants and U.S.-born Latino students.”³⁴ He traced the eventual outcomes of Latino students at an urban high school providing several different specialized courses of study, such as a Medical Academy, Graphics Academy, and Advanced Placement program. He concluded that “while schools often replicate existing social and economic inequality present in the larger society and culture, they can also circumvent inequality if students and teachers work in consort toward academic success.”³⁵

He begins his conclusion by asserting that “schools often replicate existing social and economic inequality present in the larger society and culture”. This statement offers an

³³ Igoa, *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child*, 6

³⁴ Conchas, “Structuring Failure and Success”, 475

³⁵ *Ibid*, 502

understanding of the educational institution as it fits within a societal understanding of Mayan students. While the societal and cultural positioning of Mayan students has been discussed at length, Conchas reinforces the idea that public education is a part of the larger, hegemonic society. It is not directly exempt from the same factors that influence social structures, and in many cases educational institutions serve to replicate the colonized, Anglo method of thought. Understanding public education as a branch of society at large allows us to analyze the effects of both spaces using similar tools.

Conchas continues by arguing that inequality can be prevented if “students and teachers work in consort toward academic success”. The vagueness of this statement may be suspect, but he continues by elaborating: “The distinct Latino voices in this study demonstrate the importance of school communities that structure learning environments linking academic rigor with strong collaborative relationships among students and teachers.”³⁶ This final statement connects directly to the previous section which discussed the many cultural miscommunications that occur between teacher and student, inevitably influencing academic attainment. While Conchas is partly referring to the rigorous course offerings at this particular high school, his statement can also be understood from the perspective of cultural conflict. Through encouraging direct, frequent, and open conversations between educators and students, Conchas presents a possible solution for cultural dissonance within the classroom.

These authors collectively understand that other than culture, many of the factors impacting Mayan students within school are derived from politics and socioeconomic status. Although they do not directly address identical themes, these scholars present a concurrent analysis of obstacles that restrict Mayan students from completing high school-level curriculum.

³⁶ Conchas, “Structuring Failure and Success”, 502

Community Projects

Several scholars have described successful community projects that have worked to incorporate Latino immigrants without causing these problems. Four such studies are the development of the Catholic church in Atlanta, the Maya population of Morganton, NC, the Georgia Project in Dalton, GA and the Maya population of Alamosa, CO. To immigrant populations, particularly those from non-dominant cultures, access to community spaces offer an environment in which they can freely express their native culture and traditions, without an oppressive gaze. This space ultimately provides mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits that allow Mayan immigrants to maintain their identity while experiencing assimilation into a western, Anglo society.

Odem chronicles the development of Catholic churches within Atlanta as community centers for the Latino population, and the important role of this religious space in developing collaboration throughout the population, safe spaces for gathering, and space for learning English. She connects the development of these religious spaces to cultural maintenance and religious maintenance as it relates to their native land. Maintaining these ties allows immigrants to better cope with cultural differences between their current homeland and their native homeland.³⁷ Although this focus is on the Latino population and the Catholic religion, rather than the Mayan population, the benefits of establishing religious spaces are mirrored between groups.

On a macro level, as described by Leon Fink in *The Maya of Morganton*, the established community of Morganton, North Carolina offered a place where Mayans were able to express their native culture without feeling ostracized. As a result of poultry-industry growth, immigrant populations from Central America were drawn to Morganton for employment. As the Mayan population grew, they solidified community space to practice their culture and language. The

³⁷ Odem, "Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Space in Atlanta", 120-121

increasing population of Mayan people allowed a certain amount of agency within Morganton, which manifested itself through the use of space as a means to practice and express culture. This practice allowed for the maintenance of a non-western, indigenous identity throughout acculturation into a western, Anglo society. This is illustrated by an early immigrant to Morganton, who expresses that he feels as though he has not compromised his Guatemalan identity as a resident of this town.³⁸

In Whitfield County, the public school system emerged as a leader in accommodating Spanish-speaking populations through the Georgia Project. The Georgia Project established a partnership with the University of Monterrey and teachers in the Northwestern area of Georgia. The English-speaking teachers attended summer institutes at the University of Monterrey in an effort to gain first-hand understanding of language acquisition and Mexican culture. The University of Monterrey recruited bilingual educators to assist the schools in Dalton's geographic area, and both parties collaborated on developing bilingual curriculum.³⁹ As the Georgia Project gained momentum, it began partnering with non-profits in the Dalton area to serve as a community liaison.⁴⁰

A partnership very similar to the Georgia Project was established in Alamosa, Colorado. Rather than experiencing a rise in Latino immigrants, this community experienced a rise specifically in Guatemalan immigrants. To accommodate the linguistic and cultural characteristics of this new population, educators and administrators spent time abroad in Guatemala. This developed into a transnational union between Guatemalan and U.S. educators. The results of the partnership manifested themselves in an environment that allowed the

³⁸ Fink, *The Maya of Morganton*, 147

³⁹ Rubèn Hernández-León and Victor Zúñiga, "The Dalton Story" 35

⁴⁰ *ibid* 42

incorporation of Mayan culture into education, ultimately improving mental health, raising self-esteem, and strengthening generational ties between parents and children.⁴¹

The four partnerships above demonstrate the benefits of establishing community spaces at different levels: a project within a school district, a community within a town, and an entire town composed of a community. However, the description of these projects is based on their success. The difficulties many immigrants face in the United States, linguistically and economically, often supersede an aspiration community environment.

Another partnership that is important to my future study is The Maya Heritage Community Project associated with Kennesaw State University. In the article, “Partnership Service-Learning Between Maya Immigrants and the University”, Alan LeBaron describes the attempted creation of a heritage language/community language school through a partnership between the Maya Heritage Community Project (Kennesaw State University) and the Mayan community in Canton, Georgia. The adults within the Maya community noticed their children distancing themselves from Maya heritage, so they sought to integrate it into their lives within the United States.

He describes how a strain began to grow intergenerationally; between parents who were accustomed to practicing Maya traditions and speaking Mayan languages, and their children who may have lived the entirety of their lives in the United States and drifted towards the Westernized society. Ultimately, the Maya School was never established because of issues related to low income, little education, and migrating for employment opportunities.⁴² Despite the best efforts of the Mayan community, the legislation and societal factors already in place prevented the effective establishment of a Mayan space.

⁴¹ Ludwig, “Supporting Respect”, 32-34

⁴² LeBaron, “Partnership Service-Learning”, 206

These articles describe the many levels of community space that can be established and the obstacles to their establishment. These spaces provide opportunities for immigrants to strengthen their social capital, while maintaining cultural identity. The two programs established through the public school system incorporated international education as a means of educating Anglo teachers. Through this education, the teachers were able to better establish a classroom that addressed the cultural values of an immigrant student and their family. Although effective, these programs are not prevalent throughout the United States. Understanding the 'common' public school classroom for Mayan students must be done under the assumption that they do not have access to community space within their classroom.

Proposal

In order to understand the perspective of the educators working directly with Mayan students, I propose the collection of narratives through interviews. While this literature review provides an understanding of existing scholarly work on the social and cultural impacts on Mayan students within education, interviews serve as a means of understanding an educator's perception of societal factors as it relates to Mayan students in the classroom. In conjunction with the interviews, I will combine existing research from multiple fields to supplement and contrast/compliment that accounts provided by the educators.

The interviews will take place with teachers throughout Cherokee County, Georgia who work in schools with high Maya populations. There will not be limits on the number of Maya children each teacher works with, or the grade level of the teachers. The questions that structure the interview will mostly be open ended, with the exception of specific follow up questions.

They include:

1. Tell me about your experience with students from Guatemala.
2. To what extent have the children discussed where they are from?

3. To what extent do you interact with the parents of your Mayan students? If so, what are your perceptions of the parents versus parents of other Latino backgrounds?
4. Tell me about your classroom dynamic/climate between students of different nationalities.
5. How do you understand the study habits of your Guatemalan students?
6. How do you understand the interactions between educators and Guatemalan students?
7. Are you interested in learning more about Maya or participating in a workshop or joining a focus group? Would you be interested in a trip to Guatemala?

These questions are structured intentionally to remain general, allowing the participants to direct the conversation as they wish.

Following the interviews, the responses of the educators will be analyzed. The main analysis will focus on recognizing main and overlapping themes between the interviews. There will not be specific methodology used through the analysis process. Rather, the understanding of the narratives and experiences provided by the educators will be dissected based on importance. The important themes will be labeled as such if they are repeated in more than one interview, offer conflict or agreement to ideas presented within the literature review, or present new information.

A theme present throughout the literature review, but not specifically within this proposal, is the creation of Mayan spaces in the community. The use of community spaces will be analyzed more deeply based on the narratives provided by the educators. Since the main focus of this study is the experience of Mayan students within the public school system, the use of community space outside the federally-mandated education system remains impactful, but more in a secondary sense. It is part of their experience outside school which definitely impacts their experience inside school, but it only one of a plethora of factors. There are also discussions to be had about the use of space within the classroom and the school environment.

The conclusion of this project will be presented in a final paper, which will outline the interview process, methodology used, and final conclusions. The information presented by the

educators in the interviews will be a major determining factor in the thesis of the paper. Their understandings of Mayan students within the Cherokee County School District will dictate the ultimate direction. Because my background is not in education, I am hesitant to create a definitive thesis without the input of the educators. The information provided by their narratives will act as a supplement, not only to my own research 'weakness', but also to the quantitative research analyzes throughout this literature review.

Section II

“We run a school within a school”: Educator Perceptions of Guatemalan-Maya Students in a North Georgia Public School System

Introduction

The usual haste of the school year had subsided for the summer. Haley, who teaches English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at her desk, shuffling through paperwork, in an otherwise empty classroom. She was describing a conversation between herself and a classroom teacher earlier that day. Haley sighed, “I just had a student get deported yesterday...I went to go and tell their teacher and I said ‘well now he’s back in Guatemala’...and she said ‘Oh I thought he was from Mexico’.”

Haley presented this account with obvious frustration. The seemingly benign comment from the classroom teacher exposed and embodied a deeper and all too prevalent misunderstanding of ethnic identity composition of the Latinx⁴³ population within North Georgia, and to a greater extent, the United States as a nation. Although the student in question immigrated to the United States from Guatemala, the classroom teacher erroneously assumed his nationality to be Mexican.

This misconception was presented again during the interviews with ESOL teachers in North Georgia. In one instance, Samantha, a high school ESOL teacher, described hostility from a content teacher. In response to the large population of Guatemalan-Maya ESOL students, the content teacher remarked, “I might as well just move to Mexico.” Even though Samantha acrimoniously corrected the (expressly prejudicial) misconception, the initial assumption indicates a prevalent lack of knowledge.

⁴³ ‘Latinx’ is a gender-neutral, non-binary alternative to ‘Latino’ or ‘Latina’.

In an ELL (English Language Learner) classroom, it is standard to gather information on students' language and nationality as a means of better addressing their needs as language-learners. For this reason, it might seem reasonable that the ESOL teacher would have this information, but the classroom teacher would not. However, the conversations that took place between the educators and the classroom teachers demonstrate the effects of individual assumptions without access to unrestricted discussion. Ultimately, the classroom teachers made their own assumptions based on preconceived perceptions, which went unchallenged. Through the generalized dismissiveness of these students' national identity, the classroom teachers failed to notice significant needs separating them, as a Guatemalan-Maya, from other multilingual learners.

Guatemalan students present a particular set of needs, not previously seen in other populations of immigrant or second-generation immigrant ESOL students in North Georgia. Many of these students are not native Spanish speakers, and their parents might have received little formal education. Generally, Maya household socioeconomic level is much lower than students from Hispanic cultures. They are an indigenous population in Guatemala, but in the U.S. are rarely set apart from the general label of "Hispanic", causing their academic needs go largely unmet in the Georgia schools.

The purpose of this project is to understand the teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the education of their Maya students. These attitudes and perceptions will be analyzed within a broader sociocultural context. Through interviews and first-hand accounts, I will illustrate the dilemmas teachers encounter and their subsequent responses.

Immigration in the New South

In order to understand the dynamic between educators and Guatemalan-Maya families and students, it is important to acknowledge the history of the Maya in North Georgia. Throughout the previous decades (and into the present), the Southeastern United States experienced a drastic population shift as immigrant settlement increased. This shift was, and still is, met with resistance in many communities and political arenas, including the public school system. This immigration history illustrates the social, economic, and political positionality of the Guatemala-Maya in North Georgia.

The term ‘New South’ has been used to describe the Southeast United States at various points throughout its history. Presently, the ‘New South’ denotes the economic and social development that encompasses the region. This development is characterized by increased globalization, higher populations of immigrants, and an economic shift towards industry.⁴⁴

In the 1980’s, a variety of circumstances led to the rapid increase in Latinx settlement of the Southeast. Economic restructuring attracted production and processing plants to Southeastern states for their lower taxes and cheaper labor. Simultaneously, larger Southern cities experienced population growth as corporations moved their headquarters into the area. Population growth in these small cities enforced the increasing need for low-wage workers through the construction and service industries.⁴⁵

The economic restructuring of the 1980’s also established rural areas of North Georgia as settlement communities for Mexican immigrants. During the industrialization of the Southeastern economy, Georgia stood out as a leader of industry and growth. Factories from the meat-processing industry and the textile industry relocated to rural North Georgia communities

⁴⁴ Bankston, “New People in the New South”, 24

⁴⁵ Odem and Lacy, *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*, xiv

and reaped the benefits of the lower operating costs. By the 1990's, Gainesville, Georgia was known as the "Poultry Capital of the World" and Dalton, Georgia was coined the "Carpet Capital of the World".⁴⁶

The success of these businesses, while a motivating factor, was not the sole reason Mexican and Mexican-Americans relocated to North Georgia. Beginning as early as the 1970's, the poultry and construction industries relied on labor recruitment and temporary work visa programs to attract potential 'low-wage' employees.⁴⁷ This initial recruitment eventually led to the development of community settlements throughout the area. During the industrialization of the 80's, these community settlements increased migration to the region through social networks.⁴⁸

The social networks bringing Mexican and Mexican-American workers also drew immigrants from Guatemala. These Maya immigrants first settled in cities with large Latinx populations and historical ties to migration, such as Los Angeles and Miami.⁴⁹ In Los Angeles, the early movement from Guatemala to the United States occurred in the 1970's by those seeking employment opportunities. These immigrants most likely heard about job prospects in the U.S. after travelling through Guatemala City or Mexico. During the late 1980's, the Guatemalan civil war prompted Maya migration to the United States, Mexico, and Canada in search of safety and economic opportunities.⁵⁰ In Miami, the original Guatemalan-Maya settlement arrived in the 1980's to escape this violence. Long-standing Latinx communities in Miami also provided an initial social pull for many Central American immigrants.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Bankston, "New People in the New South", 24

⁴⁷ Zúñiga and Hernández-León, "The Dalton Story", 38

⁴⁸ Odem and Lacy, *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*, xvi

⁴⁹ Bankston, "New People in the New South", 24

⁵⁰ Batz, "Maya Cultural Resistance in Los Angeles", 197

⁵¹ Hiller, Linstroth, Ayala Vela, "I am Maya, not Guatemalan, nor Hispanic", Article 10

In North Georgia, the growing Maya population is understood through its newness and unique circumstances, in comparison to those more ‘traditional’ immigration destinations, as discussed above. As the Southeastern economy grew, Guatemalan-Mayas sought out these spaces with more job opportunities and a lower cost of living. In North Georgia, the first Maya population settled in the 1990’s.⁵² By the early 2000’s, the Central American population residing in Georgia was estimated to account for approximately 6 or 7 percent of the total immigrant population.⁵³

Unlike Miami and Los Angeles, rural North Georgia did not offer the culture, population, or history represented in these cities. The initial immigration pattern into North Georgia followed those looking for better economic opportunities, after already settling in the ‘traditional’ immigrant city. As the Guatemalan-Maya population continued to grow, more immigrants travelled from Guatemala directly to North Georgia.⁵⁴ The differing dynamics of this region, in comparison to the traditional destination cities, affected community development. The general lack of local knowledge about Latinx culture was compounded by the relatively sudden community growth of Spanish-speakers. This lack of cultural knowledge from locals fueled generalized categorizing of all Latinx’s with a specific set of cultural traits, including assumed language, religion, and beliefs, among several others. As an indigenous group, ethnic generalization erased the traits that differentiated the indigenous Maya from the westernized, Spanish speaking Mexican population in North Georgia.

The erasure of Maya indigeneity stalled, if not prevented, the establishment of resources tailored to the needs of this population. These resources include everything from linguistic

⁵² Odem and Brown, “Living Across Borders”, online

⁵³ Bankston, “New People in the New South”, 24

⁵⁴ Odem and Lacy, *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*, xvi-xvii

interpreters and cultural education to financial education and immigration lawyers. Today, a local university and several churches work closely with the Maya community in North Georgia to provide much needed resources and education to the outside population. These organizations mobilize resources the Guatemalan-Maya population requires to effectively establish life and community in North Georgia. Although progress is being made, there is still a high demand for interpreters, education services, and community organization specific to the Maya people.

Politics in the New South

The increase of immigrant labor in Georgia, and throughout the greater Southeast, did not occur without resistance. The political conversation surrounding immigrants and immigration intensified at the turn of the century and much of the legislation concentrated on exclusionary tactics. Major contributing factors to the development of these laws included job availability and xenophobia. There was a strong xenophobic shift with the turn of the century following the 9/11 attacks.⁵⁵ Deteriorating economic conditions and continued Latinx immigration to the U.S. fueled this sentiment during the Great Recession that began in 2008.

Although there are many laws and political actions that influenced the lives of immigrants throughout the Southeast, this discussion will focus on laws related to immigrant education attainment, in both public and private spaces. These laws were deeply rooted in anti-immigrant sentiment and influence educational institutions. In 2012, Senate Bill 458 (SB 458) was proposed as an amendment to a previous bill. SB 458 sought to restrict undocumented student access to higher education by preventing anyone without legal residency to enroll in a college, university, or technical school within the state.⁵⁶ At the time of its proposal, undocumented immigrants were barred from enrolling in the top five public universities and

⁵⁵ Lacy and Odem, "Popular Attitudes and Public Policies", 144

⁵⁶ Georgia General Assembly, Senate Bill 458, 2012

were disqualified from in-state tuition at any higher-education institution. This bill also rejected foreign passports as acceptable forms of identification in an attempt to impede undocumented immigrant access to basic services that required proof of identification, which further demonstrates the extent to which this law attempted to prevent undocumented immigrant access to necessities. Ultimately, the House did not pass SB 458.⁵⁷

The proposal of SB 458 furthered anti-immigrant political discourse throughout Georgia. Barry Loudermilk, a legislator from North Georgia, proposed the section of SB 458 preventing any undocumented student from enrolling in any institution of higher education. The bill itself was created by the House Judiciary Committee Non-Civil, which was composed of Loudermilk and three legislators from the north metro-Atlanta.⁵⁸ The composition of this committee, and their political goals through SB 458, reflect the intentions of these politicians towards immigration reform, and how they influenced their communities. Although North Georgia experienced a consistently increasing Latin-American immigrant population, political actions attempted to prevent community building and assimilation.

Prior to the proposal of SB 458, the United States government established nationalistic policies in the early 2000's. The federal government passed a number of anti-immigrant laws through the institution of public education. In 2001, the United States began implementing Public Law 107-110, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).⁵⁹ This act concentrated exclusively on public K-12 education and replaced the Bilingual Education Act. Rather than emphasizing multilingualism for Nonnative-English speaking students, educational institutions were forced into an exclusive focus on English.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ No Child Left Behind, 2001

⁶⁰ Lee and Wright, "The Rediscovery of Heritage and Community Language Education", 143

The passage of such laws created a barrier that must be currently negotiated by both undocumented students and their educators. The combination of local legislative actions establishes a heightened exclusionary environment for non-English speaking undocumented immigrants and their children. Removing multilingual education in the public school system reinforces an erasure of culture. Although though the law is aimed at immigrant students, educators and public school administrators ultimately enforce it through teaching practices. The passage and enforcement of these laws establish a particular culture in the public school system, which can influence educator understandings and perceptions towards undocumented and non-native English speaking students.

The Immigrants

Understanding students outside of the school system is crucial for effective education. As Lisa Delpit argues, “If we do not have some knowledge of children’s lives outside of the realms of paper-and-pencil work, and even outside of their classrooms, then we cannot know their strengths.”⁶¹ As it relates to the Guatemala-Maya in North Georgia, educator perception of this indigenous cultural influences students’ academic achievement within a Western public school system. Prior to delving into the educator’s perspectives on their students’ culture, I will discuss basics of Guatemalan-Maya heritage. In order to analyze educator interviews, it is imperative to contextualize Maya culture within the United States and Central America.

The term ‘Maya’ will be used broadly throughout this study to encompass the many Maya groups that originate from Guatemala. As an indigenous group, Maya people demonstrate a tremendous amount of diversity. They reside throughout Central America and the Yucatán peninsula and speak 31 distinct languages.⁶² Understanding and maintaining language is integral

⁶¹ Delpit, *Other People’s Children*, 173

⁶² Coe, “The Maya”, 28

for Maya heritage, especially as they establish communities the United States. As identified by the educators from North Georgia, they are most familiar with students speaking Q'onjob'al, K'iche', Mam, and Chuj.

It is important to note that the spoken communication used by Maya people is a language and not a dialect. A dialect derives its structure from a language, but is slightly altered based on social or geographical conditions. Dialects are mutually comprehensible by people who may use the same language. Each Maya language is unique in structure and phonetics, and not mutually comprehensible. A speaker of K'iche' could not use their language to communicate with a speaker of Mam.⁶³ Labeling a Maya language as a dialect is a highly political tactic used to denigrate indigeneity. As previously discussed, Maya people experience ethnic discrimination within their home country, and throughout the Americas. Reducing their language to a dialect further contributes to this abuse.

Maya language and culture are constantly evolving and developing. Self-identity for the Maya people is enormously complex, especially through transnational settlement. For those that immigrate to the United States, indigenous Maya must navigate their identity through a different set of circumstances than what was experienced in Guatemala. Many continue to experience ethnic discrimination from the Latinx community while facing ethnic erasure from the dominant culture. For adult Maya in the U.S., community development has aided in establishing strong indigenous identity but proven a continuous struggle. A few of these barriers include maintaining leaders, gathering finances, and laws in the U.S. Fear of prejudice is also a contributing factor to community development, and some Maya do not openly discuss their indigenous identity upon first entering the United States to avoid discrimination.⁶⁴

⁶³ Coe, "The Maya", 26

⁶⁴ Lebaron, "When Latinos are not Latinos", 188-189

Generational differences have also created conflict among Maya parents and their U.S.-born children. For the children of Maya immigrants, growing up in the United States produced a shift towards a Latinx identity and failure to maintain their Maya language.⁶⁵ In many cases, this prevented children from communicating with extended family in Guatemala, and established familial distance and disconnect. In the mid-2000's, a university in North Georgia partnered with the local Maya and attempted to establish community space for Maya children to learn the value of their language and heritage.⁶⁶ Through the development of this project, Guatemalan-Maya parents expressed mixed opinions on their children learning the Maya language. While some desired the continuation of Maya culture through their children, others were afraid it would impede their children's ability to assimilate into the United States.⁶⁷

The Maya people and history are not static, but continually existing and developing. The experiences of Guatemalan-Mayas in the United States demonstrate the complexity of their indigenous identity as they maneuver through the economic, social, and political region of North Georgia. This brief introduction into Maya culture provides a basis to understand their heritage within the Westernized, public school system.

The Teachers

When I conducted the interviews, all educators (see Table 1) involved in this study were employed in the same county within North Georgia. They were asked to participate because the Guatemalan-Maya population in this particular county had increased to such an extent that these teachers almost exclusively taught students from a Maya background. Prior to the increase in Maya students at their institutions, the educators had very little or no knowledge of the Maya.

⁶⁵ Lebaron, "When Latinos are not Latinos", 184

⁶⁶ Maya parents noted that not all children would maintain fluency in their Maya language, but wanted to emphasize its importance. Hence the use of 'value'.

⁶⁷ Lebaron, "Partnership Service-Learning Between Maya Immigrants and the University", 200-201

Two educators cited other colleagues (outside of this study) as their initial reference or ‘informant’, and two educators learned through their direct work with the population. Therefore, their preliminary knowledge on this population was derived from personal experience or the experiences of others. In the area, there have been efforts by university educators and churches to promote education on the singularity of the Maya population, but most teachers also conducted their own research to better understand the differences they witnessed between their Guatemalan-Maya students and other Latinx English language-learners (ELLs).

Grade level	Pseudonym	Experience
Elementary	Haley	2 nd year teacher in the Newcomer ESOL program for students in grades K-5.
Elementary	Francesca	Parent facilitator at the elementary level. Position is state-funded, specific to Title 1 schools. 10 years as a parent facilitator and 1 year as a migrant coordinator.
Middle	Helen	7 th grade ESOL teacher, 10 years of experience with immigrant students.
Middle	Sofia	ESOL math teacher for the past 4 years. Also taught ESOL reading the previous year.
High	Christina	English literature for 10 th , 11 th , and 12 th grades, and ESOL teacher. 9 th year working with ESOL students.
High	Samantha	English literature for 9 th grade, and ESOL teacher.
High	Gracie	ESOL teacher, language acquisition and support classes. Previously taught Spanish.

Characteristics of the Teachers (Table 1)

The history and political climate of North Georgia influence the conclusions educators made about their students. Most notably, the Guatemalan-Maya students were identified because of their differences from Mexican or Mexican-American ELLs. Mexican immigrants arrived in North Georgia during the initial industry boom and represented a significant majority of the immigrant population for decades. Many of the services provided to ELL students are structured around the needs of Mexican and Mexican-Americans. In combination with the indigenous

discrimination faced by many Maya, and not volunteering their identity, it is understandable that these teachers were unable to immediately discern Guatemalan-Maya students.

Throughout the interview process, all teachers demonstrated a general knowledge and understanding of their Maya students. When the interviews took place, every educator had spent at least a full school year working with this population. Most educators had spent several years teaching Guatemalan-Maya students, and some had witnessed their ESOL classes shift from majority Mexican and Mexican American students to majority Guatemalan-Maya students over the past decade. Even though they had received little (if any) formal education or supplemental training, all the educators expressed fundamental knowledge of Maya culture, language, and the distinct barriers they encountered as students in the public school system. Overall, the educators understood the Maya culture in generalities but their opinions are influenced by the system in which they operate.

During the interview process, teachers occasionally overstated certain subjects or situations related to their Guatemalan-Maya students. That is to say, some observations or claims were presented without solid factual evidence, but emphasized through the teacher's passion and urgency. For example, during a conversation about gender roles, Christina, a high school ESOL teacher observed:

They dress differently a little bit...they are viewed as promiscuous. And yet, they are the least promiscuous girls you will ever meet. These girls are sheltered. They are the least sexually promiscuous people and yet, why are they pregnant? And what we have found is that, because of their cultural perspective, girls are like girls were here 100 years ago. Girls can't say no, girls are highly submissive to the male authority figure in their lives. If you are told that you will be with this person, you are with that person.

(Christina)

Christina understood her female high-school age Maya students to be submissive as a result of their cultural understandings of gender. There are generalities in this statement that can be

supported by evidence, but many of the direct statements cannot be proven. Discrimination and violence against women in Guatemala is an issue, but it is not a specific cultural trait of the Guatemala-Maya. Increased discrimination and violence against women throughout Central America grew as the drug trade also facilitated human trafficking. In regards to young women and pregnancy, socially acceptable marriage age is dependent on the sociocultural understandings of communities, not the Maya as a collective. From a study conducted in 2004 with 10 randomly selected low-economic, indigenous villages in Guatemala, only 2 were cited for higher rates of young marriages.⁶⁸ It is possible (but not proven) Christina's students are predominantly from one specific Maya group, and young marriage is more accepted, so her observations were not entirely unfounded. Nevertheless, this analysis will discuss Maya without specifying groups so all observations should be considered along with supplemental evidence to accurately portray the entirety of the situation. The boundaries of this research can be mitigated with other studies on the Maya and indigenous students in K-12 education.

It is important to understand the perceptions of educators who must struggle with the newness and geographical specificity of this situation. As previously discussed, it is difficult for the teachers to access formal training specifically on Guatemalan-Maya students. Instead, many use their personal perspectives to contextualize their experiences with individual students. There are extenuating factors, such as specific indigenous ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and motivation for migration that affect the lives of the Maya students. This is not necessarily information educators have access to, or information students are comfortable sharing. Many differentiating variables 'lie below the surface'.

⁶⁸ *Poverty in Guatemala*. World Bank Publications, 316, 323

For Christina, and the educators as a body, their passion and concern for the welfare of their Maya students and families is especially pronounced in these overstatements. It is essential to understand their statements as partial. These interviews were not conducted in a clinical tone, and educators were encouraged to discuss the topics about which they felt strongly. Their perspectives are not blanket truths, but they do demonstrate major repeating themes.

The increase in Guatemalan-Maya students is still new to the school systems and the teachers. The newness of the situation is a huge contributing factor to the general knowledge of public school employees. Without formal or systemic recognition of the needs of this population in the public school system, educators have relied on their colleagues and their own perceptions to understand their students. The complexities associated with this population transformation are exacerbated in areas that experience higher settlements of Guatemalan-Maya immigrants. In combination, the lack of resources and concentrated population creates an urgent situation for educators and students alike.

Barriers to Education

There are universal barriers experienced by Latinx immigrants within the Georgia public school system. These include undocumented students and the U.S. born children of undocumented immigrants. In a 2004 study of educational outcomes for undocumented students throughout Georgia, six primary obstacles were identified. They included a) lack of understanding of U.S. public schools, b) low parental involvement, c) lack of residential stability d) lack of resources and school support for the needs of Latinx students, e) lack of incentives for continuing education, and f) no feasible access to higher education.⁶⁹ Even though over a decade has passed since these results were published, these reasons are still extremely relevant today. Of

⁶⁹ Bohon, Macpherson, and Atilas, "Educational Barriers", 43

the educators interviewed for this study, these same six reasons were repeatedly discussed as barriers their students faced.

Many of these barriers are related to political policy and implementation. Some of these laws are directly aimed at excluding undocumented students from education, while other laws create barriers to resources. For example, SB 457 sought to specifically prevent undocumented students access to higher education in Georgia. Although it was never passed, undocumented students are still barred from attending the top five public universities, and must pay out of state tuition at any state higher education institution. Without citizenship, they are disqualified from any financial aid. Ultimately, higher education is inaccessible to these students because, even if they enroll, they cannot afford to attend.

Outside of education, housing laws and regulations frequently create instability for undocumented families. Without proof of legal residency, housing can be difficult to find and afford. Although these laws are not targeted at students in the public school system, the instability of frequent relocation negatively affects their educational performance. Students need consistent attendance to complete the milestones for each grade level. It is unlikely that the legislators intended to target the schools, however, the housing regulations, and the other anti-immigrant laws, seriously and negatively affect the lives of the children.

For Guatemalan-Maya students, barriers to education obtainment are similar to those listed above, but typically present themselves with more intensity and frequency. These barriers are compounded as a result of language, ethnic discrimination, student or family education background, socioeconomic status, and migrating for refuge (rather than employment). Many Guatemalan-Maya students are not proficient Spanish speakers. Especially in the highly indigenous areas of Guatemala, children speak one of the Maya languages first and acquire

Spanish secondarily. Once enrolled in the school system, they report their native language as Spanish as a result of ethnic discrimination. Guatemalan-Maya living in the United States statistically have a lower economic level than non-Guatemalan/indigenous immigrants.⁷⁰ Many of the immigrants from Guatemala also had less access to formal education in their home country and completed fewer years of schooling. For many Maya, the resources needed to supplement these obstacles are inaccessible or completely unavailable.

Throughout all the interviews conducted for this study, the most central theme for educators was language and literacy. Many of the Maya parents were unable to read or write in Spanish or English, and some were unable to speak in Spanish. Many newly arrived students could not read, write, or speak proficiently in Spanish. Most of the barriers discussed, including parental involvement in education, understanding of U.S. school systems, and access to resources, could be accommodated if parents and students were fluent in all aspects of Spanish language. Most Central American immigrants struggle with language and education because of access to formal schooling in their homeland. This is considerably more prominent for the Maya population because their spoken Maya is essentially an oral language. It is difficult (if not impossible) for schools to find translators for parents and students, and it is difficult for English teachers to build on students' native language knowledge for English acquisition.

The public school system is not prepared to adapt to the barriers confronted by Guatemalan-Maya students. Gorski argues that educational outcome disparities must be understood through "...the context of structural injustice and the unequal distribution of access and opportunity that underlies poverty."⁷¹ The barriers discussed above demonstrate some of the 'structural injustice' and 'unequal distribution' that disassociates Guatemalan-Maya from the

⁷⁰ Motel and Patten, "Hispanics of Guatemalan Origin", 2012

⁷¹ Gorski, "Poverty and the ideological imperative", 379

system of public education. The effects of these barriers are interpreted as deficits by teachers and administrators, based on the culture of public school expectations.

Methodology

This study will use qualitative methodology to analyze responses provided by the educators. The interviews will be analyzed inductively and the words of the teachers will shape the conclusions. This method of analysis was chosen specifically because of the newness of the Maya in the North Georgia public school systems. In this way, the analysis can build on the developing body of research related to this population.⁷²

This paper does not claim to offer detailed analysis on the actual situation of parents or children. I did not speak directly with Maya parents or students, but it is understood there is a tremendous amount of variety among the population. It should also be understood that this study focuses only on Guatemalan-Maya ESOL students in the public school system. Not every single Guatemalan-Maya student in the public school system is an English Language Learner, although it is a significant majority.

Prior to conducting interviews, I met with a ‘teacher on special assignment’, in a position of administration, for the county. This educator provided me with specific names of teachers to contact for interviews. Since the ESOL administrator for the county selected the educators involved in this study, it is relevant to note their perspectives were not impartial; they were selected through purposeful sampling. These teachers were recommended because of their extensive academic involvement with the Guatemalan-Maya population in North Georgia. Through this involvement, they are able to provide a mindful reflection on their roles as educators in connection with this community.

⁷² Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education*, 6-7

The ethnicity, gender, and national identities of the educators must be recognized as they provide a lens through which they see the world. Although the focus of this study is Guatemalan-Maya students, the narratives presented are not from Guatemalan-Maya people, or people who have lived in Guatemala. Ultimately, this lens influences the educators' understandings of their students. No person is devoid of cultural bias or ethnocentrism, and that must be taken into consideration to properly examine the interviews as broad, systemic components. To supplement these perspectives, further analysis will be used to analyze specific observations and situations.

All educators interviewed for this study were women, which influenced the conversation topics taking place between them and their students. Many of these women, especially those that worked with high school-age Guatemalan-Maya students, referred to confidential conversations; subjects not breached in a mixed-gender space. Their gender offered access to guarded topics of discussion, which illuminated the perceptions of the educators towards the roles of young Maya women within their families. However, none of the participants mentioned comparable conversations with their male students. In this way, their perspectives are gendered towards their female students.

While I would argue that the personal ethnic identities of the participants influence their understandings of interactions involving Guatemalan-Maya students, they will not be specifically defined within this study. My discussion of their personal ethnicities is limited to: a small portion of the educators interviewed identified as Latina, and a few had close personal connections to the Latinx community. None were Guatemalan-Maya or had any personal connections (outside of their roles as educators) to the Guatemalan-Maya community. Five out of seven educators involved in this study were native English speakers. The remaining educators who participated in this study did not specifically identify their ethnic identity.

The teachers taught grade levels between all three major school stages: elementary, middle, and high school. Throughout the interviews, educators discussed how these grade levels largely shape the experiences conveyed through the interviews. For example, the high school educators discussed documentation status because it influences post-secondary opportunities. At the elementary level, documentation status was not discussed at all. This is most likely because elementary-level Guatemalan-Maya students in ESOL classes are predominantly U.S. born citizens from undocumented parents. Although the citizenship status of the parent does have an effect on the life of the student, from the perspective of the educator, these effects are not as discernible at a young age.

Academic formats and expectations also differ between elementary, middle, and high schools. However, unlike content-based classes, ESOL courses do maintain significant similarities throughout all three levels. Linguistic goals are generally the same regardless of age, and each level uses similar classroom structures. Major differences are found in the content of the general education curriculum and assumed skills/knowledge of students. For instance, a 3rd grader entering the U.S. public school system without computer skills can potentially catch up to their peers in a short amount of time because less technological fluency is expected of young children. In contrast, a 10th grader entering the U.S. public school system with that same lack of knowledge will most likely experience greater difficulties.

I requested this balanced grade-level representation for the interviews (as far as it was possible) to understand the scope of interactions between the educators and their Guatemalan-Maya students. As discussed above, different barriers presented themselves depending on ages and educational levels of the students. The varying responses of educators at several different grade levels also reflect the influence of Maya students throughout the United States public

school system. They are not condensed within one specific age group, but rather influence the entirety of kindergarten through twelfth grades.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, meaning the questions used were general and constructed around common educator experiences. This method created a foundation for the teachers to direct their responses without being led. The questions were the same regardless of the grade level taught. They included:

Tell me about your experience with students from Guatemala.
To what extent have the children discussed where they are from?
To what extent do you interact with the parents of your Maya students?
If so, what are your perceptions of the parents versus parents of other Latino backgrounds?
Tell me about your classroom dynamic/climate between students of different nationalities.
How do you understand the study habits of your Guatemalan students?
How do you understand the interactions between educators and Guatemalan students?

Using these questions as a basis, educators could elaborate and move the conversation as they desired. This structure also allowed the educator flexibility to interpret the question, thus providing a response based on their most influential experiences.

The interviews themselves took place during the summer following the school year. They were conducted at the school in which the educator was employed or a public school facility. All interviews varied in length, between approximately 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The conversations of each interview were recorded and later transcribed. I met with both educators at the elementary level individually, while the interview with the high school educators was conducted as a group.

It should be noted that two of the interviews were conducted via email rather than in person. These email interviews included both the middle school teachers involved in this project. Both educators were available for follow-up questions and maintained communication after the

initial set of questions was sent. Since the interviews were done through written communication, the responses allowed for more reflection before being submitted. There was no opportunity for me to interpret emotional cues or expressions from the educators. This form of communication potentially affected the information I received from these educators. It could be argued that the information provided at the middle school level is less thorough as a result. However, upon analysis of the entire set of interviews, commentary from the middle school teachers appeared with similar frequency to in-person interviews.

After conducting and transcribing all the interviews, I coded the conversations based on repeating and relevant themes [see Appendix A]. Many quotes appear throughout different categories because the statements covered multiple themes. Not every quote or theme will be evaluated within this paper. The purpose of the analysis presented here is a comprehensive understanding, rather than a dissection of particularities.

Analysis

The conclusions drawn from this project were established through an inductive analysis. The interviews were analyzed for repeating subjects, phrases, and points of conversation, which developed into the themes discussed below. They include: ‘language and literacy’, ‘Maya knowledge deficit’, ‘barriers to education’, ‘technology as a barrier’, and ‘educator training, resources, and adaptations’. At different points throughout all of these themes, educators presented their ideas within the framework of deficit ideology. This ideology emphasizes the knowledge a student ‘lacks’, as defined by the expectations of the public school system.⁷³

Table 1 briefly summarized educators who participated in the study. These educators are identified by their pseudonym, grade level, and experience. The category that outlines their experience is based only on information provided in the interviews. This is not a full account of

⁷³ Gorski, “Poverty and the ideological imperative”, 382

their experience in education. Rather, this is the information they provided when asked directly, or information they offered at other points during the interviews.

There is differentiation in certain discussion topics based on grade level. For the educators at the elementary level, more emphasis is placed on parental involvement in schooling and the home environment. At the high school level, educators perceive their students to have many adult-like responsibilities, given by the parents in the home. This differentiation is critical to the analysis because it reflects the many factors influencing students' lives. At the elementary/middle level, the students described by the educators are typically US citizens born to Guatemalan-Maya immigrants, and they speak their Maya language or Spanish at home. Sometimes the elementary students are immigrants themselves, but they are still very young and language-learning is more accessible. At the high school level, teachers knew their students matured in Guatemala and crossed into the U.S. as teenagers. There is more discussion of trauma, culture shock, and contributing to the family unit as an adult. Students at the high school level are also less likely to have documentation, which ultimately bars them access to higher education. These factors contribute to the experiences and opportunities Guatemalan-Maya students encounter in the public school system, and ultimately must be negotiated by their educators as well.

Language and Literacy

Across elementary, middle, and high school levels, language and literacy of Guatemalan-Maya students and families was almost exclusively discussed as a deficit. Educators emphasized the language proficiency that they perceived Guatemalan-Maya to lack in their Maya language, Spanish, and English.

Many of our families...especially from Guatemala, cannot read or write even in their own language because most of them speak dialect, and even though they

understand and speak some Spanish, not all of them can speak completely 100 percent or understand or even write

(Francesca)

They have no written language...in the most advanced academic world there is a concept of the written form of Mam and Q'anjob'al but they don't have it.

(Christina)

...no education, they don't know Spanish...they speak very broken Spanish. They can't read or write in any language.

(Gracie)

This perception of literacy was a major barrier for educators. Regardless of which language was discussed, the students or families' linguistic proficiency served as an anchor for educator discussions. Teachers frequently connected their perceptions of literacy to deficits in other forms.

They come to us speaking Spanish but not knowing how to read and write it. They also have a limited knowledge of concepts and it is difficult for them to learn because they don't have the concepts from their native language developed so there is little to connect to new learning.

(Helen)

In this example, Helen understood her students' language background as a contributing factor to any difficulty acquiring another language. She specifies that they 'don't have the concepts from their native language', insinuating that students do not have sufficient formal education in their L1⁷⁴, a spoken Maya language, ultimately impeding them from learning L2 or L3. She cites linguistic 'concepts' as the primary barrier to language acquisition. I understood her use of 'concepts' to indicate formal linguistic structures and rules in their Maya language, which students may not have explicitly learned through academic education. This quote illustrates Helen's perspective on language learning, and to a larger extent, all the educators in this study.

⁷⁴ L1 is a language-education term that refers to a student's native language (or the language they used most frequently as a child). L2 is their second language, L3 is their third, etc.

Helen perceives any language-learning struggles a direct result of Maya language (as a deficit) and the education her students have received.

In this study, language and literacy are the foremost barriers expressed by educators. Their expectation of teaching language is rooted in scaffolding between L1 and L2. ELL curriculum frequently engages students' primary language to facilitate a faster acquisition of another language. This curriculum assumes students are proficient in reading, writing, and speaking their L1, or in this case, L2 (Spanish) as well. Without proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking a language, teachers encounter unfamiliar territory in providing linguistic education to their students. They cannot ground their teaching methods in the students primary language. In this particular situation, grounding teaching methods in a student's native language is additionally inaccessible because of the variety of Maya languages and scarcity of translators or educators fluent in these languages.

Discussion surrounding Guatemalan-Maya language and literacy also contained perceptions of students from rural areas of Guatemala. Educators, at the middle high school level, associated rural geography with a lack of education.

Students who came from the capital had enough literacy so that they could learn easily the content at our school. I cannot say the same for the ones who came from rural areas.

(Sofia)

Sofia directly connected geographic area with formal, academic education. From her perspective, students from urban areas were proficient in Spanish and quickly caught on to the language-teaching methods of the United States school system. Their language proficiency allowed them to develop English language concepts based on their previous knowledge. At the high school level, Christina echoed this same association.

...our kids from such a rural, limited educational background...don't even have a tenth of their own language.

(Christina)

Christina's comment on rural education was more general. She presented the assumption that the majority of her students are from rural areas, which is automatically associated with limited education. She also ties this back to language and literacy in a Maya language. For her, language is completely understood through writing, reading, and speaking structures. Educators connected rurality and the lack of formal education with a general absence of language in its entirety.

These statements must be approached with caution. Educator understanding of rurality and education ties back to the earlier discussion of overstatements. In rural areas of Guatemala, formal education may be more difficult to attain because of economic conditions and accessibility. Schools are not always within reasonable walking distances, educational materials are expensive, and low-income families are more in need of capital so children begin working. However, this is not a universal truth. As Guatemala globalized, and previously inaccessible areas developed roads, rurality is less frequently the explanation for lower access to formal education. Presently, declining economic conditions in Guatemala bar access to schooling. This is exacerbated by violence related to drug-trafficking and the quantity of people immigrating for refuge.

The perceptions of these educators are influenced by their access to information. Without accurate training and resources, educators must rely on their own experiences and research. While this independent inquiry into their students demonstrates a dedication to accommodating their needs as language-learners, it leaves little room to challenge preconceived ideas.

The quotes above demonstrate the duality of educator perceptions. These teachers are caring and compassionate towards their students, while perceiving them through deficit ideology. Gorski argues that educators attach themselves to deficit ideology when students encounter barriers because "...they allow educators to define problems in ways that call for straightforward and practical solutions."⁷⁵ The reality of the situation is much more grim: these barriers are structural and impenetrable by the limited time and resources of teachers and schools.⁷⁶ Ultimately, deficit ideology also masks structural injustice in the public system by placing emphasis on individual abilities and motivations, rather than institutional barriers.

Educators' frequent use of deficit terminology in the discussion of Guatemalan-Maya language and literacy is reflective of the hegemonic culture of the public school system. The U.S. school system exists in a narrow framework, for both students and educators. For students to find success in this system, their knowledge and proficiency must correspond to predetermined parameters. In this case, these parameters manifest through the definition of 'literacy' and 'language proficiency'. If a student or parent does not read, write, or speak a language fluently they are not considered language proficient. Educators typically have little flexibility for quantifying the knowledge and proficiency of their students outside of these boundaries. For the Guatemala-Maya, the conception of fluency used in the public school system ignores the linguistic structure and history of their Maya language. Subsequently, the traits of their indigenous language appear as 'insufficient' when viewed through systemic framework.

Maya knowledge deficit

Perceptions of Guatemalan-Maya knowledge, outside of language and literacy, were predominantly discussed at the elementary and middle levels in deficit form. Educators focused

⁷⁵ Gorski, "Poverty and the ideological imperative", 383

⁷⁶ Gorski, "Poverty and the ideological imperative", 383

on ways in which, they believed, parents were unable to support their children academically. Their understanding of inability was directly connected to the parents attainment of formal education.

They don't really have the knowledge of school and school procedures nor the tools to support their child's education meaning they don't know how to check their grades, how to help them with homework, etc.

(Helen)

Helen's commentary on academic support is understood through standards of the United States public school system. For her, academic support corresponds to parental involvement in the formal education process. Checking grades and assistance with homework, especially at the elementary and middle levels, are assumed responsibilities of parents. This understanding of involvement is further demonstrated by Haley:

We only send them [materials] in Spanish and it is not the first language for a lot of these families, it is not even something they can partially understand for some of these families. I mean, some of the families just say, you have to speak to my dad because my mom doesn't speak any Spanish...

(Haley)

Haley's connection illustrates actions taken to engage parents in the school. This particular method, sending materials home, intersects with language and literacy. Haley describes communicative practices that reflect public school culture in the United States. It is expected for parents and teachers to maintain communication about the schooling of the student, but this proves almost impossible when there is no mutual literacy or access to interpreters.

These conversations exemplify teachers navigating a situation outside their training and cultural framework. In Helen's case, she is attempting to teach reading, writing, and speaking English to a student without previous knowledge of written formal language structure. In this case, Haley is attempting to communicate with parents through a form of writing (letters, emails, etc.) or speaking, that they may not use.

Francesca identified the conclusions drawn from these unfamiliar situations.

...because they don't have the support at home, parents can't read or write, they don't have any, maybe a 1st grade education... So what happens is, because the students don't have that background, our students are behind. They are behind because they don't have anybody helping them or that has the knowledge to help them with math or reading...

(Francesca)

At the elementary level, the educators perceived academic performance to be shaped by the assistance students received from parents or family, particularly towards homework and content review. Outside of the school day, these adults are often the only source of assistance students have when completing their homework. This is compounded when students cannot access to research materials, such as the internet or a computer. In Francesca's statement, she understands students' academic performance to be heavily, if not almost entirely, dependent on their parents education level and proficiency in Spanish or English.

For the Guatemala-Maya, the accepted norms of the education system are often ineffective. These norms are based in hegemonic expectations, based on literacy. Consequently, educators apply deficit language to the Guatemala-Maya as they understand them through the structure of public education. This correlates to the conclusions drawn from educators understanding of Guatemala-Maya language and literacy. There is disconnect between the teachers conception of Maya knowledge, when applied to the framework of the public school system. This resulting use of deficit language embodies the structure of hegemonic, institutionalized education when applied to an indigenous group that speaks an oral language.

Barriers to education

Guatemalan-Maya students face many barriers to education that exist outside the classroom. Barriers observed by the teachers were largely divided based on age level. On the elementary and middle levels, focus was the home environment and parental involvement. At

these levels, educators correlated their perceptions of parental knowledge to student academic success.

Students usually have other duties at home including cooking and taking care of younger siblings. Homework is usually done late at night if done at all...they learn to do their homework while taking care of the little ones...

(Sofia)

Sofia understood her students to have a high level of responsibility at home, to the point that they were unable to accomplish their homework. This statement is made as a generality towards all Guatemalan-Maya students. I believe this is an overstatement, but it does not nullify the importance or the urgency with which she speaks. Her urgency is connected to the students ability to complete homework while at home, and how this ultimately shapes their academic education.

Haley elaborates on her perceptions of students' home-life:

...the parents aren't home when the students are home a lot of the time. They work nights so we have a large population of parents who, the students get home, they prepare them something to eat and leave them with an extended family member while they go to work the night shift.

(Haley)

Haley also understood her students to have less parental involvement during the evenings. Like Sofia, Haley recognized her students home life, and subsequently their parents, as a barrier to academic success.

At the high school level, students were perceived as adults. Their educational obstacles were less tangible, in comparison to the concreteness at younger levels, and existed outside the school system. Gracie discussed how the socioeconomic status of her students effected their education.

I think we create the high dropout rates because they have to work, they have to provide for the family. And I hear them a lot, 'well, when I graduate, I'm not

going to be able to work with my real name anyway so what is a high school diploma?’

(Gracie)

This observation connected socioeconomic status, citizenship, and its resulting control over education attainment. It is notable that she directs responsibility on the school system (or society), including herself, for the high dropout rate. Rather than presenting education attainment as an individualistic goal and applying deficit language to students, she acknowledges barriers created through politics and economy.

In recent years, there has been an influx of Guatemalan student immigrants, many of which are older and enrolled in the public school system. These minors are considered ‘unaccompanied minors’ because they journeyed to the U.S. without adult family members. The U.S., particularly North GA, is a relatively new destination for these unaccompanied minors. For teenage Guatemalan-Maya immigrants, their journey to the United States is typically a dangerous experience. At the high school level, Christina discussed how trauma impedes student learning.

...so they are literally coming now, 16 years later, to live with a family that is their mom and dad and sibling who they’ve never met or talked to. It’s very odd. I think it would be very difficult, it would exacerbate the negative learning environment.

(Christina)

In this case, trauma refers to the culture shock of entering into a new environment and a new living situation. For some students, trauma can occur during their border crossing experience or prior to immigrating. Although the educator does not delineate the correlation between negative experiences and academic success, she does recognize the importance of this consideration when perceiving student achievement in education.

I discuss barriers to education in the beginning of this piece, as they applied to immigrants as a whole and Guatemalan-Maya immigrants as a group. The responses provided by the educators, particularly at the elementary and middle levels, seem unilateral in contrast. While the high school teachers were forthcoming with their discussion on socioeconomic status, documentation, and trauma, elementary and middle grade educators centered their discussion on parental influence. This could be attributed to elementary and middle school students young age, and therefore a higher likelihood of documentation and a lower likelihood to experience trauma related to immigration. This can vary at the middle school level, where students typically range in age between twelve and fourteen. However, my understanding of middle school students, in this case, is derived from Sofia's discussion.

At the high school level, the age of students and their experiences present them as adults. The barriers they face, as described by the high school teachers, likely correspond closely to the barriers experienced by the parents of elementary and middle school students. By framing the barriers to education through the earlier discussion, it is possible to understand sociopolitical influences that affect students across all grade levels. The lives of younger students are predominantly framed by people (parents and family) who are undocumented, and who may suffer from immigration-related trauma. Although elementary and middle school educators infer parental role as it effects the student, younger students essentially experience the byproducts of these laws and regulations. Therefore, students across all grade levels are influenced by similar barriers.

This analysis of educational barriers presents concerns surrounding citizenship and socioeconomic status as it relates to the Guatemala-Maya and their U.S.-born children. It seems obvious that citizenship would provide more opportunities. However, the implementation of this

rule is different for students whose childhood is structured around laws that prevent their parents from acquiring citizenship status, financial stability, and upward mobility. This is further compounded by linguistic and ethnic discrimination. Ultimately, the extent of these factors will influence academic achievement as younger students reach high school.

Technology as a barrier

Across elementary, middle, and high school levels, technology was presented as a distinct barrier to education. The term ‘technology’ can encompass everything from smartboards and tablets to specialized computer programs that teach coding and calculus. It also includes email-based communication between parents and teachers. Presently, usage of technology in the public schools is increasingly understood as beneficial to student achievement and school success. The mass implementation of this practice assumes a certain level of familiarity with technology, established on age and grade level.

Francesca commented on the computer skills she observes with her Guatemalan-Maya students, and how they are influenced by their access to computers.

...equipping them with computer skills because they don't have them. They don't have computers at home, they don't have internet at home...

(Francesca)

Even though the use of technology is widespread, electronics are generally expensive and unaffordable for low-income families. Without computers or internet in their home, Guatemalan-Maya students have fewer opportunities to practice or learn. Francesca continues, and expands on technology and standardized testing.

Testing time comes and everything is on a computer and they are trying to figure out where's what, wasting their time doing that instead of doing what they know...

(Francesca)

Presently, standardized tests on the state and federal level are increasingly administered on computers. As Francesca points out, without a certain technological proficiency, students will spend less time demonstrating their knowledge and more time figuring out a machine or computer program.

At the high school level, educators echoed the connection between computer skills and standardized testing.

C: They gotta pass that test. The school is judged on the ESOL population geometry and American lit pass rates...no schooling. No English. This thing is written at an 11th grade Lexile for English.

G: And this year, let's add in that we are going to take it on the computer.

C: How? A computer they have never seen. And do all that reading in English...But what are we going to do? Are we going to talk to them or at them like they are a wall, or are we going to start where they need and build their skills?...

S: We run a different school within a school.

(Christina, Gracie, Samantha)

Here, the teachers dissect technology in combination with inaccessible content, as presented through a standardized test. The solution they explain with 'we run a different school within a school' demonstrates the scaffolding and adaptations made to accommodate the needs of their Guatemalan-Maya students. Their approach to education specifically addresses the variance between the skills of the Guatemalan-Maya students and the expectations of the public school system. They are subverting state and federal requirements in favor of a practical approach to educating their students.

Technology, while so frequently thought of as a resource, has developed into a barrier for many Guatemalan-Maya students. As demonstrated by the educators, the public education system expects all students to have a certain level of technological literacy. For teachers at elementary, middle, and high school, a major disadvantage of this technology reliance appears specifically through standardized testing. When a computerized test is presented to a student

without proficient technology skills, or previous experience, the student is no longer being tested on content. Instead, that test is a reflection of their ability to comprehend content when it is presented in an unfamiliar format.

Ultimately, this is a barrier that affects the school. Standardized tests, whether delivered in paper or computerized, are used to determine the efficacy of each individual institution. Schools with higher populations of Guatemalan-Maya students immediately suffer a disadvantage, simply because their students may not experience the assumed level of exposure to technology.

Educator training, resources, and adaptations

When questioned about their access to training and resources, teachers discussed the lack of accessibility, particularly as it applied to themselves. Haley mentioned the efforts made to educate teachers on the Guatemalan-Maya people. These efforts were contrasted with a continued absence of comprehensive training.

There are no additional resources, there have hardly been any teacher trainings to show them the differences in Mayan students. Our parent facilitator does a great job of trying to educate the teachers but there is still a lot for us to learn...about their culture, and who they are, and how they learn best.

(Haley)

In this quote, Haley's reference to 'them' refers to classroom teachers while 'us' groups ESOL and classroom teachers together. This grouping implies the need for supplemental training is not limited to ESOL educators, but includes classroom/content teachers as well.

Gracie demonstrated some of the lengths educators go to for information that may support content instruction for Guatemalan-Maya students.

I think there has been very little training resources provided. Everything we've looked up on our own or...Samantha looked up a poem in one of the languages.

(Gracie)

Gracie names an activity that incorporates Maya culture into a lesson. She did not elaborate on the outcome of Samantha's search, but the example still demonstrates the breadth of her actions. Including a Maya poem in a lesson integrates culture into curriculum while engaging students of that heritage. This independent research also provides an opportunity for educators to further understand this culture. In her comment, Gracie describes educators' access to training and resources as completely self-dependent. Her specification of Samantha's activity is an attempt to reconcile the disparity between the structure of public education and the needs of the Guatemala-Maya people.

At the elementary level, Francesca reiterates the deficit of training through cultural education.

Well we do get trainings. The department of Georgia does give us training for parent capacity for, you know, helping the teachers build relationships and all of that...But we don't get the trainings on the culture...Who is going to train us?
(Francesca)

It is notable that Francesca specifically points to a need for cultural training. In both Haley and Gracie's comments, the need for cultural instruction was emphasized for students and educators. For students, the incorporation of culture was a means of engaging them in education, while these teachers understood their unfamiliarity with Guatemalan-Maya culture as a deficit to efficacy.

As the educators continued, they listed many different ways in which they attempted to accommodate the needs of their students.

...I am available for help until 8:30 through email or phone...I also offer help early in the morning and during lunch-they bring their lunch to my classroom and I work with them.
(Sofia)

For Sofia, expanding her availability relates to her perception of home life for middle-school Guatemalan-Maya students. Because she understands them to have a high level of non-academic

responsibility at home, she alters her schedule to allow extra time teacher-driven academic assistance.

Haley demonstrates similar accommodations for her students.

So, students who speak a Mayan language as another language can actually stay in my program for an extra semester so they can spend more time absorbing English while they are trying to learn Spanish out in their communities.

(Haley)

Although students from a variety of backgrounds attend her Newcomer Program⁷⁷, she has modified the standards exclusively for her Guatemalan-Maya students. In this example, her alterations to the Newcomer Program provide a general acknowledgement of the differences of Maya students. However, there is a limitation on the extent to which educators can alter their curriculum. In this case, Haley is providing additional time for students to acquire the material instead of reworking the content itself.

Francesca, a parent facilitator, described a project she created and implemented entirely on her own, to accommodate students and families.

I prepare like, these little DVD's, that if they have a TV at home, they can put in the DVD and it will be their teacher for their student... So I lined up a bunch of teachers to come and record them, and each teacher did a different part. One did foundations, one did numbers, one did time tables and so forth until we had everything covered from Pre-K through 6th grade.

(Francesca)

The project she describes intersects several of the previously-discussed needs of Guatemalan-Maya families. This specific project intersects language and literacy with students' academic achievement outside the classroom. For students to practice instructional content, they only need access to a television. This DVD project allows parents the opportunity to support the academic achievement of their students beyond language or literacy barriers.

⁷⁷ The Newcomer Program is an ESOL program specifically for students who have recently arrived in the U.S. and may speak little to no English.

For the high school educators, they discussed the economic needs of their students and their own personal involvement.

C: So much of our day- feeding them, providing them with just basic necessities....

G: Making sure they have a backpack, making sure they have school supplies.

C: Ah, pencils, paper, they don't have that stuff at home.

G: Making sure they have jackets and gloves, because they are walking.

S: Band aids.

C: They don't have any of it.

G: And we are like parents in so many ways, for them, because many of them don't have parents here.

C: And then we talk about things like getting these kids involved in extracurricular activities, I mean it is a joke. Unless the teacher wants to pay for all of the- which we do, we do- we pay for all of the fees, all of the uniforms, the fees to play, all of the things to go...

(Christina, Gracie, Samantha)

While educators paying out-of-pocket for their own materials is (an all too) common practice, paying for students' materials, necessities, and extracurricular fees is not. To integrate students in the public school system, and provide them with equitable opportunity for success and involvement, these teachers used personal funds.

Educators occupy a space between the structure of the public school system and the needs of their Guatemalan-Maya students. The accommodations made to content and content delivery exemplify their efforts to reduce the disparity, but comprehensive training and resources are inaccessible. The inaccessibility of these resources is due, in part, because of the newness of Guatemalan-Maya immigrants in the United States. As previously discussed, the increase of this population has occurred over a relatively small amount of time. There is also extensive cultural and linguistic diversity throughout the Maya population which increases the difficulty of obtaining translators or cultural instructors.

The actions of the educators demonstrate sacrifice as a means of accommodating the unique needs of their Guatemalan-Maya students. Changing their schedule, restructuring the

format of their program, and providing personal financial assistance were only a selection of actions discussed throughout the interviews. The steps they took to promote a conducive educational environment for their Guatemalan-Maya students connects to the laws that establish barriers to education. These laws are not relegated to student academic success. The educators have illustrated how sociopolitical and economic factors increase their personal responsibility, and individual actions, towards their students.

Interpretation

To better understand the positionality of the Guatemala-Maya in public education, they must be viewed through the lens of critical multiculturalism. According to Marom, rather than promoting diversity based on ‘celebratory’ tactics, critical multiculturalism calls for a challenge to the power relations entrenched in Western societies; through the examination of racism that exists beyond color. As discussed at the beginning of this piece, there are mechanisms of oppression that affect immigrants from Latin-America, regardless of indigeneity. Colonial culture generalizes Maya with Latinx by painting everyone with a broad ‘brown’ brush. In doing so, the continual colonization of indigenous peoples occurring in the Americas vanishes from the analysis of race and racism.⁷⁸

In the broader scope of United States society, not only North Georgia, the institution of public education is one of many spaces that replicate hegemonic norms. The foundational laws of public education are constructed through colonial understandings of inclusion, and therefore establish it as tool to promote and continue the dominant culture. This foundation in colonialism and Western thought systematically prevents public education from supporting the indigenous cultural identity of the Guatemala-Maya.

⁷⁸ Marom, “A New Immigrant Experience in Navigating Multiculturalism” 27

Public education is not the only institution in the United States that reinforces or replicates hegemonic culture. However, education is a unique institution in this regard because it presents itself as accessible, beyond citizenship. Students without documentation are not barred from entering into the public education system. In fact, of the laws already mentioned, many established systemic accommodations for immigrant students and non-native English speakers. There is a pervasive duality within public education for immigrant students: it is accessible, but will never provide the accommodations to be deemed equitable. This imbalance is extended for Maya students as they negotiate public education as indigenous people.

The educators involved in this study frequently expressed the language, literacy, and general knowledge of their Guatemalan-Maya students and families in deficit form. Because they understand this group through the established lens of public education and modern western norms, their culture appears regressive. This perception of deficiency is unique to the Maya as an indigenous group existing in colonial Americas. It is compounded further when Guatemala-Maya people are blanketed with the label ‘Latinx’ or ‘Hispanic’, as it correlates their culture to Westernized Latin-America and consequently erases indigenous identity.

There are broad implications for deficit language used by educators, particularly as it applies to linguisticism and indigeneity. To better understand these consequences, it should be established that this is not an implication of individual educator beliefs. The public school system is a subset of hegemonic culture and as such, establishes a learning environment that replicates broader ruling class ideology. Educators are not immune from these influences, and this manifests in their observations and instruction. As Endo argues, unconscious understandings of culture, without critical exposure to the complex dynamics of language and power, results in “subjective assessments about linguistically diverse learners’ academic performance that could

ultimately perpetuate uneven academic opportunities and outcomes”.⁷⁹ Without exposing teachers to the colonial relationship with indigeneity, these underlying notions remain unchallenged, even as they influence the perceived academic competency of Guatemalan-Maya students.

The unconscious understanding of culture, as described above, presents further difficulty as it is indistinguishable for many outside its oppression. Teachers described at length the accommodations made for their Maya students, along with their desire for thoughtful and extensive training. It is obvious they cared deeply for the well-being and success of their students, but recognized the challenges to establishing an environment conducive to their education. This recognition included self-reflection and systemic critique. All the educators involved in this study actively sought to create a functional academic experience for their Guatemala-Maya students.

It must be understood: the issue is not the educators, but rather the system and its role in the maintenance of hegemony. As a component of society at-large, the structures of oppression that exist within the public school have become a collective norm. The ‘goals’ and ‘milestones’ students demonstrate across different levels are presented as preparation for their future or measures of academic success. These milestones are understood as universal truths of academic success because they are easily observed within dominant culture. This assumption of universality, as it applies to United States society, subsequently eliminates critical analysis.

Much of the research related to multiculturalism in education engages the responsibility of the educator in fostering a diverse curriculum and environment. I want to emphasize that educators are not merely proponents of this system, but also exist under its oppression. Even as

⁷⁹ Endo, “Unconscious Deficit Views of Affirmation of Linguistic Variety in the Classroom”, 208-213

teachers, they still maintain individual identities that fall under the scrutiny of dominant culture. Supplementary training and resources will not completely resolve the barriers teachers listed, because educators are not autonomous from this hegemonic system of which education is a central part. They navigate a complicated space, particularly when confronted with bridging disparities between systemic expectations and the traits of their students. This is not to argue that training and resources would be superfluous. It is difficult to imagine that there would be any detriment to providing educators with additional support. Rather, to completely understand scope of this situation is to view teachers as participants in the same system, not culprits.

Conclusion

The institution of public education serves to acculturate and socialize many students, not only the Guatemala-Maya. Any student raised outside of the dominant culture in the United States experiences some level of assimilation during their tenure as a public school student (as do all students). This institution begins imprinting values and methods of thought onto children at ages as young as four or five. First this reason, it is vital for American Studies as a field to increase their involvement in the policy, legality, and curriculum design of the public school system.

In her Presidential Address to the field of American Studies, Shelley Fisher-Fishkin evoked Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* when she asked⁸⁰:

“But who is "alien" and who's "illegal"? And when how did those legal constructs take shape? What does it mean to be "included" in or "excluded" from the nation? What implicit and explicit ideals of what and who the United States should be shaped these exclusions? What role did race and racism play as these policies developed?”

⁸⁰ It is relevant to note that Anzaldúa has a background in Education. She studied Education in college and spent many years as a teacher and parent facilitator in the public school system.

Her questions instigate discussion surrounding the concepts of identity and inclusion in the United States. This is particularly relevant for the Guatemalan-Maya, as they experience intersectionality within U.S. society, the Latinx community, and the Maya community. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa conjures the sentiment of identity formation as it traverses borders. Through their indigenous and Latinx identity, Guatemalan-Maya immigrants are forced to negotiate the United States, grounded in the implicit and explicit conceptions of dominant culture. These conceptions are marked by assumptions about indigeneity as an ‘underdeveloped’ culture, and Latinx as ‘foreign’ or ‘other’. The hegemonic concept of ‘normal’ stresses white, middle-class, English-speaking citizens as the measure of regularity. This measure of regularity compels Guatemalan-Maya identity, in its entirety, to be understood as an ‘outsider’ in the United States.

These same hegemonic ideas of identity pervade the public-school system. The foundational laws used to direct this institution are shaped by colonial understandings of inclusion. As an institution created to replicate colonial thought, there seems to be no appropriate space for the acceptance of indigenous culture. Since the very foundation of the public school system is the replication of congruent cultural ideals, it cannot systematically support indigenous cultural identity.

Stephanie, one of the high school ESOL teachers, shared a story about cultural misinterpretation between U.S.-born educators and Guatemalan-Maya students. On test days, the students attempted to share answers with each other because they understood this as a communal act of helping each other towards success. They were not acculturated in a mentality of individualized achievement. U.S.-born educators interpreted this action disapprovingly because they understood it as cheating. Stephanie explained the actions of the Guatemalan-Maya students

to other educators while simultaneously stressing the importance of individual work to the students themselves. Even though the teachers were able to understand the actions of the Guatemalan-Maya students, it was ultimately the students who altered their behavior to accommodate the culture of the school system. In this way, the public-school system attempts to promote a monocultural environment. This systematic attempt at acculturation merely creates borders and forces students to compartmentalize their identity based on the spaces they are inhabiting.

The effect of systemic acculturation can also be understood through subtractive bilingualism and the imposition of English-only education.⁸¹ This method of learning attempts to prevent the student from speaking their native language within the space of the public school. A tangible border is then created, causing students to understand the public school system as a space that only accepts hegemonic conceptions of ‘normal’. Their native language and culture is not accepted within this concept of normal, thus establishing their identity as ‘other’. Subtractive bilingualism drives indigenous and Latinx cultural identity outside of the learning environment, creating both physical and mental boundaries.

To return to Fisher-Fishkin’s original conversation of transnationalism in American Studies, the existence of indigenous and Latinx students in this educational system is demonstrative of transnationalism in the classroom. Their identities in this space establish cultural, legal, and linguistic borders that must be navigated on a daily basis. Regardless of cultural background and identity, educators are trapped within the borders of classrooms. They are the mediators between transnationalism and a system of colonization. Some may argue that educators implement these hegemonic methods of thought onto their students. I think, as shown

⁸¹ Portes and Smargorinsky, “Static Structures, Changing Demographics”, 236

by the educators involved in this study, they inhabit a complex space. It is overly simplistic to relegate their roles as the implementers of colonized culture. Educators exist within their own borders through the intersectionality of their personal identity, the identity of those they teach, and the foundations of public education. Many educators involved in this study altered the curriculum to accommodate the needs of their Guatemalan-Maya students, while simultaneously attempting to acculturate them into the United States. This was done largely for practicality and the students ability to succeed in society. Educators did not inherently want to establish the public school system as a space of hegemony, but without that acculturation, their students would most likely not be accepted into U.S. society.

As American Studies continues a focus on transnationalism and transnational identity, it would be remiss to leave the public school system unexamined. As a field that encompasses intersectionality and transnationality through the involvement of multiple disciplines, American Studies is poised to influence laws and policies that effect the public school system and to encourage more research on K-12 education. The focus on interdisciplinarity, through the unification of Humanities and Social science, allows for unique perspectives on systems that influence culture and colonial thought. There are many ways in which American Studies scholars can advocate against public policies and laws that diminish diversified cultural identity in favor of assimilation.

Many of the policies and laws discussed throughout this study are worthy of further research and analysis within American Studies. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) continues to have enormous influence on the structure of public school curriculum and design. This law defines what and how many children learn, which inevitably integrates itself into their mentality. NCLB is congruent with subtractive bilingualism, taught in many ESOL classrooms throughout the

nation. The overarching influence of these laws can be found in the history of the Americas, identity formation, and social structures. The interdisciplinarity of American Studies allows it to approach these policies and regulations as advocates, legal analysts, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, among many other roles.

Scholars in the field of American Studies are also able to develop spaces that promote the development and maintenance of heritage. Community spaces that encourage cultural and linguistic education allow people to cultivate their cultural identity, while simultaneously traversing societal systems. For many Maya immigrants, the ability to maintain their languages establishes indigenous identity and community in a westernized nation. One study suggests:

“Community-based language schools provide opportunities for students to socially network with coethnic peers and to nurture cultural identities and ethnic pride that may otherwise weaken due to pressures to assimilate. Thus, they have been an integral part of ethnic social structures by serving as the locus of social support, network building, and social capital formation.”⁸²

The maintenance of this identity provides social capital to communities of people, strengthening their ability to maintain a culture that is otherwise marginalized. American Studies scholars are able to involve themselves in the establishment of spaces such as this, through construction, organization, and implementation. This space can exist within public education classrooms as well, with proper execution. As demonstrated by the research in this piece, American Studies theories are essential to develop classrooms that accommodate cultures outside the colonial educational norms.

The solutions mentioned here are merely a few examples of the many ways American Studies scholars can be more involved in the field of Education. The field of Education goes far beyond the discussions had in this study. It is not relegated to identity formation, but has some

⁸² Lee and Wright, “The Rediscovery of Heritage and Community Language Education in the United States”, 139

influence on almost every aspect of society. Education is also not limited to kindergarten through twelfth grade. Rather, education as an experience that takes place in all spaces, at all points of life. American studies scholars are familiar with the breadth of their field and the global context it maintains. The collaboration of these two fields allows for broader, interdisciplinary analysis of social structures and their eventual outcomes. This union has the potential to educate teachers and schools on the intersectional identities and needs that students bring with them to the classroom. This intersectional understanding can apply to *all* students, not just the Guatemalan-Maya, and allow teachers and schools to tailor their learning environments for more effective education.

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