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Critical Latino Studies:

Combatting the (Mis)Education of Latino Students in U.S. Public Schools

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Educational Foundations & Policy Studies
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Masters in Transformative Education & Social
Change

By
Heidi M. Kern
May 2023

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Latino students of Philadelphia whose energy and passion for their community has captured my heart over the past six years while teaching in public schools. They have taught me so much and deserve the best educational experience that we can offer.

Acknowledgements

To start, I would like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the faculty in the Transformative Education for Social Change (TESC) program who have sacrificed so much time and energy to create and maintain this incredible learning opportunity for educators in Philadelphia. They have helped me learn and grow not only as a student and educator but also empowered me to enact real change in my community as an educational activist. I would like to personally thank Dr. Dana Morrison and Dr. Jason Wozniak for being my mentors throughout the entire program and guiding me through every aspect of the process. Your years of experience and wisdom in the field has been invaluable asset to the TESC program and has made this thesis project possible for me.

I would also like to thank my husband, Zain, and my best friend, Charlotte, who have been my biggest cheerleaders throughout this entire Master’s program. I could not have done this without their love and support.

Abstract

In this thesis, I will explore the historical undervaluing and miseducation of Latino youth in U.S. public schools using a lens of decolonial theory to combat the systems of oppression that continue to affect our Latino youth today. First, I explain what experiences brought me to this concern and provide a clear theoretical framework to explain my philosophy of education. I also articulate key concepts from decolonial scholars and educational activists that inform my own work on the educational experiences of Latino students. In Chapter Three, I provide a historical review of how a public school system rooted in colonialism and racial capitalism has delegitimized Latino students' languages, cultural practices, and epistemologies and sought to replace them with Eurocentric values and ways of being. In Chapter Four, I present a practical outline and guide for my intervention project: a high school Spanish curriculum that I developed for native and heritage speakers of Spanish entitled "Critical Latino Studies." Finally, I evaluate the effectiveness of the program in establishing a safe space for Latino youth to form a learning community that uplifts their ethnic identities, cultural values, and linguistic practices, while challenging systems of oppression.

Keywords: decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, decolonization, Latino youth, eurocentrism, critical Latino studies, Spanish education, bilingual education

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction……………………………………….………………..…...…………..1

Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks…………………………….…………………………...……..13

Chapter 3: Literature Review …………………………………..……….………..…….…..34

Chapter 4: Critical Action Research Proposal…….……………….……….………..…………..68

Chapter 5: Implementation and Evaluation……………………….……………….………….87

References……………………………………………………………..……………..……….96

Appendices…………………………………………………………..………………………104

Chapter One

Introduction

My childhood memories largely revolve around school. I remember the excitement of getting to know a new teacher every year, reading and writing stories during library time, collaborating on art projects with friends, learning songs in other languages, and going on field trips to museums and historical sights. I have always loved school—or maybe, school has always loved me: a well-mannered, neurotypical white girl from the upper middle class who is a responsible, independent learner with a moderate case of perfectionism. Virtually nothing stood in the way of my academic success, except the occasional bout of exhaustion and fatigue from balancing homework, ballet classes, part-time jobs, clubs, and family responsibilities.

From a young age, my mother brought me and my two siblings overseas during the summers while my father was working abroad in St. Petersburg, Russia. Scouring over guidebooks, atlases, and survival phrase lists, she meticulously prepared our travels so that we would be safe and comfortable, and made the most of our time there to learn some of the country's culture, history, and language. My 7-year-old self was awed by the way my mother seemed to magically communicate with Europeans in German, French, and Italian, and could somehow always find her way around. In a time with no cell phones or Wi-Fi, I admired her persistence and resourcefulness to make meaningful connections in a foreign place. When I accompanied her to the nursing home where she practiced physical therapy, I saw the way that her older Pennsylvania Dutch patients softened towards her touch, relieved to finally have someone understand them in German without needing to be spoken to in patronizing elementary English like a child. She didn't treat other languages as barriers, as some Americans do, but rather as exciting bridges to be traversed.

After eighth grade, I transitioned from a small, liberal Quaker school to the large public high school in Quakertown, PA. In this majority-white, working-class district, I made friends slowly and cautiously. Although I mostly kept to myself in class, I couldn’t help but overhear uncomfortable commentary from my peers. History classes often provoked racist comments about illegal immigrants stealing our jobs and our tax dollars, talks on women’s reproductive health triggered laughter and sarcasm, studies of African American history were largely glossed over, and there was a general consensus that in our town you should speak English, not *Mexican*. Bigoted stereotypes flew through classrooms like paper airplanes, rarely garnering any serious repercussions from teachers. After four years, I was eager to escape such harmful rhetoric and wondered if I could one day help bring it to an end.

Although my guidance counselor told me my chances were slim to none, I was accepted to Swarthmore College—a fiercely competitive liberal arts school outside of Philadelphia. I followed my passion for language learning and majored in Spanish and Educational Studies. I hoped that my love of languages, culture, and travel could flourish into something more meaningful: to open the horizons of young people who may have never left their hometown or state, to help decrease social stigmas towards people who grew up speaking languages other than English, to reduce cultural prejudice, and celebrate linguistic diversity. In essence, I saw language education as a way to bring people together across borders (both physical and emotional), which have been so heavily policed, militarized, politicized, and emotionally charged. I was especially excited to teach in Philadelphia, a language-rich city, where I hoped to help celebrate and foster pride in students who are already multilingual through richer language programming in my school. I was determined to help others love school, even if school had never loved them back.

Though my young, bright-eyed self was proud (albeit quite nervous) to start this journey in education, I did not receive the same reaction from adults in the Quakertown community who had seen me grow up. At our high school graduation party, numerous guests approached me and my twin sister to congratulate us on our post-secondary paths. Everyone *oohed* and *ahhed* at Caroline's decision to pursue textile design in Philadelphia, while I got mixed responses towards the path in education that I had chosen. In fact, when one of the private school moms heard I was considering becoming a Spanish teacher in Philadelphia, she replied with a sigh, "Oh honey, you could do so much more than that."

My heart fell and I felt a lump in my throat.

Though I knew education was an underpaid and relatively thankless job for all the extra labor it required outside of contractual working hours, my 18-year-old self wasn't ready to face such blatant dismissal head-on just yet—before I had even started! I wanted to confront this woman and ask, *When did we decide that teaching was not a field that our most competitive students should dedicate themselves to*? Instead, I swallowed my pride, smiled, shrugged, and pretended to enjoy the rest of the party that was meant to celebrate my education.

Now that I'm finishing my sixth year of teaching in the School District of Philadelphia, I realize that what this Bucks County housewife was scorning was not, in fact, the whole profession of teaching, but the specific idea of teaching *Spanish* in an urban, public school full of students of color. Had I said at the time that I would be teaching AP English Literature in a prestigious white school district, I believe I would have gotten a significantly more optimistic response, or even praise and admiration. Even though teaching was low on the hierarchy of professions that these upper-class families in my community had delineated, I had painfully discovered that Spanish teachers held a position on one of the lowest rungs of that social ladder. But *why*?

How did my vast dreams of social change through cultural tolerance and language exchange garner such a lackluster response? I knew that this particular crowd of Baby Boomers and Generation X at my graduation party loved to travel internationally and boasted of their own successes at becoming multilingual in English, Italian, and French, for example (often with the help of Duolingo or Rosetta Stone). They grew up hearing that learning to speak French is sexy, learning to speak Spanish or Chinese is a huge career opportunity, and learning to speak Japanese well enough to watch un-dubbed Anime is a personal achievement. Something wasn’t adding up. *Why wasn’t that admiration of language learning transferring over to K-12 language education?*

This question inspired me to take on an undergraduate thesis project at Swarthmore College where I researched the historical undervaluing of multilingualism in the U.S. and how it trickled down to language pedagogy and curricula in public schools. Between slashing language department budgets, reducing course offerings, firing language teachers, and reducing requirements for graduation, the respect that students and families offered to language classes decreased in relation to other heavily funded, heavily tested subjects such as English and Math (Commission on Language Learning, 2017; Rosenbusch, 2005). I found that in the U.S., the value of language education is directly influenced by the social, political, and economic needs of our nation in relation to the global economy (Kern, 2017). Due to their roots in Eurocentric epistemologies of the arts and sciences, languages such as French and German were historically afforded more prestige value, whereas Spanish had often been portrayed as the language of the illegal immigrant or the poor, uneducated Mexican who is sneaking across our border and taking property, resources, and tax dollars away from hard-working Americans (Kern, 2017). *I hope you can detect my sarcastic tone here*.

My research led me to the following questions: How do these racist, classist ideologies around language status affect students' experiences in language classrooms? How do they restrict the liberatory potential of language pedagogy and devalue both students and teachers? Here, I reflect on my own experience and observations as both a language student and teacher in U.S. public schools.

Negative Language Experiences in Schools

In 2011, I enrolled in AP (Advanced Placement) Spanish as a junior with a class full of white, English-speaking seniors and a handful of native Spanish speakers of Mexican heritage. I was determined to take everything I had learned in Spanish 1, 2, and 3 to be able to finally feel confident enough to hold conversations in Spanish with other speakers after having spent so much time writing in grammar-translational workbooks, making vocabulary flashcards, and completing grammar drills. My dreams were quickly dashed as I realized not even the teacher herself respected the purpose and mission of the course. As the senior class sponsor, my teacher turned our class period into a senior workshop where we helped her complete her tasks as class sponsor: printing and posting flyers, planning fundraisers, making decisions for prom, and organizing spirit week. I felt deceived; but rather than be public enemy #1 and report all the free time she was giving us, I waited until the following year to retake the AP course with a widely feared, demanding Spanish teacher who let no student pass his class without reaching a conversational level of Spanish. This time around, I was mocked by peers and staff alike for wanting to repeat a course I had already earned an "A" in since I couldn't receive credit for it a second time. People asked why I was so obsessed with Spanish when I could have had a free period instead. To me, it wasn't an obsession but rather a passion that drove my decision to retake the course. *Why didn't other people see the value behind my determination to become bilingual?*

Perhaps because of the stereotypically poor language pedagogy used in public schools, people respect additive bilingualism in adults as a tool for upward mobility and travel, but mock K-12 Spanish classes as a waste of time where you wear sombreros and make piñatas, sing the alphabet as a 14-year-old, and barely master any useful phrases besides "*puedo ir al baño.*" Ultimately, teaching the language skills of a Spanish-speaking toddler to an English-speaking teenager—and then abandoning Spanish after two years—isn't setting our students up for success, nor is it sending a message of prestige value in the field of education.

Overall, the Common Core curriculum prioritizes the development of academic English in all students in K-12 public education across the country. Second language instruction often does not begin until high school, with minimal graduation requirements. A student in the school district of Philadelphia, for example, only needs to take two levels of a world language (e.g. Spanish or French) to meet graduation requirements and may pass with a 60%. These practices devalue the language as well as its native speakers, which can have negative repercussions on the identity development of Latino youth in our public schools.

Devaluing Spanish, Devaluing Spanish Speakers

While our English-speaking students suffer through poorly-crafted Spanish curricula, our Latino students suffer just as much, or perhaps even more, due to the conflict with their identity development. For example, as a high schooler, I noticed in my first year of AP Spanish that the Latino students in my class had an even more negative experience than the monolingual English speakers because they were frequently singled out as banks of cultural knowledge, yet were not often represented in the language varieties that the curriculum portrayed, which was mostly centered on *castellano* - the official variety of Spanish spoken in Castilla, Spain. They would give “incorrect” answers to vocabulary-based prompts, get points deducted for lack of accent marks, and often be corrected on their spelling or use of words that “don’t exist.” Out of all of the students in my AP Spanish class, the Latino students were the quietest, stating they “couldn’t write” or didn’t know the spelling. It was students like me—students who had studied diligently from the textbooks since the beginning of their language development and had memorized the correct spellings, vocabulary lists, accentuation rules, and verb conjugation charts—who were praised the most in class. For the Mexican students in my class, their culture and language had been devalued and largely ignored in the nearly all-white school district until ninth or tenth grade when they were rostered to a Spanish class and were suddenly called upon as language experts after having suppressed that side of their academic identity in school since Kindergarten. They were clearly upset at being marginalized in a linguistic environment with little self-agency, but weren’t in a position to speak up.

I don’t blame them.

I know that this situation in my high school was not an isolated case. Many heritage and native speakers in U.S. public schools continue to take a backseat in Spanish classes due to the misalignment of the pedagogical methods with their own history and patterns of language development, the misrepresentation or simplification of their culture in curricular materials, and/or the uncomfortable dynamic of being expected to be language experts in a language that they perhaps have never formally been taught to read or write (Pascual y Cabo, 2018). In fact, our Spanish education system nationwide is so poor that our students who learn Spanish first at home are at risk of losing their Spanish proficiency due to the lack of appropriate language programming in schools. Additionally, the monolithic education of Spanish as a “foreign” language has created a hierarchy where *castellano* has maintained a higher prestige value than the more widespread Latin American varieties, such as Mexican Spanish or Puerto Rican Spanish, contributing to the cultural and linguistic marginalization of Latino speakers of Spanish in our education system.

Additionally, Ayala (2022) noted that Latino students may experience microaggressions from teachers and peers and incur feelings of inferiority when using their home language in an academic setting based on literacy standards that encourage “proper” grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. “Proper,” in this case, stems from linguistic imperialism that has been disseminated through the colonization of the Americas. Oftentimes these students try to avoid this discomfort and cultural mismatch by withdrawing themselves physically or verbally from class activities, skipping class, or switching to a different language curriculum such as French. This is an issue that I have personally witnessed both as a student and as a teacher, and it is far from being resolved.

Prioritizing English Development: Coded Racism

In elementary school, many Hispanic/Latino children are categorized as English Learners (ELs) based on the fact that they speak a language other than English at home. The goal is to develop their English skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening as fast as possible so that they can progress with their English-speaking peers toward district-wide benchmarks and state-mandated standardized tests. In some state legislatures, such as *Proposition 203* in Arizona, cases have been made to “fast track” students out of ESL/ESOL services within just one year to transition them into English-only classrooms where the use of their first language is not permitted, propelling them faster towards the “American Dream” of speaking English proficiently. Who does this affect the most? Spanish-speaking families and children, which are our largest “minority” in the U.S. Who supports these English-only movements? A lot of “nice white parents”—a phrase coined in the popular podcast by Julie Snyder from Serial Productions. White parents, politicians, and activists in states such as Arizona have argued that it is dangerous to allow students to continually speak their native language in a classroom, as this could decrease the learning that happens in the room and slow down their literacy skills in English. This coded rhetoric reveals the distrust that is rooted in racist attitudes towards immigrant groups, especially when those immigrants are low-income people of color, or in other terms, members of “the Global South,” a term used by critical theorists to identify communities that are typically underrepresented or oppressed but can voice strong counterstories to hegemonic narratives (Wozniak, 2019). I have heard my own cousins say that they chose to move districts because of the influx of Latinos in their elementary schools in Berks County, which “lowered the quality” of the education and threatened the safety of the surrounding neighborhood. Yet again, we see the devaluing of Spanish and its native speakers in the eyes of the white majority as a symptom of the ever-present racist ideologies that our country was founded on.

In this thesis, I would like to emphasize how language ideologies rooted in racial capitalism and colonialism have positioned English as the dominant language of power and caused speakers of other languages to suppress their native language use and identities in schools. I fear that English-Only movements, if re-introduced through legislatures, will garner far more support than anticipated due to deepened divisions in our bipartisan political climate. Although people often associate the harsh discipline of native language use with historical eras such as the colonial boarding schooling movement to forcefully assimilate indigenous youth across North America, this practice, unfortunately, is not a fluke of our past, but a very real part of our present history as a nation. Deculturalization (Spring, 2016), acculturation (Cavazos-Rehg, 2009), and assimilation (Lash, 2018) remain at the heart of our public education system and will continue as long as our nation remains complicit in the negative effects of racial capitalism on young people.

My Thematic Concern

Spanish class as Americans know it today is often a colonized space that perpetuates negative attitudes, feelings of discomfort or cultural mismatch, and fear of inadequacy in heritage and native speakers of Spanish (Holguín Mendoza, 2018; Marrero, 2016). Beyond the undervaluing of multilingualism and the language curriculum itself, I am more deeply concerned with the ways that this negative messaging affects the self-esteem and identity development of Spanish speakers in U.S. schools. Latino students as a demographic have historically performed with lower success on academic benchmarks than white students and have experienced clear signs of marginalization in school communities as evidenced by heightened rates of disciplinary measures and lower rates of high school completion (Taggart, 2022). Not coincidentally, they often attend the most racially segregated and underfunded schools which lack proper staff and resources (Yosso, 2006). In my thesis, I will explore this systemic problem with a critical lens and argue that the underperformance of Latino students in the U.S. stems from the racial capitalist colonial values that are deeply embedded in our schools, which continue to privilege white students and families.

To drive my critical action research project, I developed the following questions:

- *What factors have defined the Latino experience in the U.S. public education system?*
- *What negations are preventing Latino students from reaching their full potentiality?*

- *How is the Latino experience different from the experience of other students of color in U.S. public schools (e.g. African Americans)?*
- *What can we do in the language curriculum to affirm the Latino experience and identity and foster greater academic success?*

In the following chapters of my thesis, I will argue that in order to liberate Latino students from the harmful rhetoric surrounding their "incompetency," we need to examine the ways in which a public education system built on colonialism has devalued and delegitimized their languages, cultural practices, and epistemologies and sought to replace them with Eurocentric values and ways of being. My philosophy of education and critical lexicon in Chapter 2 will provide a more thorough explanation of racial capitalism and settler colonialism to better understand the ways in which our schools today remain colonized spaces that restrict the potentiality of students of color. In Chapter 3, I will provide a literature review to reveal historical trends in language education that have contributed to the current crisis in the education of Latino students. Leaning on critical scholars such as Eve Tuck, Wayne Yang, Joel Spring, and Armando Garza Ayala for support, I will outline four forms of systematic violence committed against Latino students through our public school system: racialized violence, linguistic violence, structural violence, and curricular violence. I will also present the work of fellow educators and activists that inspired my creation of a Spanish heritage curriculum, such as Curtis Acosta's Mexican American Studies program in Arizona.

Finally, in Chapters 4 and 5, I will present my critical action research project: a two-year Critical Latino Studies program I developed and implemented at a public high school in Philadelphia using critical pedagogy to counter dominant narratives of Latino students' underachievement in schools. Through this curriculum, I aim to build a culturally relevant, linguistically affirming space for Latino students to feel empowered to navigate discussions of identity, culture, power relations, shared histories, and their current place in the world using Spanish, English, or a combination of both languages in the classroom. To evaluate the program’s success, I will discuss students' survey results and share student and family testimonials from current and past participants in the course.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Frameworks

To begin the work of uncovering historical negations against Latino students in our school communities, I will first clarify key concepts and terms that I will be using throughout my thesis to perform a critical analysis of the issue. Many of these terms originated from my study of other decolonial scholars, critical theorists, and educators within West Chester's Master's program in Transformative Education for Social Change. Before beginning this program, I was ignorant of many of the scholarly terms that define the systems of power that shape our daily lives. With patient guidance from my professors, I was able to piece together a larger, more complex understanding of the causes and effects of settler colonialism and racial capitalism on our education system and on the experiences of students of color in particular.

I hope that the following explanation of such terms may help relieve the reader from any sense of self-doubt in their ability to fully understand this work—everyone deserves the right to place a name to their forces of oppression and have the words to critique the systems of power in our lives.

Language is power. Fight for it.

Key Terms - A Critical Lexicon

Term	**Definition**	**Application to my thesis**
Decolonization	A movement to remove colonial power from their control of government, land, and the minds of the colonized people themselves. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 26)	Decolonization involves acknowledging the theft of land, resources, and autonomy of indigenous peoples. In a school setting, it requires not just an acknowledgment of land rights but also involves remaking the person and the way they think about themselves.

Settler Colonialism	Unlike regular colonialism, settler colonialism involves not just the extraction of resources from a territory for the benefit of the nation in power but also involves dispossessing indigenous peoples of their land. By settling and reshaping the land and its peoples, settler colonialism adds a component of *internal* colonialism that is hard to eradicate from the minds of the oppressed (Tuck & Yang, 2012).	The U.S. is an example of a settler-colonial state where we continue to occupy the land of indigenous groups who have been extracted from, abused, oppressed, and killed by disease or by force. Teachers must recognize this brutal history in order to understand the ways that BIPOC students continue to be oppressed by the values and systems at play in settler colonialism. Teachers also need to understand the emotional trauma passed down through generations of colonized groups.
Colonialist Consciousness	The indoctrination of colonial beliefs that affect the psychology of day-to-day society and aid in the rationalization of destructive systems or beliefs, such as ontological individualism or the separation of man and nature (Grande, 2004).	In schools, this ideology manifests itself in the way we prioritize achievement, independence/autonomy, humanism (the idea that we are masters of our own destinies and can seek our own truths), and detachment from the land and our local histories. This breaks apart the fabrics of society for better consumption of human capital.
Epistemic suppression	When the knowledge of marginalized groups is delegitimized, excluded, or ignored so that the knowledge of the dominant group in society becomes accepted as "correct." This reinforces power structures and systems of oppression in a colonial society (Berenstain et al., 2021).	Epistemic suppression mirrors the process of subjugating knowledge. For example, the language of school and work often suppresses the use of indigenous or minority languages by youth, ostracizing them from what is deemed a worthy understanding of the world. Non-western remedies and medicinal practices are often devalued or blatantly dismissed in the eyes of modern medicine. This privileges a small set of knowledge of the dominant culture (often White and/or European).
Subjugated Knowledge	Knowledge that is undervalued, oppressed, or dismissed as worthless or obsolete due to it stemming from a marginalized group within a hegemonic society	Knowledge of oppressed groups is regarded as being in opposition to "Western" understandings of science, religion, citizenship, and philosophy. This knowledge has been labeled as inferior and replaced with white-

	(Malott, 2011).	washed, Eurocentric rhetoric in schools. It’s important for educators to understand how the school system functions as a tool of assimilation when it excludes, demeans, or subjugates the cultural knowledge of the students.
Deculturalization	Deculturalization is the process of removing one person’s culture with the purpose of replacing it with the culture of a dominant group (Spring, 2016).	In education, students of indigenous or minority groups are often forced to abandon their own cultural practices and adopt the language and culture of the dominant group through a standardized curriculum. This can be achieved directly through the makeup of the curriculum or can be enforced with disciplinary measures, such as punishing students who choose to speak their native language in class or wear traditional hairstyles or cultural dress that may conflict with standardized school policies.
Racial Capitalism	Essentially, racial capitalism is the way that people in power—mostly cis-gender, white men—continue to accumulate wealth through the exploitation of black, brown, and indigenous communities and the maintenance of white supremacy (Melamed, 2015).	Racial capitalism heavily influences the conditions and practices of public schooling in the U.S. today. It is the main factor in continued school segregation, inequitable funding policies, privatization of public resources (e.g. charter schools), standardization and data monitoring, and school closures in communities of color.
State-finance-racial violence nexus	The state-finance-racial violence nexus is a term used to identify the way that political/economic governance is dependent on racial violence to preserve our racial hierarchy while simultaneously sanctioning state violence towards racialized minorities (e.g. police brutality towards African American youth, and the criminalization and	As long as schools are part of the “state-finance-racial violence nexus” they will continue to reproduce violence against racialized groups, such as Latino students. Despite our identity as one of the most prosperous nations of the world, we continue to allow racialized populations to suffer from poverty, lack of affordable health care, unsustainable wages and work hours, heightened policing, criminalization, and disenfranchisement. This systematic violence is normalized in a system of

	detention of Latino immigrants) to preserve private property in the hands of the wealthy (Melamed, 2015).	racial capitalism that permeates our society as well as our schools.
Hegemony	Hegemony is a system of power that controls a large working class to benefit an elite few. The long-term acceptance of this unequal balance of power also necessitates the use of strategic consent to get people to submit to their own oppression without requiring the use of direct force (Malott, 2011).	Mass schooling and mass media help keep hegemony intact by way of numb, uninformed consent rather than direct force. Educators who strive to implement critical pedagogy in their classrooms must also strive to be counter-hegemonic: They must be aware of and challenge the *hidden curriculum* within the institution of public education in order to liberate students from systems of oppression.
Hidden curriculum	In a hegemonic society, the hidden curriculum is a set of norms and ways of being that are valued or promoted due to their association with the dominant culture. These norms are transmitted unknowingly through the everyday practices of social institutions such as schools. They also help to maintain the status quo (Grande, 2004).	The hidden curriculum is present in the everyday language that encodes our relationships with students as the empowered (teachers) and the disempowered (students). It prepares students to become compliant, adapt to the norms of the dominant society, and develop the necessary skills to be obedient workers in a capitalist society. It also tells us which cultural practices are valued more highly and reinforces divisions and prejudices across social groups.
Critical pedagogy	A form of reflective and responsive teaching that recognizes “the order of things” by not just questioning the reproduction of the hegemony in schools, but also by seeking alternatives to the existing power dynamics fueled by racial capitalism (Malott, 2011).	If we teach without judging the values that our schools are expounding, then we may simply be reproducing the complacency required for hegemony to prevail in society. Both students and teachers need to be self-reflective and understand where power lies in their society and how it operates with or without their consent. The ultimate goal of critical pedagogy, therefore, is liberation.

Relationality	Capitalism seeks to undermine our relationality (or connectedness to one another) and isolates us further from being able to unite and work together for power (Melamed, 2015).	In schools, classroom norms often emphasize individualism, competition, and independence, which challenges the relationality of students and makes them feel alienated. When we turn students into data points and constantly measure their performance, we are promoting anti-relationality which further supports the reproduction of racial capitalism in our schools.
Reproduction	The term reproduction expresses how social organization and systems of power are preserved and perpetuated through the public school system (Althusser, 1970).	In order for capitalism to remain the dominant social system in our country, public schools must “reproduce” or mirror the division of labor, prepare students to be compliant workers that follow orders, and encourage competition over collaboration.
*Latino	The word Latino describes people with Latin American heritage or cultural origins. They may have personally been born or grown up in Latin America, or they may have family or ancestors from Latin America.	Hispanic refers to people who have cultural roots in a Spanish-speaking country. Although this term applies to the population I am discussing, it focuses on the language of the colonizer: Spain. For this paper, I use the word Latino, rather than Hispanic, to center my studies around students that have roots in Latin America and have many shared cultural values and traditions. Latino is an ethnicity, not a race. Today, many scholars in the U.S. have turned to gender-inclusive forms of the word, such as Latine, LatinX, or Latin@, but as a native English speaker who does not belong to this cultural group, I do not feel comfortable choosing a different label and will defer to the most widely used term instead.

My Philosophy of Education:

The Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in a Settler-Colonial State

Education is impossible to separate from ideology: It can never be a neutral practice. This is true for several reasons: one, that educators are human and carry their own biases, expectations, and perspectives that have been shaped through personal experience as well as cultural context. Second, that education is not *free* in any sense of the word. When something requires public or private funds to survive, the need for "buy-in" almost always shifts the ideologies behind the program itself to align more with the groups in power. Third, education does not take place in a vacuum: Schools, teachers, and students are products of and agents within a greater social sphere that encompasses sociopolitical, historical, and economic concerns which naturally make their way into the classroom space both explicitly and implicitly. Therefore, one must critically question the forces that shape education both to understand the way that schools have been leveraged for political purposes throughout history and also to ask ourselves what goals or outcomes schools are moving students towards.

Today, *education* most often refers to the organized learning activities that take place within school buildings, which can more appropriately be termed *schooling*. Logically, when the majority of the population spends at least thirteen of their formative years as full-time students, schooling becomes a highly influential force in the grooming and shaping of young people in terms of the way they think, behave, or *mis*behave. From the beginning, certain students are positioned to thrive while others are destined to be categorized as failures. This is, of course, not a matter of fate but rather a result of the systematic oppression of communities that are deemed less worthy in a meritocracy that values diligence, time management, compliance, competition, and ableism. In this way, schooling reinforces existing power dynamics to maintain the status quo in a hegemonic society.

In this chapter, I will argue that settler colonialism has established a system of education that preserves “the order of things” in a hegemonic society, privileging white students and oppressing students of color. First, I will establish a critical view of the socio-political structures and systems of power within the U.S. and their relation to settler colonialism. To support my claims, I rely on the work of Curry Malott (2011), Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012), Jodi Melamed (2015), and Sandy Grande (2004) to define the ways in which hegemony, settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and the structures of colonialist consciousness, respectively, oppress students of color in the United States. Next, I delve into the current status of public schooling using Foucault’s (1975) lens of power relations and discipline to critically examine pedagogical practices in schools and ultimately propose my own ideas for the transformative potential of education.

Socio-Political Structures of Power

To begin, we need an understanding of the way that hegemony influences the relationality between various aspects of our lives and between one another as people. Here, I use the term hegemony to refer to a system of power that controls a large working class in order to benefit an elite few (Malott, 2011). Malott argued that for long-term acceptance of this unequal balance of power, this system necessitates the use of strategic consent to get people to submit to their own oppression without requiring the use of direct force or overt violence. In this way, American society at large has consented to the preservation of existing power structures (e.g., racial capitalism, the patriarchy, and class hierarchies) by accepting the ways that schools reproduce (or mirror) the hegemonic structures of society. Essentially, schools prepare students to find their place in a pre-established “order of things” which naturally stratifies students based on race, class, and standardized test scores. White students of middle or upper-class backgrounds are generally positioned to reap greater benefits from the education system, while black and brown students are positioned to fail or be led through the school-to-prison or school-to-inequitable-workforce pipeline.

Naturally, if force and violence were visible day-to-day in the classroom, administrators would face stark criticism from students, families, and community members. However, the silent, gradual transformation of young learners into compliant and efficient workers through a state-run school system has proved to be an exceedingly effective approach to configuring and maintaining a capitalist society built on settler colonialism. This transformation is made possible by the *hidden curriculum*: a set of norms and values that the dominant culture promotes and foments through institutions. These norms are transmitted unknowingly to students through the everyday practices of social institutions (such as public schools) in order to maintain the status quo (Grande, 2004). The hidden curriculum is present in the everyday language that encodes our relationships between the empowered (teachers, administrators) and the disempowered (students). It prepares students to be compliant, adapt to the norms of the dominant society, and develop the necessary skills to become obedient workers in a racial capitalist society. It also determines which cultural practices are valued more highly and reinforces divisions and prejudices across social groups.

To illuminate the purpose of the hidden curriculum, I examine Althusser’s (1970) work that positions schools as tools to preserve the social relations and ideologies of capitalism. Althusser argued that the key to the reproduction of a capitalist social economy is the reproduction of labor power, which is ensured by wage labor. For example, the hierarchical skills of labor are reproduced through the education system in a capitalist society. Students learn concrete techniques and content area knowledge that support their participation in the job market, but more importantly, they learn rules of conduct: “rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination,” (Althusser, 1970, p. 5-6). In other words, the education system supports capitalism because it ensures that our young people will buy into the pre-established divisions of power and labor and therefore be more easily exploited and repressed by *the order of things* in their struggle to compete for wage labor.

Many of these social divisions and structures of power originated through a history of settler colonialism in the U.S. According to Tuck and Yang (2012), unlike regular colonialism, settler colonialism involves not just the extraction of resources from a territory for the benefit of the imperial nation in power, but also involves dispossessing native peoples of their land and livelihood. The lack of spatial separation between the colonized and the colonizer is what defines settler colonialism: the colonizers do not just exploit the resources and labor power of the land, but also inhabit it, shifting the culture and practices of pre-established communities to align more with the dominant culture of the colonizer. In the U.S., for example, boarding schools, mining projects, and oil extraction have all incentivized the removal of indigenous peoples from their land for the accumulation of capital through dispossession (Wang, 2019). Boarding schools, however, have gone beyond simply expropriating the colonized group for profits to forcibly assimilating them into Western civilization’s “order of things” to prevent them from posing a threat to the dominant culture in both the private and public sphere. In this sense, schooling has long been “the establishment of filters of control, vigilance, pacification, and extermination” of marginalized communities (Walsh, 2018, p. 19). In the traditional mission school, for example, indigenous languages were replaced by the dominant language of the colonizers: English, French, and Spanish, in the case of much of the Americas.

As the years went on, modernized schools failed to educate children in the local traditions and indigenous practices of their communities, opting rather to indoctrinate them into the social relations of capitalism, which paints school as a path to financial and material fulfillment while concurrently forcing students to "abandon their spaces and rhythms of life, their means and modes of production and reproduction" (Walsh, 2018, p. 21). This is what Tuck & Yang (2012) termed the "internal" form of colonization. Educators must recognize this brutal history to understand how BIPOC students continue to be oppressed by the values and systems at play in settler-colonial states. Educators also need to understand the emotional trauma passed down through generations of colonized groups.

Applying Sandy Grande's Deep Structures of Colonialist Consciousness

By settling and reshaping the land *and* its peoples, settler colonialism adds a component of internal colonialism that is hard to eradicate from the minds of the oppressed. Sandy Grande (2004) identified this internal colonialism as a form of *colonialist consciousness* that wields an invisible power over native, indigenous, or colonized peoples that lingers long after the initial era of conquest. Colonialist consciousness can be defined as the indoctrination of colonial beliefs that affect the psychology of day-to-day society and aid in the rationalization of destructive systems or beliefs, such as ontological individualism or the separation of man and nature (Grande, 2004). In schools, this ideology manifests itself in the way we prioritize achievement, independence, autonomy, and humanism (the idea that we are masters of our own destinies and can seek our own truths), as well as our detachment from the land and its local histories. A colonialist consciousness breaks apart the fabric of society for better consumption of human capital.

Today, schooling offers a standardized approach to assimilating indigenous, poor, rural, and other marginalized communities into the mainstream agenda of global progress. The goal, in this case, is integration into a government-controlled system that infuses education with ideas of modernization, industrialization, and discipline that will produce a new generation of productive, law-abiding citizens. Beyond cultivating obedient workers, Sandy Grande (2004) argued that "the constructions of a grand narrative organized around change as progress and progress as change not only legitimates the path of whitestream "history" but also sustains the hegemonic goals of capitalism (wealth accumulation) and colonization (appropriation of property)" (p. 98). Here, the deep structures of colonialist consciousness (which I will include here in italics) are responsible.

First, White Anglo-American culture glorifies a *belief in progress as change and change as progress* as the basic structure of colonialist consciousness (Grande, 2004). This manifests itself in the way that schooling often feels like a competition or race: a race to cover more curriculum, accomplish tasks faster and more efficiently, or develop more academic progress in a shorter amount of time through initiatives like digital reading and math intervention programs. As Americans, we often embrace the "new" as a stepping stone toward progress without always considering the ethical or social implications of that change. In schools, students are pitted against one another to compete for the highest grades, honor roll, or status as valedictorian, rather than form a collective body of understandings and shared experiences.

Secondly, the *belief in the effective separateness of faith and reason* identifies American schooling as a completely secular venture, which often negates the validity of spirituality and faith that many students learn through their home cultures. More dangerously, this belief in the neutrality of reason makes it easier to willfully ignore prejudice, biases, or racially-charged sentiments that seep into everything we do from technology development to scientific research.

Third, a *belief in the essential quality of the universe and of "reality" as impersonal, secular, material, mechanistic, and relativistic* can create a sense of helplessness or a lack of agency when students consider their place in an automated world while dismissing beliefs in higher powers as elements of superstition. These beliefs may feel dehumanizing to some, as cultural epistemologies that do not have roots in hard science and positivism would be quickly dismissed as illegitimate.

Next, *a subscription to ontological individualism* glorifies independence and autonomy as the ideal achievements of the self. In schools, teachers may try to encourage group work and collaboration when appropriate, but the colonialist consciousness overpowers their efforts when students are constantly fed the message of independence and individualism through the hidden curriculum. This leads to students consistently opting to work alone to avoid having other students appropriate their ideas and credit that they have worked to earn from the teacher. Melamed (2015) would argue that these beliefs purposefully establish anti-relationality across marginalized groups for the benefit of racial capitalism. Isolating people in this way is not only beneficial to promote competition but also to reduce the chances of social uprisings that would band the oppressed together against the oppressor. If a collective action for justice might sacrifice the social standing, property, or livelihood of an individual, it is best avoided because ultimately one's responsibility to oneself is of the greatest importance.

Finally, the *belief in human beings as separate from and superior to the rest of nature* creates a psychological and ethical distance between people and the land that they occupy. Of course, this serves the interests of colonizers who seek to avoid feelings of guilt or shame for their role in decimating the sanctity of the land they have colonized. To the dismay of conservationists, human "progress" wipes out an average of 200 different species of flora and fauna a day for our insatiable appetite for economic growth and remains largely unchecked due to how ingrained this colonialist consciousness is in developed countries such as the U.S. which continues to accumulate wealth through violent yet seemingly justified means (Quinn, 2002). In schools, we see this detachment from nature in the way that all formal learning now occurs within the classroom, and outside learning is often demoted to the status of recess or playtime. It is also apparent in the way that many children and young adults have very little knowledge of local traditions, history, or an appreciation of the land itself.

Epistemic Suppression

Thanks to the theoretical groundwork of Sandy Grande, this process of identifying and challenging the ways in which colonialist consciousness legitimizes the violent accumulation of wealth for white colonizers at the expense of black and brown bodies will help us liberate students of color from this harmful rhetoric that continues to devalue, criminalize, and punish them in schools. In our education system, the effects of colonialist consciousness derived from settler colonialism are evident in the epistemic suppression of indigenous scholarship. In this context, epistemic suppression is the phenomenon where the knowledge of marginalized groups is delegitimized, excluded, or ignored so that the knowledge of the dominant group in society becomes accepted as "correct" (Berenstain et al., 2021). This reinforces power structures and systems of oppression in a settler-colonial society. As Berenstain et al. (2021) explained,

> Contemporary political theory in the western academic world is dominated by the mundane conceptual landscapes of colonial white supremacy. These landscapes uphold

> conceptual traditions that reliably produce epistemic oppression under the guise of objectivity, neutrality, and the faithful application of disciplinary knowledge. (p. 290)

If the suppression of cultural knowledge and alternate perspectives of the world is this apparent in the academy, then imagine how early its roots were established through the K-12 education system. For example, the *de facto* language of the school and the workplace often suppresses the use of indigenous or minority languages by youth, ostracizing them from what is deemed a worthy understanding of the world. Similarly, non-western remedies and medicinal practices are often devalued or blatantly dismissed as illegitimate in the eyes of modern medicine. This epistemic suppression privileges a narrow frame of knowledge established by the dominant culture which, in our case, is white and European. In order to break this ideology out of our school system, we need to take a decolonial approach to these issues of injustice.

The Common Thread: Race

A critical view of hegemony, settler colonialism, and colonialist consciousness also helps us understand the ways that capitalism is inherently racialized due to the nature of social relations in the U.S. Theoretically, in a capitalist society, anyone is “free” to be successful by working hard, starting their own business, making a profit off of goods or services, or investing in private property, such as buying a home. This is what our schools preach consistently as the motto of the American Dream. However, to accept this narrative at face value would sorely miss a highly influential factor in the well-being of Americans: race. We do not live simply in a capitalist society, but rather a racial-capitalist society. Essentially, racial capitalism is the way that people in power—mostly cis-gender, white men—continue to accumulate wealth through the exploitation of black, brown, and indigenous communities for the maintenance of white supremacy (Melamed, 2015). Additionally, Jodi Melamed articulated that racial capitalism has taught us to maintain social divides that make it easier to manipulate which groups have access to capital (or to relationships with each other) and which groups will be singled out for expropriation. These kinds of social divides are manifested today in zip codes, school district funding and demographics, housing market discrimination, hiring industry biases, predatory lending, and more, which continue to harm families and students of color in public schools. These discriminatory practices are often hidden behind the rhetoric of those who subscribe to meritocracy: the idea that everyone receives what they deserve, based on how much they work for it. For example, white people may rationalize the failure of people of color through arguments of character flaws or lack of self-discipline, downplaying it as an issue of motivation or a lack of intellect rather than an issue of racial discrimination centered in settler-colonial attitudes. The belief that good things come to those who work hard ignores the systemic racism that underlies every structure of power in our country. Within education, racial capitalism keeps schools segregated, normalizes the underfunding of urban schools, and funnels black and brown students through the school-to-prison or the school-to-inequitable workforce pipeline. It also helps feed into the rhetoric of privatization that keeps opening charter and private schools as alternatives to a “failing” public school system.

Critical Pedagogy: Applying a Decolonial Lens to Schools

In its current state, school is a successful experiment in the way that the organization of space and time becomes a silent power over students (Foucault, 2009). Students are conditioned to move with the bells, only rise out of their seats with permission, wait for timed lunches and bathroom breaks, and be highly productive in sustained bursts of activity over the course of the day. The ultimate goal is for students to conduct themselves without consistent reminders of the adults in charge. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), this conduct is what Foucault identified as clear evidence of power relations in education. Schools cultivate discipline in students so that ultimately, they will learn to self-discipline and meet the demands of the production of capital. Their movements are punished for laziness, distractions, and inefficiencies, and praised for speed, reliability, compliance, and obedience. Not coincidentally, these are the same skills and expectations of soldiers on a battlefield or workers in factory environments. For schools to be truly liberatory, they need to abandon some of these highly vigilant practices that track students' movement and activity with punitive measures and behavior management standards. Catherine Walsh (2018) explained that in Western civilizations, "the actions, apparatus, and devices of discipline and control, and of institutionalized schooling, have always had an essential function and role within the colonial matrix of power" (p. 5). Therefore, by dismantling these devices of control in the classroom, we can ultimately de-school our existence through a decolonial lens of education.

Instead of focusing on behavior management, schools need to build relationships of trust between youth, adults, and their community at large. Teachers can help by making power relations clear and overt in the classroom and then respond by allowing students to turn a power relation on its head. For example, if teachers understand that assigning point-based grades to each completed task creates an imbalance of power between them and their students (as well as an unhealthy sense of competition between the students themselves), they can find ways to subvert that power relation and place more control in the hands of students.

Ideally, students should work together to define the criteria of success in their classroom, or democratically select the next due date for an assignment that would better fit their needs as a group. Especially in a country where white teachers continue to dominate the field of education, even in school districts that are majority people of color, these small acts of resistance to power dynamics can help empower students to free themselves of the colonialist consciousness that has been steeped into our education system. Rather than simply serving as a blanket metaphor for social justice efforts to support students of color, decolonization necessitates an active acknowledgment of the theft of land, resources, and autonomy of indigenous peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In a school setting, it requires not just an acknowledgment of land rights but also involves remaking the person and the way they think about themselves. When students suffer from the force of epistemic suppression, their identities, languages, and ways of knowing are criticized, devalued, or even forbidden in the mainstream classroom. English-only policies in diverse linguistic populations exemplify the harshness of epistemic suppression in schools as they negate children's primary form of expression. This ties back into Grande's principles of colonialist consciousness in the way that students of color begin to internalize their own devaluing and sense of otherness in schools. Without conscious efforts to challenge power relations in schools that feed into hegemony, the existing school system will inherently negate the potentiality of BIPOC students through the dominant forces of settler colonialism in the society they are situated within.

Given this argument, what can educators do to combat the reproduction of settler-colonial values in schools? First, students need access to multiple perspectives of history, not just the Eurocentric myths that are rooted in ideas of White supremacy and manifest destiny. Counter-stories can help students feel a sense of recognition that their places in history have not always been as victims or puppets of white colonizers but rather as groups with voices and their own stories to tell (Yosso, 2006). Rather than centering the voices of the dominant group, "a counterstory recounts experiences of racism and resistance from the perspectives of those on society's margins" (p. 2). In addition to honoring the perspectives of oppressed groups, counterstories also make visible the toxic narratives of white supremacy in the curriculum. In *Cultivating Genius*, Gholdy Muhammad (2020) presented a “historically responsive literacy model” as a guide for educators to help tackle social and educational inequities by establishing four tenets at the center of our curriculum: identity, skills, intellect, and criticality. Though many standardized curricula are centered around building students’ skills and knowledge in each predetermined content area, our education system lacks a focus on student identity building and critical thinking about the systems of power and inequity that drive our society. Centering authentic voices of color is essential to liberating students from a settler-colonial agenda.

In addition, students need support to recognize the ways that systems of power influence their daily lives both as students and young people. If students are unable to recognize the hegemony that permeates their country, they will be unable to challenge it. Grande (2004) argued that especially within “whitestream institutions,” students’ knowledge of the oppressor and their language is essential to efforts of resistance. Knowledge of one’s own oppression becomes the first tool to challenge systems of power. Then, beyond just this spirit of resistance, students need clear tools to identify, investigate and negate colonial attitudes that have infiltrated their schooling and harmed their communities. This would form the foundation of a truly transformative experience in education and a possibility for change, as I will demonstrate later in Chapters Four and Five.

Applications for Critical Action Research: Theory of Change

For my critical action research project, I apply a decolonial lens of critical theory to develop a Spanish heritage program for Latino students that challenges hegemonic relations of power in the U.S. that have been established and preserved through settler colonialism. The program’s curriculum will support my theory of change: In order for students of color to feel liberated from hegemony, they should be provided with educational experiences that honor and explore their own rich cultural heritage and linguistic identities in a way that challenges master narratives rooted in colonial, racial-capitalist ideologies.

Today, there are many misconceptions circulating in the media about critical theory (particularly critical *race* theory), which claim that its purpose is to spread anti-American hate and pit social groups against one another. In reality, critical theory is a way of viewing the world that allows scholars to recognize how different social groups are manipulated, controlled, and oppressed by systems of power in society (Malott, 2011). This lens helps us examine power relations as well as the processes that drive our economies and social relationships. Through critical theory, we can identify a master narrative that is fed to us both explicitly and implicitly through our “schooling” in preparation to join a stratified workforce as producers of capital. When we challenge the dominant narratives in society—for example, the idea that any good man can pull himself up by his bootstraps and succeed if he works hard enough—we recognize that marginalized groups experience negations that prevent them from realizing their ability to thrive as people.

Opponents of critical theory have realized that its application in schools is essential to identifying and dismantling the structures of education that continue to oppress black and brown students. This realization, in turn, has led to not just closures of indigenous, bilingual, or community-based schools, but also fueled explicit violence and legal action against those who seek to decolonize the American education system through Latino heritage programs or Chicano ethnic studies in high schools, for example (Acosta, 2007). Although the U.S. doesn’t use disappearances, violence, and murder to silence radical educators (as we’ve seen in Latin

America), our lawmakers and politicians continue to use legislation to silence the voices of the oppressed through banning books, banning critical pedagogy, banning trans women from playing sports, banning ethnic studies, suppressing voters in communities of color, and more.

It is my belief that teachers can combat the myth of white supremacy by applying critical theory to their daily practices in the classroom to become critical pedagogues that will better serve their communities. C*ritical pedagogy* is a form of reflective and responsive teaching that recognizes the "order of things" by not just questioning the reproduction of hegemony in our education system, but by also searching for alternatives to the existing power dynamic fueled by racial capitalism. Rather than reverting to complacency and teaching the masses the values and norms that are required for good "citizenship," critical pedagogy demands inquiry into not only the current imbalances in power and justice in society but also its root causes. In this way,

> the responsibility of the critical educator is therefore to be able to determine if a particular action, points of view, curriculum, or pedagogy supports the basic structures of power or resists them—no matter *who* or *where* they are coming from. (Malott, 2011)

If we teach without judging the values that our schools are expounding, then we may simply be reproducing the complacency required for hegemony to prevail in society. Both students and teachers need to be self-reflective and understand where power lies in their society and how it operates with or without their consent. The ultimate goal of critical pedagogy, therefore, is liberation from oppressive systems of power.

Given this argument, I explore the ways that critical pedagogy with a decolonial lens can help create a more just space for Latino students in the realm of public education. Through my Spanish heritage program, I hope to challenge the dominant discourse in the Americas that glorifies the white-washing of North America and focuses on the white, English-speaking Christian man as the ideal “American” whose values we must emulate. I will also challenge traditional modes of schooling that perpetuate settler-colonial systems of power at the expense of marginalized groups. In this way, critical pedagogy will help me explore alternatives to the “order of things” and seek to negate the negations of communities of color, with a specific emphasis on Latinos in the U.S. who share a collective history of exploitation and dispossession at the hands of white colonists. The goal of my critical action research project is to create and enact a bilingual Latino studies program in my high school that will put critical pedagogy into practice with the hope of empowering Latino students in Philadelphia to challenge the dominant narrative that settler colonialism and racial capitalism have put in place about the failures of black and brown students.

Chapter Three

Literature Review: A History of the (Mis)Education of Latinos in U.S. Public Schools

It is no secret that Latino students as a group have been historically outperformed by both white students and other minority students within the U.S. public education system, while at the same time, they have been overrepresented in disciplinary measures, such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Taggart, 2022). When compared to their white and Asian peers, Latino students as a demographic score lower on mathematics and reading achievement tests, earn fewer AP (Advanced Placement) credits, and complete fewer high school degrees (De Brey et al., 2019). In fact, Latino students continue to have the lowest high school completion rate overall when compared to other ethnic groups in the U.S. (De Brey et al., 2019). According to 2019 data from the Office for Civil Rights, male Latino students in particular are widely overrepresented in the rate of out-of-school suspensions. While some may claim that this is a sign of cultural deficiency in terms of ability or motivation, or evidence of what Oscar Lewis (1966) termed *the culture of poverty*, I argue that the underperformance of Latino students stems from the racial capitalist colonial values that are deeply embedded in our society and which create inequitable schooling experiences for students of different ethnic groups—particularly students of color.

In this chapter, I draw on colonial scholarship to more deeply understand the ways that settler colonialism and racial capitalism have positioned Latino students at a disadvantage in a public school setting both historically and presently in the United States. As a public school teacher and graduate student writing from a critical decolonial lens of schooling, I do not claim to be a decolonial activist in the physical sense of returning stolen land to the dispossessed. Rather, I am using decolonial theory to better identify the ways in which the perceived shortcomings of Latino students are rooted in an inequitable system sustained by colonialism that utilizes deculturalization as a weapon against students who are black, indigenous, and/or people of color (BIPOC). Tuck and Yang's (2012) writing on decolonial studies cautioned against other researchers' over-application of the term "decolonization" in a metaphorical sense. They called for more direct action to address inequity rooted in settler colonialism, rather than relying on a vague application of the term to educational research. For this reason, I want to make it clear that I am not ignoring their plea, but rather applying a decolonial lens to the way I view curriculum as a tool to address the historic undervaluing of Latino students in common schooling experiences.

To develop my own critical lens of education, I studied the work of decolonial theorists such as Walter Mignolo (2011), Enrique Dussel (2006), and Aníbal Quijano (1992), as well as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012). Their theories laid the groundwork for my decolonial lens on schooling and helped me see the ways in which knowledge itself has been colonized through our public school system and the whitewashing of history.

A History of Schooling as a Colonial Weapon

Although a comprehensive history of my concern could begin with the Spanish colonization of the Caribbean, I have chosen to focus on the *origins of common schooling in the United States* to demonstrate the use of education as a colonial tool of hegemony and assimilation, which has endured for centuries and continues to taint our public education system today. To begin, it is important to recognize that the U.S. was established as and continues to function as a settler-colonial state. Tuck and Yang (2012) delineated settler colonialism as involving not just the extraction of resources from a stolen territory but also dispossessing native peoples of their land and livelihood. In this type of colonialism, the settler establishes a long-term residence on the territory of the dispossessed, building not only villages, towns, and churches, but also codifying daily practices of life. Resistance to settler colonialism is complicated by the lack of spatial separation between the colonized and the colonizers as permanent settlements form. Ultimately, the language, customs, and knowledge systems of the colonizers clash with the native population as settlements grow in size and power, and continue to dispossess the natives of their land. In this manner, colonization necessitates violence as accumulating capital for one group requires the dispossession and extraction of another group (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wang 2019).

Beyond purely physical territory and resources, this same process of dispossession was applied to the hearts and minds of native peoples via education. Historically, European colonists in North America turned to boarding schools such as the Carlisle Indian School to indoctrinate the younger generation of native peoples in the hope of assimilating them into the dominant culture (Spring, 2014). Many of these boarding schools took indigenous children from their villages by force and kept them in these strict institutions to be taught European ways of life, adopting Christianity, the English language, and Western hair and dress—and severely punished those who resisted assimilation (Spring, 2014). These “civilizing” missions were often justified through the church, but in recent years their true terrors have come to light with the exposure of unmarked child graves at such schools in August of 2021 in the U.S. and Canada (Thorne & Moss, 2022). Clearly, schooling was weaponized against colonized groups to remove any potential threat to the dominant culture and extend a filter of control over colonized communities, which suffered lasting generational trauma from these violent, miseducative experiences (Walsh, 2018).

In the context of settler colonialism, I draw on Walter Mignolo (2011) and Joel Spring’s (2014) work here to better articulate the psychological effects of colonial schooling on marginalized communities such as Latino students in the U.S. One purpose of common schooling in our country was to unify the upcoming generations in a shared sense of nationalism and to develop a shared language and culture rooted in Anglo-Saxon traditions while in turn establishing a set range of knowledge and values that every American was expected to know and believe in (Spring, 2014). This was an intentional decision made by post-revolutionary leaders who "rejected the idea of a multicultural society and advocated the creation of a unified American culture formed around Protestant Anglo-Saxon traditions," (Spring, 2014, p. 49). As a country in its infancy, mass schooling would be one critical tool in solidifying a modern state with a citizenry that would support its new form of government.

In education, Noah Webster was a key figure in the creation of a common school curriculum that would develop a dominant Anglo-American culture through the standardization of American English, spelling books, patriotic readings, and moral catechism in the 1780s (Spring, 2014). His three key tenets were patriotism, nationalism, and virtue. Essentially, the founders of these common schools believed that an Anglo-American culture would support Republican, democratic institutions most effectively, and that other cultures would be disruptive to our nation's mission. While practical from a political point of view, this type of standardized curriculum focused on achieving "Americanization" through deculturalization. According to Spring's definition, "Deculturalization is the educational process of destroying a people's culture (cultural genocide) and replacing it with a new culture" (Spring, 2014, p. 8). The preservation of the nation itself took priority over the preservation of the diverse cultural traditions and languages that the colonies established.

Webster's mission to standardize American English through common schools ultimately jeopardized the diversity of student language practices both in school and at home as the U.S.

grew into a linguistic graveyard rather than a melting pot (Rumbaut, 2009). Similarly, educational texts such as McGuffy readers included illustrations of school children in these books that were typically light-skinned with European hairstyles and dress, further promoting white, Anglo-American culture as the desired culture of schools. While they intended to teach good moral character and lifelong values of truth and honesty, these workbooks often denigrated the practices of other ethnic groups that the schools served (Spring, 2016).

This type of patriotic, nationalizing education was normalized until the late 1900s when various student movements of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos protested standardized curricula that sought to erase their stories and identities. Student protests in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the African American student walkouts in Philadelphia and Chicago, demanded more culturally relevant pedagogy, equitable dress code policies, and better representation of Black culture in schools, in addition to the implementation of African American studies in the curriculum, ideally taught by Black teachers (Danns, 2003; Rury & Hill, 2013). Similarly, Chicano student movements in Texas, Arizona, and California fought for educational improvements for Latino students, protesting systemic inequality and racist practices against Mexican American students in public schools (Berta-Avila et al., 2011). For example, in New Mexico, Chicano youth in the 1960s and 70s organized nonviolent protests to demand a change to the Anglo-centric curriculum, teachers, cafeteria food, textbooks, and school culture (Gutiérrez, 2010). They also protested the severe punishments for speaking Spanish at school and at recess. Similar student walkouts erupted in California and Texas as Latino students demanded recognition and respect in their school communities.

As the two largest groups, the struggles of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in particular laid the foundation for educational activism for Latinos as a whole. A closer look at the history of the colonization of Latin American territories will contextualize Latino student movements and help us recognize the weight of their continued struggle to be valued and have their needs addressed in U.S. public schools.

Conquest & Colonization: The Annexation of Mexico and Puerto Rico

Throughout the expansion of the United States as a country, we annexed large portions of territory originally belonging to Latin American nations, such as Mexico and Puerto Rico. Our annexation of these territories has catalyzed a clear mission of common schooling to perform a colonizing duty, and on the political level, these acts of conquests have been justified by the U.S. government as having a civilizing mission of providing more stability in regions that were "culturally and racially inferior" to the areas of the country settled by European Americans (Spring, 2016). Once their homelands were annexed, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were pressured to adopt the cultural practices of U.S. public schools, such as replacing their home languages of Spanish and/or indigenous languages with American English.

The Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848 was a crucial turning point for the establishment of U.S. territory across the southwestern border. After defeating Mexico and annexing half of their territory (part of which became California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Texas), the American government then had to deal with the dilemma of absorbing a diverse population of indigenous Mexicans as well as *mestizos*: Mexicans with a mix of both indigenous and (European) Spanish heritage due to the racial mixing propelled by Spain's colonization of the region centuries before.

Lasting political resentment between Americans and Mexicans was accompanied by racial tensions, as white Americans viewed Mexicans as a lesser race, denying them immediate U.S. citizenship (Spring, 2016). Mexican American citizenship juggled back and forth in the palms of U.S. politicians as they went from being classified as "white" to being classified as "Indians" but at the same time did not qualify for the same provisions as "Native Americans" because they were considered non-native to the country. This racial ambiguity highlights the unwillingness for the U.S. government to embrace the Latino population as their own, which culminated in a mass-scale deportation of 400,000 Mexican-Americans in the 1930s back to Mexico—the war-torn country their parents had fled during the Mexican Revolution. Entire Mexican communities were driven out of their homelands in Texas and Colorado in the mid-1800s. These violent acts of dispossession are clear signs of settler colonialism and were justified with racist rhetoric, identifying Mexicans as pests to be exterminated from the land. Mexican American families who remained faced discrimination and harassment, especially in public settings such as schools (Planty et al., 2009).

Evidently, the annexation of this Southwestern territory in the U.S. created clear segregation between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans. In his book, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986,* sociologist and historian David Montejano (2010) explained, "Anglos and Mexicans stood as conquerors and conquered, as victors and vanquished, a distinction as fundamental as any sociological sign of privilege and rank. How could it have been otherwise?" (p. 5). In the introduction to his book, Montejano argued the importance of addressing this long, divisive history between white Americans and Mexicans, which is often overshadowed by the narratives of the heroic westward expansion into "Indian" territory, or the infamous accounts of slavery and segregation in the South detailing the horrors of the Black-white racial binary in the U.S. The racial-capitalist social relations of the Mexican *peón* producing capital for the Anglo-American *ranchero* accentuated the hegemonic division of power and territory in the Southwest, further shaping the relations between these two social groups (Montejano, 2010).

These social relations rooted in the colonization of Mexican lands help inform the way that Latinos in the U.S. continue to be *othered*, or seen as less “American” than the standard white American of European descent. Additionally, the U.S. government’s reluctance to establish full constitutional rights and statehood for Puerto Rico is further evidence of the violence that emerged historically through the colonization of Latino people. This systemic violence continues to shape the racial-capitalist social relations between these groups today, creating negative experiences for Latinos—especially in public institutions such as schools.

Puerto Rico: Controversy over Citizenship

The end of the Spanish-American War led to the annexation of Puerto Rico as a colony in 1898. Rebellions in Cuba led to a clear push for the U.S. government to establish military strongholds in the Caribbean to preserve our economic interests. Consequently, Puerto Ricans as a colonized people suffered from exploitation under the U.S. government, such as forced military service under the 1917 Jones Act while being denied the right to vote in national elections (Spring, 2016). In fact, neither Mexican Americans nor Puerto Ricans had full citizenship rights until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was largely won by the determination of African American Civil Rights activists fighting for racial equality. Ten years later, electoral ballots were finally mandated to be multilingual, expanding voting access to many Spanish-speaking Latinos across the U.S.

With heightened waves of immigration from Central America and the Caribbean in the 1960s, social tensions continued to escalate as a diverse array of Latin Americans migrated North. Latinos became the largest minority group in the U.S., and consequently, in U.S. public schools. Educators lacked adequate resources and training to address the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of their minority students. Community activism and protest spurred Civil Rights victories for Latinos in the form of legislation such as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which called for equal educational opportunities for language minority students. Despite these influential grass-root movements to organize community protests around educational inequity for Latino students, there still has been relatively little effort from policymakers on a national level to support Latino students' needs in school. As evidenced by the continued underachievement of Latino students in U.S. schools, this social justice work is still not finished today as students of minority groups continue to fight for proper recognition and representation in the public school curriculum.

The following section of this chapter is a historical overview of the systematic violence committed against Latino students through our public school system. I have divided these phenomena into four distinct categories to better analyze the causes and effects of each: racialized violence, linguistic violence, structural violence, and curricular violence. These forms of violence were often wielded against other minority groups such as Black students, indigenous students, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community, spurring the aforementioned series of student protests rooted in the Civil Rights Movement. Overall, I argue that rather than a cultural deficiency in the students themselves, it is these forms of systemic violence that have contributed to the underperformance of Latinos in U.S. public schools and negatively shaped their educational experiences.

Racialized Violence

Throughout the history of the U.S., multiple waves of immigration challenged the dominance of white Anglo-American communities. Efforts to consolidate the power of white

Americans were made clear through immigration-related legislation such as the Naturalization Act of 1790, which tied the idea of citizenship to whiteness and therefore automatically excluded other races from this privilege (Kunnan, 2009). Throughout waves of immigration, European groups have mostly experienced assimilation or hybridization (which essentially became an opportunity to solidify their place in the dominant white majority) whereas BIPOC groups were often denied access to such privileges and excluded from educational opportunities (e.g., through the Black Codes) or experienced deculturalization in schools (Spring 2010). Though each group of immigrants in turn faced their own discrimination, western Europeans such as Irish and Italians were ultimately white-passing and eventually benefitted from assimilating into the racial classification of "whiteness." Other minority groups such as African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans continued to be excluded and marginalized in the education system—if not downright attacked by it.

To illustrate, the Carlisle Indian School systematically stripped Native American youth from their culture, assigned students English names, cut off their hair, and forced them to adopt Western dress. In the 1892 Conference of Charities and Correction, Richard H. Pratt blatantly exposed the racism behind their "civilizing" mission with his famous remark that rather than exterminate Native Americans outright, we should strive to "kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Pratt, 1973). He hoped to eliminate Native Americans as a separate race and assimilate their youth into the white-washed customs of the dominant society. Within these institutions, dangerous cultural differences were supposedly being contained and made safe in extremely surveilled and controlled environments (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Indigenous scholars Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) argued that this so-called "civilization" of Native Americans replaced indigenous languages with American English, and countered "paganism" with

Christianity through a strict standardized curriculum that often masqueraded as a pathway to equal opportunity. Unfortunately, new journalism across the U.S. and Canada has revealed the extent to which indigenous students were violently treated in schools, often leading to severe illness or death, with the uncovering of child graves at the sites of numerous colonial boarding schools (Thorne & Moss, 2022).

Of course, schools are a reflection of the larger society they are in, and these examples of racial violence against people of color in U.S. schools are plentiful. However, Latinos are not typically the first group to be exemplified as victims of such violence in these narratives. For example, just as thousands of African Americans were brutally lynched in the U.S. between the 19th and 20th centuries (and, arguably, up to the present day through police brutality and neighborhood watchdogs), Mexican Americans were lynched just as frequently in the South (Carrigan & Webb, 2003). Although Mexican Americans were some of the earliest Americans in terms of the annexation of southern territory, they have historically been racially othered and excluded from dominant society in violent ways.

In 1924, President Coolidge signed the Immigration Act of 1924 which drastically limited the number of immigrants from Eastern Europe who could enter the U.S. through a quota system and barred Asians from the country with the purpose of "preserv[ing] the ideal of U.S. homogeneity" and solidifying a common whiteness of American society through scientific racism. Politicians of the era heeded the recommendations of eugenicists that believed certain races were biologically inferior and less intelligent than the white race. Eugenics ultimately provided a "scientific" justification for the racist attitudes toward people of color and tainted our politics, education, and healthcare systems for many years to come (Spring, 2014).

Another example of anti-immigration legislation was the creation of Mexican border control in 1924. Over the last century, the U.S. has intentionally created a push-pull relationship with Mexico, forcibly restricting their access to the U.S. labor market when the economy is struggling (e.g., sending 600,000 Mexicans back to Mexico during the Great Depression) and subsequently inviting Mexicans back over the border to provide cheap labor when the labor market needed it (e.g., the Bracero Program after WWII) (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999). Although racialized rhetoric accusing Mexicans of stealing American jobs, welfare, and tax-payer money still circulates around many American dinner tables, history makes it apparent that many U.S. businesses historically rely on the accumulation of wealth through the cheap labor supply of Mexican (and other Latin American) bodies when it is the most convenient option. Yet by the same token, they often deny these Latino families the perks of citizenship such as access to health care and human services (Perreira, 2012). This ambivalence towards immigrants creates a toxic environment for Latino youth who are the recipients of racial slurs, linguistic and cultural discrimination, bullying, and tracking in U.S. schools, not to mention the destabilizing effect of creating seasonal jobs for their families that require frequent relocation (and thus, transferring schools, causing gaps in their education, or dropping out altogether). Overall, the U.S. government has provided limited legal protection or pathways to citizenship for these migrant workers.

More recently, legislation such as the Senate Bill 1070 in Arizona in 2010, which granted law enforcement officers the right to check any person's immigration status if presented with a "reasonable suspicion," has created yet another resurgence of racial attacks on Latino families in the U.S. (Supreme Court of the United States, 2012, as cited in Ayón & Philbin, 2017). This kind of anti-immigration rhetoric that pervades conservative policy decisions foments racialized violence against Latino youth in schools whether or not they are U.S.-born citizens. For example, Córdova and Cervantes (2010) explained that “U.S. citizen Latino youths reported being stereotyped as gang members, whereas foreign-born Latino youths report discrimination attributed to low acculturation indicators such as the use of Spanish, limited English proficiency, and wearing traditional attire” (as cited in Ayón & Philbin, 2017, p. 20). In addition, technology has played a role in the dehumanization of Latino youth in the U.S. through increased policing and surveillance. For example, a Chicago Gang Database uses an algorithm to predict who will be involved in gang-related incidents of gun violence. Activist groups such as Mijente and the Black Youth Project 100 were outraged that 96% of the people on the list identified as Black or Latino. This type of surveillance does not necessarily prevent crime, but rather commits further racialized violence toward Black and Latino males of Chicago who may be denied job opportunities, denied social services such as childcare, or be targeted by immigration enforcement due to being on the gang database list (Chicago Gang Database, 2017).

These racialized stereotypes have historically contributed to the structural inequalities and lack of privilege that Latino students face in their daily lives. In schools, this is manifested in the underperformance of Latino students as well as heightened emotional stress, lowered self-esteem, and an increased desire to conform to the dominant culture to avoid violence and discrimination, thus perpetuating colonial power relations (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009; Garza, 2022).

Linguistic Violence

As mentioned in the previous section, U.S. common schools have historically served the purpose of creating a homogenous Anglo-American culture, which required a unified American English language. Although in technical terms, the U.S. has no “official” national language, the status and prevalence of English as the *de facto* American tongue has led to the country becoming a "linguistic graveyard" of other languages brought to North America through immigration (Rumbaut, 2009). Today, the majority of American public schools use English as the language of instruction, even for linguistically diverse groups of students. Educational scholar Lin Pan (2015) explained that the ideology behind the unchallenged prevalence of English use in schools is clear evidence of hegemony:

> The assumption that English is a tool for getting ahead in social life and that teaching English is empty of ideological content is exactly an exemplification of ideological hegemony. And requiring individuals to learn English for education and jobs and for social development often helps to sustain existing power relationships. (p. 253)

Although Pan is writing in the context of Chinese public schools, the principle applies to many countries who teach the language of the dominant group in society at the expense of sacrificing minority or indigenous language practices—a phenomenon that has now been globalized. Indeed, in the United States, the idea of English being the most highly-valued language in a largely diverse nation trickles down to negatively affect speakers of other languages, who must consistently suppress a central part of their identities to participate in educational contexts.

Historically, the United States implemented English-Only policies in schools beginning in the late 1800s as part of the common school movement, which believed that Anglo-American culture was superior to other minority cultures and would help strengthen republican and democratic institutions. In response, educators began forcing students to abandon minority languages in the classroom (particularly Spanish and indigenous languages) in favor of English, creating a culture of linguistic violence in common schools (Spring, 2010). English-Only policies are manifestations of symbolic violence against non-English speakers which can lead to physical violence when students fail to conform to the dominant culture. Here, Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, two theorists of social power, would argue that the colonizer is symbolically exercising their power and domination over the colonized by imposing their language and culture on them (as cited in Shannan & Escamilla, 1999).

In addition to Latinos, other ethnic groups such as Asian Americans have also been clear victims of discrimination for speaking with an accent or speaking languages other than English in school (Lippi-Green, 2012). For Native American children in boarding schools, harsh discipline and punishment for speaking their languages created a false stereotype of the stoic, silent indigenous child (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Without prior instruction in English, these children were forced into silence. The myth of the “silent Indian” actually bolstered the rhetoric of white educators that believed in their own superiority and responsibility to educate and civilize these wayward children. This began a century-long tendency to blame students, rather than schools, for their own academic underperformance (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

A few promising moves were made to help support students who spoke other languages, such as the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, which passed in the wake of the Civil Rights movement. As the first federal legislation designed to support the educational needs of students not yet fluent in the English language, it provided funding to bilingual programs in elementary and secondary schools, acknowledging that the federal government needed to play a role in providing more equity for immigrant students (Wiese & García, 1998). Although the 1968 Bilingual Education Act was an encouraging step toward linguistic justice for Latino students, it was hotly debated and bilingual education, even today, presents a threat to the colonizing mission of schools (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999).

The prestige value of English monolingualism is evident through the evolution of bilingual policy: Between 1974 and 1994, the federal policy clearly stated that the goal of bilingual programs was for students to learn English (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999). Even within schools that do have bilingual programs, curricular materials are often in English, and English and Spanish do not share the same status, supporting an ideology of English monolingualism through the messages conveyed by the teachers and the structure of the curriculum. For example, many bilingual programs are transitional, meaning that the ultimate goal is to minimize the need to speak Spanish in the classroom and transition to 100% instruction in English. Spanish would be given less time and resources than English, and tested subjects such as math and language arts were often taught in English. These trends continue to marginalize Spanish speakers and devalue their heritage language in the classroom (Ayala, 2022). Students quickly learn that they must assimilate to the dominant culture and language to be fully respected.

Although English-Only movements began in the late 1800s, they became popular again in the 1980s when specific states and counties (such as Dade County, Florida, and the Commonwealth of Virginia) passed laws to make English the official language of their territory. In 1998, Ron Unz, a Silicon Valley millionaire, advocated for the passage of Proposition 227 in California which effectively banned bilingual education in schools and replaced them with English-only immersion classes for immigrant children (Garcia-Reid, 2008). At the time of this ballot initiative, entitled “English for the Children,” an estimated 700,000 children in California were receiving instruction in their home language as they were learning English (Council of the Great City Schools, 1998). The climate of xenophobia in California, coupled with a general misunderstanding of the pedagogy behind bilingual programs and language acquisition, aided in passing the bill which paved the way for other states to do the same (Johnson & Martinez, 1999).

By 2006, less than one in ten third-generation Americans reported being able to communicate well in their heritage language (Rumbaut, 2014).

Of course, I do not presume to mean that Spanish has had no place in U.S. public schools. In fact, it is one of the most widely taught languages in our public schools due to its perceived utility. However, I argue that world languages fluctuate in market value due to their immediate political and economic utility. That is to say, language value (or the value of multicultural education in general) is tied largely to the political and economic needs of the nation, rather than the needs of the students themselves. In this way, the value that languages are prescribed in the school setting reflects the greater needs of racial capitalism and colonialism to continue to accumulate wealth and power through the extraction of resources from minority groups. At the end of the day, English will always have a higher value in our settler-colonial society. Even so, there is a pervasive double standard in the American upper and middle classes, where foreign language study is encouraged for cultural and cognitive enrichment, while the native language maintenance of immigrant children is discouraged due to its perceived threat to English as the language of education for our youth (Pavlenko, 2003). This kind of hypocrisy highlights the ways in which the dominant culture appropriates elements of other cultures when beneficial to the maintenance of their own power.

Other examples of linguistic violence towards Latinos in the U.S. include the hierarchy between varieties of the Spanish language. The Spanish colonization of a large swath of Latin America established Spanish as the dominant language across the continent, challenging the existing indigenous languages in a similar way that English was used to replace the languages of Native Americans. However, when Spanish was brought to U.S. schools in the form of foreign language instruction, *castellano* became the dominant linguistic variety of the classroom amongst educators who turned to Spain for authority (Mar-Molinero, 2000). The use of *castellano* instead of Latin American Spanish reflects colonial power relations of European Spanish over the indigenous languages and traditions of the Americas.

Other language varieties such as *Spanglish*, which Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa considered to be the native language of the US-Mexico borderlands, struggle to claim validity and are often shunned in both English and Spanish language classrooms as being illegitimate in terms of “academic” language (Ayala, 2022). Therefore, even when a student’s language is spoken in school, it may not match the variety spoken at home, which can create a sense of tension in the classroom when teachers correct these students on vocabulary, spelling, or pronunciation. In his 2014 field studies of bilingual Latino adolescents in South Central Texas, Ayala noted that students experienced microaggressions from their teachers as well as their peers due to their language use in the school. For example, one bilingual Latina student was told multiple times by her peers to “go back to Mexico if you wanna talk Spanish" (p. 7). On the other hand, in the Spanish Language Arts classroom, one of her classmates of Mexican heritage was discriminated against for her language variety when the teacher commented, “That’s not the way we should speak Spanish” (p. 8).

After repeated hostility, verbal abuse, and even physical attacks in response to their language use, many Latino students have internalized their own oppression and begun to believe that their identity is not acceptable in the school community (Ayala, 2022). Overall, the phenomena of linguistic violence detailed in this section can be categorized as forms of linguistic imperialism that highlight colonial trends of repressing minority and indigenous languages and replacing them with the language of the dominant culture at the expense of student well-being (Johnson, 2013).

Structural Violence

In addition to establishing English as the dominant language of American society, common schools' secondary function was to alleviate inequality, poverty, and crime, especially in urban centers. As industrialization created a wave of child labor laws, public schools would occupy youth during the day to avoid increased delinquency in the streets (Spring, 2014). One idea behind common schooling was that a national moral education would eliminate crime and poverty through discipline and efficiency. Early common schools in Pennsylvania adopted the Lancasterian system: huge classrooms with students seated in rows, receiving instruction from monitors who all reported to the master at the front of the room, much like a factory system. A cheap way to educate the poor, the Lancasterian system prioritized discipline, speed, and silence in the classroom, using a system of rewards and punishments to encourage desired behaviors (Spring, 2010). Although it was meant to instill a republican (and ultimately capitalist) culture of hard work and morals in American youth, in reality, the Lancasterian system established complacency and submission to a culture of power built on the ideology of white Anglo-American political figures who had a predetermined set of goals for how they wanted to groom the younger generation into a monocultural society.

Though they did get children off the streets, we know that public schools did not achieve the grand goals of eliminating social and economic inequality. In fact, some basic research can reveal that public schools have exacerbated inequalities through unfair funding formulas, inadequate resources, and over-testing students. Clearly, the underperformance of Latino students is deeply tied to structural violence that is reproduced within schools. Garcia-Reed (2008) defines structural violence as "any constraint on human potential that is due to economic and political structures" (p. 236). For Latino students, this can include access to limited resources in schools, living in a state of poverty, experiencing an adverse school climate, attending school in dilapidated buildings, and experiencing low societal expectations for their success.

Historically, Latinos as an ethnic group have attended some of the most segregated and poorly funded schools with buildings in physical decay, including leaky roofs, plumbing, heating, and lighting issues, and a lack of proper ventilation (Evans, 2004, as cited in Garcia-Reid, 2008). Kozol's (1996) *Amazing Grace* described the elevated risk of asthma and lead poisoning among poor children as one form of structural violence which increases inequality of educational outcomes due to the potential neurological damage that such hazardous conditions can cause in children. Poor communities' lack of clean air, potable water, adequate living arrangements, and access to health care translate to inequalities at school, connecting structural environmental violence to school violence. This kind of inequity becomes ubiquitous and therefore almost invisible in the day-to-day lives of those affected. When hostile conditions become normalized, students begin to accept their own oppression, which Hartman (1997) termed "internalizing the whip," creating yet another layer of psychological violence.

Jonathon Kozol's harrowing portrait of Camden, New Jersey in *Savage Inequalities* (1991) is another famous example of structural violence. Camden serves as a snapshot of the "Black ghetto," where students "live in spaces where inadequate educational opportunities, high unemployment, and underemployment, disinvestment in communities, lack of access to quality resources, police brutality, and an unjust court system create feelings of vulnerability and despair" (Watts & Everelles, 2004, p. 277). When students are struggling for their day-to-day survival, they rarely find hope and redemption in their under-served schools. Urban centers struggle with labor exploitation and social and economic degradation that occurs in racially segregated neighborhoods. Poverty, in this case, is not an individual plight but a systematic trap that has devastated cities such as Camden. Our country remains clearly divided into two main groups: heavily surveilled “internal colonies” (ghettos, barrios, city centers, and reservations) versus affluent white suburbs (Watts & Everelles, 2004). These two groups receive drastically different educations. Driven by systemic racism, the decades-long gutting of public funding for community resources, including schools, has failed to provide adequate educational opportunities for many urban communities or internal colonies (Kitzmiller, 2021). Therefore, the failure of Latino and BIPOC students in public schools represents our failure to fund communities of color, not a failure of the communities themselves.

Structural violence can also be explained as the role that schools, as institutions of social control, play in the social reproduction of violent student behavior (Watts & Everelles, 2004). Labeling the students inside these under-resourced communities as “deviant” enables those in power to transfer the blame to the community. Their perceived deviance has created a historical trend of overrepresentation of Black and Latino low-income students in special education classrooms, juvenile detention centers, and correctional schools. Watts & Everelles (2004) argued that it is the material conditions of the prison-like urban school system within which the ideologies of race, class, gender, and disability converge to create the “violent” student of color. Zero-tolerance policies have only exacerbated the problem. These policies originated in 1994 under the Republican administration, and since then, the number of school suspensions has increased. Rather than supporting students, these policies perpetuate the punishment and criminalization of students of color, often pushing them back out onto the streets where their problems originated (Watts & Everelles, 2004). On paper, these policies kept students safe from violence in schools; but in reality, they pushed Black and Latino students outside of the mainstream school system and into the surplus labor force and informal economy, making them easier targets for criminalization and imprisonment (Watts & Everelles, 2004). In other words, policies that supposedly promoted school safety and well-being for all students actually served a colonial function of surveilling and disciplining students of color. It is no surprise that an increase in school suspensions in the 90s correlated with an increase in incarceration, especially of young African American and Latino males (Casella, 2001, as cited in Watts & Everelles, 2004). Within schools, Watts and Everelles argued that instead of preventing violence, the strong security presence and ubiquity of metal detectors and hall monitors socialized students “into a culture of violence that may not have been apparent to them before, but that now be[came] a natural part of their existence” (p. 283). This kind of structural violence in school conditions Latino students to expect discipline and punishment as soon as they enter the building.

Sadly, by 2013, more resources were being allocated to Philadelphia’s prison system rather than its school system, perpetuating the cycle of structural violence and solidifying the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color in poor communities (Kitzmiller, 2021). As these forces of oppression have now been modernized, technology and data collection have been incorporated into the role of surveillance of communities of color. For example, social services like food stamps and welfare portals have become digitized and monitored. Standardization also contributes to additional monitoring and over-testing of struggling school districts. This tracking of student data leads to neoliberal practice of rationalizing the failure of urban schools and privatizing them. These dangerous effects of standardization will be further explored in the next section.

Curricular Violence

In addition to the aforementioned forms of racial, linguistic, and structural violence against Latino students, they have also been victims of curricular violence in U.S. schools. Here, I use the term *curricular violence* to refer to the ways in which the pedagogy and content of U.S. public schools have systematically undervalued, dismissed, misrepresented, and even erased the multiple histories of Latino students. Villenas, Deyhle, and Parker (1999, as cited in Watts & Everelles, 2004) reported through ethnographic studies that Mexican and Chicano families in U.S. schools face discrimination in the form of lowered teacher expectations, vocational tracking, simplified curriculum, and the erasure of Mexican traditions. These forms of discrimination stem from anti-immigrant, xenophobic rhetoric, much like the founders of common schools' original fears that multiculturalism would endanger the unity of the American nation. Although methods of deculturalization in schools range between segregation, isolation, language use, standardized textbooks, achievement tests, denial of cultural expression, and use of teachers from the dominant group to establish norms, I will focus more on the inclusion and exclusion of curricular content itself as the main form of curricular violence against Latino students.

In educational research, three layers of curriculum exist: the direct curriculum, the indirect (or *hidden*) curriculum, and the null curriculum (Eisner, 2002; McCutcheon, 1995; Milner, 2017). While many critical theorists address the hidden curriculum in their work, that is, the ways in which schools serve the purpose of establishing hegemonic social relations, (Grande, 2004), I would like to also address the null curriculum as a form of deculturalization or disempowerment of marginalized groups. The null curriculum refers to what content is specifically left out (Eisner, 2002; McCutcheon, 1995; Milner, 2017). When we intentionally withhold educational experiences from groups of children, especially of a marginalized group, we perpetuate the struggle for memory and risk additional harm to those students when their stories are omitted from the curriculum.

When paired with the hidden curriculum of schools, the null curriculum becomes even more dangerous as public schools may replace the stories of an oppressed community with a biased story of the dominant one. From a decolonial perspective, this is an essential element of deculturalization, which serves to assimilate students to the norms and epistemologies of the dominant society. Apple (1993) brought up the important question in the title of his work: “Does a national curriculum make sense?” When we consider the decisions going into creating such a large-scale curriculum, we rely on people to make those decisions around what they consider to be “official knowledge,” which has the potential to meet the needs of the majority group but may exclude the knowledge of minority groups who have historically been disenfranchised or left out of decision-making opportunities. This is precisely the problem I am trying to address at my school: the lack of a curriculum that centers the needs, voices, and values of Latino students.

In his book, *Western Modernity*, Mignolo (2011) made clear that the belief in only one system of knowledge originating in European philosophy and academia is pernicious to the rest of humanity as well as the global species. Indeed, out of this “Western code” has sprung individualism, racial capitalism, and neoliberalism which continue to drive our social relations today. Mignolo (2011) explained that when a dominant group builds and controls the structure of knowledge on principles of racism and patriarchy, they purposefully exclude or limit the participation of people who do not fit these values. The kinds of global power struggles we continue to see today maintain the colonial matrix of power rather than challenge it. While options exist outside of human exploitation and racial capitalism, the “West” (or highly developed nations) has chosen to maintain this path. Schools are one consistent way to maintain the colonial control of knowledge and rhetoric of modernity that consistently places the blame for failure on the oppressed communities themselves. Mignolo’s work supported Aníbal

Quijano's (1992) concept of *coloniality,* a framework for delinking our ways of knowing from European epistemologies. In this sense, we can take a position of decoloniality within our existing school system by honoring alternate knowledge systems rooted in the Global South and minoritarian voices rather than in Western imperial powers and majoritarian groups.

Another way that researchers have conceptualized this issue is in the *struggle for memory.* Within the context of education, Shackle and Palaus (2006) argued that the purpose of a "struggle for memory" (p. 50) is to resist the dominant narrative which centers the stories of the elite or the traditional heroes of history (e.g., Christopher Columbus) and to also highlight other stories that may be overlooked. The history we teach in schools has a profound effect on our students: The way teachers talk about the past gives students an understanding of what is possible or not possible for certain groups, whether or not this is explicitly stated (Holt, 1990). This realization is crucial in understanding how curriculum can be used as a form of violence against marginalized groups. Students have already come to this realization decades ago, as evidenced by their forms of protest against the standardized curriculum that has ignored or misrepresented their histories. Examples include the previously-mentioned Chicano student walkouts of the 1960s and the Philadelphia student walkout on November 17, 1967, which demanded better conditions in schools, more African American teachers and administration, the inclusion of African American history in the curriculum, and the acceptance of Black culture and dress in schools.

In terms of the sociopolitical history of Latin America, this kind of resistance to the domination of national memory has been essential in the fight against institutionalized violence by governments and militaries against their own people. Examples range from dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil throughout the twentieth century to indigenous genocides in Guatemala all the way up to 1996. Victimized communities are left not just physically scarred but also psychologically scarred in the ways that their governments ignore their calls for justice or alter the telling of the events through the media to put themselves in a more favorable light. In this way, memory, when under the control of an authoritarian regime, can be politicized and weaponized against the oppressed. A similar danger exists in the systematic erasure of these stories through common school curricula. Understanding this important historical connection to the struggle for memory in Latin America's violent past is essential to realizing the current need to struggle for memory within the public schools that serve our Latino students today as a way to recognize and end this generational violence against marginalized groups (Montaño & Crenzo, 2015).

Standardization: A revitalization of "common" schooling in the curriculum

More recently, large-scale policy movements in education have followed the trend of standardization. This resurgence of the ideologies behind "common schooling" prioritizes quantifying academic achievement over addressing the diverse needs of students in its insistence on monitoring school performance through common core state standards and high-stakes standardized testing across grade levels. The rhetoric behind the national curriculum often defends its purpose to raise standards of accountability across schools through shared goals, standards, and achievement testing. Though accountability is important in ensuring that every student gets a high-quality education, we need to continue to ask questions about *who* is making these decisions for a highly diverse nation such as the U.S. and what values their curricular ideologies may be founded on. When we have sweeping reforms, which groups will benefit, and which groups may experience loss? (Apple, 1993).

Historically, standardization efforts have come during Republican or right-leaning administrations (such as George H.W. Bush). Key thinkers such as E.D. Hirsch Jr. pushed for standardization in public schools, revitalizing Rush and Webster's ideas during the conservative resurgence in the 1980s. Hirsch Jr. wrote extensively on "cultural literacy," which serves as a euphemism for "cultural uniformity" to the dominant ideology. Hirsch Jr. argued that essentially, the goal of public education was acculturation. He explained that books are written with a common reader in mind, which requires a shared set of knowledge with the writer. Therefore, if our students do not share common cultural knowledge, they will be ill-equipped to read curricular materials. Following this logic, Hirsch Jr. is reducing reading to the act of transmitting and processing a predetermined set of information. I agree with Richard Paul's (1990) critique of Hirsch in the sense that his beliefs about reading purposefully downplay the need for critical thinking and developing students' own knowledge and understanding of the world.

Indeed, anything with the word "critical" in it these days seems to scare conservatives in the educational realm as it provides an invitation to challenge common norms, ideologies, or the status quo established by a colonial education system. An example of this would be the 2010 Mexican-American studies ban in Tucson, Arizona, which victimized white Americans as a way to prevent teachers and students from centering Latino history and culture in the classroom. This is yet another example of the power that white, cis-gender voices have in the decisions that shape our schools due to their higher amounts of cultural, social, or economic capital which give added weight to their demands in school districts (Kitzmiller, 2021). Though standardization has been permitted at the national level since the origins of common schooling to promote a monolingual, monocultural society dedicated to the Anglo-American values of discipline, hard work, and Christian morals, recent challenges to this dominant ideology in schools have been labeled as a threat, further evidencing the fear that allowing diversity could mean challenging the dominant systems of power rooted in colonialism.

Conclusion

Overall, common schools were never intended to honor the diversity of students, but rather served a clear purpose of assimilating diverse groups of people into the dominant culture through methods of deculturalization. Students of color, especially Latinos, who make up the largest minority in the U.S., have suffered from racial, linguistic, structural, and curricular violence in U.S. public schools as their experiences, languages, and cultural traditions have been devalued through waves of standardization.

Addressing the Current State of Latino (Mis)Education: Models of Action Research

This section will outline three key scholars that have taken on their own critical action research projects to tackle the continued marginalization and underperformance of Latinos in school settings. I utilize the work of Tara Yosso, Armando Garza Ayalá, and Amanda Taggart as inspiration for my own Critical Latino Studies course, which I will describe in further detail in Chapter Four. These three authors have all acknowledged that the blame of the underperformance of Latino students does not lie within the community itself, but in the discriminatory colonial values that are embedded in our school system.

Yosso: Critical Race Counterstories

In her book, *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline* (2006), Tara Yosso exposes this institutional neglect through what she terms the “chicano/a educational pipeline.” In terms of demographics, it is evident that Latinos form the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the U.S. and have for years (De Brey, 2019). However, our public schools are notorious for under-serving, assimilating, isolating, and even excluding these students from the educational community. By compiling data from the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, Yosso mapped out in concrete terms the loss of educational attainment through the chicano/a educational pipeline. As detailed by Yosso (2006), out of one hundred chicano/a elementary school students, only forty-four would graduate from high school and seven would attain a bachelor's degree, leaving less than 1% to earn a Ph.D. This is unsurprising due to the conditions of their schools alone. Similarly to African Americans, "most chicano/a students attend overly crowded, racially segregated schools, which lack sufficient numbers of trained faculty, updated textbooks, and even desks" (Yosso, 2006, p. 2).

In response to both discriminatory conditions and culturally irrelevant curriculum, Yosso (2006) presented a possible solution to the deficit narrative of Latino students: critical race counterstories. Rather than centering the voices of the dominant group, "a counterstory recounts experiences of racism and resistance from the perspectives of those on society's margins" (p. 2). In addition to honoring the perspectives of oppressed groups, counterstories also make visible the toxic narratives of white supremacy that are interwoven with our traditional curriculum. In a school setting, counterstories can help liberate Latino communities from the myth of cultural deficiency and help empower them to succeed in overcoming the continued colonial suppression of their cultural epistemologies, or ways of knowing the world. In my critical action research proposal, I will draw on Yosso's use of counterstories to help engage the community of Latinos in Philadelphia with a Critical Latino Studies program at Franklin Learning Center that highlights their voices rather than majoritarian ones.

Taggart: The Power of Culturally Relevant "Educación"

Following Yosso's call to action, numerous other scholars have examined the continued marginalization of Latino students as well as the ways in which decolonial education could help boost their confidence and academic achievement in U.S. schools. For example, in 2022 Amanda Taggart exposed the continued overrepresentation of Latino students in disciplinary measures at schools through her quantitative study entitled, “The Influence of Educación on Latinx Students’ Academic Expectations and Achievement.” One under-researched area of the Latino educational pipeline is the misbehaviors in class that go unreported in disciplinary data collection: talking back to teachers, arguing in the classroom, disrupting instructional time, or showing disrespect. To address this, Taggart conducted research with 400 students of diverse racial backgrounds from the Southwestern U.S. through self-reporting to track instances of misbehavior and determine whether or not that correlated with academic achievement. Taggart argued that actually increasing a student's cultural connection to the community value of *educación* could protect Latino students and enable higher levels of academic achievement since she found a correlation between positive behavior at school and student expectations of going to college.

The value of *educación* in the Latino community can be defined as a sense of shared moral values, deference towards one’s elders, peaceful interpersonal relationships, respect for authority, and obedience to parents (Taggart, 2022, p.2). Her quantitative study also confirmed that taking more rigorous coursework (such as AP Spanish) earlier in middle or high school, as well as having high educational expectations, positively influences Latino student achievement. Unfortunately, the current U.S. public school system sets most Latino students at a disadvantage on these two variables. This provides further evidence of the need for culturally rich, academically rigorous bilingual heritage programs, such as the one I am developing at Franklin Learning Center.

Ayala: Combating Discrimination Against LatinX Students

In addition to discrimination through perceived misbehaviors and disciplinary measures at schools, Ayala (2022) outlined the ways in which bilingual Latino students continue to suffer from linguistic violence in school. As an immigrant scholar who has suffered his own discrimination in the field of academia, Ayala used his personal experience of racial microaggressions and anti-immigrant sentiment to inspire a 2013-2014 ethnographic study of the way that bilingual middle school students in South Central Texas continue to experience linguistic marginalization, de-legitimization of their language variety, and Spanish language loss.

Similar to my own concern, Ayala's main research questions were: "(1) how do bilingual Latina/o/x adolescents experience linguistic violence in school settings, and (2) how do they conceive themselves as proficient Spanish/English bilinguals?" (Ayala, 2022, p.2). We know that language ideologies rooted in colonialism have positioned English as the dominant language of power and caused speakers of other languages to suppress their native language use in schools. In a literature review of linguistic violence toward Latino students from the last two decades, Ayala gathered evidence that after repeated exposure to hostility, verbal abuse, and even physical attacks in response to their language use, many Latino students have internalized their own oppression and begun to believe that their identity is not acceptable in their school community.

Despite the stigma, other students have become brave enough to challenge the hegemonic language ideologies in schools by using Spanglish as a form of resistance, for example. Ayala conducted observations of a predominantly (80%) Latino middle school in a dual-language classroom of 25 students. His study of these students revealed evidence of "(1) marginalization of Spanish and its speakers, (2) legitimizing varieties of the Spanish language, and (3) language loss and blocking biliteracy" (Ayala, 2022, p. 6). Despite the fact that these students belonged to the largest ethnic group of the school, they still suffered the harmful effects of colonial values in our school system that center whiteness and English language use while subordinating people of color and their language practices. The one place that these students did feel safe alternating between Spanish and English was in their dual immersion classroom. Overall, Ayala indicated that the dual-language program helped develop a sense of pride in the students' shared linguistic and cultural identities as Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. I strive to directly address the lack of such bilingual spaces for Latino students in the public school curriculum.

Current Applications to My Concern

Collectively, Ayala (2022), Taggart (2022), and Yosso (2006) have voiced the need for more culturally and linguistically relevant programming for Latino students in U.S. public schools with the goal of honoring and respecting their diverse identities in the hopes of encouraging greater academic retention, achievement, and self-esteem. However, it is important to note that dual-language, bilingual, or heritage programs alone will not solve all barriers to Latino student success. As Ayala (2022) noted in his case study, Latino students may still experience microaggressions from teachers and peers and incur feelings of inferiority when using their home language in an academic setting based on literacy standards that encourage "proper" grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. "Proper," in this case, stems from linguistic imperialism that has been disseminated through the colonization of the Americas. It is important to remember that most Spanish historically taught in U.S. schools stems from *castellano*, or Castilian Spanish from Spain, rather than regional varieties from Mexico, Central America, or the Caribbean—the areas of the world where most of our Latino students' families are from. This creates a linguistic hierarchy that reflects colonial sentiments of inferiority in our students. Consistent patterns of discrimination such as these cause students of color to internalize their feelings of inferiority when the dominant culture continues to "other" them.

This realization brought me to the third issue of *Lápiz*, an academic journal focusing on Latin American Educational Philosophy. Entitled "Decolonial Education in the Americas," this issue highlights decolonial studies that offer a path to liberation by adapting the way we frame relations between students, teachers, communities, and society at large. In the introduction, Aleksandra Perisic (2018) identified Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Aníbal Quijano as the primary scholars that have analyzed the ways in which knowledge itself has been colonized through our public school system and the white-washing of history. In essence, "coloniality thus ensures the predominance of European modes of production, European modes of thinking, and European values" (Perisic, 2018, p.13). Therefore, in order to give Latino students a more equitable education, we would need to establish a framework of decolonial education where minority, rather than majoritarian (Eurocentric) epistemologies would lead the conversation.

In the School District of Philadelphia, for example, we are working towards establishing a district-wide initiative to more effectively roster Spanish speakers to heritage and native speaker courses, rather than beginner-level Spanish courses. Of course, this is easier said than done. It requires proper screening and rostering of students, development of a culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum, and training of language teachers to understand the distinction between heritage and native speakers of Spanish and to provide authentic resources and interactions between students. As part of the curriculum-writing team, we adopted Gholdy Muhammad's framework of identity, intellect, criticality, and joy in every thematic unit in an attempt to center the experiences and needs of our students in every aspect of the curriculum. However, the course is still focused on the use of the Spanish language in four modes: reading, writing, speaking, and listening, while embedded in thematic units mirroring the structure of beginner language courses (such as Spanish 1 or 2) that the district offers. Offering language courses for Spanish speakers is one solid step towards more culturally responsive teaching, as it saves them from the boredom, apathy, or embarrassment caused by being placed into a beginner language acquisition course for two years of their teenage lives as proficient speakers of the language.

I support the direction that the district is heading in but wish to push it even further with my development of a Critical Latino Studies course that applies the act of language maintenance to a critical exploration of coloniality, racial capitalism, and the nuances of Latino identity. Although the field is constantly evolving, decolonial education will form the foundation of my curriculum to provide more supportive, identity-affirming, and liberatory practices that will encourage the success of Latino students in our public school system. As long as our curriculum, ideologies, and practices in our school communities continue to perpetuate Eurocentric colonial values, Latino students and families will continue to suffer from discrimination, marginalization, deculturalization, and linguistic violence.

Chapter Four

Critical Action Research Proposal

For my critical action research project, I drew inspiration from the 1967 student protests in Philadelphia when African American youth demanded changes to their school rules, curriculum, teaching staff, and dress code that would honor and uplift Black culture rather than ignore or penalize students for it. Though the large group of students were brutally attacked by Philadelphia policemen and dogs led by Commissioner Frank Rizzo and threatened with suspension by their school administrators, their voices were ultimately heard and their demands were recognized. Today, we can see the fruit of their labors: the addition of African American History as a required component of Philadelphia's public school curriculum, the addition of more African American faculty, permission to wear traditional African clothing, as well as thirteen other demands that were met by the school board following the protest (Sigmond, 2011).

Although Latino youth have historically been active participants in similar student movements around the nation, they were not rewarded the same recognition that African American students were in Philly after their efforts of protest. Additionally, the demographics have shifted since then as Latinos have risen to become the largest minority group in the country. They deserve to have their needs met by school districts as well.

In order to address the current state of (mis)education of Latino students in public schools, I have developed a Critical Latino Studies Program for both native speakers and heritage speakers of Spanish to have a space at school to foster pride in their identity as Latinos, normalize translanguaging—a natural bilingual practice of switching between languages in the same communicative event—and challenge hegemonic relations of power rooted in colonialism. I developed this program as a two-year advanced Spanish course at my school—a public magnet high school with a newcomer program. According to the 2022-2023 school profiles posted by the School District of Philadelphia, our school serves a diverse community where 29% of students identify as Latino or Hispanic. By comparison, 50% of our students are African American, 11% are Asian, 6% are white, and 4% identify as multi-racial or "other." Out of the 19% of the student body that is designated as English Learners, 81 of those students reported Spanish as their primary home language. It is also important to note that although we are a magnet school accepting student applicants from across the city, 75% of our students are economically disadvantaged, receiving benefits from either state or federal public assistance programs, such as food stamps.

As a bilingual educator, I was thrilled to be in a school with such a high percentage of Spanish speakers, however, I realized early on that our existing language program failed to attract and retain those students. As Latino students form the second largest ethnic group in our school, I found it strange that our school had only consistently offered Spanish 1 and Spanish 2 world language classes. When I was hired in 2018, Spanish 3 was struggling to gain enough interest from students to maintain a complete roster, with a grand total of eleven people enrolled out of thirty-three seats. What barriers were limiting Latino student engagement in the World Language department?

- A lack of a World Language curriculum designed for native and heritage speakers. Spanish courses in the district are designed for native monolingual English speakers.
- The promotion of World Language waivers to exempt bilingual students from studying languages in high school in exchange for another elective or a free period.
- A School district policy to exempt beginner English Learners from taking a world language so that they can focus solely on the development of academic English skills.

- A push from school staff for Spanish speakers to enroll in French classes so they would learn something “new.”
- A lack of a celebrated culture of bilingualism and translanguaging to validate the language practice as an asset among students and teachers in the building.

After reflecting on these barriers to meaningful engagement of Latino students in the classroom, I decided to adapt the Spanish 3 class I was given into a course for Latino students (or advanced speakers of the language) to give them a more meaningful educational environment to explore their identities, cultures, and linguistic practices.

Though the transition did not happen overnight, I started marketing my skills as a bilingual Spanish 3 teacher to gain more interest from our newcomer students who recently immigrated from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. This mostly involved brief classroom visits in the sheltered ESOL classes for newcomer students where I gave a short presentation in Spanish about the course and handed out flyers with the course description before the course selection process in the spring. Most of the Latino students in the ESOL classes had grown up speaking Spanish their entire lives and then migrated to Philadelphia in their adolescence, taking on the daunting task of completing their high school education in a new language: English. Although it was difficult to fit in around their other credit requirements, I worked hard to develop this course for them as a safe space to be amongst other Spanish speakers for an hour of the day where they could be their authentic selves and speak their first language comfortably without judgment. After three years of pushing for action from my principal and my roster chair to officially establish the course as a separate program for Latino students, my *Spanish for Native Speakers* class was finally born.

Much of this chapter is inspired directly by the work I have done over the past five years in the language classroom to create an intentional learning community for Latino students at my school. For the purpose of this thesis, I will refer to the course as *Critical Latino Studies*, which could be applied to a variety of educational spaces, but is intended as a high school course for both native and heritage speakers of Spanish.

Before outlining the specific goals and overview of the program, I will explain the rationale for a critical action research project as the intervention to my thematic concern. After explaining the theoretical components of the program in relation to my thesis, I will provide a practical guide for educators to use as a stepping stone to creating similar programs for Latino students in their own school communities.

Why Critical Action Research?

One common critique of critical theorists is that we expound upon the problems that plague society but do too little to enact change. It is easy to point out problems, but difficult to remedy them when it requires combating powerful, pervasive social systems such as racial capitalism, colonialism, the patriarchy, or hegemony.

Using critical action research (CAR), I aim to challenge dominant ideologies about Latino youth and language practices in the classroom. Critical action research involves the active participation of stakeholders (e.g., educators and students) and uses a cyclical process of reflection to assess whether or not the intervention is achieving the desired outcome (Jacobs & Murray, 2010). For the process to be considered critical, teachers must identify their own beliefs or assumptions about students before engaging in reflection. Critical reflection focuses on the educator’s understanding of power and hegemony in relation to their practice (Brookfield, 2017). By bringing systems of power to light, we can attempt to subvert the ways that schools have been used to maintain power in the hands of the elite. With an intervention in place, teachers can be active researchers in their own classrooms, taking time to pause and reflect along the way. By evaluating how well the intervention has challenged the system of power at hand, we can make continuous adjustments to the intervention until we are satisfied with the result. Consequently, critically reflective teachers can drive their own research and need not rely on outside agencies to conduct it for them. By conducting the research and enacting change in my own school community, I can directly address the needs of the students in front of me while using the decolonial lens of critical pedagogy that this Master's program has helped me to develop.

Moving From Theory to Practice

In chapters two and three, I outlined the ways in which common schooling has been historically weaponized to maintain racial capitalist social divisions and acculturate youth into an education system that privileges white, English-speaking students. Using a decolonial lens, I designed a program to intentionally question the power structures of racial capitalism, combat the reproduction of hegemony in the language classroom, and overcome the structures of colonialist consciousness in Latino youth.

First, the Critical Latino Studies program undercuts one of racial capitalism’s most oppressive tools: anti-relationality. Anti-relationality is the process whereby a group in power seeks to prevent the oppressed group from forming bonds of solidarity in order to better keep them more isolated (Melamed, 2015). Racial capitalism purposefully reinforces divisions and prejudices across groups to prevent people from working together for power. The nature of this program intentionally brings Latino youth together in a shared space to explore their shared yet unique identities, cultural practices, and language use in a way that fosters community-building, empowerment, collaboration, and mutual respect.

Second, the traditional public school curriculum instills dominant values and epistemologies implicitly through the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum represents the sets of norms and values that the dominant culture promotes and transmits through social institutions to maintain the status quo (Grande, 2004). To practice critical pedagogy in the classroom, you must also be counter-hegemonic, challenging systems of power (such as de facto English-only policies in schools) to help students reach their full potentiality. In the proposed Critical Latino Studies program, I developed units of study that directly engage students in inquiry-based learning that seeks to uncover systems of power across the Americas that have affected their communities both directly and indirectly. I also establish translanguaging and using Spanglish as valuable language practices to counter the idea of standardized English and *castellano* as the most prestigious language varieties for academic use.

Though colonialist consciousness is an internal phenomenon that is difficult to observe and measure as an educator, I used Sandy Grande's (2004) conceptualization of it to provide counterpoints through my program. As colonized people, Latinos of both indigenous and mestizo roots have been assimilated into the mainstream agenda of global progress. According to Grande, the government-mandated curriculum of public schools often touts modernization, industrialization, and discipline as the pillars of a productive new generation of law-abiding citizens. In this program, students are encouraged to embrace typically suppressed epistemologies such as indigenous traditions, spirituality, collectivism, feminism, intersectionality, and social justice activism. Centering these counter-narratives can empower Latino youth to push back against colonial belief systems that devalue their cultural practices and identities. Creating an intentional space for Latino youth to gather, learn from one another, and share cultural practices is my attempt as an educator to decolonize the language curriculum.

Intervention Proposal: Critical Latino Studies Program

This program proposal serves as a how-to guide to provide interested educators with the tools to feel confident enough to establish a Critical Latino Studies program in their schools. First, I will provide step-by-step guidance on establishing the program as an official course of study for students, then I will outline suggested thematic units for instruction. This is not a comprehensive guide, but rather a stepping stone for critical educators to begin the process with a clear direction and adapt their approach along the way as needed, depending on their specific setting and community.

Purpose and Goals of the Program:

To summarize, the purpose of the Critical Latino Studies program is to challenge racial capitalist colonial power relations in the language curriculum by establishing a safe space for Latino youth to form a learning community that uplifts their ethnic identities, cultural values, and linguistic practices. Creating an intentional curriculum for Latino students to explore their shared histories and roots will help mitigate the miseducation of these youth in beginner Spanish language courses which often demean their regional differences or lack of formal or academic language conventions, and help reframe them as authentic knowledge-bearers whose bilingualism is an asset to their educational experience, rather than a deficit. The following bulleted items include additional goals and outcomes of the program:

- Increased pride in one’s identity as a Latino/*hispano*/LatinX youth
- Develop confidence in one’s ability to use Spanish as a language of learning and intellectual discussion
- Further develop reading and writing abilities and skill transfer across languages to foster biliteracy

- Provide a base of Latin American history through inquiry-based learning to allow students to form connections between Latin American history and U.S. history
- Challenge hegemonic power relations and teach students to view their world with a critical lens and question the status quo
- Provide counter-narratives to challenge traditional stories of white-washed history
- Inspire Latino students to expand their voice and influence in their school to celebrate their presence in the community

Administrative Approval: Frame a Clear Argument

The first step to initiate a new school program is to earn the approval of your administration. Depending on your workplace relationship, this may be easier said than done. If you have sympathetic colleagues in the World Language or Humanities Department, gather their support first to vouch for your program as a team. Then, early on in the school year, before the rush of spring hiring season and standardized testing windows, schedule a meeting with your administrator. Come prepared with a clear rationale for your course in language that your administrator will understand. Based on my experience, you may benefit from preparing to respectfully counter the following arguments against a program for Latino students:

Counterargument	**Rebuttal**
"An AP/IB class would serve native and heritage speakers just as well."	Although it is possible for Latino students to perform well in an AP or IB class, those programs were not designed for them. AP Spanish is intended as a fourth year of study for English speakers who are studying the Spanish language in a classroom setting. AP Spanish rewards students for correct grammar, standardized vocabulary, and fluid use of academic Spanish, which is something your Latino students may not have confidence in. Additionally, the tasks required of students on the exam are intended for seniors; mandating freshmen or sophomores to take the fast-paced, high-

	stakes AP exam before they are fully prepared would be unethical.
"An AP/IB class improves our school data."	The needs of our students should be prioritized over data points. A Critical Latino Studies course for native and heritage speakers can be offered for honors credit instead, which will boost our students' GPAs and college readiness and diversify the advanced course offerings at our school.
"An AP/IB class attracts competitive teaching staff to our school."	Requiring Spanish teaching applicants to get certified to teach an AP course may actually exclude educators who are native or heritage speakers of the language and who may feel intimidated by the certification process and the high-stakes testing involved in offering an AP course.
"Advanced Spanish courses already teach culture."	Teaching Spanish as a foreign or world language automatically situates the culture of Spanish speakers as "foreign," othering that demographic. Schools that have significant Latino populations need programs where Latino culture is centered as the norm and serves as a shared knowledge base between students. The purpose of a heritage program is to reward Spanish speakers with a class that is tailored to their own needs and identities and to create a shared sense of community and belonging.
"It's too much work to establish a new program this year and it will be a burden to our roster chair."	[Pennsylvania] already mandates [two] years of language credits for students. Rather than overcrowding our level 1 and level 2 Spanish courses with students whose language levels are inappropriately matched, we should provide a separate course for Latino students who have ample experience with the language so that they do not become bored or apathetic in the language classroom.

If you receive pushback on your first attempt, do not give up hope. Use your perseverance as a critical educator to reevaluate the situation at your school and find a new approach. Have a conversation with your roster chair, elicit support from your district's world language curriculum office, or phone a friend who has successfully started new programs at their own school. Gathering parent support is also a persuasive tactic to enact change at the school-based level. If your principal still does not allow a top-down change in the course offerings, start teaching the values and ideas of the program from the ground up with whatever students you may have in front of you. Once the students understand that this is not a typical Spanish class, your rostering issues may just fix themselves as they spread the word to interested peers.

Roster with Intention

Once you have established that you will be teaching a course for Latino students, it is time to develop clear parameters about who should be rostered into the class. These decisions should be made with the specific context of your school community in mind but should follow these general steps.

First, write a short summary of the course in both English and Spanish for you or the roster chair to provide to interested students. Visit other classes with high concentrations of Latino students, if possible, to give a short talk promoting your course for the following year.

Next, establish clear prerequisites for the course: this could include being raised in a Latino family, having Latino heritage, speaking Spanish as a native or heritage language, or having a high interest in the subject with proficiency in the Spanish language. Provide a student survey to identify the above traits as well as collect student-reported input on their comfort levels listening, speaking, reading, and writing levels in Spanish versus English. You may also wish to ask them about which daily tasks or interactions they conduct in which language or have a short, five-minute “interview” with each student to converse in Spanish about the course and get a sense of their confidence with the language. This kind of screening should ideally be done in the spring prior to the beginning of the next academic year. It will also inform you about what kinds of language scaffolds you may need to provide to accommodate various levels of Spanish proficiency or bilingualism.

Lastly, use your tentative roster to prepare for Back to School night in the fall. Provide the same summary of the course for students and families who will be in attendance, as well as a printed syllabus of the thematic units you will tentatively be exploring. Offer a sign-up sheet for family or community members who may be interested in speaking on those topics or coming as a guest for your class. Send families home with a letter explaining the course goals in more detail, especially for those who were not able to attend Back to School Night (see the attached example from Profe Nygaard's blog). Connecting with families early on is important, as some students may believe that they are insufficiently prepared for an advanced Spanish course and request an easier alternative, but families may help encourage them to take the course once they understand that it is far more appropriate than Spanish 1 or 2.

Establish Classroom Norms and Expectations

To be an authentic proponent of a decolonial curriculum, you must also establish clear relations in the classroom that are liberatory and empowering, rather than punitive or demeaning.

Establish liberatory language practices. For example, it is important not to use your power as an educator to mandate language use, such as a strict Spanish-only policy, for this may be just as damaging to some students as traditional English-only policies and could devalue their identities as bilinguals who naturally may revert to translanguaging when placed together in a learning community. In addition to the unit on language use in life, have an open discussion with your students about language practices in the classroom and make it clear that translanguaging, as well as Spanglish, count as valuable bilingual practices. If you wish to encourage more Spanish language use for certain activities, create heterogeneous groupings to allow students with less confidence in the language to lean on the support of native speakers or otherwise more experienced producers of the language.

Whenever possible, provide authentic Spanish-language materials. Even better, try to present Latin-American voices over European ones. It is important to model Spanish language use as a source of intellectual production and not just a private feature of the home. Depending on your own experience with the language, use Spanish as much as possible in your direct instruction, but translanguage where appropriate if you lack an exact translation. Seeing a teacher translanguage can help promote it as an accepted practice. Provide glossaries, word banks, and sentence starters for course materials to expand on your students' linguistic knowledge base.

Give your students the tools to evaluate the world with a critical lens. Educating students through critical pedagogy is admirable, but unless you transfer the skills to them to be more self-directed critical scholars, you will end up limiting their full potential. Treat your students as co-conspirators in the fight to challenge the hegemonic narratives around black and brown people. Don't shy away from using academic terms with them, such as *racial capitalism.* Gatekeeping the world of academia from students of color will only perpetuate the inequities in education. Provide students with the necessary scaffolds and vocabulary to understand the systems of oppression that affect their daily lives. Having the language to express the imbalance of power is the first step in disrupting it. As young adults, your students can handle more mature content than you think, especially when it comes to issues of power, oppression, colonization, and the effects of racial capitalism on their communities. For example, I have already had fourteen and fifteen-year-olds fail to distinguish verbs from nouns in English class, but successfully analyze the relation between racial capitalism and language extinction in the Americas in their first year in the Critical Latino Studies program.

Provide ample opportunity for student voice but do not lose sight of the goals of the program. As teenagers, students may not always know what they want to study because they are still being exposed to new topics regularly. Youth often rely on adults in their community to help guide their attention to issues that matter**.** A few key thematic units serve as the foundation of the content of the program: *La identidad latina* and *El lenguaje en la vida.* These units help build community in the course to share experiences of being a Latino as well as a Spanish-speaker, and foster pride in the students' identities. From there, you may start requesting more input from the class either informally through open discussion or formally through written surveys to identify areas of curiosity in your students. However, don't be surprised if they all suggest units on dance, food, and music! Though these topics sound exciting in theory, students may not have meaningful ideas for how to structure these learning experiences around them since they may have only seen stereotypical representations of Latin American culture in traditional Spanish textbooks or associate them with Spanish class parties rather than academic areas of study. Come prepared to **teach culture through a critical lens**. See the following examples based on topics I have taught in my own classroom:

If your students say they want to learn about Latin American food…	**Move beyond** simply researching famous Mexican dishes and doing traditional how-to recipe projects.	**Instead**, explore how indigenous women in Mexico prepare pre-Colombian food as a way of preserving native culture in the Americas to resist the deculturalizing effects of colonization.
If your students say they want to learn about Latin American dance…	**Move beyond** simply watching videos of Bomba performances and writing descriptions of the costumes, instruments, and movement.	**Instead,** analyze how Bomba dance in Puerto Rico has served as an act of resistance to oppression and a historical archive of Afro-Latino culture. Relate its historical uses in the plantation economy to present-day intersections with Black Lives Matter protests.
If your students say they want to learn about Latin American music…	**Move beyond** basic biography projects of famous Latina musicians.	**Instead,** perform a critical analysis of feminist lyrics as acts of protest against forms of violence that are perpetuated by *machismo*, the patriarchy, and government oppression across Latin America.

Suggested Outline of Thematic Units

Below, you will find a suggested outline of thematic units that may span a two-year curriculum. The development of thematic units is rooted in critical pedagogy: I chose critical pedagogy as my instrument to question dominant epistemologies in the language classroom and combat the oppressive forces of racial capitalism and colonialist consciousness from within the classroom (Malott, 2011). However, the development of this curriculum is not something I executed in isolation. I drew inspiration and resources from my mentor teacher Kaley Lankford, educator workshops on Central America led by Nanci Buiza at Swarthmore College, and Courtney Nygaard's public blog on Spanish Heritage teaching.

Depending on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of your students, you may wish to adapt the selection or sequence of units to better fit their needs and interests. I have taught all of these units at least once, but change my own sequence of instruction year-by-year for the aforementioned reasons, shifting or substituting units as needed. Remember, this program should center on the needs and experiences of the Latino youth in the room, and critical pedagogy requires regular time and space for reflection to evaluate whether or not your practice is leading to your desired outcomes for the students you serve.

Year One - *Primer año*

Unit *Unidad de estudio*	**Essential Questions and Objectives** *Preguntas esenciales y los objetivos de la unidad*	**Critical Lexicon** *Palabras Claves*
The Latino Identity *La identidad latina*	**What does it mean to be Latino or Hispanic? What is the difference between race and ethnicity, and how does it complicate the way we define the Latino identity?** This unit serves as a core foundation of the program to establish a shared cultural identity between students and to provide the appropriate vocabulary to define their personal	- race vs. ethnicity - stereotype - generalization - diversity - counterstories

	identity. Students will grapple with stereotypes of Latinos in the media as well as their lived experience, and challenge these generalizations with counterstories. Students will study memoirs and poetry of Latino authors to explore the Latino identity. They will also explore self-love through weekly journaling and write a personal narrative exploring the story of how they got their name.	
Language in Our Lives *El lenguaje en la vida*	**What is linguistic imperialism? How has it informed language prestige in our everyday lives? How does our language shape the way we view the world?** Students will identify their own language practices and develop the vocabulary to express the way that certain language varieties hold more respect or prestige in society. Through an inquiry-based project, they will explore the effects of colonization on language use and research endangered or extinct languages in their families' native countries. They will also analyze the use of translanguaging, code-switching, and anglicisms in their own lives and evaluate how these language practices either conform with or challenge systems of power.	- translanguaging - code-switching - hierarchy - linguistic imperialism - language prestige
Conquest and Colonization *La conquista y la colonización*	**How has the history of colonization impacted the current state of instability in Latin America? How has colonization affected the culture of Latino peoples?** This unit provides students with enough background on world history to explain the causes and effects of the European conquest and colonization of the Americas. Students will analyze the roots of inequality that originated from the global era of colonization and understand how a history of European imperialism and racial capitalism has played a role in the current discrimination and poverty that indigenous peoples face in the Americas. Students will also explore how the Columbian Exchange changed relations between the old world and the new world.	- coloniality - assimilation - marginalization
Indigenous Communities *Los pueblos indígenas*	**What barriers do indigenous people face? How is the status of indigenous rights linked to colonial systems of oppression? What unique knowledge systems do indigenous communities provide about the world?**	- indigeneity - human rights - deculturalization

	Students will critically examine their own stereotypes and biases about indigenous people in the Americas before studying their diverse cultures and histories. In this unit, they will explore the struggles of indigenous communities that are rooted in colonial relations of power and learn from examples of powerful indigenous activism such as Rigoberta Menchú's work for civil rights for Mayans in Guatemala. The class will also explore indigenous epistemologies or ways of viewing the world through their oral histories, storytelling, myths of creation, and guiding principles of life.	
Afro-Latinos *La afro-latinidad*	**How does being both Black and Latino shape people's lived experiences? What stereotypes exist about Afro-Latinos and how can we combat them? How have Afro-Latinos enriched the Latino community across the Americas?** Ideally aligned with Black History Month, this unit celebrates the contributions of Afro-Latinos in Latin America and the U.S. While students will deepen their understanding of systemic racism through explorations such as colorism in Latino media, they will also honor the ways in which the African diaspora has enriched Latino culture. Students will study Afro-Colombian music and film as an example.	- systemic racism - colorism - profiling - intersectionality
Migration *La migración*	**What are the push and pull factors for Latin American migration? What are the different pathways to immigration in the U.S. and how do they meet the needs of migrants? How do stereotypes shape U.S. perceptions of Latin American migrants?** Students will explore historical trends of migration between their countries of origin and the United States, and also explore the waves of Latinos arriving in their own towns/cities. After learning more about official immigration policy, students will critique the U.S.'s role in the migrant crisis. They will study the bilingual memoir of an undocumented Guatemalan teen who migrated to Philadelphia and compare her story to their own families' experiences.	- displacement - gentrification - racial capitalism - asylum

Year Two - *Segundo año*

Unit *Unidad de estudio*	**Essential Questions and Objectives** *Preguntas esenciales y los objetivos de la unidad*	**Critical Lexicon** *Palabras Claves*
The Right to Education *El derecho a la educación*	**What universal rights do all youth deserve? What role does education play in our communities?** Students will explore historical and contemporary student protests and the fight for education across the Americas and will compare it cross-culturally with examples such as Malala's fight for the education of girls in Pakistan under the oppressive regime of the Taliban. Students will also learn about the components of successful activism and organizing strategies to enact change in their own communities.	- student activism - organizing - nonviolence
Civil Wars and Dictatorships *Las guerras civiles y dictaduras*	**How has U.S. intervention played a role in the destabilization of Latin America?** Students will study a few key examples of civil wars in Central America, such as the Guatemalan Civil War that ended in 1996. They will examine the causes and effects of these violent conflicts and explore the struggle for memory of the victims lost. Students will also perform a comparative study of dictatorships across the Americas to identify common tools of oppression between governments and their own people as well as their historical justifications for genocide. Finally, they will form a critical understanding of the U.S.'s role in the destabilization of Latin America for both political and economic interests.	- dictatorship - intervention - neoliberalism - struggle for memory - genocide
The Origins of Gang Violence in Latin America *El origen de las pandillas*	**How did Central American gangs go from supporting youth to terrorizing youth? What is the U.S.'s role in the origin of gang violence in Latin America?** Students will reflect on their own assumptions and biases surrounding gangs in Latin America, as well as Latino gangs in the U.S. Then, they will study the tough-on-crime era in the U.S. that strategically profited off of cocaine addiction while simultaneously criminalizing black and brown people. Using prison-based gangs in Los Angeles,	- repatriation - criminalization - tough-on-crime

	California as an example, such as *la Mara Salvatrucha*, students will critique the U.S.'s role in the spread of gang violence throughout Central America.	
Women's History *La historia de la mujer*	**What barriers to success do Latina women face in society? How have Latina women served as influential changemakers in society?** Students will first develop an understanding of the tenets of feminism and antifeminism, as well as *machismo*. The class will determine the ways in which women have overcome barriers in Latin America and will research influential women. They will also analyze feminist music as resistance to honor the counterstories provided by feminist Latina artists.	- feminism - patriarchy - *machismo*
Climate Justice *La justicia climática*	**What responsibility do we have for the current state of our planet? How does climate change disproportionately affect black and brown communities?** Students will deepen their existing understanding of climate change and apply it to their own communities to examine the effects of environmental racism and climate injustice on black and brown people. Furthermore, students will explore specific stories of climate injustice in Latin America such as the Chilean fight for water rights in indigenous territory. The class will propose ideas to support climate justice in their own communities and produce a video project to educate their peers on the topic.	- climate injustice - environmental racism - accountability
Myths and Legends *Mitos y Leyendas*	**How do stories shape our understanding of the world? What can stories tell us about the cultural values of a community?** Students will enjoy an exploration of myths and legends from their cultural background to learn about storytelling as a way to preserve and promote the knowledge systems of their community. Students will study story-telling as a method of resistance to epistemic suppression and teach one another about their own cultural traditions through storytelling.	- subjugated knowledge - epistemic suppression - counterstories

Further Recommendations

In addition to the coursework itself, the Critical Latino Studies program can be expanded beyond the language classroom. For example, a school with a student-run newspaper can recruit students from the program to form a Spanish-language column or to serve as translators for the newspaper. In extracurriculars, students in the program may want to form an after-school club to put on more cultural events for the school such as Hispanic Heritage Month or Black History Month. Additionally, they might wish to celebrate Latin American holidays or festivals. Listen to your students and guide them with the necessary support. Look for ways to provide extra recognition for your students. Sign them up for special programs or awards on the state or national levels such as the Seal of Biliteracy, which celebrates high school juniors and seniors who have developed strong literacy skills in at least two languages. Additionally, involve Latino families, community members, or local role models as classroom guests as much as possible. Show your students that they, too, will find a valuable place in their community and serve as inspiration to other Latino youth in the future.

Chapter 5

Implementation and Evaluation

The Critical Latino Studies program is designed as a two-year course that satisfies the Pennsylvania world language requirement of two credits toward high school graduation. It may also be counted as a humanities elective if a student has already fulfilled their language requirement or received a language waiver. Of course, the structure and objectives of this course could also be adapted for study at the college level, or through other alternative modes of education such as summer programs, clubs, or interest groups. For interested teachers, please review Chapter Four for explicit instructions on how to implement this class at your own school.

As previously explained, this program requires school-based support from both your administrator and your roster chair in order to ensure its integrity and preserve its longevity year after year. So often, educators have a vision of a curriculum that they wish to pursue with passion, and they face challenges when the students who are rostered to the course do not meet the pre-requisites, interests, or age group that you designed your instruction around. For this program to truly be “critical” in nature, educators must implement it with clear intention and planning beforehand. That way, you will have a classroom community that will benefit from the critical pedagogy and thematic units of the program.

Community and Parent Involvement

Ideally, this program would break through the four walls of a traditional classroom and involve more community-based learning experiences. One goal of my own would be to include at least one guest speaker from the Latino community in Philadelphia to present on an issue related to our units of study and hold an open conversation with the class. This would give students the opportunity to learn not just from each other, but from other Spanish-speaking role models in the city that reflect their cultural identity. I would also encourage at least two annual field trips to local community spaces such as non-profits, art exhibits, restaurants, or other Latino businesses that have made a positive impact on the community. Although the School District of Philadelphia has established many restrictions on teachers' flexibility to take students on field trips, learning experiences outside the classroom are often more valuable than those at our desks, and students will remember them for years to come (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008).

Another aspect of community involvement is connecting with students' families through the coursework itself. This program is identity-based in nature and involves ample reflection on one's cultural roots, ethnicity, race, and nationality. For example, in the first unit, *La identidad latina,* one narrative writing assignment that students complete involves an exploration of the meaning behind their names. In addition to doing online research about the origins of their name, students spend time talking with family members about their names as they explore the following questions: *Who named you? What stories does your family tell about how you got your name? What cultural significance does your name hold? Do you believe that your name accurately reflects who you are today?* Activities like these encourage students to ask questions of the adults in their lives that perhaps otherwise would have been left unexplored. It also provides meaningful opportunities to speak in Spanish with one another or share in the experience of reading and writing in Spanish at home, where many students have become comfortable reverting back to English for school-related tasks. It also encourages more inter-generational storytelling and enriches students' understanding of their heritage, which is one of the core objectives of the program. Additionally, it is important to give alternatives to students who may not have access to their own family history due to separation, adoption, or estrangement.

Through a combination of community and parent involvement, the Latino youth in the program would feel a greater sense of connection to their school as well as the surrounding community, and families would be treated as valuable funds of knowledge to support inquiry, reflection, and storytelling.

Assessment & Evaluation

Any exercise in critical pedagogy requires a cycle of reflection. While implementing this critical action research project, I must ensure that I am actively combatting hegemonic systems of oppression and colonial ideologies by engaging in regular reflection to understand the effectiveness of my critical pedagogy. In critical action research, the participant must cycle between planning, acting, observing, and reflecting in order to gauge whether or not the approach receives the desired outcomes (Jacobs & Murray, 2010). Continuous adjustments are made until the desired outcome is achieved.

One of my objectives of the program is to bring Latino youth together in a shared space to explore their identities, cultural practices, and language use in a way that fosters community-building and empowerment. This goal requires thoughtful facilitation of social norms in the classroom to ensure a sense of respect and belonging amongst the students. Intentional student groupings or interactive activities can encourage participants to form relationships, strengthen their confidence in communicating in Spanish, and understand their shared values as Latinos. Depending on the maturity of the students, I may need to model what productive discussion sounds like, what respect feels like, and what acceptable language practices look like in my classroom. Monitoring student engagement and interaction is a daily commitment to the course values to ensure that it fosters community and collaboration, not competition and criticism. This aspect of critical pedagogy fights the anti-relationality and individualism that racial capitalism has instilled in American public school culture.

Another important goal of the program is to foster deeper curiosity, understanding, and pride in students' cultural and linguistic identities. To combat the Eurocentric, Anglo-American ideologies that are centered as the dominant narrative in schools, I need to be conscientious about the texts, authors, stories, activities, and assessments that I choose to use in the course. My hope is that these outward acts of critical pedagogy will inspire inner change in the way that my students perceive themselves in the world. To successfully combat the burdens of colonial consciousness as defined previously in Grande's (2004) decolonial work, students should embrace historically suppressed epistemologies such as indigenous scholarship, collectivism, spirituality, feminism, and intersectionality, as well as participate in social justice learning activities. Centering these counter-narratives is one step toward decolonizing the language curriculum for youth through the Critical Latino Studies program.

Assessing student performance

Throughout the school year, classroom assessments will help track students' progress toward deepening their understanding of Latin American culture, history, and identities. Rather than focus on traditional summative assessments such as timed tests with a series of questions that have only one correct answer, I use a diverse array of assessments to foster curiosity, gauge understanding of the topics, and encourage collaboration. For example, rather than taking a test to evaluate students' memorization of the different immigration pathways to the United States, students participate in a team-based media project to produce an original video exploring their school community's perceptions of immigrants, immigration policy, and citizenship. Ample freedom and student choice in the project create opportunities for groups to explore facets of the issue that they are more passionate about or have affected their own families directly, and they take ownership of countering some common stereotypes in their community by educating their peers on the issue.

Although they require careful planning and facilitation from the classroom teacher, project-based assessments like these create more memorable experiences and meaningful interaction between students. After each unit-based assessment, I take the time to reflect on what the main takeaways were for students based on the content of their projects. Students also provide feedback about what they did and did not enjoy from the unit, and submit remaining questions or curiosities that were not answered by the unit. Then, I review the lessons that led up to the assessment to determine potential revisions for the following year, shifting the focus of the unit where needed to ensure the outcomes remain within the goals of a decolonial framework that challenges the social relations of racial capitalism.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the course, I developed a student survey to understand students' perceptions around their identity as Latinos as well as their confidence in their linguistic abilities to evaluate whether or not the Critical Latino Studies program has had a positive impact on them (see Appendix B). Ideally, this survey would be administered at the beginning and end of the course to better quantify the change in students' attitudes over the course of each school year that they participate in the program. The student survey asks for scaled responses to agree or disagree with a series of statements about their cultural and linguistic identities and confidence levels. After seven months in the program, my students responded with overwhelmingly positive feedback on the survey. Of the eighteen students that responded, 66.7% *strongly agreed* that this course deepened their understanding of the Latino/Hispanic identity, while 33.3% *agreed.* An overwhelming 94.4% of students reported that they *strongly agree* they are proud of their Latino/Hispanic identity. In addition, 88.9% of students responded that they improved their reading and writing skills in Spanish over the course of the program.

In a final open-ended question, students explained which units of study or course activities they enjoyed the most. Interestingly, their responses overwhelmingly reflected a higher interest and satisfaction in the decolonial studies that we did, rather than the typical "fun" cultural activities like the March Madness bracket we put together for Latino music artists. For example, multiple students mentioned the units on Latin American conquest and colonization, gentrification and displacement in Puerto Rico, and indigenous rights as being their top learning experiences in the course. Learning about endangered languages in the indigenous community was also popular. One freshman explained,

> *El tema que más me interesó este año fue la evolución del lenguaje en el mundo. Me gustó mucho porque es asombrante el perdido de lenguas que hay en el mundo entero y hay que cuidar esas lenguas porque son especial hacia una cultura y también porque son únicas.*
>
> The topic that interested me the most this year was the evolution of languages in the world. I liked it a lot because the loss of languages throughout the whole world is shocking and we have to take care of these languages because they're special for people's culture and also because they're unique.

A newcomer student from Honduras reported that the unit on colorism in Latin America was the most meaningful to her because she felt like is a topic that hardly anyone talks about: "*Es un tema que casi no se habla.*" For several Mexican students, activities around el Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe and Día de los Muertos resonated most with them, since it was the first time they were able to explore those important cultural traditions in a school setting and learn more about their histories:

> *Para mi, [fue] cuando aprendimos las culturas porque yo amo el día de los muertos y pues me encanta hablar sobre eso*.
>
> For me, it was when we learned about cultures because I love Day of the Dead and well, I loved talking about that.

This feedback gave me clear confirmation that this work matters: students benefit from seeing themselves and their identities represented in the coursework.

Limitations & Looking Ahead

One clear limitation of the Critical Latino Studies program, as it stands, is that it is rooted in the structures of public schooling and must function within the confinement of traditional school norms, such as staffing limitations, budget constraints, credit fulfillment, rigid grading requirements, and measurable assessment and accountability for students. However, sometimes the best work of a critical educator is to challenge the system from within to best serve the students immediately in front of her. Walsh (2018) describes this as fighting the colonial order through "fissures and cracks" in our traditional learning spaces. With patience, critical educators can grow the resistance to harmful racial-colonial practices in our education system while still leaving the possibility to fight for top-down policy change in the long run.

Although the need for language programs for Latinos has been widely recognized for decades in states like California and Arizona, beginning in 1998 for example, these states have experienced pushback from conservative politicians who have abolished bilingual education programs (Irizarry, 2011). These measures forced Latino students into fast-tracked English immersion courses with the goal of focusing all of their academic energy on English language development, regardless of the fact that it takes multiple years for students to develop proficiency in another language at school (Irizarry, 2011). This is especially ironic since the Latino population in those states became *majority-minority* around the same time, which should have warranted additional dual-language programs.

In more recent years, Spanish programs for native and heritage speakers have been slowly gaining popularity in other regions of the country. For example, in the past five years of my development of this program in Philadelphia, I have seen an increase in teacher-created resources being made publicly available on social media platforms or blogs in an attempt to grow the community of educators interested in this work. Many of these educators have identified the same lack of support for Latino students in their school community and have created their own courses for Spanish speakers to affirm and strengthen their cultural and linguistic practices. This large undertaking can sometimes feel unachievable when teachers are burdened with a slew of other time-consuming tasks such as lesson plan requirements, observation forms, assessment protocols, and intervention documentation.

Thankfully, some school districts with larger populations of Latino students have joined the cause and begun developing a shared curriculum for teachers to follow for Spanish speakers. I am currently working with a small team of Spanish teachers to develop the School District of Philadelphia's heritage and native speaker curriculum to share for next school year as a guide to help new teachers implement a language program for Latino students in their own schools. The curriculum guide will offer shared resources, goals, and pedagogical techniques to serve as a roadmap for interested teachers. Certainly, this is a step in the right direction to gaining recognition for an ethnic group that makes up 26% of our school district. However, it is important to remember that each school community is distinct in terms of its student body; it is important to cater any curriculum to the needs and interests of the students in front of us if it is intended to be critical in nature.

Conclusion

Putting critical pedagogy into place to combat systems of oppression is much easier said than done. The Transformative Education for Social Change program at West Chester has made it clear that it is not enough to simply point out the problems in the world because then we are at risk of perpetuating them through complacency if not through an outright failure to act. With the recent waves of book banning, attacks on critical race theory, and challenges to counter-narratives of U.S. history, critical pedagogy is once again under scrutiny. I fear that the recent rise in radical political beliefs will challenge the rights of our Latino students to maintain their heritage language and culture in the classroom and that conservative legislatures and school boards may once again restrict their cultural expression and identity exploration in public schools.

We must not let fear be the victor, but be personal agents of change to fight for a more liberatory education, or “education otherwise” (Walsh, 2018). As the peacemaker and social justice activist Mahatma Gandhi famously instructed in 1913,

> We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him… We need not wait to see what others do. (p.158)

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Appendix A

Letter to Families

Estimadas familias:

¡Estoy muy emocionada de comenzar el año escolar! Especialmente, porque este año conoceré a algunos estudiantes en persona por primera vez.

Mi nombre es Profesora Nygaard y enseño el programa de hispanohablantes aquí en ______________. Me encantaría tomarme un momento para presentarme y explicar lo que su hijo/a puede esperar de este programa.

Este es mi décimo año enseñando español en _____________ y mi sexto año enseñando clases de hispanohablantes. Yo misma tuve que aprender español mientras crecía. Aprendí español tomando clases en la escuela secundaria y en la universidad, así como trabajando en un restaurante mexicano durante diez años. Me gradué de la Universidad Bethel con una licenciatura en educación en español K-12, donde también pasé un semestre estudiando en Valencia, España. Desde entonces, he estudiado un Máster Internacional para Profesores de Lengua y Cultura Españolas de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca. Creo que el bilingüismo es una habilidad muy valiosa y me apasiona ayudar a mis estudiantes a mejorar sus dos idiomas en un contexto educativo.

A nivel personal, llevo diez años casada y tengo un hijo de tres años llamado Oskar y una hija de cinco meses llamada Sofie. Algunos de mis pasatiempos incluyen leer, cocinar, nadar, viajar y ver telenovelas.

Programa de Hispanohablantes en _____________

Dado que su hijo/a está en séptimo grado, tendrá la oportunidad de tomar la clase de hispanohablantes hasta el undécimo grado. Lo mejor de esta clase es que los estudiantes podrán estar con muchos de los mismos estudiantes durante los próximos cuatro años, formando una sólida comunidad.

Esta clase es ideal para estudiantes que han escuchado mucho español mientras crecían. En lugar de aprender vocabulario básico y aprender a conjugar verbos, ¡podemos comenzar a usar el idioma en contexto leyendo y escribiendo! Los componentes principales de la clase son cultura, lectura de novelas cortas y escritura en español. También pasamos los primeros diez minutos de clase haciendo lectura libre, ya que tengo una biblioteca de libros interesantes en español en el salón de clases.

¡Los animo a involucrarse en la clase! Si alguien quiere compartir sobre su carrera o su cultura, por favor, contáctenme. Me encantaría tener invitados/as en la clase.

Si tienen alguna pregunta, no duden en preguntar.

Un saludo cordial,

Courtney Nygaard
Spanish Teacher
número de salón
correo

Appendix B

Student Survey: Critical Latino Studies Course

Please use the following scale to respond:
1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly Agree

1. This course helped me to understand the Latino/Hispanic identity.
Esta clase me ayudó a comprender mejor la identidad latina/hispana.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

2. I feel proud of my Latino/Hispanic identity.
Estoy orgullos@ de mi identidad latina/hispana.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

3. I feel more prepared to use Spanish in an academic or professional setting.
Me siento más preparad@ para usar español en un entorno académico o profesional.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

4. The course readings, videos, and activities helped me to better understand issues in Latin America.
La lectura, los videos, y las actividades de esta clase me ayudaron a comprender mejor los problemas y acontecimientos de América Latina.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

5. I believe my reading and writing skills have improved this year in Spanish.
Creo que he mejorado mi capacidad para leer y escribir en español durante este año escolar.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

6. What topics, class discussions, or activities were the most interesting or beneficial to you? Explain what you learned.
¿Cuáles temas, discusiones, o actividades han sido lo más interesante para ti? Explica lo que aprendiste.